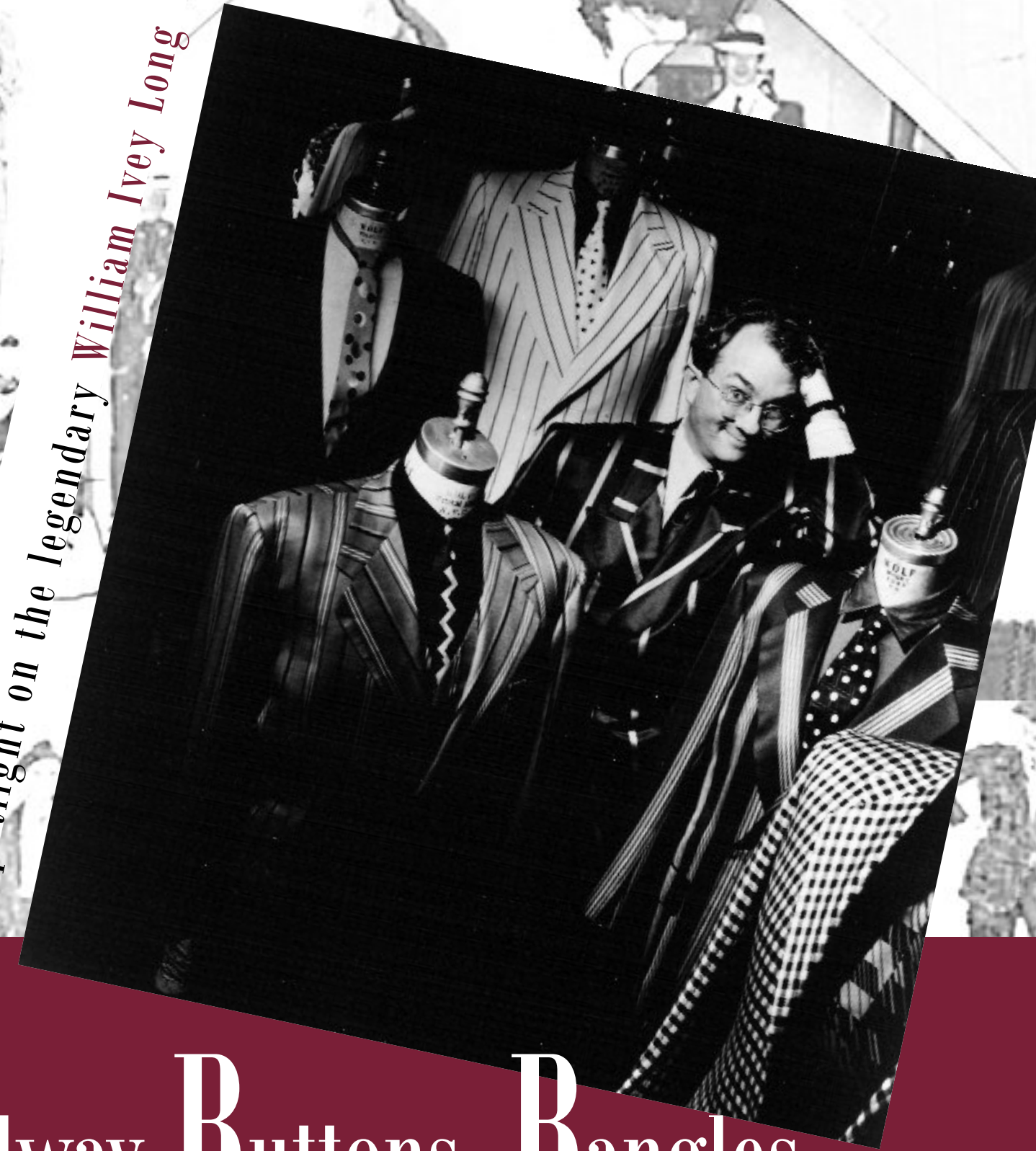


*Spotlight on the legendary William Ivey Long*



# Broadway Buttons, Bangles





**WILLIAM IVEY LONG** has theatre in the blood, as his family were in the business. He literally grew up on the stage - due to a post-war housing shortage in North Carolina he spent the first 3 years of his life living with his parents in a stage-left dressing room. He has been designing Broadway productions for almost 30 years and his natural exuberance and inherent good taste reflects itself in many of his impeccable creations. Although for many years a costume designer, he started out designing, briefly apprenticed to Josef Svoboda, and worked on several projects including a Leonard Bernstein production in Vienna. He also studied for several years under the famed couturier Charles James after moving to New York in the mid seventies. He is perhaps best known for his often outlandish and stunning costumes for highly popular shows such as his forties-style zoot suits in *Guys and Dolls* and the vibrantly coloured sixties clothes in *Hairspray*, the musical currently running on Broadway, in perfect synchrony with John Water's zany approach in the original movie. He has won four Tony Awards for Best Costume Design: *Hairspray* (2003); Mel Brook's *The Producers* (2001); *Crazy For You* (1992), and *Nine* (1982). Since 1989 he has also notched up several Tony nominations for shows including *The Music Man*, *Cabaret*, *Chicago*, and *Lend Me a Tenor*. When not costuming for the theatre, he also designs for movie stars: he created Halle Berry's elegant white gown for the Screen Actors Guild Awards in 2002. Current assignments are as diverse as the revival of the play, *Twentieth Century* and Stephen Sondheim's musical *The Frogs*, set in Ancient Greece.



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Marissa Jaret Winokur as Tracy Turnblad "Welcome to the Sixties"



by Maria Harman

**We would like to know what type of cultural environment you frequented when young and if your studies were immediately directed towards the art world.**

I am very privileged to have grown up on college campuses. My parents were both college professors, and my father founded and was head of the theatre department at Winthrop, a small southern university. My brother, who designs theatres around the world, and I are both following directly in

our parents' footsteps. My parents are both from farming families in North Carolina, and they are the ones who trailblazed into the world of the arts. An interesting development is that I am now back living in North Carolina, on the family farm, when I'm not in New York, so I'm still back doing the family business! From a very early age, practically from birth, I was exposed to the theatre and to music and dance. I was fascinated with the ballet and I would draw dancers on big newsprint pads.. I remember



