

ABSTRACT

Title of thesis: A COSTUME DESIGN FOR
DUKE ELLINGTON'S SOPHISTICATED LADIES

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The goal of this thesis is to document the design process and execution of the costume design for *Duke Ellington's Sophisticated Ladies*, produced at the University of Maryland, College Park.

The role of the costume designer is to support the vision of the director through collaboration with the production team. Background information leading to the original production of *Sophisticated Ladies* is presented. Based on this background, research was conducted to develop a costume design in conjunction with scene, lighting, and sound designs. Various aspects of the costume design execution are discussed leading to the successful realization of this production. An analysis of the design and execution was conducted and is presented along with concluding remarks specific to the costume design. Visual documentation is used to illustrate the various phases of this project and is contained in the appendices.

A COSTUME DESIGN FOR
DUKE ELLINGTON'S SOPHISTICATED LADIES

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS	iii
LIST OF TABLES	v
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 1: TEXTUAL ANALYSIS	3
Duke Ellington	3
Harlem Renaissance	7
The Cotton Club	9
Sophisticated Ladies	11
CHAPTER 2: DESIGN PROCESS	15
Concept Meeting	15
Visual Research	16
Preliminary Design	21
Final Design	24
CHAPTER 3: DESIGN EXECUTION	25
Post Meeting Preparation	25
Fabric and Clothing Shopping	27
Draper Meetings	32
Rehearsal Process	33
Costume Build and Fittings	35
Technical/Dress Rehearsals	44
CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS	52
APPENDIX A: RESEARCH IMAGES	59
APPENDIX B: COSTUME RENDERINGS	77
APPENDIX C: SUPPORTING PAPERWORK	95
APPENDIX D: PRODUCTION PHOTOGRAPHS	102
BIBLIOGRAPHY	115

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Fig. 1. Research image for color palette.	59
Fig. 2. Research image for color palette.	60
Fig. 3. Research image for pattern motif.	61
Fig. 4. Key image: Aaron Douglas painting.	62
Fig. 5. Key image: Louis Armstrong.	63
Fig. 6. Research image of Duke Ellington.	64
Fig. 7. Research image for Act I.	65
Fig. 8. Research image for “Hit Me With a Hot Note.”	66
Fig. 9. Research image for “Hit Me With a Hot Note.”	67
Fig. 10. Research image for rendering inspiration.	68
Fig. 11. Research image for “Music is a Woman.”	69
Fig. 12. Research image for “The Mooche.”	70
Fig. 13. Research image for “It Don’t Mean a Thing.”	71
Fig. 14. Research image for “It Don’t Mean a Thing.”	72
Fig. 15. Research image for “Something to Live For.”	73
Fig. 16. Research image for “In a Sentimental Mood.”	74
Fig. 17. Research image for “Satin Doll / Just Squeeze Me.”	75
Fig. 18. Research image for “Imagine My Frustration.”	76
Fig. 19. Rendering for “I’ve Got to Be a Rug Cutter.”	77
Fig. 20. Rendering for “Music is a Woman.”	78
Fig. 21. Rendering for “The Mooche.”	79
Fig. 22. Rendering for “Hit Me With a Hot Note.”	80
Fig. 23. Rendering for “It Don’t Mean a Thing.”	81
Fig. 24. Rendering for “Bli-Blip.”	82
Fig. 25. Rendering for “Take the A Train.”	83
Fig. 26. Rendering for “Solitude.”	84
Fig. 27. Rendering for “Don’t Get Around Much Anymore / I Let a Song Go Out of My Heart.”	85
Fig. 28. Rendering for “Something to Live For.”	86
Fig. 29. Rendering for “Caravan.”	87
Fig. 30. Rendering for “I’m Checking Out Goombye / Do Nothing ‘til You Hear from Me.”	88
Fig. 31. Rendering for “I’m Beginning to See the Light.”	89
Fig. 32. Rendering for “Satin Doll / Just Squeeze Me.”	90
Fig. 33. Rendering for “I’m Just a Lucky So-and-So.”	91
Fig. 34. Rendering for “Imagine my Frustration.”	92
Fig. 35. Rendering for “I Got It Bad and That Ain’t Good / Mood Indigo.”	93
Fig. 36. Rendering for “It Don’t Mean a Thing (reprise).”	94
Fig. 37. Technical Drawing for dancers in “The Mooche.”	96
Fig. 38. Technical Drawing for dancers in Act II.	97
Fig. 39. Production photo: “I’ve Got to Be a Rug Cutter.”	102
Fig. 40. Production photo: “The Mooche.”	103
Fig. 41. Production photo: “Hit Me With a Hot Note.”	104
Fig. 42. Production photo: “It Don’t Mean a Thing.”	105

Fig. 43. Production photo: “It Don’t Mean a Thing.”	106
Fig. 44. Production photo: “Take the A Train.”	107
Fig. 45. Production photo: “Solitude.”	108
Fig. 46. Production photo: “I’m Checking Out Goombye / Do Nothing ‘til You Hear from Me.”	109
Fig. 47. Production photo: “Satin Doll/Just Squeeze Me.”	110
Fig. 48. Production photo: “I’m Just a Lucky So-and-So.”	111
Fig. 49. Production photo: “Imagine My Frustration.”	112
Fig. 50. Production photo: “Drop Me Off in Harlem.”	113
Fig. 51. Production photo: “Drop Me Off in Harlem.”	114

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Measurement Chart.....	95
Table 2. Initial Costume Plot Example.....	98
Table 3. Scenic Breakdown	99
Table 4. Wardrobe Costume Plot Example.....	100
Table 5. Rough Costume Plot.....	101

INTRODUCTION

The goal of this thesis is to document the design process and execution of the costume design for *Duke Ellington's Sophisticated Ladies*, produced at the University of Maryland, College Park. The show was performed in the Kay Theatre at the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center from October 17 to October 25, 2003.

The focus of the costume designer is to create a visual concept portrayed through the performer's attire, which will reveal the characters of the production to the audience. The costume designer is a member of a team working to support the vision of the director, who was Associate Professor Scot Reese for this production. The choreographer was Alvin Mayes from the Department of Dance. The musical conductor was Edward Walters from the School of Music. The remainder of the production team included: Pegi Marshall-Amundsen, scene designer; Yi-Hui Lee, lighting designer; Marcia Saylor, sound designer; Lacey Finkner, stage manager; David Kriebs, production manager; and Robyn Meyer, assistant costume designer. The faculty advisors for this production were Helen Huang, Professor of costume design; Daniel MacLean Wagner, Chair of the Department and Professor of lighting design; and Daniel Conway, Associate Professor of scenic design.

The following chapters provide a detailed analysis of the costume design. Chapter I introduces the background of the original production through discussions of the composer, Duke Ellington, and the period during which his musical style evolved. A brief presentation of the Harlem Renaissance helps to establish a foundation for some of

the motivations that led to this production. Chapter II describes the design process from the perspective of the costume designer. Specifics include the collaboration with the design team, research leading to design concepts, and costume renderings. Chapter III presents the various aspects of the design realization. Key points include post meeting preparation, fabric and clothing shopping, draper meetings, the rehearsal process, costume build and fittings, and technical/dress rehearsals. Chapter IV provides a summary of the entire project with emphasis on an analysis of both design and execution. This chapter also documents my growth as a designer resulting from the challenges presented through this venture. Finally, the appendices contain copies of research, rendered designs, supporting paperwork, and production photographs, which support the discussion presented in the chapters.

CHAPTER 1: TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Duke Ellington

The success of Duke Ellington cannot be attributed to one single instance or association, but rather is a combination of factors and teachers, which shaped his outlook and his future. This musical mastermind was born Edward Kennedy Ellington on April 29, 1899 in Washington, D.C.¹ Although his parents were of middle class standing, they nurtured their son with a richness of self worth and gave him an understanding of the finer things in life. Despite the fact that Duke Ellington had a sister, several years separated their ages and in essence he grew up as an only child. His mother, Daisy Kennedy Ellington, was said to have doted on her son and embedded a phrase that would remain with him for the rest of his life; “Edward you are blessed. You don’t have anything to worry about. Edward you are blessed.”² His father, James Edward Ellington, is said to have fostered the business savvy in young Ellington. Together they set the foundation for his life’s experiences, which would shape his character and his music. The Ellington household fostered a mindset of living as if they were millionaires. They highly valued an appearance of refined etiquette and dress. In fact, this persona was so outwardly displayed in Edward Ellington that it resulted in a high school friend, Edgar McEntree, coining his infamous nickname. McEntree looked at Ellington’s polite manners, fashionable clothes, and aristocratic bearing and nicknamed him “Duke.”³

¹ John E. Hasse, *Beyond Category: The Life and Genius of Duke Ellington* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 21.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., 23-24.

There were many teachers in Duke Ellington's life. Some of these seemed to have crossed his path while he sought out others as mentors. The start of these important influences began with his parents who introduced him to music. Ellington recalled his mother playing the piano "pretty things like 'Meditation', so pretty they'd make you cry."⁴ His father was an opera fan. Although Ellington was given his first formal training in music at age seven, he was more focused on young boyish pursuits. As he progressed in school, he was not regarded as the scholarly type but did show promise in the arts, particularly in mechanical and freehand drawing. He showed so much promise that during high school in 1916 he was offered a scholarship to study art at the prestigious Pratt Institute of Applied Arts in Brooklyn.⁵ Ellington's inner musical soul pulled him in another direction. Perhaps this is because music never left his life. As a teenager, he improvised his first tune on the job while playing piano at a soda fountain.⁶ This improvisation would later become known as "Soda Fountain Rag."⁷

A newfound interest in ragtime music sparked Ellington's musical senses. He sought out pianists in Washington to observe their style. While this newfound pastime suited him and these artists kept him interested, none would have as much impact as the artist he encountered while on vacation. On this particular trip, young Ellington and his mother detoured from their usual destinations and came across the pianist Harvey Brooks. Young Ellington managed to meet Brooks, whose impact was quite profound on

⁴ Carole Marks and Diana Edkins, *The Power of Pride: Stylemakers and Rulebreakers of the Harlem Renaissance* (New York: Crown Publishers Inc., 1999), 172.

⁵ John E. Hasse, *Beyond Category: The Life and Genius of Duke Ellington* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 43.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁷ James Haskins, *Black Music in America: A History Through Its People* (New York: Harper Collins, 1987), 83.

the youthful artist. So much so, that Ellington is regarded as saying: “I cannot tell you what that music did to me...and when I got home I had a real yearning to play. I hadn’t been able to get off the ground before, but after hearing him I said to myself, ‘Man, you’re just going to *have* to do it.’”⁸ The right inspiration or guidance would magically find Ellington at the most opportune moments in his life. If the inspiration did not find him, he would find it. One of these friendly mentors was the bandleader Oliver “Doc” Perry, the “piano parent” as Ellington affectionately referred to him, who taught Ellington how to read music. John E. Hasse noted “Perry and fellow pianist Louis Brown deeply influenced Ellington with their poise, manners, discipline, musical skill, and broad-mindedness.”⁹

The combination of several unique factors forms the distinctive style known as the Duke Ellington trademark. Paramount to Ellington’s approach is his philosophy and work ethic. Ellington learned early on that he was first an observer, then a doer. In observing others, he gained knowledge of the music and the artist’s interpretation of it. In practice, he furthered his own skills as a musician not only employing the techniques he had observed, but also striving to improve upon them through refinements, which would emerge in future performances. Hasse noted that “If Washington provided Ellington his basic musical education, Manhattan would be his graduate school.”¹⁰ While living in Washington, Ellington maximized his life experiences as an artist and professional by carefully choosing the path he followed. He laid the foundation for his future success from these experiences, and he built upon this foundation during his years

⁸ John E. Hasse, *Beyond Category: The Life and Genius of Duke Ellington* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 36.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 61.

in New York. Ellington was superb at utilizing his specialized skills to create a persona, music, and a style. This talent can best be summarized by Winton Marsalis, a famous trumpet player, who states that Ellington's music reflects so many diverse things, "(Ellington's music is) about the human experience; if it was experience, he stylized it."¹¹ Ellington's desire for perfection is coupled with his strong work ethic. There were many occasions when the band would play all hours of the night, and then Ellington would utilize several daylight hours to compose and perfect his music. He also expected his band members to take their jobs seriously by showing up on time and was known for making their lives miserable if they disrupted the band's progress. Evolution and growth of the band stemmed from the talents of its members and the distinctive sound they achieved. Two members of the band vital to this sound were a trumpeter and saxophonist. James "Bubber" Miley fashioned the distinctive "growl" with his trumpet, which converted the personality of the refined dance band into the world of jazz.¹² Sidney Bechet's great musical abilities helped bring the sounds of swing to the band through his saxophone. Bechet's influence would linger with the band long after his departure.¹³

Ellington's constant desire to increase the band's success caused him to don many hats. His two primary hats were as bandleader and composer. He also functioned as a booking agent, businessman, manager, and student of music.¹⁴ Through it all, Ellington managed to project a feeling of personal style that got him noticed, and his demeanor made an impact on his interactions with other people.

¹¹ Ibid., 14.

¹² Ibid., 76.

¹³ Ibid., 81.

¹⁴ Ibid., 46-56.

Harlem Renaissance

It must be noted that Ellington's legacy emerged during a particularly prominent period in the history of African-American society, the Harlem Renaissance. The term Harlem Renaissance refers to the artistic, cultural and social growth of African-Americans in American life. Renaissance is defined in Webster as "a movement or period of vigorous artistic and intellectual activity." This revival occurred during the 1920's in Harlem, New York. As the African-American community strove to form their identities after many years of bondage and misery, Harlem became the focal point for African-Americans as they searched for belonging and ownership of a new identity.

Harlem was the center of urban black life. If you wanted to write, you went to Harlem. If you wanted to dance, you went to Harlem. If you wanted to effect social change, you went to Harlem. If you wanted to compose music, you went to Harlem. If you wanted the best chance at changing your circumstances and you were black, you went to Harlem.¹⁵

True to Ellington form in continually striving for self-improvement and meeting adventures head-on, the lure of Manhattan attracted him. Ellington first moved to New York in 1923 to embark on the next phase of his career. Ellington stated, "Harlem, in our minds, did indeed have the world's most glamorous atmosphere. We had to go there."¹⁶ The Harlem Renaissance represented a large endeavor by African-Americans to project positive black images and break down racial barriers. In contrast to the view that the Harlem Renaissance promoted equality for African-Americans, George Schuyler, a black writer and critic, noted that Harlem Renaissance doctrine might backfire. Specifically, he

¹⁵ Bruce M. Tyler, *From Harlem to Hollywood* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1992).

¹⁶ John E. Hasse, *Beyond Category: The Life and Genius of Duke Ellington* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 57.

was concerned that the movement would emphasize the racial differences between whites and blacks, therefore lending credence to the racist practices of segregation and discrimination.¹⁷ His assessment implied that the identity of African-Americans was due in part to negative attitudes towards them rather than to the new and progressive identity that African-Americans were trying to foster.

