

Show Overview

The Emperor's Clothes takes Hans Christian Andersen's familiar fairy story and tells it in a fresh way which is fun for all ages. A vain and selfish emperor rules a land where fashion and looking good are the only things that matter. The arrival of two charismatic strangers sets everything into confusion, but if the audience members think they know exactly how this story ends, they're in for a surprise! And no, there is no nudity...

This is a family show, intended for all ages, not just children. The energy level is high and all of the characters are larger than life, but this is not a pantomime. Both authors love panto, but that is not the style needed for this show. The story has some serious points to make about honesty, integrity and not being a slave to fashion. However, it is humorous throughout. Most of the humour arises from characterisation.

This is a show which each member of the company should feel fully part of. Previous productions have given each member of the cast a distinct role and personality within the Empire, and each of the principal characters step in to the ensemble from time to time.

Synopsis

Long ago in a far-off land...

Emperor Frederick the Fashionable is obsessed with his clothing and demands a brand-new outfit every day. The people of his Empire copy his fashions. Then, one day (as the show opens), the unthinkable happens: there is no new outfit for the Emperor to wear!

His most trusted advisors (the Treasurer and Wardrobe Mistress) announce a competition to find a new chief designer. Meanwhile, a pair of con artists (the Brother and Sister) arrive and realise that there is an opportunity here to make a lot of money, and the Treasurer bullies the Launderer into giving him what should have been the old designer's last payment.

The interviews for the new designer are a disaster until the Brother and Sister arrive, promising to make an outfit from cloth that can only be seen by the most intelligent, brilliant and attractive people. The Treasurer claims to be able to see it, and the Emperor has to agree (to avoid losing face), declaring that he has found his new designers.

Later, the con artists scheme, the Emperor sulks, and the Treasurer extorts more money for himself. The Cobbler confronts the Emperor about his selfishness, and suggests he should try looking at the world from a new perspective. He has a change of heart, and decides that someone else should have the honour of wearing his new outfit.

The next day, a parade is held. But who is wearing the outfit? Has the Emperor really changed his ways? Will everyone get what they deserve? Spoiler: There is, of course, a happy ending waiting at the end of the show!

Set and Costume Requirements

The show is not set in any specific time or place, so there is a great deal of flexibility in design. Previous productions have used clothing-related items as part of the set, such as coat stands, clothes lines and hat boxes.

The scenes take place in locations in and around the Emperor's palace, including his throne room and dressing room. Big set changes are not anticipated - just enough to indicate a change of location.

Costume is extremely important for this show, but there are very few costume changes - most characters keep the same outfit for the majority of the show, if not all of it. You will need a LOT of yellow clothes - the Emperor is wearing yellow, so everyone else is copying this choice.

You will also need:

- Another outfit for the Emperor, in blue.
- Clothes in any colour other than yellow for the Brother and Sister.
- A number of clothing items as props, including some outlandish accessories.
- Vest and boxer shorts for one character.
- Costumes for ensemble in 'If Truth Be Told' (again, not yellow).

Wardrobe teams should be encouraged to be creative for this show!

Our friends at Legacy Performers have a package of set, prop and costume items available to hire, including a large wardrobe with false back which can be used as an entrance/exit. We can put any companies interested in this in touch with them at licence application stage.

Orchestration

We have two options available to suit different groups and venues:

Option A. Piano-conductor score (included in rehearsal set), band parts for Bass and Kit/Percussion, plus click tracks

Option B. Full backing tracks.

Casting Information

7 principal roles, 4-8 featured roles, small or large ensemble.

All roles are flexible in terms of age (unless otherwise noted) and ethnicity.

Principal Roles

Emperor Frederick the Fashionable

Male. Younger than the Cobbler. Baritone (optional falsetto).

The vain ruler of the empire, who acts like a spoiled, overgrown child most of the time, but the audience must warm to him.

Treasurer

Male. Mid to high baritone.

A man who revels in his power and resents how costly his ruler's tastes are. Although he has a point, he undermines this by acts of petty cruelty, marking himself as a villain.

Cobbler

Female. Should seem old enough to be the Launderer's mother. Mezzo (belter).

A wise woman who sees how ridiculous the empire has become and worries about the effects of the clothing laws on ordinary people.

Launderer

Any gender. Young. Flexible vocal range.

The naïve and well-meaning child of the Cobbler who believes in the good in people and gets frustrated when things appear unjust.

Wardrobe Mistress

Female. Mezzo-sop (possibly lyrical, with optional higher range).

Exotic and flamboyant, one of the Emperor's most trusted confidantes. Although she is all business in public, when she is off-duty she revels in the excitement that clothing brings.

Brother and Sister

Male. Tenor (with optional higher range) / Female. Alto to mezzo-sop.

A pair of con artists who travel the world carrying out schemes intended to teach someone a lesson as well as bagging them plenty of gold.



Ensemble and Featured Roles

The ensemble are a mixed group of people of all ages and all walks of life. Ideally, they should be individualised rather than homogenous. Ensemble roles used in previous productions include doctor, herald, librarian, chorister, gardener, maid, hairdresser, valet, artist and more. They double as the Brother's backup singers and/or dancers in 'If Truth Be Told'. The full ensemble play a part in at least half of the musical numbers.

Featured ensemble roles (all can be played by any gender):

Small group of **Fashionistas**, who hold jobs relating to the Emperor's appearance (e.g. manicurist, hairdresser). Often speak as one, generally flattering the Emperor. Featured in 3 scenes and 2 songs, with dialogue and some sung solo lines for up to four individuals.

A **Builder** and a **Chef**, who have dialogue in a couple of scenes and will appear as Designers (see below).

Four **Designers**, ensemble members (including the Builder and Chef) who try to impress the Emperor with their fashion skills. They have dialogue during one scene.