one of my first recurring nightmares that I had as a child was my mother screaming and running and having her hair pulled – no, this was not home abuse, this was my mother playing the wife in Death of a Salesman but I made no distinction between the two! I think they had taken me at the age of two or three to a production where my father had designed the scenery and my mother was playing the wife. That is my earliest memory that I can isolate as a piece of theatre because it was very carefully explained to me that this was not life – but it was life because I was experiencing it! I was born in 1947 so I was a post-war baby, and

after the war there was a housing shortage in North Carolina where my father was technical director and director of this little theatre and the only place for us to live - it sounds biblical - was in the stage-left dressing room of the outdoor amphitheatre. So we lived in this one little room which is about 40 by 40 feet and you would open the door and go right out onto the stage. That's where I grew up, on the stage. So, it's in my blood, but I also have farming in my blood because my father's people have been living on the same land that I am farming right now since 1676, and we are very proud of that though it's very hard to keep all that

going but it's interesting that we raise cotton and peanuts because cotton is what I work with. My parents were very excited about experiencing the world of the arts, which was not unknown in their growing up but it was certainly not practised as a profession. In fact, my parents were the very first people to have jobs with a salary, everyone else was self employed, agrarian farmers. In the whole line of my ancestors, they were the only two people who ever got paychecks! Isn't that funny? Well, I don't know what that has to do with art but in my background there is a sense of self-starting and regeneration.



Gary Beach as Roger Debris in *The Producers*



Photo: Paul Kórnik

**What made you decide to work in show business?**

Interestingly enough, I don't exactly know that answer. My undergraduate degree was in History at the College of William and Mary in Virginia (Thomas Jefferson went there) and then I did graduate study at the University of North Carolina and I was studying Art History, not theatre because the family business was theatre. I was still working in summer designing and making costumes, making scenery but I never took it seriously, it was just what I did, what we all did. Then, in my third year of being at Chapel Hill I realised that I really wanted to go in to the theatre but I wanted to be a set designer so I applied to Yale University School of Drama and I graduated three years later with my MFA in set design, having studied costume design and lighting. I then came to New York and started