In any event, the *New Negro* movement began and resulted from the contributions of the black veterans of World War I.¹⁸ The *New Negro* represented the hopes and dreams of African-Americans that life in the North was sweeter, that opportunity was abundant and most importantly that they could do and be what they wanted.¹⁹ Ellington's inner psyche was in tune with the changes that the philosophies of the Harlem Renaissance were striving to achieve. While these ideologies propelled him, they also created hurdles that he had to overcome. In his book, *Beyond Category*, which chronicles the life of Duke Ellington, John Edward Hasse refers to these beliefs as “ ‘problems’ Ellington created for himself with his insatiable need to break old rules, write new ones, break new ground, and to create and innovate.”²⁰ He further explains that:

Duke Ellington must be seen as a key figure of the cultural awakening of Harlem. He would achieve as much as any literary figure of the Renaissance, and would keep on achieving after most of the writers had faded or died.²¹

The Harlem Renaissance represents a time of major progression for African-Americans. A sentiment expressed by Alain Locke, one of the leaders during the Harlem

¹⁷ Winthrop D. Lane, “Ambushed in the City: The Grim Side of Harlem,” *Survey*, no. 11 (1 March 1925): 692-694.

¹⁸ Gail Gelburd, *Blossoming of New Promises* (New York: Hofstra University, 1984).

¹⁹ Sheila J. Hardy and P. Hardy, *Extraordinary People of the Harlem Renaissance* (New York: Children's Press, 2000).

²⁰ John E. Hasse, *Beyond Category: The Life and Genius of Duke Ellington* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 18.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 64.

Renaissance, was that he and others could teach not just African-Americans but all Americans, about black America.²² In doing so they could begin to recreate the identity of black people and this was the perfect time.

Blues originated from work songs in the Deep South and was essentially a form of African-American folk music. The combination of blues and ragtime coupled with changes in rhythm, resulted in forming jazz. Jazz emerged as part of the Harlem Renaissance. This music style was a revolution in itself and brought together many black and white musicians in defense of their art through music. Jazz started on the banks of the Mississippi, and the opening of the 1921 all-black musical *Shuffle Along* marked the Jazz Age.²³ The shift in musical developments can be attributed to the changes in societal customs and attitudes. As these musical genres developed, the notion of dancing in public was not only deemed socially acceptable, but also regarded as a widely popular activity. As this pastime increased, so did the demand for orchestras equipped to supply the fashionable music that "...was at the heart of American social life..."²⁴ White New Yorkers were curious to explore this new music at popular sites such as The Cotton Club.

The Cotton Club

The Cotton Club, also known as "The Aristocrat of Harlem," was a profitable yet questionable business that sported an unusual décor, had strict employee criteria, and for all intents and purposes catered to an all white clientele. The owners were gangsters who

²² Christy Draper, *African-American Women Sculptors During the Harlem Renaissance* [database on-line]; available from <http://www.u.arizona.edu/ic/mcbride/ws200/grp5Cpots.com>; accessed 10 March 2002.

²³ Sheila J. Hardy and P. Hardy, *Extraordinary People of the Harlem Renaissance* (New York: Children's Press, 2000).

²⁴ James Lincoln Collier, *Duke Ellington* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 16.

despite Prohibition laws, proudly served liquor. According to Hasse, “The club was decorated with southern and African motifs, and the whole experience was intended to give its patrons a respite, however brief, from the cares of the present time. The audience would be transported to some far-off, exotic place for an hour of fast entertainment, energetic dancing, skimpy costumes, and unusual music.”²⁵ Ellington capitalized on the abilities of his musicians, by converting their sounds into a unique art form that came to be recognized as the “jungle music.” Hasse further describes the atmosphere of the shows at The Cotton Club, “The shows combined hot music, snappy dancing, vaudeville, and even burlesque.”²⁶ The infamous Cab Calloway, who first performed at The Cotton Club in 1930, stated:

The sets and costumes were stunning and elaborate, like operatic settings almost. The chorus girls changed costumes for every number, and the soloists, dancers, and singers were always dressed to the hilt—the women in long flowing gowns, if that was appropriate, or in the briefest of brief dance costumes.²⁷

Ellington provided more than just the sounds of his orchestra; he created theater.

As Charles Fox observed, “His music has a theatrical dimension, soloists being deployed rather like characters in a play, their comings and goings planned and orchestrated.”²⁸

Hasse describes Ellington as being synonymous to a playwright who is “fortunate enough to have a repertory company of actors for which to write, Ellington was able to compose specifically for the various instrumental voices in his band.”²⁹ The ability of Ellington to transform and adapt the talent that he worked with was a significant factor, and the

²⁵ John E. Hasse, *Beyond Category: The Life and Genius of Duke Ellington* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 106.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 102.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 103.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 106.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 106.

variety in the band's performances continually entertained audiences. This skill showcased Ellington's versatility, which he constantly tried to improve. Unquestionably, Ellington was a serious composer but could still enjoy the more playful side of his work. Duke Ellington created some very graceful and sophisticated compositions along with a set of very "hoochie choochie" pieces.³⁰

While Ellington created the on-stage flair, his relationship with his business manager, Irving Mills, helped to manage financial aspects of the band. Despite Ellington's relative success, the reality of being an African-American performer during the Harlem Renaissance was that he would still have to overcome many obstacles. Mills was essential to the band's steady employment, generating a maximum income for the band.³¹

Sophisticated Ladies

Conglomeration, collaboration, and confidence are three "C's" which characterize Duke Ellington's endeavors. Although he achieved much success expanding far beyond the realm of music, there was one credit, which has been referred to as the achievement Ellington was unable to obtain himself, a Broadway hit.³² Perhaps this is why it is even more fitting that the creation of *Sophisticated Ladies* was conceived.

The time was the 1970's and Mercer Ellington, Duke's son, was striving to maintain his father's legacy through the current band. In the same way that fate and good

³⁰ Richard Powell, "Harlem Renaissance", *NewsHour*, Forum (February 1998).

³¹ Frank Driggs and Harris Lewine, *Black Beauty, White Heat: A Pictorial History of Classic Jazz* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1996), 93.

³² John E. Hasse, *Beyond Category: The Life and Genius of Duke Ellington* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 393.

fortune shadowed Duke Ellington, this same positive karma found Mercer. At the start of the new decade, the Broadway trend for revues of black songwriters such as *Eubie!* and *Ain't Misbehavin'* prompted the creation of *Sophisticated Ladies*.³³ The revue would feature Ellington's songs mixed with some instrumentals. This production opened on March 1, 1981 and closed on January 2, 1983 staging a total of seven hundred sixty seven performances.³⁴ The Broadway cast featured Gregory Hines, Judith Jamison, and Phyllis Hyman, as well as Mercer Ellington functioning as the musical director. Although the show was successful, Mercer voiced his opinion concerning the musical emphasis of the show; "What I objected to about the show was that there was a bit too much Broadway in it. The music wasn't the star of the show the way it should have been..."³⁵

Notwithstanding Mercer's personal feelings concerning the focus of the production, it is important to point out the contributions the production did fuel. Interest in Duke Ellington continued through the remainder of the 1980's and early 1990's with previously unreleased recordings being released, issuance of a commemorative stamp in his honor, a series of concerts at the prestigious Lincoln Center, the release of a PBS documentary, and the acquisition by the Smithsonian Institution of the Ellington archives.³⁶ As closely as Mercer was aligned to the music, there are critics who question how well the re-creation represented certain artists and the genres of music. Gunther Schuller points out in his commentary titled *The Case for Ellington's Music as Living Repertory* the importance of continued performance of Ellington's works by modern jazz orchestras.

³³ Ibid., 392.

³⁴ "Sophisticated Ladies", *Internet Broadway Database* [database on-line]; available from <http://www.ibdb.com>; accessed 1 March 2004.

³⁵ John E. Hasse, *Beyond Category: The Life and Genius of Duke Ellington* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 392.

³⁶ Ibid., 394-396.

His opponents argue that trying to emulate orchestras is impossible, hence, to imitate original artists and thus their music cannot be recaptured for repetition. Schuller further states that:

(Ellington's compositions) can be played by others sensitively re-creating the original notes, pitches, rhythms, timbres, etc...in performances by fine musicians with fine ears, not only re-create the original, but bring to it an excitement and drive that has its own validity... (Ellington's music) can be preserved—and must be. It is too important a part of our American musical legacy.³⁷

Donald McKayle, an accomplished dancer, choreographer, director and educator, originally conceived *Sophisticated Ladies*. McKayle was born on July 6, 1930 in New York and began dancing in high school. His first professional appearance as a dancer came at the age of 18, as did the beginning of a successful career as a choreographer. His credits span television, film, and theater, some of which received Tony nominations, including *Sophisticated Ladies*. As a full professor of dance at the University of California at Irvine, McKayle continues to generate a legacy through his students. A most notable aspect of Donald McKayle's work is his willingness and desire to induce an emotional response through his choreography.³⁸ His passion for the art of dance and in particular the Negro artist in American dance is captured in a short article he authored, *The Negro Dancer in Our Time*.³⁹ McKayle candidly discusses the social limitations placed on Negro dancers. The need for artistic freedom that he depicts in this discussion may have been a driving force behind his desire to create the celebration of Negro art

³⁷ Mark Tucker, *The Duke Ellington Reader* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 418-421.

³⁸ Kimberly Pittman, *Great Performances: Free to Dance*, [database on-line]; available from <http://www.wnet.org/freetodance/biographies/mckayle.html>; accessed 1 March 2004.

³⁹ Walter Sorell, *The Dance Has Many Faces* (Chicago: Columbia University Press, 1966), 71-75.

found in *Sophisticated Ladies*. McKayle was not alone in this endeavor, as a team of four choreographers including Henry LeTang, Bruce Heath, Mercedes Ellington, and Michael Smuin collaborated on the production.

Michael Smuin served as the director for *Sophisticated Ladies* as part of a highly successful career. As a native of Montana, his first exposure to dance came through a spontaneous inclination to participate in a Native American ceremonial dance. At the age of fourteen, he began his formal education as a dancer, which quickly led to his role as a choreographer. He choreographed for ballet before he was twenty, and his career in this occupation led to numerous awards including five Emmy Awards and a Tony Award.⁴⁰ Smuin's talents reached beyond that of dancer and choreographer; he also became the director of the San Francisco Ballet eight years prior to the opening of *Sophisticated Ladies*. His collaboration with McKayle on this project proved fruitful, as the production garnered Tony nominations in directing and choreography.⁴¹

Given an understanding of the many influences that led to Duke Ellington's success, the design team was provided with a basis of discussion for creatively producing *Sophisticated Ladies* at the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center. As the costume designer, this basis would help me better understand the intentions and vision of the director and choreographer.

⁴⁰ Janet Lynn Roseman, *Dance Masters: Interviews with Legends of Dance* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 158.

⁴¹ "Michael Smuin", *Smuim Ballets* [database on-line]; available from <http://www.smuimballets.com/Michael.htm>; accessed 1 March 2004.

CHAPTER 2: DESIGN PROCESS

Concept Meeting

The concept meeting for *Sophisticated Ladies* was held on Friday, March 7, 2003 with Scot Reese serving as the director and accompanied by Alvin Mayes as the choreographer. The intent of the director was to create a tribute to Duke Ellington which was fitting of this revolutionary artist. Reese spoke of Ellington's popularity and how it is more pertinent now than in Ellington's own time. He also mentioned the fusion of styles: jazz, blues and swing, which Ellington combined.⁴² The director supplied the design team with a list of "key words" as well as a list of "style influences" to evoke the character of the production. In his vision, this list of key words included such terms as sophisticated, sentimental, soul, elegant, sultry, and slinky. His list of style influences spanned the 1930's, 1940's, and 1950's and included such names as Dorothy Dandridge, Lena Horne, Bessie Smith, Cab Calloway, Aaron Douglas, Josephine Baker, and Louis Armstrong. Reese wanted to combine the period style with a contemporary flavor to be introduced by individuals such as Badgley Mischa and Armani.

Reese envisioned an Art Deco set reminiscent of the 1930's, 1940's, and 1950's as seen in a 2003 "musical review." He imagined the set as a "sculptural unit." Within this unit, he described the actors for Act I as people who would come to the Cotton Club to go out dancing and to have fun; while Act II would depict more of a "red carpet awards show" emphasizing high society. The director described the essence of this idea

⁴² Perhaps this fusion was motivated by Ellington's strong distaste to be observed in terms of categories or labels. He regarded these as limiting and professed the motto, "No Boxes." John E. Hasse, *Beyond Category: The Life and Genius of Duke Ellington* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 50.

with the metaphor that Act I was about wearing a “derby” and Act II was reserved for the “top hat.” As a practicing milliner, this image resonated with me, and I found it most useful to reflect upon during the design process. Reese stressed to the designers that this production was not about a historical recreation, but rather to be inspired from its history. He encouraged the designers to look towards the Harlem Renaissance and places like The Cotton Club, and Savoy Ballroom for this inspiration.

The script lists very specific costumes for each of the songs. The director chose to discard this information and preferred that the design team focus on the music for inspiration. While the director wanted to maintain an avenue of creativity on the part of the designers, there were some specific parameters to bear in mind. For instance, the production would include a core of six to eight dancers and eleven singers (five male and six female). It was stated that the casting remain non-race specific. There would also be a band of eight to ten members. A request from the director was to costume the singers and dancers in one outfit for each act. For subsequent appearances by the performers, their costumes would be modified to simulate the illusion of a complete costume change. These modifications were achieved through “add-ons” to the original costumes. The exception to this was one number that was referred to as the “exotic” dance number, “The Mooche.” Although a part of the show, this number was treated as its own entity and therefore would require its own set of costumes apart from the “add-on” theme.

Visual Research

My starting point for the research began with sources on or related to the Harlem Renaissance. Books such as: Sheila Jackson Hardy and P. Stephen Hardy’s

Extraordinary People of the Harlem Renaissance, Rudolph P. Byrd's *Generations in Black and White*, and Carole Marks and Diana Edkins's *The Power of Pride: Stylemakers and Rulebreakers of the Harlem Renaissance* were especially helpful. I also reviewed books such as *Swing Era New York: The Jazz Photographs of Charles Peterson* by W. Royal Stokes, and *Black Music in America A History Through Its People* by James Haskins. These books were telling of the musical genre, along with a book I purchased, entitled *(1920-1950) Black Beauty, White Heat A Pictorial History of Classic Jazz*, by Frank Driggs and Harris Lewine, which brought to life a closer examination of the bands and life inside the various clubs. The combination of these sources helped to disclose the type of world that Reese articulated. Keeping in mind the list of "style influences" mentioned earlier, I turned to sources both past and present. I located books specific to such people as Dorothy Dandridge, Lena Horne and Billy Holiday. Other useful sources were related to Gianni Versace, Christian Dior, and Giorgio Armani. *This Fabulous Century, 1950-1960* by Time-Life Books highlighted additional "style influences," while providing historical information. My findings continued, and I aimed at familiarizing myself with the various silhouettes and costume pieces of the 1930's, 1940's, and 1950's. I also compared my period research with numerous contemporary magazines which contained applicable silhouettes and styles.

