

Contents

Preface	1
Introduction	2
Materials	5
Section I: Costumes	9
<i>Chapter 1: Full Costumes</i>	11
<i>Chapter 2: Jackets and Pants</i>	60
<i>Chapter 3: Costumes for Children</i>	70
Section II: Accessories	79
<i>Chapter 4: Hats and Headpieces</i>	81
<i>Chapter 5: Big Heads</i>	106
<i>Chapter 6: Masks</i>	120
<i>Chapter 7: Jewelry</i>	129
<i>Chapter 8: Collars, Cuffs, Flaps, and Capes</i>	132
<i>Chapter 9: Wings</i>	138
<i>Chapter 10: Gloves, Belts, and Aprons</i>	140
<i>Chapter 11: Feet, Shoes, and Leggings</i>	144
<i>Chapter 12: Undergarments</i>	150
Section III: Props	157
<i>Chapter 13: Native American Props</i>	159
<i>Chapter 14: Wands and Poles</i>	164
<i>Chapter 15: Armor</i>	166
<i>Chapter 16: Thrones, Crowns, and Scepters</i>	170
<i>Chapter 17: Dinnerware</i>	176
<i>Chapter 18: Lamps</i>	179
Section IV: Illusion Costumes	181
<i>Chapter 19: Illusions</i>	183
References	199
Index	201
About the Author	205

Preface

Many of the costumes and accessories included in this book were made over the years and have found a home in rental shops and theatre companies and are used year after year to enhance parade floats and masquerade parties.

Using the conversion method, you too can create fabulous, unique costumes for your needs with very little money, time, or expertise. You don't need to be a seamstress to make a costume. You just need an imagination and the willingness to hunt the thrift shops, garage sales, and discount stores for that perfect item you can convert into a costume. Think simply and have fun.

It's always more fun in costume, so whether you're looking for a full costume or a hat or mask to accessorize your own clothing, I hope you'll think of my methods and use them to keep it fast, cheap, and easy.

Introduction

I am an illusionist. Using everyday clothing — something that has been discarded — I do magic, transforming otherwise common people into superheroes, movie stars, knights, and other extraordinary characters. You see, people in search of a costume don't care how you get the desired effect; they merely want to look the part.

Costuming is in the details. The exact same garment can take on a totally different look depending on how you accessorize it. Take a long-sleeved, full-length black dress as an example. Put a cape, pointed hat, and broom with it, and you have a witch. Put a white collar, apron, and black and white bonnet with it, and you have a pilgrim. Cut some holes and add a belt, chains, fabric paint, and small hat with a drape, and you have gone medieval. You are only limited by your imagination. The black dress is the canvas, and you are the artist.

Props also help determine the effect. Sit a man in a chair, and he is just a man in a chair. Convert the chair into a throne, and he is a king. Put a man in an overcoat and he's simply another man. Add a fedora and gun, and he becomes menacing. Props help set the mood of the costume.

An illusion costume is one that is not what it appears to be. You've seen them: the man who looks as if he's riding a horse, the clown car that is actually strapped to the clown underneath his costume, even a headless man carrying a severed head on a platter. Are these difficult to make? Not if you think simple.

A teacher once told me I had a tendency to take everything down to its simplest form and that such a tendency would not serve me well in life. Everyone's entitled to his opinion, but in costuming it has served me quite well. I could have learned to sew, use patterns, and go through the painstaking process of making costumes, hats, and accessories ... but why, when there is an easier way? The clothing manufacturer has already done all the mundane work, so I get to have fun with it.

Earlier in my costuming career, I had very little money or time. Even if I'd known where to buy my accessories, I wouldn't have been able to afford them. But a trip to the thrift shops, a day rummaging at garage sales, and sometimes even a walk past people's garbage cans would bring me the treasures I needed to turn that old dress, suit, or robe into a fabulous costume. Actually, I began to enjoy the thrill of the hunt, and the way my heart stood still when they told me it was only two dollars. Before I got the item home, I was redesigning it, making the accessories in my mind that would transform it into something magical.

As my business grew from one room to fifteen and my costuming time grew limited, I found easier, faster, and cheaper ways to make things. Many times there was no time to hunt; I had to make accessories with whatever was at hand. They say necessity is the mother of invention, but lack of time will produce the same results. When I'm in a hurry, it isn't unusual for me to grab a shoulder pad out of a garment, add a tie, decorate it, and turn it into a hat. That is how I've discovered some of my best, and certainly my most unique and creative, work.

In this book, I will share with you all the secrets I've learned over the years. Imagine turning the sleeves of a robe into leggings; a shirt yoke into Cleopatra's collar; a suit into a frock coat, military uniform, cutaway, even a matador. I'll help you understand why it is better to purchase feathers and sequins to make your own masks rather than buy pre-made ones. I'll show you how to change cheap cardboard hats into wonderful creations, straw into gold (as far as costuming is concerned), and cheap plastic masks into unbelievable, unique designs that will last. (Yes, I can make plastic bend.) We will do beading without beads and create fabulous jewelry from collars, dress bodices, and Christmas trim. These things and more I will teach you — in my own simple way.

As long as you don't complicate the process, anyone should be able to make a wonderful costume using my methods. Get rid of your old ideas, open your mind, believe you can do it, and half the battle is over. Because you don't have to go through the work of making costumes and accessorizing

from scratch, costuming should be a, creative process, filled with the childlike glory of playing pretend. There are no rules, so do it however it works. And most importantly, have a good time. Costumes should be fun — not only for the wearer, but also for the designer.