assisting scenic designers and I worked with Ming Cho Lee, my great teacher at Yale, I also assisted Josef Svoboda on an opera as his set design assistant. He was totally amazing and I had met him first in 1970 when he gave a masterclass at Yale. Years later I worked with him as his main assistant on [Leós Janáček's opera] *Jenufa*. Over the years I have tried to imagine when I started

working on costumes because for a while there I gave up the theatre and apprenticed myself to a major fashion couturier, Charles James. I came to New York in 1975 and I moved to the Chelsea Hotel right after graduating from Yale and I lived there for five years until Charles James died. I was doing a job during the day, doing little shows and then working with him at night,

learning all manner of things. So I guess I started to work in show business after my degree and after the years of working with Mr. James. It was sort of decided for me; I have a wonderful group of friends, and directors and other designers would recommend me so I would go and design scenery for some show; everything was off-off Broadway, then I gradually moved up on Broadway so it was an interesting start. I have never assisted a costume designer. Isn't that interesting? I'm not sure why I ever started in costume design.

**Do you feel you had real masters or just people you referred to as role models?**

I had real masters. I had Ming Cho Lee

and Josef Svoboda and Charles James. Now, two of those are in stage design but I felt they were major masters. I was also privileged when I was at Yale to design something in Vienna for Leonard Bernstein: his *Mass*, which he had created for the opening of the Kennedy Center in Washington D.C. and then two years later our music and drama school got permission to mount a production of the *Mass* in Vienna, in the Concert House. I later did a world première with him: his *A Quiet Place* combined with *Trouble in Tahiti*, which was a biographical opera, we debuted it at the Staats Oper. But my first experience in Vienna was with this *Mass*, I had done the costumes and it was thrilling to work