The director did not specify a particular color palette. In deriving my palette, I felt a wise choice could be found among my Art Deco research. I was particularly fond of an image found in Alastair Duncan's *American Art Deco* (see Figure 1). This showcased an auditorium's interior of the 1930's. I especially liked the combination of vivid colors juxtaposed against the sensuous and curving lines incorporated into the

architectural detailing. I supplemented this with the painting, *Black Belt*, by Archibald J. Motley Jr. (Figure 2) and color blocks of fabric furnishings based on art deco for pattern inspiration (Figure 3). The auditorium source aided me in envisioning a range of color possibilities to showcase each song within the scope of the production. The Motley painting echoed these colors and the intensity of the blue possessed the quality I imagined in the treatment of the set. The set designer also selected a blue hue to paint the set, which was reminiscent of the Motley painting. The result was a vibrant harmony between the costume and set color choices. For instance, in the song “Take the A-Train,” it was as if the performers were canvassed in a living painting representative of Motley (see Figure 44). Research in the area of Art Deco enabled me to locate my color palette and was inspirational for my choices of line, pattern, and motif.

Once I had collected my research based on our initial concept meeting, I felt it was important to discuss my findings with the director. During this meeting, we perused the large research sampling, which I had photocopied and sorted. This enabled the director to react to the approach I was forming based on his initial ideas. It also provided me an opportunity to determine if the scope of my research was within the realm of the directors’ vision and to begin filtering out research, which did not resonate with this vision. Engaging in this meeting was a very encouraging step for me due to the following. After the initial concept meeting, I reflected on the ideas presented and began my visual research. I found the range of research to be a bit overwhelming in that I was researching four time periods: the 1930’s, 1940’s, 1950’s, and contemporary to create a cohesive look. This daunting aspect made me question if I was headed in the right direction. I was concerned that I had brought too many pages of research to the initial

meeting with the director. At the outset of our meeting, I admitted to Reese that I had a lot to share but was not necessarily expecting that he would have time to scan everything. Reese was generous with his time. We were able to go through each piece of research, commenting on what we were drawn to as we went along. He also felt the approach I had taken was correct. Specifically, not to immediately hone in on a single image for each number, but rather to become immersed in the essence of the styles and people of the era. I found his patience and enthusiasm to be very supportive. The meeting provided me with the assurance that I was on target with the ideas of the production. It enabled me to convert what originally felt like a daunting stack of research into a wealth of information that I organized in preparation for the research meeting.

Realizing that I would not have the luxury of presenting all of my material during the research meeting, I felt it was necessary to compile it such that I could highlight an overall point of view. Based on the productive meeting I had with the director, I sorted my research into categories and used individually labeled folders to organize the information. My groupings included: atmosphere and artists; Duke Ellington; dancing; ensemble looks; jungle number looks; overview; Act I and Act II looks; couture designers; and hairstyles.

Category one, “atmosphere and artists,” showcased such artists as Aaron Douglas, Archibald J. Motley Jr., Miguel Covarrubias, and Winold Reiss (see Figure 4). All of these artists depict movement and a free spirit in their work. The atmosphere was depicted through snapshots of various bands within these clubs, places like Connie’s Inn, and handbills of the Cotton Club announcing the engagements of featured individuals at these clubs (see Figure 5). My “Duke Ellington” category contained a variety of

photographs highlighting him in “jam sessions.” These were telling of the passion he exuded for music (see Figure 6). The “dancing” collection showed the zest that couples at different establishments had for the music. The “ensemble” section illustrated groupings of people, which helped to contrast various styles. In many cases, the similarities among these individuals helped me visualize the manner in which they remained a cohesive unit. In other words, people are shown dressed in different outfits but the manner in which they are grouped together shows that they belong together. For example, there could be a group of guys in suits of different textures and with different accessories like ties, shoes, etc. but they function as a unit (see Figure 7). The “jungle number” showcased animal prints, exposed the skin, and had costume sections that extended beyond the body in artistic fashion. Contained in the “overview” grouping were costume details such as: accessories like hats and shoes; patterns and costume detailing; similar necklines and hemlines; and glamour and glitz in the form of feathers, sequins, and sparkle. “Act I and Act II looks” were compilations of looks appropriate for those sections of the production. Specifically, various day dresses, suits, and hats for going out to the clubs pertained to Act I, whereas formal evening wear with notched lapels, trains, and fancy jewelry pertained to Act II. Along with my various folders, I also compiled several contemporary magazines to help merge the historic with the current perspective. This method of organization was key to my efficient presentation of the significant aspects of my research findings during the preliminary research meeting.

The preliminary research meeting for *Sophisticated Ladies* was held on Friday, April 4, 2003. During the course of this meeting, designers from each area were given an opportunity to share the visual images they had collected. Lighting designer Muriel Lee

showed a variety of paintings which evoked an emotional response. Her selections also reflected a mood which was captured in the treatment of paintings through light, shadow and color. Scenic designer Pegi Marshall-Amundsen displayed similar paintings along with her findings on bandstands of the era. My presentation included the research outlined above. Given the limited time allowed for this meeting, the preparation of the images including the prioritized order in which they should be presented was necessary to ensure a smooth transition from one category to the next. I found the meeting participants engaged in and excited about my findings. It was interesting to note that we were all drawn to images of Aaron Douglas. Although we may have all been influenced by this source in different ways, our connection to this artist demonstrated that everyone understood the vision of the director, and we were on track to creating a cohesive production. Once all members of the design team shared their findings, both the director and choreographer voiced their responses to the positive progress generated thus far. It was now time for me to reexamine my research and apply it more specifically to each number in the production. This would bring me closer to my next milestone, preliminary sketches.

Preliminary Design

I began the preliminary sketch phase of the process by focusing on the music. I listened to it several times as a whole and then went back to hear each individual piece. I outlined each song, keeping in mind the number of performers each required. I then tried to come up with a list of key words for each number. With this information in mind, I scanned my collected research and selected specific key images for each song. I was

intrigued by the parallels I was finding between the period and contemporary research. I felt that the fusion of the two would not only produce an interesting design, but would also be recognizable to a contemporary audience. A good example of this process was the design for “Hit Me With a Hot Note.” The combination of the period elements shown in Figure 8 and the contemporary aspects shown in Figure 9 resulted in the final design in Figure 22. My aim was to capture the mood of each piece in a creative and meaningful manner. During this process it was also necessary to seek out poses for each character. These poses would further enhance what I was trying to convey about each number. I created a new series of folders specific to each song to collect my interpreted feelings based on the newly selected research. This method enabled me to draw from my original set of folders for further information if need be. More importantly, it aided me in focusing more directly on each piece. A further consideration beyond simply designing each individual costume was the need to account for the costume progression of each performer. This progression refers to the idea of using “add-ons,” which are changes to the performer’s original costume designed to provide a different look when they appear in another song. This approach presented me with an interesting challenge requiring careful coordination of my design choices leading to an efficient execution.

It was now time to begin the rough sketches. I explored possibilities for each character in an attempt to reveal the best possible look. Once these impressions were complete, Professor Helen Huang and I met and discussed each look along with my accompanying research. We noted which ideas were presented in a strong and cohesive way and identified those that could benefit from further enhancement.

At this point in my process, I felt it was necessary to converse with both the director and choreographer prior to the scheduled preliminary design meeting. I met with each separately and during the course of presenting my impressions, took note of their reactions. Both were excited to see the ideas emerging and eager to make suggestions. I then set out to revise my sketches, incorporating the thoughts and advice from Helen Huang, Scot Reese, and Alvin Mayes.

The preliminary design meeting was held on April 24, 2003. This meeting is quite exciting as it is an opportunity to see previously generated ideas from the design team taking on a more concrete form. My designs were presented as black and white renderings, accompanied by a color representation referred to as “thumbnails.” These thumbnails are a reduced version of the costumed character, revealing the color palette. The director approved my preliminary designs, which now required a realistic assessment with the costume shop prior to obtaining final approval.

The practice of preliminary costing is done to ensure that the needs and desires of the show created during the developing of the design can be achieved. In the area of costumes, the individual responsible for this evaluation of the design is generally the costume shop manager. With regard to the costing of *Sophisticated Ladies*, I provided the costume shop manager with color copies of the designs. We then talked through each rendering as I relayed the ideas that had been discussed in the proceeding production meetings. With this information, the shop manager was able to divide the renderings as either designated built costumes versus pulled or rental costumes. It also enabled her to start thinking about how to divide the built costume load with respect to the various skill levels of the shop personnel. These discussions with the costume shop manager resulted

in an agreement that the costs of the show were achievable pending the approval of the final design.

Final Design

The final design meeting, held on Friday, May 9, 2003 went smoothly as the director and choreographer endorsed their final approval of the designs. In preparation for this meeting, it was necessary to revisit the costume renderings. While the renderings were lively and the design ideas were strong, they were lacking in exuberance. I decided to return to my research and focused on those images that I felt a strong connection to. I found the depictions of Miguel Covarrubias (see Figure 10) to be exhilarating and proceeded to portray this same essence by creating a new set of renderings inspired by his style. This new approach proved very fruitful for me as a designer. It was a breakthrough in the design process to capture the spirit and energy befitting a musical. To help feature this new style, I also wanted to bring more “punch” to the rendering by enhancing the color. The positive responses I received from the rest of the design team, along with those of the choreographer and director were very rewarding.

CHAPTER 3: DESIGN EXECUTION

Now that the costume design for the show had been approved, it was time to nurture the ideas into a tangible form. Several steps were necessary to prepare the costumes for stage to include: shopping, draper meetings, fittings, and finally technical dress rehearsals.

Post Meeting Preparation

I began “post meeting preparation” to secure the major areas affecting the budget and to resolve issues related to the cast. The first concern I had was with regard to the cost of purchasing all the dance shoes. Because the show is a musical review, one of my main questions for the director and choreographer was any desire for specific footwear. Having some experience working with musicals, I knew how important footwear would be for the performers and understood the costs involved. I felt this information would be crucial in breaking down my budget. It was stipulated that singers and dancers would require character shoes for the production. In addition, one particular number featured a ballet solo, therefore pointe shoes were necessary. It was discussed that tap shoes may be required. I made a mental note to follow up with the choreographer regarding footwear. This would be a crucial area, not only to ensure the performers received adequate shoes, but its impact on the budget. During the course of shopping in the D.C. area for my pre-thesis show, I discovered Cipriano Danceware. Knowing that my thesis show was on the horizon, I spoke with the owner about the possibility of acquiring a large quantity order in the future. Because of this earlier conversation, the owner and I were better able to cover the specific needs of the current show. I relayed to her the scope of *Sophisticated*

Ladies, the types of shoes which were required and when they would be needed. In addition to what shoes this vendor could provide, we also discussed the fitting options, delivery, and discount in cost due to the size of the order.

Another area that greatly impacted the budget was with respect to the tuxedos. Once again, this source was located during the course of working on my pre-thesis show. Bob Michel, my contact at Perfect Fit Tuxedos, was very willing to work with me to support the needs of the show. We discussed the tuxedos, ways to handle the fittings, delivery, and also the discount he could provide. I felt making the above contacts were not only important in aiding the budget due to the discounts that would be received, but also showed that as a practicing designer I am always looking for and being aware of potential resources.

In addition to these local specialty shops, it was necessary to make inquiries at the area fabric stores. I began textile research at G-Street Fabrics in both Maryland and Virginia as well as at Myann Fabrics in Virginia. I selected swatches which best represented potential fabrics for the show. The intention of this quest was to determine what was locally available and any possible impact they proposed on the budget prior to shopping in New York.

Because of the calendar production schedule of *Sophisticated Ladies*, it was necessary to design the show prior to the actual casting date. The final design approval occurred about the same time as the announcement of the cast. I spoke with the director about familiarizing myself with the cast and discovered that Reese had scheduled a meeting between himself and the cast to touch base prior to breaking for the summer. I requested to be present in order to introduce myself, as well as take photos of each cast

member and acquire any measurements not previously taken by the costume shop. These cast photos would later prove helpful when shopping for fabrics or clothing and when speaking to the drapers during construction meetings. While obtaining measurements of the cast, a couple of cast members relayed that they were planning on losing a significant amount of weight over the summer. Based on this information, the shop manager and I concurred that it would be necessary to re-measure these cast members after the summer. This was also an important fact to keep in mind while suit shopping, therefore more than one suit size was ordered for certain individuals.

The above outlined work was completed during the semester prior to the actual production's opening. Although the designs of the show had been approved, the post meeting preparation was a necessary stage in the process for me as a designer to insure that no loose ends remained. It placed me mentally and strategically in a place of contentment knowing that I had explored crucial resources prior to the semester's end. The production process would take a brief rest during the summer break and I felt I had a head-start on the next phase of my journey.

Fabric and Clothing Shopping

In order to facilitate fabric shopping for *Sophisticated Ladies*, professor Huang and I met to re-cap the results of the design approval meeting and to strategize our approach. Our first concern was with respect to the men's suits in Act I. Because of the bright colors of the men's suits for "I've Got to Be a Rug Cutter," Professor Huang felt that these suits should be built. I relayed the current build plan for the shop, which did not include the suits. We decided to make a concerted effort to purchase the suits, and as

a last resort adjust the build load for the shop. It was also agreed that shopping to obtain the women's dresses prior to shopping in New York would be most beneficial. Since time and money were large factors affecting the New York trip, information concerning these two costume areas would aid in optimizing the one-day we had allocated for this trip. This exemplified our need to prioritize our costume shopping requirements.

Professor Huang and I also discussed the swatches I originally gathered to facilitate fabric choices. We decided to visit G-Street Fabrics in Rockville, Maryland to expand the swatch possibilities. During this pursuit, I located two versions of a very flashy and fun stretch fabric with sequins. Both versions were made of white lycra with two unique patterns in black and sprinkled with sequins. I felt these options would be perfect for the dancer's costumes in Act II. Specifically, the combination of color and line used to create the patterns, along with a touch of multicolored sparkle suggested a formal yet highly energized movement, which I felt characterized the dancers. Rather than selecting only one of these patterns for all the dancers, I decided that having both patterns added variety without compromising the uniformity of the group.

I started shopping locally for the women's dresses, concentrating my efforts on the look for "It Don't Mean a Thing." My search encompassed a range of vendors in both Maryland and Virginia. I located possibilities for this costume and was able to find costume options for "Satin Doll/Just Squeeze Me." I set these options up on dress forms and photographed them. Hardcopy versions of these photographs provided me with a visual reminder of the alternatives currently obtained and were helpful when considering choices during our trip to New York.

Several vendors were explored in an effort to locate the men's suits. The design concept for the four suits was that they would all be in varying shades of blue and possess different fabric characteristics. One suit was to be solid in color, one pinstriped, one patterned and one textured. Of the sources explored, the options were very limited in terms of fabric treatment and color. Therefore, I determined that detailing on the suits was not achievable for "I've Got to Be a Rug Cutter," and I focused on selecting color choices that best represented the original design. When placing orders for the suits, I selected more than one size due to the anticipated weight fluctuations in the cast members as discussed previously. One more suit for "Music is a Woman" needed to be located, and thus became an emphasis during future shopping exploits.

