

ART/history:

A retrospective exhibit on the career of costume designer Paul Foltz

“Welcome to chaos” – a photo exhibit on the creative process

Following around Paul Foltz as he prepares costumes for another production for Theatre Harrisburg, one gets the sensation of being caught in a whirlwind of fabric, thread and trims as he dashes around his studio crammed full of those materials, along with sewing machines, dress forms, sketches, patterns, research books and costumes in various states of completion.

“Welcome to chaos,” Paul greets us with his big engaging smile. While at first glance it does seem chaotic with the riot of color, patterns and things covering every wall and surface area, there is also a sense of a calm rhythm of production as two of Paul’s dedicated volunteers toil away at their sewing machines.

We were privileged to get a behind the scenes tour with Paul to learn about the creative process of costuming a show. The process starts with a planning meeting of the Theatre’s staff who develop the show list for the season about a year in advance. Theatre Harrisburg currently offers six shows a season, including two musicals, a review and three dramas or comedies. Scripts are read, budgets developed, decisions are made and approved by the board of directors. Shows are then cast and Paul then measures the actors for their costumes and then it is off to the races.

Research

Paul does any required research into the period of the show. “I do a lot of background reading in social history,” says Paul. “I am trying to evoke an era, and create a reflection of society during that time period.” He usually avoids looking at costumes of productions by other theater companies of the show he is costuming, preferring to let his own vision and interpretation guide his designs. He compiles all notes, ideas, thumbnail sketches, actors’ measurements and the show script in a binder he refers to as his “Bible” for the show.