Hugh Jackman as Peter Allen Copacabana Sketch

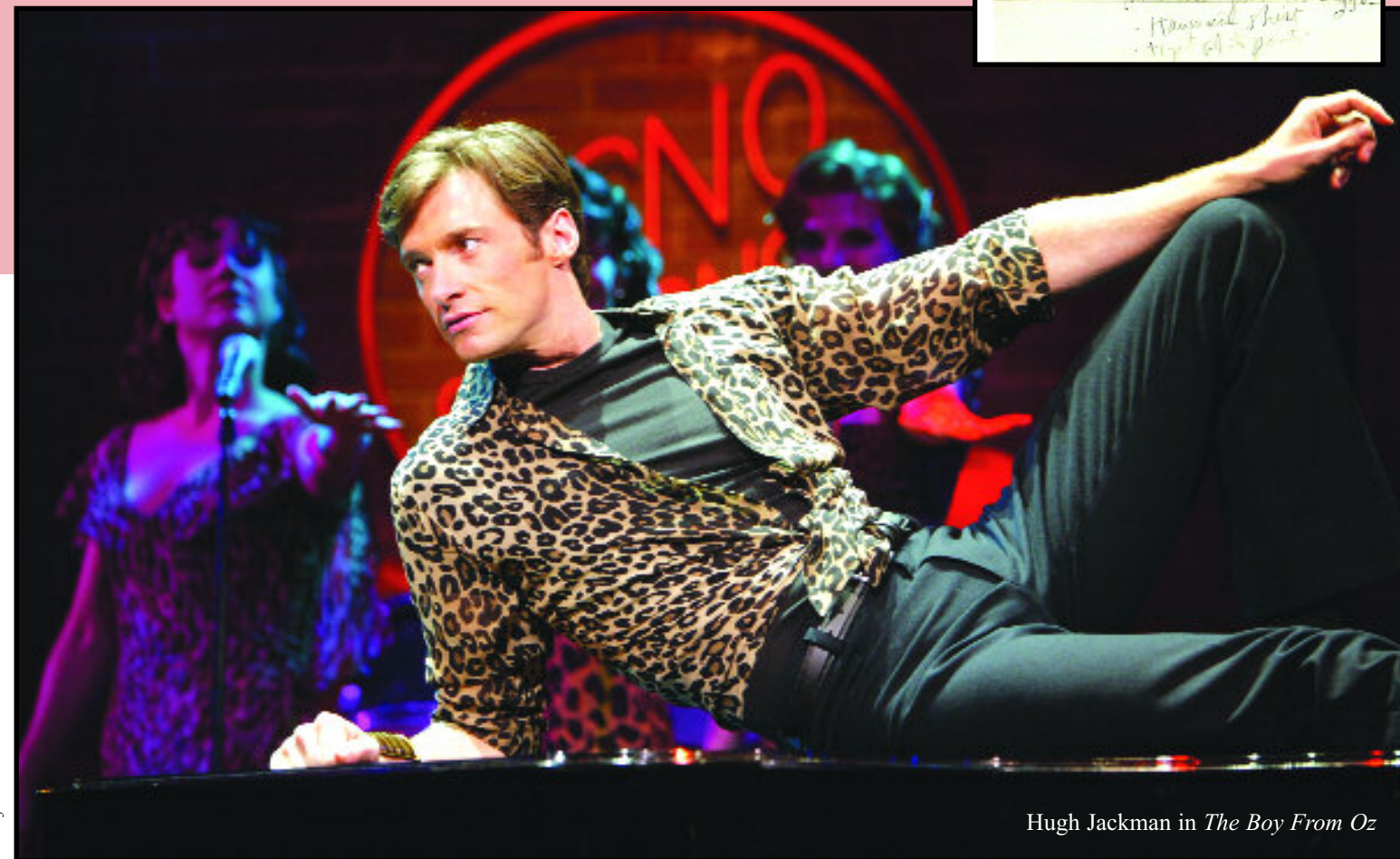


Photo: Joan Marcus

Hugh Jackman in *The Boy From Oz*





Susan Egan and Adam Pascal in Cabaret

Photo: Jonn Marcu

with Leonard Bernstein, for heaven's sake! So that was another life observed and a definite master so I am very privileged to say that I started out at the top. You know, sometimes, early idols disappoint; these just grow and grow. I still continue to be inspired by them.

**In your view, do you think there is a great difference – or vice versa a common ground – between American and British musicals?**

Well, of course there are differences. I have worked in London. I have Chicago running there now in its sixth or seventh year. I have designed several shows there: Crazy For You was a big success story over there, and Contact, we did that last fall so I do quite a few things in London. I currently have six shows running on Broadway. Cabaret has just closed after six years; that was the revival of Cabaret at Studio 54, directed by Sam Mendes and Rob Marshall, if you can imagine that combo. And Sam Mendes, the film director of American Beauty, and Rob Marshall are both stage directors; Rob is a choreographer and Rob just directed a movie of Chicago.

**Do you feel you have links to and draw inspiration from conceptual artists and contemporary art?**

Absolutely, and it's one of the joys of living in New York. In fact, two bricks away is the sculptor, Louise Bourgeois, she's my next-door neighbour and I see her every day. I think she is America's greatest living sculptor. She is many things and 'surrealist' is one of the many descriptions of her. I received the most magnificent Christmas present from her – it's an ear, a brass ear. She's fabulous and very French, even though she has lived in America for many years. She has a salon every Sunday that people come to and sometimes she asks me to come in and sit on it but I'm too intimidated to make comments, but people come from around the world to show her their work. I also go to galleries and I see things and of course you can't but absorb things through the skin if you live in an environment. I read five newspapers a day. I read the "New York Times", the "Daily

News" and the "New York Post", then I read "Daily Variety" and "Women's Wear Daily". I do not watch television and so my main link with the world is those five papers. I think I get a better point of view that way. I need to feel connected. Well, my three years study in Art History was very important, too because I've read widely and I think that study opened up many avenues for me.

**Have you drawn much inspiration from your studies, and from Art History in particular?**

Oh, one million per cent! Because there is so much knowledge out there, education is really about knowing where to find the information you need. We can only really learn an index because there is so much to take in, so through all my degrees and my studies I've learned where to find the information, I would say quite humbly that the knowledge I have learned is where to find the knowledge. I don't think I have any but I know where to find it! In my studio we have six or seven computers. The Internet is really wonderful and you can find things very quickly. I'm very proud of my own personal library; Internet doesn't give you that tactile pleasure of leafing through a book. You ask me if I know about costume houses in Italy; I know Tirelli's in Rome. I have Piero Tosi's beautiful book about all his work and personally inscribed to me by Mr. Tosi so I consider that one of my prized possessions. I use all my books and I don't know if they are going to be in pristine condition when I die, but they will be very well loved, and very well thumbed.