In preparation for the New York shopping trip, I arranged a shopping booklet to increase effectiveness. It contained reduced color renderings of Act I on one page and Act II on another to aid in viewing the entire show at a glance. It also contained research pertinent to each song and color inspirations to assist in selecting fabrics. I included a measurement spreadsheet containing the most significant and commonly used measurements for all of the actors (see Table 1). I also brought along photographs of the purchased dress options, which I had previously set up on dress forms. Finally, I started a spreadsheet of expenses utilizing the shop manager's breakdown as a guide, but with added categories for each person and each article. This became an important tool for tracking expenses, and had the added benefit of providing a comprehensive list of those items that still needed to be acquired.

Professor Huang and I embarked on our New York shopping excursion on August 12, 2003. Our clothes shopping focused on possibilities for "Satin Doll/Just Squeeze

Me,” which required an evening dress and “Hit Me With a Hot Note” which required a ladies suit. We were unable to find a ready-made suit in Washington D.C. or New York due in large part to the required color. My design called for a rich coral accented with an applied lime green sunburst as shown in Figure 41. Therefore, it was desirable to have this costume built, and the fabric would be purchased while in New York’s fabric district. In order to add this costume to the shop’s build load, it would be necessary to replace an already designated build with a purchased costume. Fortunately, my previous shopping in the Washington D.C. area resulted in an excellent option for the “Satin Doll/Just Squeeze Me” evening dress, which was originally slated as a built costume. Having spent the time to explore the local options available prior to shopping in New York combined with having organized visual information, allowed me the freedom to alter the original build load to best serve the design needs of the show.

During the execution phase of the design process, some changes occurred which somewhat deviated from my original ideas. For instance, the dress designed for “Music is a Woman” was inspired by a research picture that featured a delicate feather trim throughout the dress (see Figure 11). In searching the various fabric stores, it became apparent that neither a suitable fabric nor the trim was available. However, Professor Huang and I did discover a gold silk fabric highlighted by metallic-like gold accents. This fabric was boldly sophisticated, which was in tune with the essence of the song and was determined to be a good choice. The director concurred during our discussions about the purchased fabrics. He remarked how great this particular fabric was and that he felt it would draw the audience’s focus to the actress. Recognizing that this number would be

staged in the house rather than on stage, we knew that the gold color would “pop” against the red walls of the theatre’s interior.

Another example of the need for flexibility when translating the original design to execution was for the costumes in “Solitude.” This performance piece included a solo singer and a ballet dancer. The staging of this song required the singer to enter from the wings and end up sitting on a swing downstage. As the song progressed, the dancer would emerge from the opposite wing to balance the stage. The original design for the singer’s coat required a single opaque color for the outer coat fabric and an art deco inspired lining. The song reflects an inner turmoil, which I felt was expressed in the wavy lines of the art deco pattern. Professor Huang and I found a sheer lining fabric with a pattern to mimic the art deco research. We later changed the outer coat fabric from opaque to sheer, which intensified the art deco pattern. I felt that this supported the mood of the song. The sheer outer fabric allowed the art deco pattern to be visible as soon as the singer walked on stage. With the pattern visible from the start, the audience is immediately drawn into the moment and ultimately the singer’s inner turmoil.

Although the art deco pattern worked nicely for the singer’s costume, this same fabric created a problem for the dancer’s costume. The original dress design for the dancer was a sleeveless, fitted bodice with a long, full, circular skirt in a solid color to compliment the coat. There would also be a free-falling scarf attached to one shoulder at the back. The dancer’s costume contained a wavelike inset, which originated at the neckline of the bodice and gradually widened as it continued down to the hem of the skirt. The art deco fabric was initially chosen to create this inset, but the pattern size was too large and not conducive to the inset shape. This design was replaced with a previous

idea using ombré fabric for the bodice and skirt with a complimentary solid color inset. The inset would only be contained in the bodice and was created as a controlled ruched section. This change allowed the dancer to compliment the singer.

Draper Meetings

My next step in realizing the costumes was to conduct draper meetings. Prior to meeting with the individual drapers assigned to *Sophisticated Ladies*, I felt it was necessary to gather some fundamental information to ensure progress at the meetings. I compiled individual folders, labeled for each draper. These preparation packets contained copies of the renderings, distinct research, and technical drawings. The intent of the draper meetings was to have a one-on-one dialogue between the draper and designer to understand the inspiration and intent of a given costume design. It is an opportunity for the draper to clarify any questions, which may arise when viewing the costume rendering such as the location of seam lines, darts, or gathers. These questions are often resolved with the aid of technical drawings such as the ones shown in Figure 37 Figure 38.

To support the costume execution, I provided the costume shop with a notebook termed the “bible.” This notebook contains information pertinent to the show such as copies of designs, fabric swatches, rentals, measurement charts, etc. It aids as a reference tool for drapers or anyone needing to access information, especially when the designer is not available. Upon my return from New York, fabric swatch charts were added to the bible and this information was incorporated into the draper meetings. It proved useful for the drapers to see the hand (drape) of the fabric and to be able to better visualize what the

finished design would look like. In addition to the costume shop bible, I created a “designer’s working bible.” This is similar to the shop version, but contains more categorized information such as “to do” lists, pulling lists, shopping lists, production information, fittings, and budgets. I found this notebook to be a very useful tool for staying on track during the course of the show.

Rehearsal Process

The first rehearsal for *Sophisticated Ladies* was held on September 15, 2003. All designers were present on this date, and we were given the opportunity to formally present our respective designs to the cast. This design presentation meeting is valuable for acquainting the cast to the type of atmosphere or vision we have created for the production, along with the director and choreographer’s insights. For the costume designer, it is a chance to show and briefly talk about the renderings. This along with future fittings would help familiarize the cast with their various costume pieces so that they could integrate them into their movement. To assist in the rehearsal process, I provided copies of the renderings for both the stage manager and the choreographer, which enabled them to quickly reference a given costume.

Rehearsal costume pieces were provided and at the first rehearsal, a set of boaters and top hats were supplied. Various clothing pieces and accessories were made available as the rehearsals progressed. I maintained an open dialogue with the assistant stage manager who was assigned to costumes. We kept each other informed regarding costumes and shoes, which were added to the rehearsals and those items that were no longer needed. Outside of rehearsals, we met in the costume shop to go through the

costume rack. I acquainted her with the various costume pieces and how their use was integrated within each song. I also provided her with updated costume piece lists as design choices were solidified.

It was essential to periodically attend rehearsals, making myself available to answer any questions and to monitor the effectiveness of the costumes for each song. In this way, I was hoping to make any necessary changes or adjustments that would assist the actors and to help ensure that dress rehearsals ran smoothly. For instance, the boaters used in “I’ve Got to Be a Rug Cutter” served not only as a flashy accessory to their look, but were incorporated into their energized choreography. The rehearsal boaters that were initially provided were plastic and therefore too light. As such, they were impeding the quick movements of the performers. The best solution was to switch these out for actual straw boaters. In another instance, I observed the walking patterns of the girls who would be attired in evening gowns during Act II. One girl in particular would be wearing a gown with a long train attached. Her current rehearsal garment had length, but did not simulate the long train. It was apparent that the tight turns being made in rehearsal had the potential of being hindered by the train she would ultimately wear. Also, as some performers moved across the stage, they passed each other in alternating lines, where a dress train could interfere with the spacing. Therefore, I added a muslin train to the back of the rehearsal garment to simulate the length of the real train. I noted how this affected the manner in which the actor turned, making those actors closest to her more aware of the necessary spacing that should be maintained. Observing rehearsals not only affected costume design elements, but also revealed some interesting interplay with scenic aspects. For example, in monitoring the female actor in “I’m Beginning to See the

Light,” she perches herself on a stool. I felt the height of this stool was not conducive with the cut of the dress she would be wearing. Likewise, in “Solitude” the singer sits on a swing. The design for this look was a short, fitted dress worn with a long topcoat. I felt that the height of the swing was important as the actor needed to sit on it comfortably. This meant the swing should not be too high, but also high enough that the topcoat could trail down. Because of the issues concerning these two songs, it prompted a brief meeting with the director, choreographer, scenic designer and I to best showcase each piece. In this way, I believe we resolved issues in a sensible manner, which saved valuable time had we not noticed them until dress rehearsals.

Costume Build and Fittings

Sophisticated Ladies entered the shop for construction on August 25, 2003. The majority of fashion fabrics had been purchased at this time. I searched through the costume fabric stock for any trims, linings, and fabrics, which could be used for mock-ups. This was done to save money as well as utilize already existing resources.

Aside from costumes that were built by the shop, the remainder of costumes were acquired from stock, purchased, or rented from local theatres. I was able to obtain tuxedos from George Washington University and evening dresses from The Shakespeare Theatre. This was an exciting prospect because the agreement between the costume shops at The University of Maryland and these two theatres is a no charge rental. The budget for this show was very tight; so any items, which could be utilized from these rental agreements, would help the budget. On the same day that I picked up the tuxedos from George Washington University, I also visited my previously mentioned local

vendor, Perfect Fit Tuxedos. During this appointment, specifics were discussed for various options of the rental to include whether their shop would supply a complete tuxedo purchase, a partial purchase and partial rental, or a complete rental. I was able to view swatch cards for cummerbund and bowtie color choices. During this visit, I ordered the top hats needed in Act II for both men and women. The design called for black top hats for the men and white hats for the women. In my quest for these costume pieces, it was apparent that the white hats were harder to locate and thus more expensive. Although I was able to track down other vendors for these hats, Perfect Fit Tuxedos had the best price and was convenient given that I was already going to obtain the tuxedos from them.

The fitting process was a valuable aspect of the design execution from many perspectives. It allowed me to work closely with the actors and drapers simultaneously, enabling important interaction on construction details. It stimulated various dialogues with the director and choreographer, keeping us in steady communication. It also garnered an opportunity to have a more experienced eye evaluate my work through my advisor, Professor Huang.

A device, which was indispensable throughout the fitting process, was a digital camera. I found this tool helpful as a method of communication with my advisor, the director, and the choreographer to replicate what was accomplished during fittings. This was particularly important as schedule conflicts prevented these individuals from attending every fitting. Given the visual assistance provided by the digital images, we were able to discuss critical aspects effectively. The digital camera was also advantageous for viewing multiple looks of each actor. These multiple looks could

include various choices for a given song, or the various looks that naturally occurred from one song to the next for a given performer. Employing digital pictures was also beneficial for maintaining continuity for multiple outfits such as for the group of dancers. The “exotic” number for “The Mooche” is a perfect example where having printed photographs of each fitting enabled me to discuss the changes required in the muslin mock-ups and provided a specific reference for the student draper to follow. Likewise, it enhanced the long distance communication with an outsourced draper. For instance, I recognized how the photographs would clarify the fitting notes being provided to the draper; therefore I included a copy to accompany the muslins being packaged to her.

Along with the digital camera as an asset during fittings, having Professor Huang’s advice was beneficial. She offered suggestions to flatter the actors with respect to the designs in both the built as well as purchased costumes. Use of digital pictures was invaluable for altering the silhouette of a given garment as demonstrated by Professor Huang by drawing over the top of a printed photograph. This method was used to enhance the fit of the evening gown designed for “In a Sentimental Mood.” Although the physique of the actor was considered during the draper meeting, more could be done to create a flattering look while maintaining the integrity of the design. Professor Huang and I started by evaluating the photograph taken from the muslin fitting. We analyzed the strengths and weakness of the silhouette portrayed in the photograph. Those features that needed to be modified were indicated directly on the photograph in colored pencil. For instance, the front neckline, which originated from a halter cut, was quite flattering for this actress, so we strove to maintain this line. Therefore, the front neckline was kept open and seams under and around the breasts were added. To balance this look from the

back, the back neckline was created with an arch and sleeves were added with a split at the hemline. The skirt had a side slit that we shifted to fall from the side front. There was also a pleated drape, which hung from the waist. We decided to eliminate the drape and replace it by adding more length to the skirt, cutting the back skirt as a gore and having it fall in a slight train with a center back godet. These changes were annotated on the photograph to distinguish the new lines. In this way, the changes made were straightforward and clearly communicated to the draper resulting in a more graceful look.

Another instance where I valued Professor Huang's input was during fittings of the dancers for "The Mooche." This piece was designed with two different but complimentary looks for a total of six dancers, three outfitted in each look. The dancers needed to be assigned to each look so that the drapers would know whom they would be costuming. I had spoken with the choreographer to determine if he had a preference for the assignment of the costumes to the dancers, which would affect any patterns created in the choreography of the dance. His intention was not to line them up in a particular order with regard to the costumes and in fact preferred a more random look. Since I was given leeway to divide the six dancers into two looks, I considered their physique along with their measurements. However, I also felt their height was a consideration as one headdress was considerably taller than the other. I also wanted to try to keep in tune to the random aspect expressed by the choreographer. For these reasons, I purposely did not pick the three thinnest girls to wear the swagged skirt, which went along with the turban look. Once we were able to see the two versions of these costumes in the muslin fittings, it was determined that my reasoning should be revisited. Professor Huang suggested that we take photographs of each fitting. In order to create a more proportioned look for some

of the dancers, we drew over the photograph to experiment with the swagged skirt and turn the center portion into more of a “loin cloth” look. Having a photograph of all six dancers in costume to look at simultaneously was useful. Ultimately, the best solution to maintain the integrity of the design without lots of changes was to reassign the dancers based on their physique. Although my initial instinct coincided with the final designation of each look, I allowed other factors to influence my preliminary choice. Ultimately I learned that following my instinct would have been the best choice for this situation.

Another instance of meeting the desired goal of the design was concerning the solo ballet dancer’s costume in “Solitude.” The fabric choice underwent a change from the original intent as discussed in the section on fabric shopping. During the draper meeting for this garment, a circular skirt was discussed, as I wanted a very full, flowing skirt. This approach would have worked if the fabric had remained a solid color. Since the purchased fabric was a beautifully ombré dyed silk, the draper and I were concerned about maintaining the subtle transitions of the dye job if a circle skirt was employed. Professor Huang suggested that the skirt be cut as gores and that I work with the draper to determine the width of the gored pieces. In this way, the darkest hues of the ombré were concentrated at the hemline and gradually faded in intensity as the skirt transitioned to the bodice.

Professor Huang offered guidance on ways to flatter actors with respect to the designs in both the built and purchased costumes. For instance, one of the male singers appears in “I’ve Got to Be a Rug Cutter” and later in “Take the A Train.” He starts out in a brightly colored suit for the first number and then makes a change in which he replaces the suit jacket with a long sleeved shirt. Although the shirt fit and was the same orange

color and style depicted in the rendering, I was concerned about putting it alongside the blue-green suit pants. I relayed my concern to Professor Huang who felt that the color was fine, but thought that an alternative fabric choice would be better. The original shirt was cotton and projected a casual aura. Although this was in rhythm with the style of “Manhattan Transfer” which was the inspiration for this piece, I agreed that a richer fabric would improve the look. I located a rayon blend in a comparable color, which had subtle texturing. This new shirt appeared more reflective and alive and was an enhancing change.

