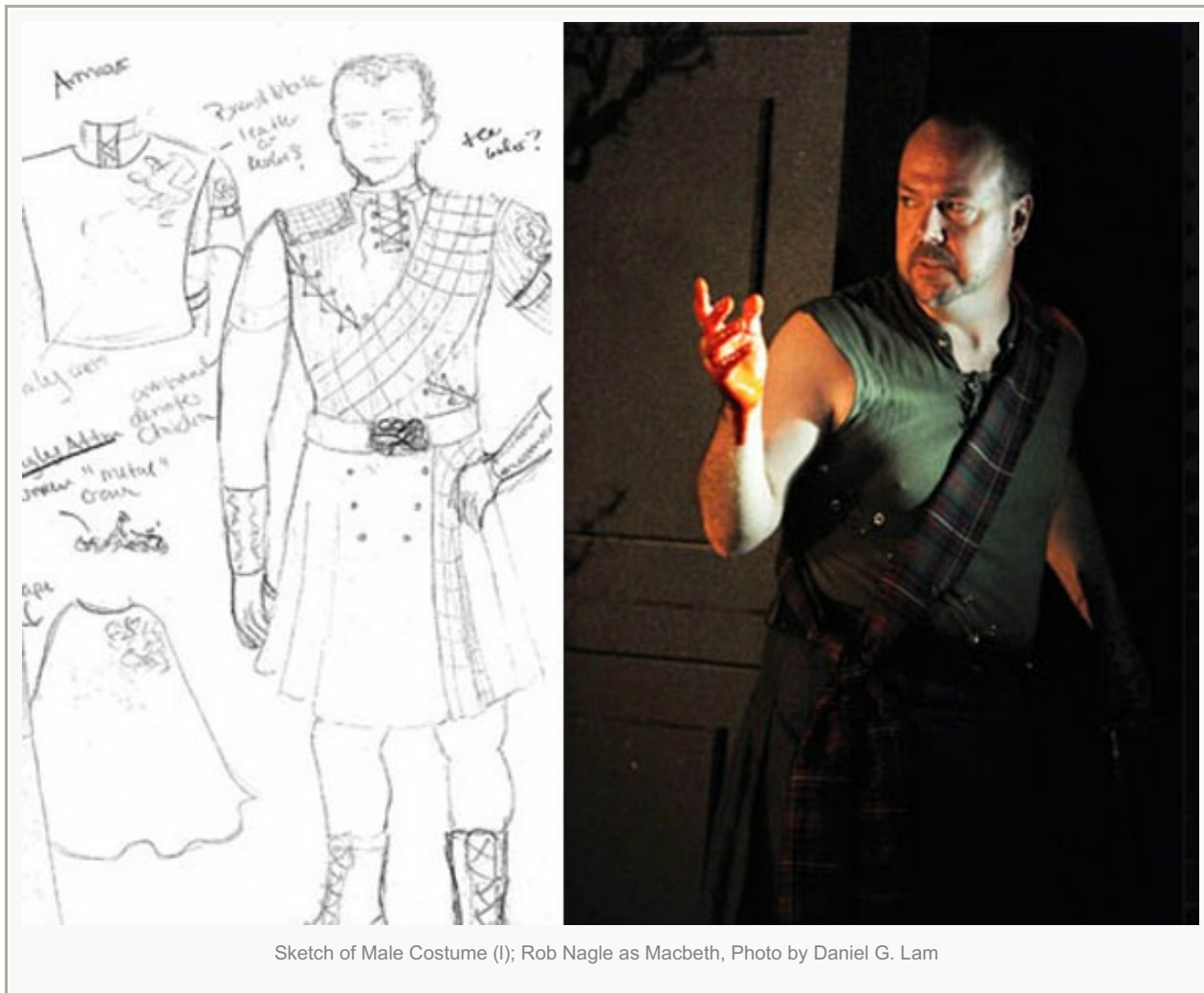


A Scottish Tale of Two Jessicas

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Sketch of Male Costume (l); Rob Nagle as Macbeth, Photo by Daniel G. Lam

So there's one cast ("the Kinsmen"). Then there's another ("the Thanes"). And then there are the Hurlyburlys.

It's the Antaeus Company's way of making sure that if an actor is called away in the middle of a run to star in a film by Ron Howard or a TV show by Shonda Rhimes, the entire production doesn't have to shut down.

Antaeus double-casts for every fully staged production, so each player can fill in for the other one who's playing the same role. And then at performances by the Hurlyburlys, all the cast members are shaken up like dice and tossed in to play with a random selection from each cast.

It sounds as if it might be confusing, but it works, as Antaeus' many awards attest. But how does it work for a costume designer on a tight budget, who has to clothe several people, regardless of their size, in costumes that look the same?

Jessica Olson, who is charged with the task of designing the clothes for Antaeus' new production of *Macbeth* that opens this week, seems to be having a ball.

"The costumes in this production are unique," she says. "About 20 to 25 percent of both casts can share the same costumes. And, because, in [director] Jessica Kubzansky's vision, this play is timeless, we've used 21st-century materials for the clothing."

They are still Scottish-themed, she notes, but the soldiers' kilts are not wool plaid. "They're gray denim," she says. "What modern workmen would wear." Their clans' colors are still represented, though, in swaths of plaid sewn into their skirts and in armbands and sashes.