**Have you ever collaborated with other stylists and designers?**

Well, yes and no because all my assistants are designers in their own right, most of the people in this room hold a Master of Fine Arts in Costume Design. Most of them are in their twenties and thirties and I feed off everybody's inspiration. One of the things that I love about doing costume design is that it is one of the great hand-made art forms that are still made by artisans, artists and craftspeople, from the wigmakers to the shoemakers, everything is made by hand. I mainly do live theatre so it's very important for me to know and work on things that will

last. I'm very proud to have six shows running. I have Chicago now in its eighth year and the longest running revival on Broadway. And I have many productions of The Producers and Hairspray and I have new ones this fall: Never Gonna Dance, the Fred and Ginger musical, and Little Shop of Horrors revival, all this on Broadway, then I have several things off-Broadway. Because you make a pact with the producers to produce garments that will last you really have to pay a lot of attention to how the materials are constructed so I take that very seriously. I also love working with new materials. All the time we are trying to discover new things and new ways to make things.

**Ever more frequently, the fashion world adopts a spectacular, entertainment-world style of language, both through direct collaborations and in the use of imagery during fashion shows. There is often an element of crossover. What is your opinion in relation to this? Do you consider it a positive factor?**

Well, I recently saw pictures of Alexander McQueen's fashion show last year, it was a sort of dance marathon, and I designed a Broadway musical called Steel Pier. It took place in the thirties and it was about marathon dances so for this I designed hundreds of amazing bias-cut, flowing and clingy, very sexy dance clothes. I'm sure he didn't know what I was doing but it's very interesting that several people can come up with the same thing. So, it looked very much like Steel Pier when I saw the pictures. McQueen does have a very theatrical edge to his costumes. I wish I had seen that show; I would love to have seen how the clothes moved because it's everything to me how clothing moves. Of course, Galliano is very inspiring, with those fabulous jewel objects that he creates. Everyone's crazy about his work. It's amazing what he is doing, he has great imagination. Did you know that two years ago I presented a fashion line on 7th Avenue? I spent a year working on it and presented during fashion week and I called it "Evening into Overnight". And I have designs ready for ladies' clothing and lingerie. Because I spent so many years

doing this for my day job I thought: "Oh, this will be a cinch, I'll just make clothes for the fashion world." Well, the Gods punished me! But they punished me in the most intricately painful way. I was privileged to receive very good reviews for my show and we started the process of taking orders from the various stores but then it all collapsed and fell apart when I couldn't figure out how to manufacture. I hadn't done all my homework, you see. So, I then gracefully retired before starting. I basically realized that I was in over my head and had no idea what I was doing. I am sitting on international copyrights for my trademark but I think I don't know enough to go any further. I didn't know about outsourcing at the time and I was taking short cuts and didn't know it. The more you know, the less you know. But I have never regretted one minute of that because it introduced me to a whole new group of people, right here in my town. I've really gotten to know a lot of people in the fashion world. I have great respect for everyone in that business. Bruce Weber, the photographer, is a very good friend of mine and I've been a stylist on many of his shoots. Last fall he went to Sweden, for Vanity Fair, and I put together the looks for that. I've worked with him on his book, "Chop Suey" and I've done various things with him. So, there's quite a cross-pollination. I think we all interact, we all see things and we're all influenced by things. My studio recently took a field trip to the wonderful exhibit of Elsa Schiaparelli at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Probably the best, most thoughtful, intelligently presented exhibit of a designer's work that I've ever seen. Just beautiful. And in an art museum, where it should be. I've been studying her for years and years and I've seen various pieces in group shows and in fashion shows about Surrealism but I had never seen a whole body of her work. She really collaborated. Her friends Picasso and Salvador Dali would design prints for her fabrics.