Another concern occurred during the course of outfitting the dancers for the song “It Don’t Mean a Thing,” in Act I. The original concept was to have multicolored pants and white tops. This look was accessorized with black suspenders and black hats. Based on the conversation I had with the shop manager during our costing meeting, the pants were expected to be a built item. Although I had swatched a pant fabric which was very similar to the research, the reevaluation of the build load in the shop was that costumes for this number would have to be purchased. Due to my prior investigations in trying to acquire a pant similar to the design, it was evident that none existed. The closest option was a black fabric with some pattern detailing. Therefore, Professor Huang and I decided to transfer the color from the pants to the tops. Because I liked the colors found in the research for the pants, I opted for pink tops to go with the black pants and was hoping to find colored suspenders or a means to enhance black suspenders with trim. During my shopping trips I found tops, which I felt mimicked the design. Because these tops were tricky to find, I purchased them in a variety of sizes. I also came across hats for the dancers, which I felt were right on target. In the meantime, the vendor whom I had

previously contacted regarding the patterned black pants informed me that some of those options were now discontinued. Ironically, the costume shop was in a position of providing more support because of incoming students. At first, it was discussed with the shop manager that a student be given the pants as a draping assignment. After examining the fabric that I had previously swatched, it was decided that a more experienced draper would better handle the building of the pants. I was glad to have the pants built rather than purchased because I felt the purchased fabric better translated the intent of the research. After the first round of fittings, Professor Huang and I assessed the look. Although the photographs taken during the fittings revealed a look, which matched the rendering, it was suggested that a new choice for the tops be found with a better fabric option. In my quest to locate a new top for the dancers, I searched many vendors and finally came across a possible option. These tops featured a v-neck, had a flared sleeve with a self tied belt, and were a wonderful berry colored silk, which matched the pink in my fabric swatch perfectly. The trouble was that not all the sizes I needed were available in this store. Since the vendor was a chain department store, I combed various Maryland and Virginia locations until I acquired the variety of sizes needed from three different stores. The response from fitting this new option was very positive. The dancers really liked the new tops and people present in the shop during the fittings echoed the comments. Professor Huang liked the tops as well and informed me that she was glad I made the choice to seek out an alternative fabric. Even though this second fitting of the dancers was great in terms of look, there was some concern as to its function. Specifically, there were some reservations raised as to the tops looking just as great with the perspiration factor of the dancers. Also, it was important that these tops worked when

the dancers changed to their safari look for “Caravan.” Because of these concerns, exploring additional alternatives for these tops became necessary. Other options considered were pulling from the University’s dance stock and exploring dance catalogues for new items. Throughout this process, I was in communication with the director, the choreographer, and my advisor. Another matter to keep in mind was the fact that we wanted to have the dancers compliment the singer without drawing attention away from the singer inadvertently through their costume. After carefully considering all views relating to the dancer’s tops, I came across black bodysuits, which were purchased. They had a scooped neck, long sleeves with contrasting French cuffs, and the fabric was treated with a cutwork pattern, which suggested hints of flesh-tone revealed beneath. The dancers found these bodysuits exciting and very comfortable to move in. Even though the final solution for this one costume piece took some time to resolve, it was an important and necessary step in the design process. My efforts were concentrated on trying to find a top that was appropriate for both numbers and balanced the quality of the pant fabric without overpowering the singer. I feel I was successful in this pursuit.

Another change that occurred during the course of fittings involved the purchased pants that coordinated with the tuxedo tops for the dancer’s Act II costumes. In the interest of saving money and re-evaluating my initial approved design ideas, I decided that the second pair of pants for the dancers was no longer necessary. The director’s concept called for an atmosphere of formality in Act II in contrast to the club atmosphere seen in Act I. To execute this, I envisioned the dancers gradually formalizing themselves with costume add-ons with each new appearance on stage. Given this approach, the dancers would have first appeared at the top of Act II in basic undecorated black pants,

which provided an air of formality alongside the dancer's tuxedo tops. The dancer's second appearance would have involved a costume change into a similar looking pair of pants enhanced by a tuxedo stripe of identical fabric to the tuxedo tops. To facilitate this change, it was planned that two pairs of pants be purchased for each dancer. Subsequent appearances by the dancers during Act II would necessitate added costume accessories such as customized gauntlet gloves and top hats. The gloves would be created out of the same fabric as the tuxedo tops. In shopping for these pants, I wanted to find some with the cleanest line possible. Therefore, I was searching for pants with flat fronts, a clean waistband and no cuffs. I also wanted the fabric to look good alongside the purchased glitzy tuxedo top fabric. Eventually, I found twelve pairs of pants all in the same style and in multiple sizes. Once the fitting process for these particular costumes was underway, I realized that the idea of a change from one pair of pants to another was subtle and may not be significant. For this reason, I felt it was important to impact the audience with this high-energy ensemble from the start. With this thought in mind, I searched out additional pant options. I was able to locate black pants in a slinky stretch fabric enhanced with a row of rhinestones down the outseam of each leg. The cost was comparable to the ones I had previously purchased, and the rhinestone trim simulated the tuxedo stripe of fabric, which was originally going to be applied by the costume shop. The final decision met the design goals, reduced the workload for the shop, and saved money.

In preparation for the upcoming technical and dress rehearsals the distribution of certain information was essential to insure that everyone involved in a wardrobe or costume capacity was kept informed. At the time of the costing approval process, I

created initial costume plot charts for each performer and a scenic breakdown (see Table 2 and Table 3). Throughout the build and fitting phase of the show, I kept these charts updated. I provided these charts to my assistant who generated a list suitable for wardrobe's use. This list detailing the costume pieces and changes was created the week prior to the technical and dress rehearsals. This timing was important so the wardrobe supervisor could better acclimate the wardrobe crew to the various costumes and how the costumes were used during the show. Copies of the wardrobe costume plot (see Table 4) and scene breakdown were made and distributed to the wardrobe supervisor, posted in the men and women's dressing rooms, included in the shop bible, and given to the assistant stage manager overseeing wardrobe.

I was in communication with the stage manager to confirm the appearance of the orchestra. They were scheduled to arrive during Sunday's technical rehearsal. The orchestra was to be integrated into the production, as they would be performing on a moving bandstand, which had been designed by the scenic designer. Because the orchestra would be on stage, Reese and I discussed if they would be in costume. We agreed that they would appear in tuxedos that they would provide. To pull them into the glamorous atmosphere we were creating for Act II, Reese and I discussed various accessories to heighten their appearance. We settled on flashy bowties manufactured by my assistant and me.

Technical/Dress Rehearsals

Two days prior to the start of technical rehearsals, Reese entered the costume shop and informed us that the dancers were slipping on the floor. He, the costume shop

advisor, and I conferred about ways to alleviate this issue. During the first production meeting, we decided not to dance rubber the shoes. Since the dancers were slipping, we revisited the dance rubber prospect, but again decided this was not a viable option. We agreed that the best course of action would be to rough up the soles of the shoes. As I gathered the shoes from the dressing rooms, I became very concerned as I noticed that the blue paint used to treat the stage floor had adhered to the performer's shoes, especially the dance and pointe shoes. The next day I spoke to the scenic designer and her advisor. Apparently, the paint was smearing on other articles because the floor had not been sealed. I spoke to the costume shop manager, and we decided to try and remove the blue markings from the shoes after the floor issues had been resolved. We communicated our approach to the director and choreographer. I later met with the painter because she was more familiar with the paint properties than I, and asked for her suggestions on how to remove the markings from the shoes. She felt that either denatured alcohol or acetone would be sufficient. The costume shop later executed this approach.

The problems with the dancers slipping on stage continued to occur throughout the dress rehearsals. Both the scenic and costume areas worked to solve this problem. The scene shop developed a method to consistently treat the floor. The costume shop initially roughed up the shoes and also purchased shoe grips for each of the performers. This combined effort made the stage a workable space for the production.

October 10, 2003 marked the first technical rehearsal. The production schedule was set up to allow technical rehearsals to take place two days prior to the first dress rehearsal. The primary focus is to allow the lighting and scenic designers time to fine-tune cues and adjust scenic elements as necessary. Even though costumes are introduced

on this evening, they are provided to complete the overall scope of color choices in conjunction with the scenic and lighting designer's choices. For this reason, it is understood that hair and make-up will not be integrated until the first dress rehearsal. While costumes are not the primary focus during the technical rehearsals, having them on stage allowed me an opportunity to begin making improvements. My notes ranged from larger concerns, such as draper fitting issues for "The Mooche," to smaller details such as changing jewelry and adding pocket squares.

In addition to having my assistant and myself scrutinize the costumes, the director and choreographer would voice what they liked or wanted to change. One of their first concerns was the hat worn by the female singer in "I Let a Song Go Out of My Heart." The research inspired for this hat was a cylindrical shape and had a series of curved feathers ascending up the center front of the hat. I found a blue textured felt hat in stock that was re-blocked into this shape. Feathers from stock were also carefully attached to a wired base to duplicate the research picture. Unfortunately, the hat was a bit overpowering for the performer. Because the colors of her outfit were working so well together, we decided to reduce the hat to half of the original size versus eliminating it from her ensemble. Professor Huang suggested that prior to reducing the hat size, we try the look with just the feather in the performer's hair, add more curls to her hairstyle, and replace the blue gloves with lace ones. After seeing this look on stage, the director felt that the singer's hair was too curly and needed to be sleeker a la "Veronica Lake," so that there was curl only at the bottom. Having viewed this last option on stage, the director and I conferred again. Given the performer's delicate facial features, this hairstyle did not suit her. He suggested simply having her put her hair in a ponytail. I expressed that

this hairstyle may not be mature enough to go along with the rest of the outfit. After trying several options, the director, choreographer, and I decided the performer would wear the blue gloves, the feathers in her hair, and sported a ponytail. We felt that this combination framed the singer in the best way.

Hair and make-up application played a large role in the overall look of the design. While I had spoken to each performer about these elements during fittings, they needed to be enhanced for the larger theatre stage. Professor Huang suggested I find individual hair research. I went back to my research folders and tagged hair research for all the female singers in the production. I then made color copies of these pictures and posted them at each lady's station in the dressing room, providing the performers a visual reference. One of the wardrobe crewmembers was quite competent and willing to assist the ladies with their hairstyles. She was especially skillful in creating the "up-do's" required for Act II and helping the ladies place their jeweled hair ornamentation. In working with the ladies regarding their make-up, Reese and I had previously discussed acquiring more proficient assistance. Reese knew a colleague who was practiced in creating very glamorous make-up, especially making it read from stage distances. This colleague graciously worked with the ladies in the dressing room, providing individual attention. He assisted in offering advice not only on the make-up application, but which colors were more flattering and which ones to avoid. The ladies were not accustomed to wearing this type of heightened glamour make-up. When viewing themselves from the short distance of the dressing room mirrors, they felt their appearance was odd. I reassured them that due to their distance from the audience, this style of make-up was very effective.

In evaluating the dancers' various looks, I decided I could jazz them up more. This notion was more apparent to me when Professor Huang pointed out that in some cases their costume color is primarily black and blended into the set pieces. For instance, when the dancers appear in "It Don't Mean a Thing" they are in their jazzy pants, black bodysuit, and black hat. The set pieces were black, silhouetted cutouts against a white background. The combination of black scenery and black costume pieces caused some of the dancer's energetic movements to be less visible. During the technical rehearsals, I noticed that the lighting contributed to this problem. To help resolve this issue, I suggested to the director and choreographer that a trim could be added to the bodysuit cuffs and other parts of the costume. They agreed to try the trim in one place at a time. I wanted an uncomplicated trim that would stand out but not overwhelm the singer who appeared with these dancers. I selected a fuchsia-colored sequin from my personal stock and felt this would add the right touch of sparkle. I provided two options, one with the sequins on the cuffs and the other with trim on the cuffs that matched the fabric from the pants. The director and choreographer both liked the sequin version. I also suggested we add a choker to liven up and highlight the dancer's faces. I created two versions of a flashy choker, one with the same sequins as the cuffs and one with a large gemstone at the center. The response from Reese and Mayes was positive, and they selected the sequins variety. The remaining touch I wanted to add to these costumes involved trimming the dancer's hats. I noticed that the tops of their heads were disappearing into the set. I trimmed out two of the hats using two different patterns. One option used rows of sequins that originated from the center of the hat to create a starburst pattern. The other option was a random scattering of sequins across the entire hat. The scattered

sequin version was the optimal choice as it added a touch of pizzazz, keeping the costume in tune to the music.

While adding touches to the dancer's costumes for this song, I also added similar embellishments to their costumes for "Caravan." Iridescent sequins in two sizes were added to the dancer's scarves and spats. The changes to the scarves helped distinguish them from the vest, as they were different fabrics but similar in color. Adding the sequins to the spats helped draw the eye to the dancer's intricate footwork without losing sight of the entire ensemble. During intermission at the show's preview, I spoke to Mayes who complimented me for this subtle change. He admitted that when we first discussed my ideas for the changes in "Caravan" he was worried about its effectiveness because all the girls were not the same height. However, he stated that it really worked. I was grateful for his honesty and also his trust in allowing me to execute my idea.

Despite the fact that I tried to solve issues prior to dress rehearsals, there were two areas that still required consideration. One of these was the shirt for "Take the A Train" discussed earlier in the fitting section. Even though a new shirt had been selected prior to the dress rehearsals, it was not the best choice on stage. The color and patterning of the shirt was correct, but because of its fabric content, it became clingy on the actor and distracted from his overall look. I discussed this garment with Professor Huang, and she concurred that a button down style in the same color would be more appropriate. It was difficult to find the shirt in this shade of orange, but I was successful in purchasing a button down style in the desired color. The director agreed that this reevaluated choice was an improvement.

A second costume that necessitated some attention was the evening gown with a train in “I Got It Bad and That Ain’t Good/Mood Indigo.” I previously discussed simulating this costume for rehearsals by adding a muslin train to the rehearsal garment. Although I believe providing the rehearsal garment was beneficial to the performer, the actual gown was not functioning with the train as planned. The train placement on the rehearsal version of this garment could not exactly duplicate the real costume. In reality, the train loop was placed slightly lower on the real garment as compared to the rehearsal costume. For this reason, the singer was having trouble collecting her train to perform her movements on stage. In talking with the singer, I recognized that the loop holder would have to be large enough to rest comfortably on her wrist and would have to be visible so she could easily retrieve it. In order to integrate the visible loop holder with her costume, we utilized the same trim that was used to make an art deco fan decoration, which had been applied to one shoulder. The modified loop holder proved to be a viable solution and at the evening rehearsal she confidently scooped her train up like a professional.

In order to effectively distribute dress rehearsal notes to the costume shop, I developed a system. Two photocopies from each night’s dress rehearsal were generated; one was given to the costume shop and the other was kept for my assistant and me. I used highlighters to color code the notes utilizing one color for each individual responsible for that note. I provided a consistent color key identifying which color was assigned to each individual. In addition, distinct colors were used for actor notes and those note that were my responsibility. My advisor commented that this system was an

effective method of organization. Given the large number of costume pieces and the various people involved in the production, organization was important for my success.

CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS

Serving as the costume designer for *Sophisticated Ladies* not only presented me with a challenge as an artist but also afforded me the responsibility of enfolding the audience into the flavor of another era. Costumes played an integral part in *Sophisticated Ladies* of defining the moment of each song presented, while unifying the essence of the show. This provided me an opportunity to participate and explore and hopefully to fully capitalize on each moment. The magnitude of such a large and complicated show was successful due to the receptiveness on the part of the director, choreographer and myself to share and explore our ideas, concerns and solutions to the challenges we faced. I feel that as we each approached *Sophisticated Ladies* from different vantage points we worked in harmony and tandem to bring out the best in each song and ultimately in the production. In this chapter, I will present how collaboration, teamwork, and communication led to an enriching production. I will also summarize my successes in the design process to include execution of my design. I will discuss some of the challenges that were met with enthusiasm and identify those areas where I believe further growth will better enable me to flourish as a designer.

Although the number of fittings for this show was significant due to the amount of costumes, I was able to speak to each actor individually to discuss the inspiration for each costume. In this way, they were enlightened by the individual research selected to portray the mood of each piece. This also provided an opportunity to receive their input and concerns. With this approach, I felt that I was able to resolve issues raised by the

performers. We regarded their outfit as more than a costume, something with vitality and energy that would enhance the portrayal of the characters they were playing.

During fittings for “The Mooche” dance number, I worked closely with the dancers and drapers to maintain the stylized multi-pieced costume while ensuring the choreographical needs were met. The drapers and I troubleshot ways to maintain the integrity of the design while keeping them dancer-friendly. I spoke to the dancers about how the free-flowing elements of their costumes (lacing, skirts, feathers and raffia) would enhance their movement. The dress rehearsals revealed that the dancers were confident with their costumes and their ability to move freely. I credit the choreographer with an energetic and free-flowing piece, and the design enriched these aspects. A particularly gratifying comment made by the choreographer was: “The headpieces are great; I especially like when their movement continues for a brief moment after the dancer’s movements stop.”

Another instance where good communication led to positive results was during the fitting for the singer in “Music is a Woman.” Based on my interpretation of the song’s expression, I shared my vision of how I saw this singer and how I thought she would move on stage. I explained to the singer portraying this character how her costume was designed with the spaghetti straps and slit at the hem to allude to her sexy sophistication. I showed the actress how to strike a pose so that the slit and her stance were emphasized in a sexy yet elegant manner. The more she tried this pose, the more comfortable she became, and was eventually able to incorporate this into her stride in high heels. By the time we reached dress rehearsals, this stride had evolved into a commanding confidence expressed through her demeanor.

In addition to the benefits achieved through collaboration, many constructive outcomes occurred when actors were inspired by their costumes and the way these costumes made them feel. Moments of inspiration for the actors occurred at different intervals of the process: some with the costume sketch, some in viewing the fabric, some during first muslin fittings, and some after construction when accessories were added. This euphoric feeling was particularly evident for the costumes worn in Act II. Several of the female singers commented how “glamorous” their gowns made them feel. One singer expressed that she loved her gown so much and how all the accessories, particularly the flower in her hair, added so much to her appearance. She looked forward to every performance and in direct reference to her solo she stated, “It was that one moment you dream of your whole life when all eyes are on you!” Even the male singers expressed how “dapper” they felt in their tuxedos.

Another rewarding aspect of the design was observing actors who were motivated by their costumes and masterfully exploited what their costumes had to offer. In “I’m Just a Lucky So-and- So,” three back-up singers are featured alongside a soloist. I wanted to showcase this singer’s sassy, penuche attitude. He resembled the back-up singers but with a tipped fedora and stylized, flared overcoat. The actor was quite adept at manipulating the fedora over one eye at strategic points of the song. Likewise, he incorporated spins and a slide on both knees, which took full advantage of the flared coat. The director commented on how the styling of his costume enhanced his movement and thus allowed his character to come alive.

Initial steps taken during the conceptualization and design process were pivotal for the execution of the production process. In embracing the scope of the show, my

approach was to break down the design process into compartmentalized blocks. In this manner, I was attempting to tackle each nuance of the costume rendering, i.e., pose, characterization, costume detail, etc. Ironically, in my attempt to be as complete as possible, it was not until I adapted my costume renderings after the style of Miguel Covarrubias that these elements worked together to capture the flavor and spirit of the show. This was an important revelation for me as a designer because while the response to my preliminary sketches was positive in terms of the design and rendering ability, the response to my final rendering style was more along the lines of “I can see this character in this show.” While I fully understand the importance of costume renderings as an essential tool of communication of ideas for the production team, actors, and the costume shop, a costume rendering that communicates beyond these essential players is much more successful. As a designer, I must maintain this sensibility and strive to find a path to this journey earlier in the process.

I feel I was successful in achieving a contrast between the atmospheres of Act I and Act II, while maintaining unity as a complete show. The costumes in Act I can be characterized as energetic, fun, and purposeful. In contrast, Act II exuded glamour, elegance, and formality. The costumes achieved these attributes through silhouette, fabric selection and quality of fabric drape, color, and carefully selected accessories. This was important in satisfying the director’s instruction that the audiences relate to the actors in Act I as people who would frequent The Cotton Club and that Act II have the feel of a 2004 award show.

Throughout various stages of my design process, Professor Huang articulated which of my design concepts resonated most with her artistic eye. Initially, she felt that

the costumes for “The Mooche” and “Hit Me With a Hot Note” were the most successful during my design phase. As I explored a new rendering style in the design approval stage, she gravitated toward the renderings of “I’ve Got to Be a Rug Cutter,” “I’m Just a Lucky So-and- So,” and “Sophisticated Lady.” While shopping in New York, my fabric selections drew her towards “Music is a Woman,” “It Don’t Mean a Thing,” “Solitude,” and “In a Sentimental Mood.” During dress rehearsals, Professor Huang commented that my most successful costume looks were for “I’ve Got to Be a Rug Cutter” in Act I and “Imagine My Frustration” in Act II. I feel these interactions were essential to my growth as a designer in continually striving to improve in all aspects of my artistic endeavors.

In addition to the achievements I obtained on stage, I feel equally proud of my success “behind the scenes.” My willingness to work towards accomplishing the director and choreographer’s visions aided in our working relationship. I felt we maintained an open and successful dialogue. Similarly, I felt the importance of maintaining good communication with my advisor, my design assistant, and the costume shop personnel was important for a successful production. This aspect was also crucial in dealing with the local area vendors such as my tuxedo and shoe contacts. I feel my personal skills were an asset. I believe my organizational skills in compiling my designer’s working bible, various lists, and charts aided in greater completeness. This coupled with my ability to follow through and attention to detail helped ensure the ultimate success of the production.

Reflecting on the design decisions made for *Sophisticated Ladies*, there were some areas where I could have made alternative choices. First, with regard to the concept of employing Art Deco as a means of inspiration, I could have been bolder in exploiting

this idea. For instance, the use of the sunburst motif in “Hit Me With a Hot Note” could have been more evident. Likewise, the initial idea of selecting a pattern on the fold back of the dancer tuxedo tails was discarded in lieu of patterned buttons. While the buttons were reminiscent of Art Deco, a larger pattern would have been more evocative. Although I feel that several good fabric choices were made, selecting more saturated hues and textures may have added to the spirit of Art Deco more fully.

Another area that was not wholly satisfying was the implementation of the men’s first vests in Act II. My initial idea was to have these in a colored fabric as opposed to black. Since we knew the tuxedos would be acquired as a rental, it was discussed and understood in concept meetings that our resources would dictate this possibility. I explored ways to make this a reality with my vendor contact along with discussing alternatives with the shop. Ultimately, due to budgetary reasons, the vests remained black. Had color been an option, I feel this would have added to the liveliness of a musical production. I was pleased, however, that I was able to make a subtle change in the men’s look during Act II with a second vest. Although both vests were black, the first look was a full backed version. This allowed the actors to be seen without the use of the tuxedo jacket and still maintain a complete appearance. As they reached the final song, “Sophisticated Lady,” the actors changed to a more formal, backless vest which complemented their tuxedo jackets. This change supported my initial concept that Act II begins with a formal tone, which only becomes enhanced throughout the act.

The success of *Sophisticated Ladies* can be attributed to the dedication of the production team. Scenic and costume elements worked well together and color choices were in harmony. During one of my discussions with the director, he commented on how

happy he was with the choices and colors I was selecting and how well they went with those of the scenic designer. He remarked that, “It is like you guys talked and picked things out together.” Choices of the lighting designer were complimentary to both scenic and costume designs. The addition of a live orchestra on stage enhanced the overall ambiance of the production. The passionate cast performed with vigor and conviction. It was their energy and talent that brought vitality to my costumes and to the tribute of Duke Ellington.

Designing the costumes for *Sophisticated Ladies* was certainly a challenging project but not without its rewards. Being responsible for overseeing the designs of a large production gave me the self-assurance necessary for a designer in the professional world. I feel fortunate to have been involved in a production that combined several artistic forms. The demand of creating designs for acting, singing, and dancing encouraged me to analyze the show from various angles. This aspect has made me a more well rounded designer and artist.

APPENDIX A: RESEARCH IMAGES



Fig. 1. Research image for color palette. Reprinted from Alastair Duncan, *American Art Deco* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1986), 175.

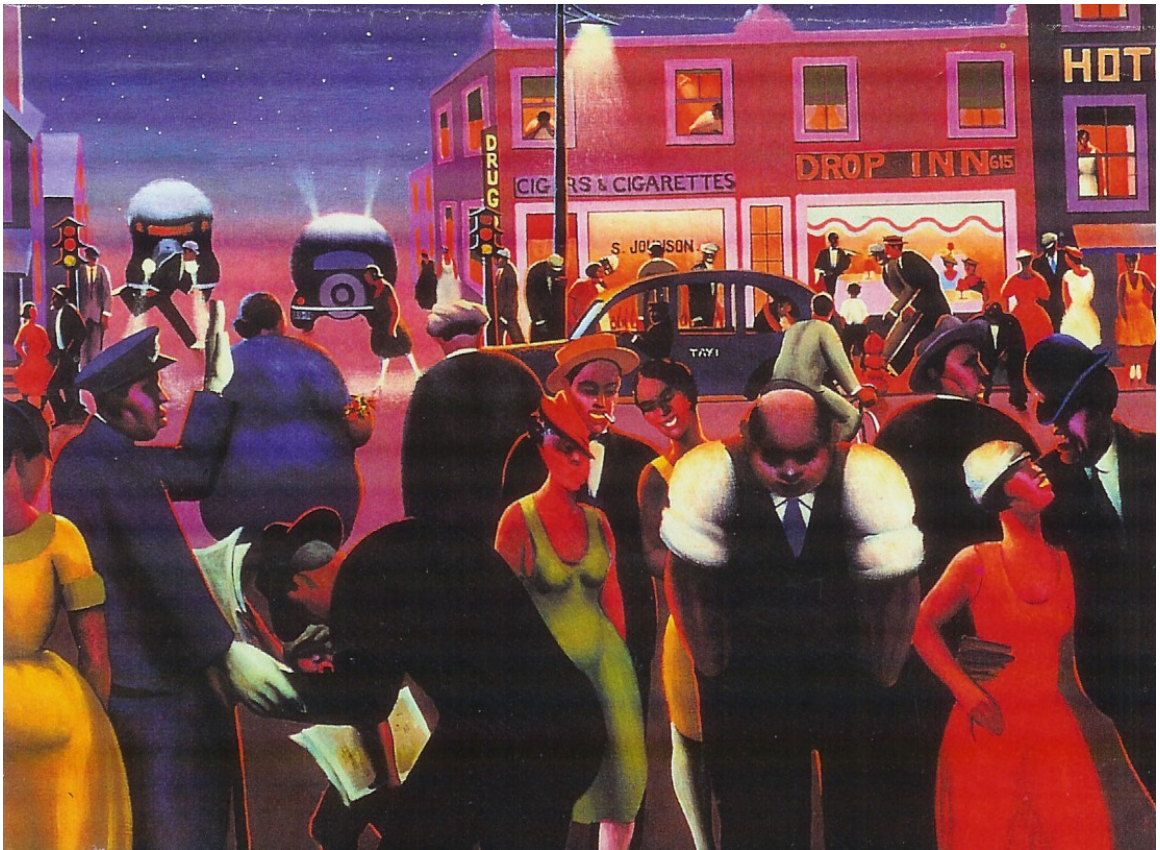


Fig. 2. Research image for color palette. Reprinted from David A. Bailey, *Rhapsodies in Black: Art of the Harlem Renaissance*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).



Fig. 3. Research image for pattern motif. Reprinted from Victor Arwas, *Art Deco* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2000), 66.



Fig. 4. Key image: Aaron Douglas painting. Reprinted from The Studio Museum in Harlem, *Harlem Renaissance Art of Black America*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1994), 24.



Fig. 5. Key image: Louis Armstrong. Reprinted from W. Royal Stokes, *Swing Era New York: The Jazz Photographs of Charles Peterson*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 36.



Fig. 6. Research image of Duke Ellington. Reprinted from W. Royal Stokes, *Swing Era New York: The Jazz Photographs of Charles Peterson*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 129.



Fig. 7. Research image for Act I. Reprinted from Frank Driggs and Harris Lewine, *Black Beauty, White Heat: A Pictorial History of Classic Jazz*, (New York: Da Capo Press, 1996), 200.



(a)



(b)



(c)

Fig. 8. Research images for “Hit Me With a Hot Note.” Reprinted from (a) Frank Driggs and Harris Lewine, *Black Beauty, White Heat: A Pictorial History of Classic Jazz*, (New York: Da Capo Press, 1996), 255. (b) Leslie Palmer, *Lena Horne*, (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1989), 66. (c) Unknown source.



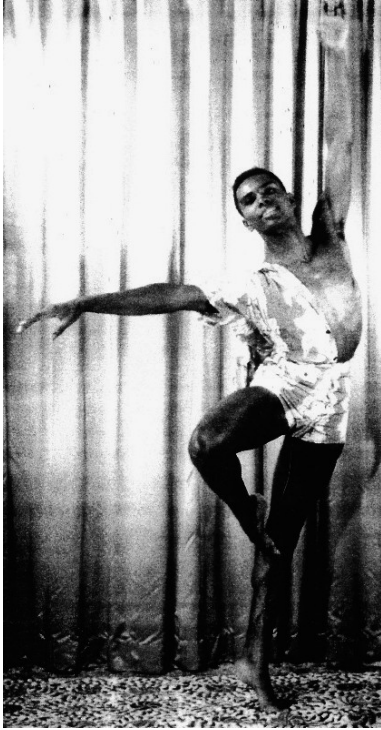
Fig. 9. Research images for “Hit Me With a Hot Note.” Reprinted from *Collezioni Haute Couture*, Spring Summer.



