
OTTERBEIN
COLLEGE

Office of College Relations • Otterbein College • Westerville, Ohio 43081
(614) 898-1600 • Patricia Kessler, Director

Contact Valerie Klawitter 898-1605

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GENERAL ENTERTAINMENT

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Straight from the hit Broadway production of "The Phantom of the Opera" where he is assistant costume designer, David Robinson arrived last week at Otterbein College to create costumes for "The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie." The adult theme comedy/drama will be presented by Otterbein College Theatre March 10-13.

Robinson says the switch in projects -- moving from the hectic New York pace to a college campus -- isn't a shocking change of pace. "It wasn't like I got off the plane and said 'now what's this like?' I know Otterbein." As a 1978 theatre alumnus of the college, Robinson's quite familiar with the department's operating style and has remained in touch by returning to work on various plays. Last year he designed costumes for Otterbein Summer Theatre's "The Dresser" and "See How They Run." Other Otterbein productions he has designed include "Plenty" and "Whodunnit." After leaving the college summer theatre last year, he joined the design team of "...Phantom," in New York. Since the opening he has been handling costumes for replacements and understudies.

Although the work with "The Phantom of the Opera" (his first Broadway job) was exciting and challenging, Robinson implies that he doesn't want to fall into the pattern of assisting on a permanent basis. "I was very flattered (being selected to work on such a prestigious production), but it also made me feel that I shouldn't be

doing this a lot. You can really become a professional assistant, and I don't want to get stuck in that. There are a lot of people who just assist -- they don't design -- and it's easy to get caught in the trap because the money's good and the work is always there. But at the same time it's bad because it just perpetuates itself and you never design anything."

A good project is the key to Robinson's artistic enthusiasm, he claims, adding that a director is the essential element in any production. Director for the upcoming Otterbein production is theatre faculty member Stephen Buckwald who indicates that the character of Jean Brodie offers a strong personality for the designer to work with. Brodie, an anti-establishment, free-spirited teacher in a private Scottish girls school in the 30s, is pitted against the conservative administration. She flaunts tradition and inflames romantic notions in her students.

"The clothes follow her character through the changes and transitions of her personality in the 30s and 40s," Robinson says. "Actually the transition of fashion in that period flows along with her character. She starts out in soft feminine clothes which typifies the begging of the 30s and then ends up much more militaristic and mannish, the fashion trend of the 40s. Fashion, in fact does for the character, what I would want to do for her design-wise.

"The clothes should look like real clothes from the 30s -- not like costumes," the designer adds. "Thirties clothes are challenging, because cutting the patterns properly and draping the fabric are very important. They don't have a lot of details -- they're simple -- so all details you do are very important."

Designing for "...Jean Brodie" is interesting, Robinson remarks, because it is a well-written play. "Quite often you'll be designing for characters that aren't well written and you sort of have to make the characters up because they aren't well-defined. With a play like this you have a lot of information to go on."

Robinson who says he aspires to design for films, started his career in 1978 as resident costume designer for American Repertory Theatre of Cincinnati. After one season,