**How much time do you require to set up a show? How do you organize the work?**

I have worked on a show as long as a year





Steel Pier  
Jack Hayes and Elizabeth Mills

and as little as three months. It really all depends on how organized the director is and when they want to get started. When you do an opera you routinely spend a year or more planning it because there are so many considerations before the actual opening because it has to work in repertory and it has to fit in to an entire season. But I don't really do many operas. We did a big production that has just completed its tenth season: A Christmas Carol, at Madison Square Garden. I have over 500 costumes so for that we worked on a year to do. I routinely do Broadway musicals and I would say six months is a good time to design and construct. I would love to say I have six months but it's not always the case. Three months is a little more like it, which is awfully rushed because that only gives you six weeks to design it and six weeks to make it. It's cutting it pretty close. I must tell you the reality of most projects; when the funding finally comes together sometimes you just have to say go, start. But I would prefer a six-month period. How do I organize the work? I first meet with the director and the choreographer and I bring no references or sketches, I come with an open mind, having nothing except having read the script. The second time I come with either little sketches or with lots of books and references and probably with some ideas.

The third time I come in with thumbnail sketches and I really have the entire show sketched, every single costume. I sketch them on long pieces of paper that I tape together and I sketch them scene by scene. I can have this paper up to eight feet long, and I put the lead in the middle and the principals around this lead and on each side I sprinkle out everyone else who appears on the stage during that scene or



The Music Man Pick a Little Ladies (Left to Right) - Leslie Hendrix as Alma Hix; Ruth Williamson as Mrs. Shinn; Ann Brown as Mrs. Squires; Martha Hawley as Maud Dunlap

production number. I do it like this because I find that directors and choreographers love to know what that whole number is going to look like. I think I have created this method. Sometimes, after these thumbnails I am able to do large individual sketches but more often than not I just have to make these clothes from the thumbnails. I do spend a lot of time on them but I pretend they're just little quickies, therefore they come effortlessly, and I'll do the really beautiful sketch later! Well, listen, they seldom come. Sometimes I'll do a new sketch and just glue it right on top of the old one and then I staple fabric choices to them and that ends up becoming the document for the production. It's a very organic way of creating a piece and this kind of storyboard has something to do with my set designer training. I colour-xerox each of the figures and put it into my bible (the record of the production) and I take each of these colour-xeroxes to the draper and we work with that many times if it's a period production. I bring xeroxes of a detail of a hemline or a neck detail and I'll paper clip it behind each sketch because drapers love to see period

reference. The draper will start in a muslin and we do a mock-up and I work on the form with the draper. My training is in cutting and draping, which gives very architectural clothes. In the first fitting I always change everything when I have the human body wearing it. I think it's one of the reasons that designing for the world of fashion was so perplexing to me because I was designing for a theoretical person in the fashion world. My excitement is having the live human being in front of me wearing this piece of kinetic fabric, fabric that moves in space. Imagining who that person might be was beyond me, I couldn't figure it out. Now I understand how certain fashion designers have muses - it's more than a muse, it's someone who can excite them by wearing these garments - but I hadn't figured that out! In that first fitting in the muslin I usually have the fabrics on bolts and I drape them over to see, but at times I reject those. I would say the most crucial part of the process for me is that first fitting with the actor. And since I do a lot of shows with dance I really think of everything as moving in space. I would say I make at least 150-250 costumes for

a show. The largest number of costumes I made was 750, for A Christmas Carol. These are clothes that have to be lived in, eight shows a week, for... ever. Every consideration is made for wearability, movability and 'lastability'. We make copies; on very difficult clothes for dance that get a lot of stress we do triplicates. For Hugh Jackman in The Boy from Oz on Broadway, he has triplicates of his shirts and pants and other clothes because he never leaves the stage and these clothes get a real beating. They're supposed to look like he took them off the coat hanger and just put them on. They're made of silk, and I use a lot of silk. I would say that silk is my favourite because it's the toughest fabric. I find it's stronger than cotton and survives drycleaning - drycleaning is our greatest enemy because of all those chemicals - and especially if you work with mixed fibres like polyester, they have some beautiful polyester micro filaments, but they are slowly dissolved by drycleaning fluid, whereas the natural fibres like silk, cotton, wool and flax last so I try to use as many as those fibres as possible. I consider myself a very good



craftsman and I've studied with master craftsmen but I still consider myself to be in training. Whenever anyone says to me that it's art I tell them that it's art a hundred years from now - that's if anyone remembers - that's when it's art. Right now, it's just what we do and it's crafts. The biggest assignment to yourself is to be a very, very good craftsman. So, knowing your material and knowing the construction is really important. The art part is about 10%.