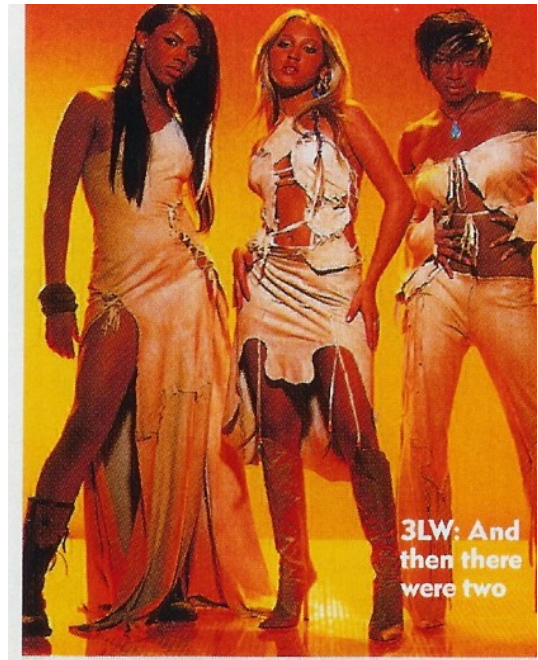
Fig. 10. Research image for rendering inspiration. Reprinted from Miguel Covarrubias, *Negro Drawings*, (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1927), 33.



Fig. 11. Research image for “Music is a Woman.”
Reprinted from *Essence*, April 2003, 149.



(a)



(b)



(c)

Fig. 12. Research image for "The Mooche." Reprinted from (a) Rudolph P. Byrd, *Generations in Black and White*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993). (b) *Honey*, March 2003, 101. (c) Richard Martin, *Gianni Versace*, (New York: Henry N. Abrams, Inc., 1997), 22.



(a)



(b)

Fig. 13. Research image for "It Don't Mean a Thing." Reprinted from (a) *Honey*, March 2003, 2. (b) Stella Blum, *Everyday Fashions of the 30's*, (New York: Dover, 1986), 60,71.



(a)



(b)



(c)

Fig. 14. Research image for "It Don't Mean a Thing." Reprinted from (a) Dilys E. Blum and H. Kristina Haugland, *Best Dressed: Fashion from the Birth of Couture to Today*, (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1997), 52. (b) *Honey*, March 2003, 92. (c) Rudolph P. Byrd, *Generations in Black and White*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993).



(a)

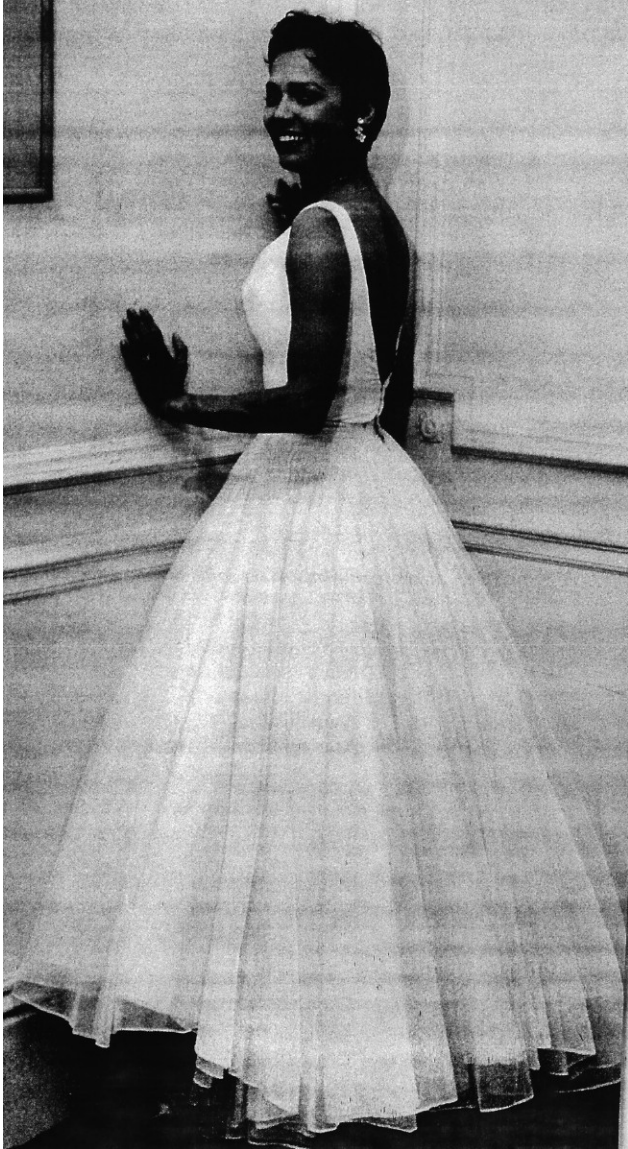


(b)

Fig. 15. Research image for "Something to Live For." Reprinted from (a) *Savoy*, April 2003, 72. (b) W. Royal Stokes, *Swing Era New York: The Jazz Photographs of Charles Peterson*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 51.



Fig. 16. Research image for "In a Sentimental Mood." Reprinted from New York Graphic Society Book, *Life: The Second Decade 1946-1955*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1984).



(a)



(b)

Fig. 17. Research image for "Satin Doll / Just Squeeze Me." Reprinted from (a) Donald Bogle, *Dorothy Dandridge*, (New York: Amistad, 1997). (b) Patty Fox, *Star Style at the Academy Awards*, (Hong Kong, 1999) ,53.



(a)



(b)

Fig. 18. Research image for "Imagine My Frustration." Reprinted from (a) Richard Martin, *Gianni Versace*, (New York: Henry N. Abrams, Inc., 1997), 98. (b) *Collezioni Haute Couture*, Spring Summer.

APPENDIX B: COSTUME RENDERINGS

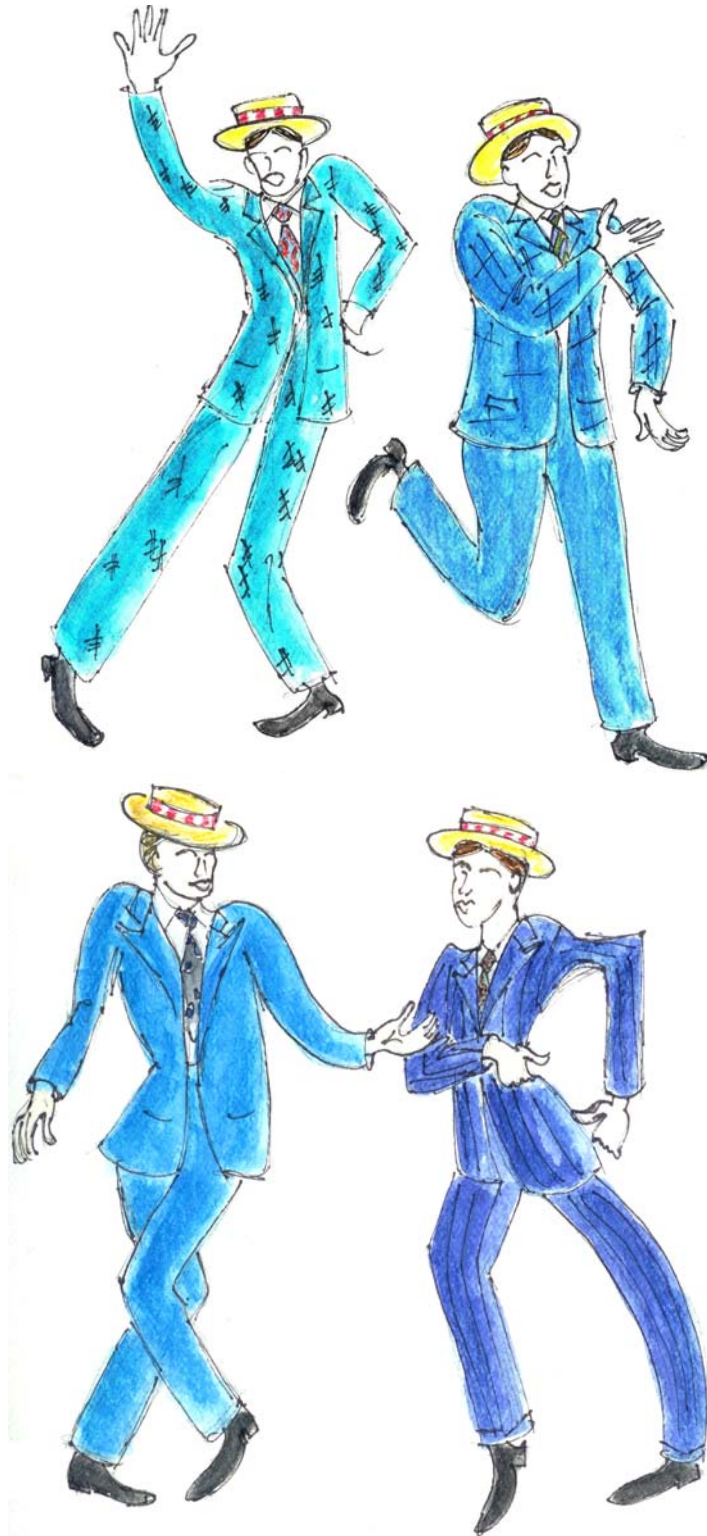


Fig. 19. Rendering for "I've Got to Be a Rug Cutter."



Fig. 20. Rendering for “Music is a Woman.”



Fig. 21. Rendering for "The Mooche."



Fig. 22. Rendering for “Hit Me With a Hot Note.”



Fig. 23. Rendering for “It Don’t Mean a Thing.”



Fig. 24. Rendering for "Bli-Blip."



Fig. 25. Rendering for "Take the A Train."



Fig. 26. Rendering for "Solitude."



Fig. 27. Rendering for “Don’t Get Around Much Anymore /
I Let a Song Go Out of My Heart.”



Fig. 28. Rendering for “Something to Live For.”



Fig. 29. Rendering for "Caravan."



Fig. 30. Rendering for “I’m Checking Out Goombye /
Do Nothing ‘til You Hear from Me.”



Fig. 31. Rendering for "I'm Beginning to See the Light."



Fig. 32. Rendering for “Satin Doll / Just Squeeze Me.”

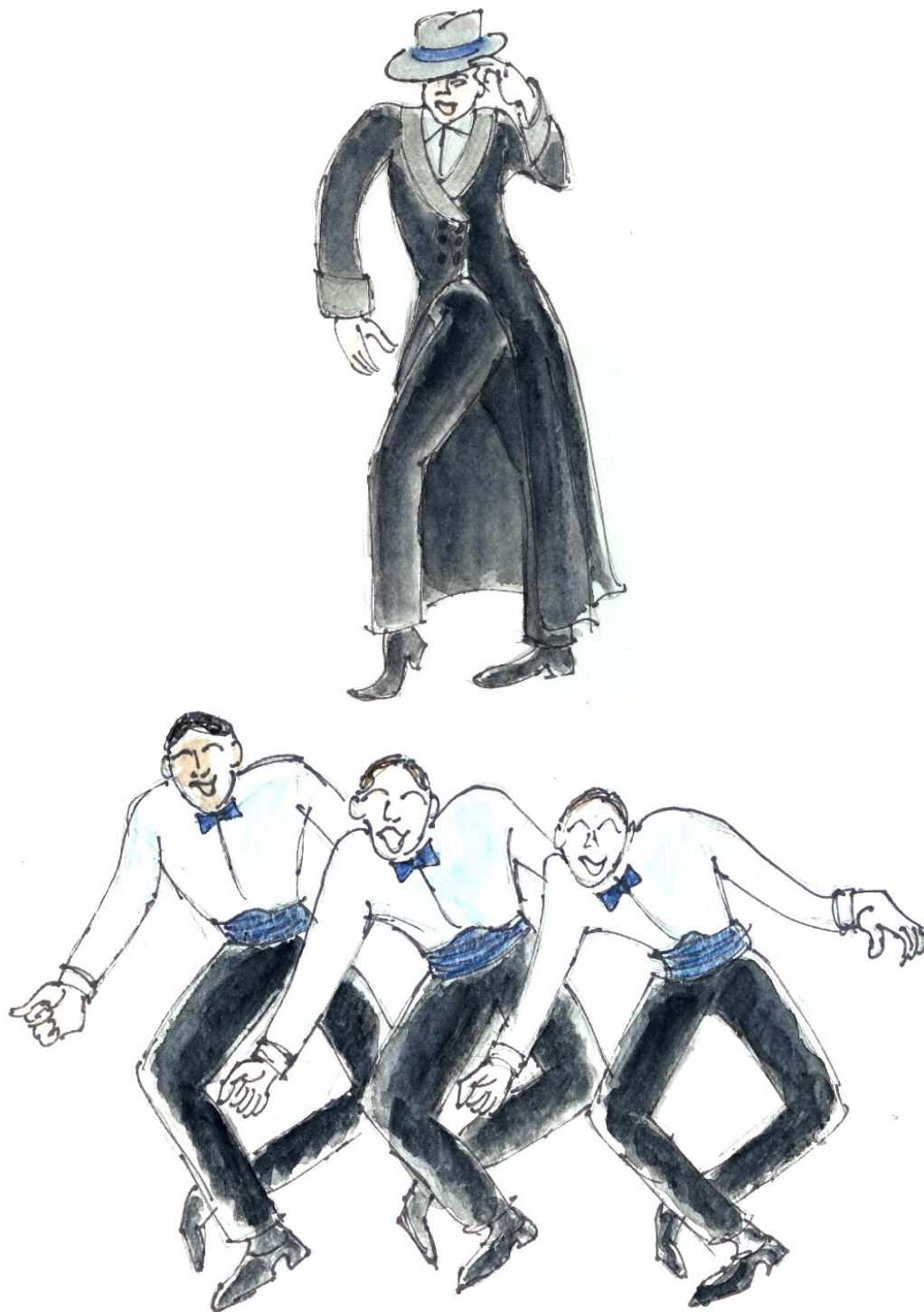


Fig. 33. Rendering for "I'm Just a Lucky So-and-So."



Fig. 34. Rendering for “Imagine my Frustration.”



Fig. 35. Rendering for “I Got It Bad and That Ain’t Good / Mood Indigo.”



Fig. 36. Rendering for "It Don't Mean a Thing (reprise)."

APPENDIX C: SUPPORTING PAPERWORK

TABLE 1. Measurement Chart.

