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UC Irvine exhibit spotlights Shakespearean stage costuming for women

By KATHLEEN LUPPI
APR 12, 2018 | 4:25 PM





Student Laura Hatch looks at a modern costume designed for Ophelia inspired from Shakespeare's Hamlet, on display during the opening of Costuming the Leading Ladies of Shakespeare at the Muriel Ansley Reynolds gallery at UCI's Langson Library. (Don Leach / Staff Photographer)

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A Shakespearean costume researcher watched a production of "Henry IV" in Stratford-upon-Avon and marveled at the scene where the newly crowned king crossed the stage dressed in a gold-sequined outfit.

At that moment Marcy Froehlich, then a college student studying in London, knew she wanted to be a costume designer.



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Since then, Froehlich has worked on touring productions of Broadway's "The Phantom of the Opera" and designed for a number of shows, including "Hamlet," "Gem of the Ocean," "Les Miserables" and "Camelot."



Today, as a professor and costume designer with the drama department at UC Irvine Claire Trevor School of the Arts, Froehlich continues to tell a story through the medium of clothing by defining a character and creating a believable world for the actor and audience.



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She presented a keynote lecture April 5 during the opening night of UCI Libraries' 2018 Spring Exhibit, "Costuming the Leading Ladies of Shakespeare: From Stratford to Orange County," a collection running through the end of September that features pieces used in various Shakespearean productions at UCI — including the summertime New Swan Theater productions — and newly acquired materials from the late Shakespearean actress Helena Modjeska who made her home in Orange County.

"It made such an impact on me and conveyed what the story was about," Froehlich said of the "Henry IV" costume to an audience of students, designers, faculty members and visitors. "As designers, we always try to find the balance between the words and spectacle."

The exhibit, curated by Joshua Hutchinson, cataloging and metadata librarian, and Scott Stone, research librarian for performing arts, focuses on historical costuming trends that examine how women's costumes in Shakespearean plays have both changed and stayed the same throughout the past 150 years.

Archival material, such as photographs, books and fabric pieces from Modjeska's life and career are on display, as well as costumes created by UCI students and faculty for productions and course requirements.

Two dresses worn by Ophelia in the 2016 New Swan Shakespeare production of "Hamlet" are displayed, as are costume renderings, production posters, photographs and classic pieces of art portraying her.

Modjeska, considered the most fashionable woman of her time in Warsaw, Poland, relocated to California and had a ranch, Arden, built in Silverado, an estimated 30-minute drive from UC Irvine.

The actress designed her own costumes, wishing to depict the character's emotions, Froehlich said.

For her role as Ophelia, Modjeska chose to wear a green gown, symbolizing Earth, for her drowning scene.

At the end of her career, Modjeska had amassed 65 trunks of costumes. She cut up pieces and sent fabric scraps to friends and fans. After her death in Newport Beach in 1909, her husband sent her clothing back to Poland, but many of the clothing pieces were destroyed in World War II, Froehlich said.

Many of her pieces were on display in a temporary exhibition at Bowers Museum in Santa Ana. The exhibition closed in April of last year.

Actresses tell stories not just with their words but with their costumes, Froehlich said, and costuming choices reflect society.

"The art may change but the why stays the same," Froehlich said at the conclusion of her talk. "How best to illuminate the Bard's best words?"

If You Go

What: "Costuming the Leading Ladies of Shakespeare: From Stratford to Orange County"

When: Through September 2018

Where: UC Irvine, Langson Library, Muriel Ansley Reynolds Gallery

Cost: Free

Information: (949) 824-4651 or www.lib.uci.edu

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Kathleen Luppi



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