**Today's craftsmen are ever more difficult to find and top quality materials are scarce. How do you manage to realize your designs to the best effect? Do you commission work to theatrical costume houses, small artisans or haute couture costumiers?**

Yes, I use all sorts of people to make the clothes. Working in London really did change my outlook on craftsmanship. In London they only have two main costume houses: Angels and Monty Berman Associates and everything else is made by individual people working in their kitchens, and they're called costume makers. Leave it to the British to use the simple English, very pragmatic! When I was doing Crazy for You, which was my first big project, I met with all these people, and I was used to going to one shop for the whole duration of the six weeks construction. Well, in London you have to work with twenty different people and it was very difficult at first but over the years I have brought that back to New York and now routinely I have six or seven shops and people, if not more, working on each production. I try to steer it to what their specialty is. So, it means more time for me in a taxi cab but I feel I get better work that way, I don't overwhelm one person or one shop and I get their interest because they don't have to do everything. I learned that in London and I must say that, by example, I do believe I have shifted the way we do it over here now.

**How does your very personal way of bringing a show to life come about? Do**

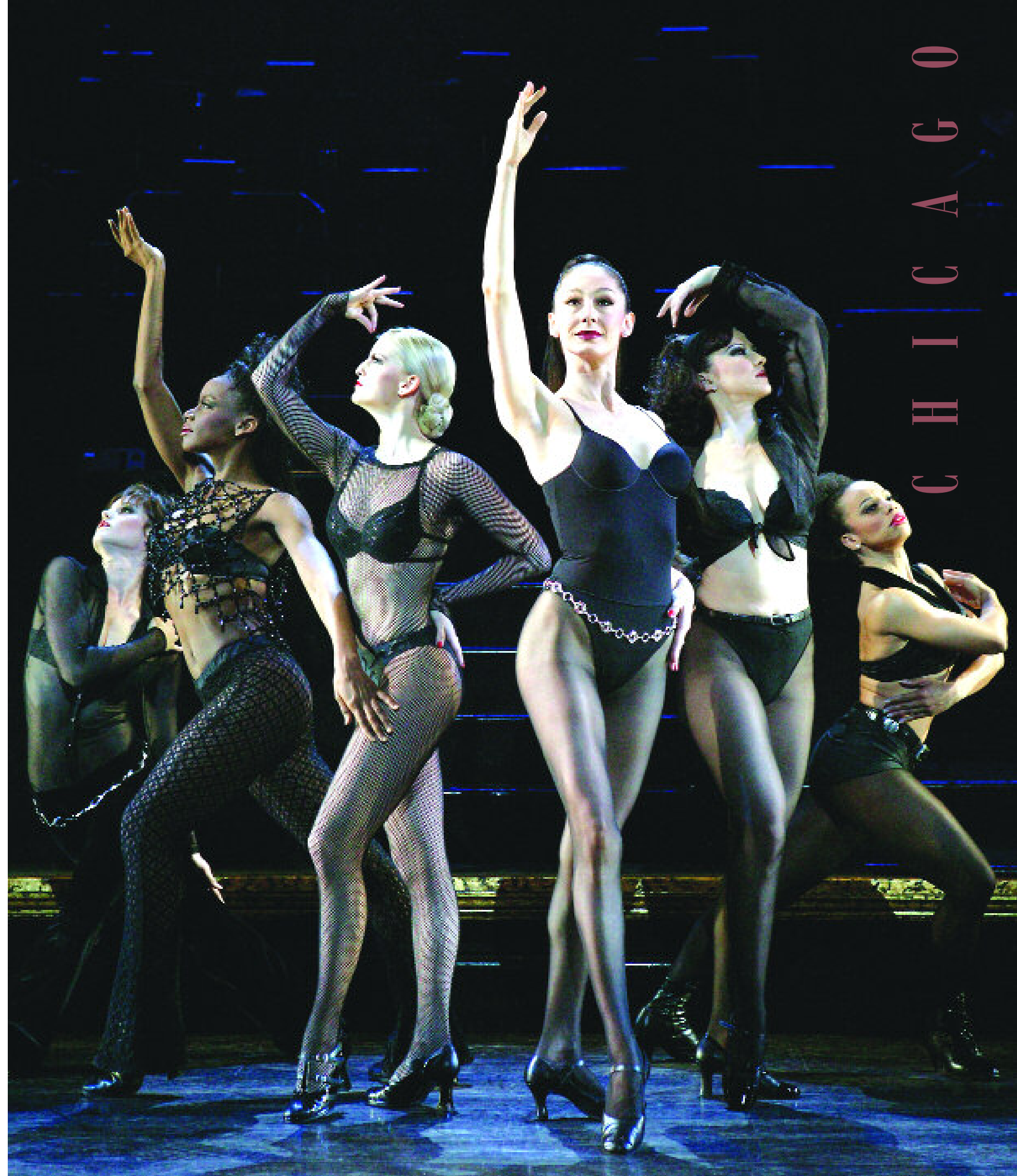
**you have a preferred colour palette or a typical style of expression?**