Men	Actor	Height	Weight	Chest	Waist	Hip	Neck-Seat Across SH	Suit	Shirt	Pants	Shoes	Head
	Maurice											
	Clemons	6'4"	230?	50	49	53	31	21	18x36	48/50x36	15	27
	James Gardiner	5'10"	125	34	31	39.5	29	18	15.5x32	30x30	9.5	23 1/4
	Matt											
	Gottleib	5'9"	180	42?	36?	43?	30	18	16x34	34?x32	10.5	22 3/4
	Brian											
	Hoffman	5'10"	135	35	31.5	39	29	18	15x32	30x30	8	21 3/4
	Michael											
	Kelley	5'11"	150	38	31.5	39.5	32	17 3/4	15.5x34	32x34	10.5	23 7/8
Women	Actor	Character	Height	Weight	Bust	Waist	Hip	Dress	Blouse	Pants	Shoes	Bra
	Rachel											
	Carlson		5'4"	140	38.5	30	43	10	10	10	7.5	22
	Malinda											
	Ellerman		5'7"	140	38	29	42	10	10	10	8.5w	23 1/8
	Abby											
	Gustafson		5'8"	120	34	28	39	2 1/4	S	4/6	8	21
	Jessica											
	Hyman		5'5"	275	50	47	58	24	20/24	24/26	10w	23 1/2
	EJ											
	Zimmerman		5'3"	120	34	26.5	37	2	S	2	6	34B
	Joanna											
	Howard		5'4"	117	35	27	38	4	4	?	7.4	22
	Ronya											
	Anderson	Dancer	5'5"	115	34	26.5	37.5	2 1/4	S	?	8	24
	Melissa											
	Coleman	Dancer	5'3"	126	36	27	40	3/4	3/4	5/6	8	22.5
	MaryBeth											
	Hanley	Dancer	5'3"	135	37	29	41.5	7/9	?	11	9.5/10	23 1/4
	Kendall											
	Klein	Dancer	5'2"	130	36	27.5	40	7/8	?	8	7.5	21
	Megan											
	McGill	Dancer	5'4"	108	33	26	37	4	S	?	7	22 1/8
	Kaarti											
	Sundsmo	Dancer	5'10"	135	33	27	38.5	8	M	8/10	7.5	22.5
	Molly											
	Welch	Dancer	5'9"	160	38	33.5	42	10/12	L	10/12	9	22 3/4

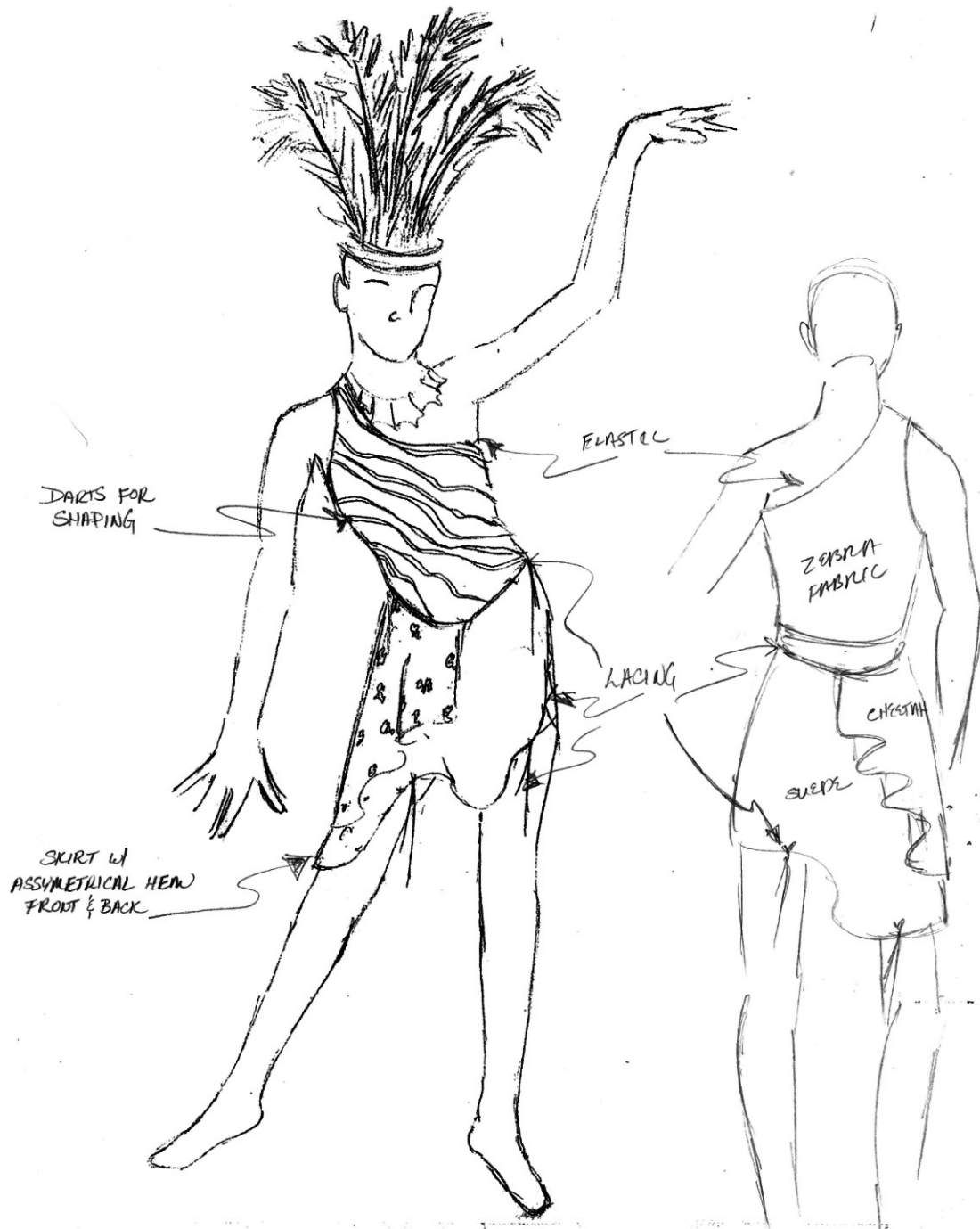


Fig. 37. Technical Drawing for dancers in "The Mooche."

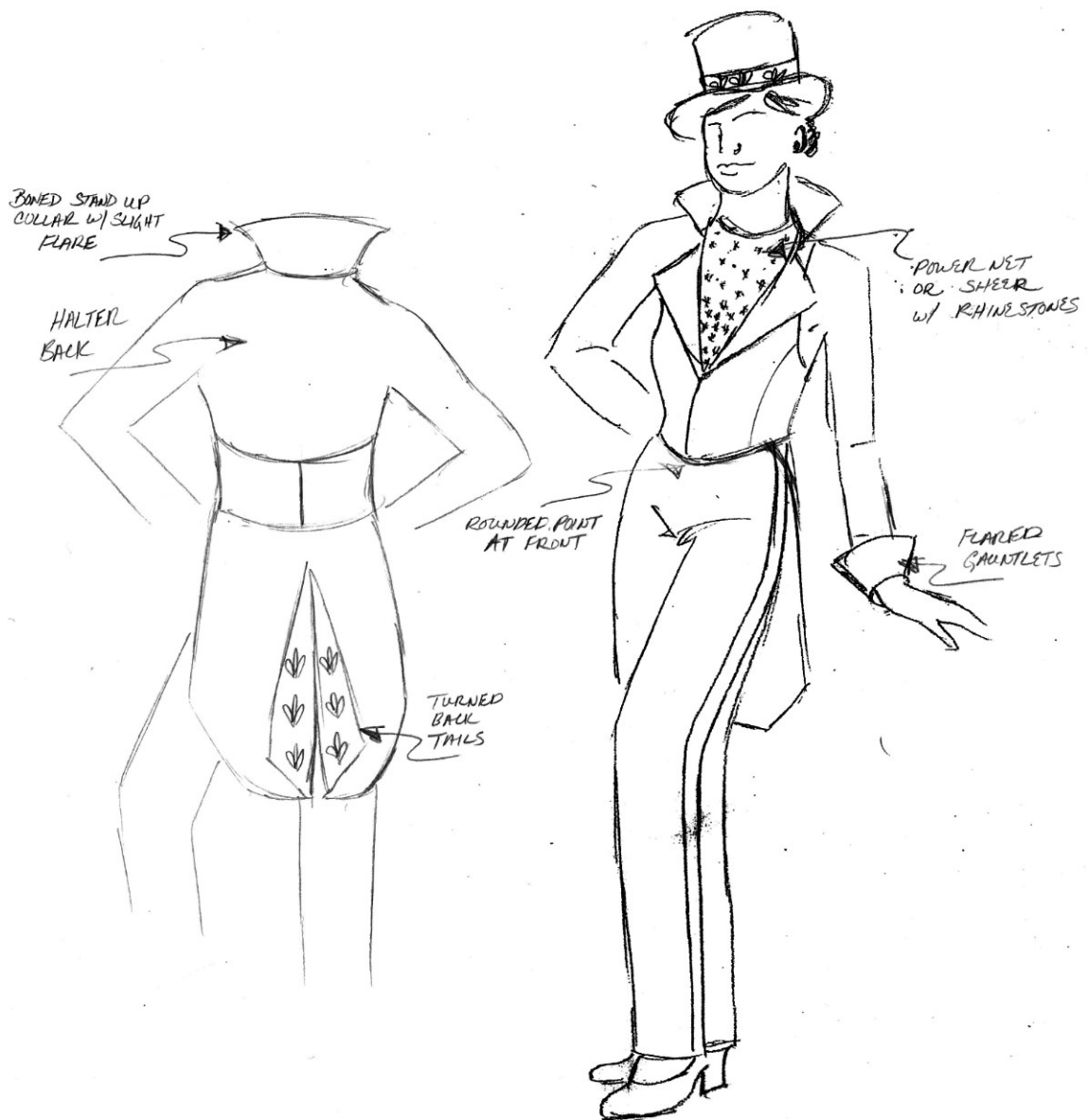


Fig. 38. Technical Drawing for dancers in Act II.

TABLE 2. Initial Costume Plot Example.

Character: #2 Rug Cutter				Costume no.: 1-4	
Actor: James/Mike/Brian/Matt				Scene: Act I	
List Main Items		Gloves			
4 suits: Pants & Jackets		Gloves x4			
1 plain	Changed to 2 and 2				
1 textured	i.e., 2 blue, 2 green	Swords/Weapons			
1 pin-stripe					
1 plaid					
4 dress shirts		Wigs/Masks			
Under/support garments					
T-shirts x4					
Tights/socks/hose		Accessories (Jewelry)			
Socks x4		Ties x4			
		Pocket squares x4			
Shoes/boots					
Shoes x4	Taps? - NO				
Belts/suspenders					
Belts x4 (Brian has suspenders instead)		Special Notes			
		Ribbon w/ "Art Deco" for boaters			
Outerwear					
Hats/headaddresses					
Boaters x4					

TABLE 3. Scenic Breakdown.

	EXHIBITATED LADIES											
	#1 ONE	#2 ONE	#3 ONE	#4 ONE	#5 ONE	#6 ONE	#7 ONE	#8 ONE	#9 ONE	#10 ONE	#11 ONE	#12 ONE
MARE SINGERS												
M. CLEMENS	X											
J. GARDNER	X											
M. GITTLEB	X											
B. HOEFMAN	X											
M. KELLEY	X											
FEMALE SINGERS												
R. CARLSON	X											
M. ELLEBRAN	X											
A. GUSTAFSON	X											
J. HYMAN	X											
E. J. ZIMMERMAN	X											
J. HOWARD	X											
DANCERS												
K. ANDERSON	X											
M. COLEMAN	X											
M. B. HANLEY	X											
K. KLEN	X											
M. McGILL	X											
K. SWANSON	X											
M. WELCH	X											

TABLE 4. Wardrobe Costume Plot Example.

MEGAN McGILL-DANCER

ACT I

Song # 4 The Mooche

Cheetah Train Dress

Strapless bra

Maroon turban with shell trim & Raffia

Wig Cap

Bracelets – one large

(barefoot)

Song # 6 .. .Mean a Thing

Sparkly jazz pants with stripes

Black / sheer long sleeve bodysuit w/ cuffs

Dance hose

Tan Character shoes

Black newsboy hat

Sequins choker

Song # 12 Caravan

Same pants and top as # 6

Add Safari jacket

Add Spats

Add Safari Scarf

Same Character shoes

Same Dancer Hose

ACT II

Song # 14 Drop Me Off In Harlem

Sequined Tux Tails

Black Rhinestone Stripe Pants

Same Character shoes

Dancer Hose

Gauntlets

Earrings – solitaire

Two rhinestone hairclips

Song # 20 Imagine My Frustration

Same as # 14 but no gauntlets

Song # 24. .. A Thing (reprise)

Same as # 14

Add Sequin Gauntlets

TABLE 5

ROUGH COSTUME PLOT			
Song #	Costume #	Actor	Costume Description
	A - K	Conductor and Band	Evening wear
2	1 - 4	James, Mike, Brian, Matt	Day wear
3	5	Maurice	Day wear
3	6	Rachel	Day wear
4	7 - 12	Dancers	Exotic dance wear
5	13	E J	Day wear
6	14	Jessica	Day wear
6	15 - 20	Dancers	Dance wear
7	21	James	Day wear
7	22	Malinda	Day wear
9	23	Abbie	Day wear
9	24	Joanna	Day wear
9	25	Brian	Day wear
9	26	Matt	Day wear
10	27	Rachel	Day wear
10	28	Kaarli	Dance wear
11	29	Maurice	Day wear
11	30	Abbie	Day wear
11-A	31	Joanna	Day wear
12	32	Mike	Safari gear
12	33 - 38	Dancers	Safari gear
14	39 - 44	Dancers	Formal dance wear
14	45	Maurice	Evening wear
15	46	Jessica	Evening wear
16	47	E J	Evening wear
16	48	Brian	Evening wear
17	49	Joanna	Evening wear
17	50	Mike	Evening wear
19	51 - 53	Maurice, Brian, Matt	Evening wear
19	54	James	Evening wear
20	55	Malinda	Evening wear
20	56 - 61	Dancers	Formal dance wear
20	62	James	Evening wear
20	62 A - C	Maurice, Brian, Mike	Evening wear
21	63	Jessica	Evening wear
21	64	Matt	Evening wear
21	65	Melissa	Formal dance wear
22	66	Abbie	Evening wear
22	67	Rachel	Evening wear
23	68 - 72	All Male Singers	Evening wear
23	72 A - F	All Lady Singers	Evening wear
24	68 - 72 rep	All Male Singers	Evening wear
24	72 A - F rep	All Lady Singers	Evening wear
24	73 - 78	Dancers	Formal dance wear
24	79	Kaarli	Evening wear

APPENDIX D: PRODUCTION PHOTOGRAPHS



Fig. 39. Production photo: “I’ve Got to Be a Rug Cutter.”

Photo by Stan Barouh.



Fig. 40. Production photo: “The Mooche.”

Photo by Stan Barouh.



Fig. 41. Production photo: “Hit Me With a Hot Note.”

Photo by author.



Fig. 42. Production photo: “It Don’t Mean a Thing.”

Photo by author.



Fig. 43. Production photo: “It Don’t Mean a Thing.”

Photo by Stan Barouh.



Fig. 44. Production photo: "Take the A Train."

Photo by Stan Barouh.



Fig. 45. Production photo: "Solitude."

Photo by Stan Barouh.



Fig. 46. Production photo: “I’m Checking Out Goombye /
Do Nothing ‘til You Hear from Me.” Photo by Stan Barouh.



Fig. 47. Production photo: "Satin Doll/Just Squeeze Me."

Photo by Stan Barouh.



Fig. 48. Production photo: "I'm Just a Lucky So-and-So."

Photo by Stan Barouh.



Fig. 49. Production photo: “Imagine My Frustration.”

Photo by Stan Barouh.



Fig. 50. Production photo: “Drop Me Off in Harlem.”

Photo by Stan Barouh.



Fig. 51. Production photo: “Drop Me Off in Harlem.”

Photo by Stan Barouh.

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