Because Kubzansky sees the play's activities as representing "a perversion of nature," Olson has designed the clothes to be asymmetrical, or perverse, as well. "There are tee shirts with only one sleeve, for example," she says, "and it's up to the audience to make that connection between the costumes and the plot." Or not.

According to Kubzansky, the Macbeths are "good people who do a bad thing." They are motivated by the fact that they are childless, she believes. "They had a child who died," she says, "and being childless is very much on their minds.

"They are in screaming pain and they need a project. We have to know who these people are and not just assume they're evil."

Kubzansky arrived at this interpretation "from Shakespeare's text," she says. As in the passage where Macbeth exclaims with bitterness, "I have done all this for Banquo's issue!" and in another, where Lady Macbeth says, "I have given suck and know how tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me."

For Kubzansky the play is "all about family: parents and children, and the pain of losing a child or a loved one."

Additionally, Macbeth's actions are, he believes, a chance to achieve immortality. He has heard the three witches cry, "All hail to Macbeth!" and he has heard their extravagant prophecies.

"Shakespeare's plays are always beautiful, brutal, and painful," Kubzansky says, "but they also deal with the humanity of the people." Still, even though the play is timeless, it definitely adheres to a time when a monarch was the absolute ruler and women were second-class citizens, she adds.

Even Lady Macbeth? After all, she was the one who instigated the murder plot and persuaded her husband to perpetrate it.

"Ah yes," Olson replies, "but if she were a 21st century woman she would have done the deed herself."

Olson is very much aware of how the costumes reflect the characters of the players. Lady Macbeth is dressed in brooding colors: green crepe-backed satin with an overskirt of black chiffon, and a bodice of woven black and gold material.

The witches' basic costumes, which Olson procured at Goodwill, are overlaid with loosely woven netting.

"All the costumes are made of modern materials," she says. "The tartans are acrylic and polyester, the leather



Jessica Kubzansky and Jessica Olson



Bo Foxworth as Macbeth and Ann Noble as Lady Macbeth; Photo by Daniel Blinkoff

is vinyl, and everything is machine washable.”

Olson, who was born in Sherman Oaks, grew up in North Carolina and began her theater career as an actor at the age of 12. As part of a regional professional company, she spent her weekends touring. Being away from home so much made her ineligible for a role in her high school play and so, anxious to be part of the production, she volunteered to do the costumes.

“I knew nothing about costumes,” she says, “but my grandmother had always designed and made her own clothing, and both my parents were actors. Plus, we used to go to Colonial Williamsburg at least once a year.”

Armed with these credentials, she costumed her first production, *The Madwoman of Chaillot*, at the age of 16. That play, she says proudly, “involved designing and making an authentic Edwardian wedding dress.”

Having discovered that she loved the work, she went on to get her bachelor’s degree in costume design from the University of North Carolina School of the Arts.

Moving on to Los Angeles, she secured work with the Antaeus Company, whose resident designer is the multi-award-winning A. Jeffrey Schoenberg. He became her mentor and, she says, “I learned so much from him... Jeffrey has his own distinct style and he creates costumes authentic to the period. He has an eye for subtle tonalities and the tone that they give to the characters.

“And he taught me about the nuances of costuming for different historical periods. For example, the way a man ties his cravat means different things in different time periods. It can indicate his status in society, his personality, etc.

“Further, I learned to consider the color palette for the lighting designer. As people change costumes they need different lighting.”

For Antaeus she assisted Schoenberg with the costumes for *The Seagull*, *The Malcontent*, *King Lear*, and *Classicsfest 2010*, and then became the sole costume designer for *Peace in Our Time* and *Classicsfest 2011*. (*Classicsfest* is a series of staged readings of classic plays initiated by company members. The performances take place on Sunday and Monday nights, when the Antaeus stage is normally dark. The next series will be held from July 22 to August 27).

Olson has been designing costumes for theaters in L.A. for the past four years, most recently for the current Sacred Fools Theater production of *Stoneface* and, for East West Players, Stephen Sondheim’s *Little Night Music*, which was set in “a very European city in 1910” a city like Shanghai,” in the words of its director Tim Dang.

Those plays didn’t require her to deal with nearly as much stage blood as she encounters in *Macbeth*. “The play has an overabundance of killing, including regicide and infanticide,” she notes. “It’s considered by many to be Shakespeare’s bloodiest work.”



Elizabeth Swain, Fran Bennett and Susan Boyd Joyce as the three witches; Photo by Daniel Blinkoff



Witch costume sketch (l); Kimiko Gelman, Photo by Daniel G. Lam

Macbeth, presented by the Antaeus Company.
Opens Thursday and Friday. Plays Thu-Sat. 8
pm; Sat and Sun 2 pm. Through August
26. Tickets: \$34-\$30. Antaeus Company, 5112
Lankershim Blvd., North Hollywood. [818-506-
1983](tel:818-506-1983). www.antaeus.org.

*** All *Macbeth* production photos by Daniel Blinkoff
and Daniel G. Lam

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Rebekah Tripp, Ann Noble, Eve Gordon and Abby Wilde in "Peace in Our Time"; Photo by Steven Brand