Since you're called The Scenographer, I should just mention that my profession is second in line; the costumes serve the set. You have to relate to the world that has been created. The world must be created first and then we people it, like the Bible. Third, is the lighting design because they wait to see what we've all done: "Oh, what a mess, I gotta come in and fix it!" And then there was light! For the colour scheme I really do work with the set designer. I often use paintings. I have a xerox of the set design in front of me and try to figure out colour schemes from this. One of my tricks is going to my books and my favourite paintings. They don't necessarily have to relate in subject matter but I sometimes hold them up in front of the set design and that's how I figure out my colour scheme. I hold them upside down so I'm not looking at what they are so my attention isn't diverted to the actual image, I'm just looking at the colour. I remember when I was doing a revival of Guys and Dolls, about ten years ago. The great Tony Walton had done the scenery and it was Technicolor, to be understated. So, I would bring all my books of Gauguin paintings of Tahiti, which are very colourful, and hold them up to the sets. Gauguin helped me sort out a colour scheme. So that's how I designed the colour for Guys and Dolls, turning Gauguin paintings upside down! And I even use the colours in the shadows. You should use everything because in every painting there are certain colours that 'pop' and that artist will 'talk' to you, will show you what to look at. To talk about cross-pollination and interweaving, that is one of my tricks of the trade: I steal! Total theft!

**What productions involving your work are currently running on Broadway and elsewhere? What new productions are you currently working on?**

I'm doing five non-profit productions in a row now. I had three Broadway musicals

opened this fall, three in three months, can you imagine that? They were The Boy From Oz, the Broadway premiere of Little Shop of Horrors, the Jerome Kern musical Never Gonna Dance, based on the Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers movie. Of the five non-profit productions: the Neil Simon play with Mary Tyler Moore, Rose's Dilemma on Broadway; then there's Paul Rudnick's new play called Valhalla based on the life of the mad king Ludovic of Bavaria, which is at the New York Theatre Workshop, where Rent was created. We are having a first dress rehearsal for Susan Strohman's new ballet for the New York City Ballet, and that's a fabulous piece called Double Feature; then I'm doing the revival of McArthur and Hecht's Twentieth Century (not the musical) at the Roundabout Theatre. Now that's a strange hybrid because it's called a Broadway show but it's done in an off-Broadway environment; in other words with off-Broadway fees and budgets! Then I'm following that with a fabulous production we're doing in the Lincoln Center, another non-profit venue, of Aristophanes The Frogs with music by Stephen Sondheim and direction and choreography by Susan Strohman, so that's really exciting. I've got various projects that I'm still working on for tours and productions in different countries. I've just opened The Producers in Toronto and now we're working on Hairspray in Toronto; we're working on The Producers and Hairspray for Sydney and Melbourne and we're working on a production of The Producers for the Theatre Royal Drury Lane in London. And I'm getting ready to do my fifteenth and sixteenth productions of Chicago, of which there will be a Rome production and a Rio de Janeiro production. It's exhausting but very exciting. ■



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