



Costume in Motion: A Guide to Collaboration For Costume Design And Choreography

By E. Shura Pollatsek with photography by Mitchell D. Wilson
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Review by Ola Kraszpulska

Costume in Motion is described on its back cover as a “guide to all stages of the collaboration process between costume designers and choreographers, documenting a wide range of approaches to the creation of a dance piece.” It is a collection of process-based chapters, interjected with six case studies documenting specific dance productions and their unique design approaches. The target audience is identified as undergraduate or graduate students in costume design or choreography, or any artist wishing to increase their collaboration skills in dance.

The first two chapters provide an excellent overview of considerations when approaching a design, including

this world. Specific examples deepen the reader’s understanding at any level, including introductory concepts such as “designing is choosing”—hence, even a simple leotard is a design, or advanced examples from dance companies working in each genre, like Ranee Ramaswamy from Ragamala Dance Company discussing her approach to classical dance style of India called Bharatanatyam.

The third chapter, on collaboration styles, initially caught my interest. While in theatre the director is typically working off a script, in dance, choreographers commonly create a brand-new piece and even costume it themselves. Here, the text explores the methodologies of the choreographer as the main driver, group/team evolution, choreographer as a designer, and costume-inspired choreography. Rich with examples, this chapter solidified my understanding of how approaching dance and theatre is different, and how to work within these differences, leaning on essential collaboration skills, such as communication and flexibility, is essential.

“With practice, designers and choreographers can experiment together and investigate new pathways in an increasingly productive and satisfying fashion.”

how each design element (stage, lighting, sound, costumes, props, projections, and make-up) functions within the world of dance. This is followed by a thorough description of the production process for dance and an overview of styles and genres of dance. The language and definitions are simple enough for a beginner who is getting their first introduction into

The final three chapters explore the design process, from initial concepts through the final product. As a relative dance novice, I loved the descriptions of various dance origins, such as those inspired by music, movement, or text. Also helpful was the breakdown on how to find the design idea, especially if choreography has not started yet. The impor-

tance of creating a mockup or prototype that could be worked within rehearsal was stressed throughout, which allows for the development functionality and movement. “A successful design comes from a collaboration where all the artists involved feel like they can explore, so the product becomes more than the sum of its parts,” the author states.

The appendix, “Tips and Strategies for Dance Costume,” is invaluable. While I gave my students (“costume design for dance”) a similar handout at the start of the semester, it was nowhere near as thorough as this one, including details such as the logistics of touring or the purpose of the undergarment. Additionally, this list includes tips for implementing the design, such as dyeing and structures, as well as ideas on how to fix any issues that might occur (e.g., sleeves that ride up). It also details the visuals that are typically the purview of the choreographer.

Wilson’s photographs of various

dance shows featured throughout the case studies and chapters of this book are part of what makes it great. Having this level of detail, up close and in motion, really helps readers understand the points highlighted by Pollatsek. Whether it’s the use of color in *joyUS justUS*, diagonal stitching in *In My Your Head*, uniforms in *Follow Me*, or sculptural pieces in *Ice Cycle*, the photos are very illuminating. Companies featured vary in sizes and styles, from *The Wizard of Oz* through *STATE*. From mesh hoods, felt skirts, elaborate headpieces and costumes that must withstand months of rehearsals and performances, a great diversity of needs is addressed.

I appreciate that each documented piece shows up in multiple places throughout the book, making multiple points. However, I wish that every dance piece mentioned was also featured in photos. I found myself looking up pieces online. Because the experience of seeing the costumes while reading about

them was so helpful, I noticed when the photos were lacking.

This book is a useful read for various levels of students, both in costume design and choreography. It’s also extremely helpful for anyone rooted in theatre who finds themselves working in dance. I learned a lot about various design approaches, choreographers’ working styles, and the kinds of questions to ask. I’d recommend this book for the classroom and personal use and find Chapter 3, “Styles of Collaboration,” and the appendix especially useful. “With practice, designers and choreographers can experiment together and investigate new pathways in an increasingly productive and satisfying fashion,” the author says.

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