

BY MIKE LAWLER

YOU'RE A THEATRE student who loves working backstage. You're smart, creative, reliable, determined, and as your kindergarten teacher might have noted on your very first report card, you work well with others.

Perhaps you have one of the following jobs in your future.

It's been several years since the publication of *Careers in Technical Theater*, my book detailing dozens of ways to make a living behind the scenes. Some things have changed since then, but much has stayed the same. The core specialties listed here are as vital to theatre production as they have been for decades. While many of them necessarily evolve with the technology that drives certain fields, at least one job category is something that we can truly call an emerging field.

Each of these jobs can be found in some form in all areas of the performing arts: theatre, opera, dance, rock'n'roll, theme parks, and so on. Some positions are found more frequently in some fields, but there is so much crossover that it becomes nearly impossible to separate it all out. This leads to another important thing to remember while envisioning your dream job: for those of us working in the arts, adaptability is essential. A production manager with a position in a small professional theatre in a mid-sized city will not have the same working life as another production manager employed by a ballet company in a major metropolitan area. However, each will retain the same essential duties and responsibilities, though one of them may also be a technical director. And while you might have a very specific career goal in mind-wrangling wigs for an opera company, say, or engineering sound for concert tours-you're likely to find opportunities that excite you, and certainly more chances to learn and grow in your craft, if you look be-

In the scene shop at Seattle Rep.

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yond those boundaries. A job is a job, and you might be surprised where the search leads.

When I asked theatre professionals around the country what they liked about their jobs, a few common ideas emerged right away. First, almost everyone replaced the word "like" with "love" (although, admittedly, a few used the opportunity to complain). Most of them also mentioned how much they enjoyed solving creative problems and the way their work was always shifting and changing: the problems being solved provide plenty of variety to keep things interesting. I think this says quite a bit about the types of people who thrive working in the arts-they have a passion for what they do, they embrace challenges, and they take pride in their ability to adapt and think creatively. Another favorite comment was the lack of a desk or office.

Note: the survey you'll see references to here are the initial results of an ongoing 2014 Tech Theatre Earnings Survey, an update to a similar study I conducted in 2006 for my book.

Production Manager

a.k.a.; Production Director, Director of Production, PM

Job description: Along with technical directors (whose duties they occasionally share), the production manager is an essential member of any producing organization. Responsible for the time, money, and people required to mount a production-especially technical elements such as scenery, props, costumes, lighting, sound, and other technology-PMs spend their days creating and modifying schedules, budgets, and contracts and supervising production staff. Each department under the production manager's supervision has its quirks, but his or her primary function does not shift: coordinating people and information to bring shows in on time and under budget, meeting or exceeding the expectations of the organization where production values are concerned. Union affiliation: Not generally members of any union. Production

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Cincinnati Playbouse in the Park crafts/dyer Dean W. Walz creates one of the more than fifteen bonnets that are being worn in the Playbouse's production of Pride and Prejudice this spring.

managers are commonly former or current stage managers and may belong to Actors' Equity Association (see Stage Manager) and are sometimes active members of IATSE.

Training: Because production mangers need to be broadly knowledgeable in technical production, typical training can vary a great deal. The most common educational background tends to be stage management, though it is becoming more common for high-level production managers to have training that is focused specifically on production—and there are many programs geared to this field at the university level. **Range of compensation:** Produc-

Range of compensation: Production managers are less likely to be freelancing independent contractors (unlike designers, costumers, wig and makeup artists, and many others profiled here) and therefore have more stability and regularity in their paychecks. They tend to be the highest-paid members of the production staff, as they generally report directly to the artistic director and are responsible for all areas of production.

Of the thirty-seven production managers surveyed for this article (mainly those working in regional theatre in the United States), six of them reported an annual income over \$100,000, but the majority earn between \$35,000 and \$50,000.

Why it's a dream job: "I love the view from here. I

love trying to know how it all ends before we begin. I love choosing my words carefully, I

love always learn-

Marie Control of the Control of the

ing something new. I love simplifying. I love translating. And of course, I love it when a plan comes together."—Michael Broh, production manager, American Players Theatre, Spring Green, Wisconsin

Stage Manager

a.k.a. Production Stage Manager, Equity Stage Manager, Assistant Stage Manager, SM, PSM, ASM

Job description: The work of a stage manager is the most essential link between the disparate departments, artists, technicians, performers, and managers involved in a production. A qualified stage manager is equally comfortable working with actors and stagehands—as confident discussing a complicated cueing sequence as helping an actor remember his blocking.

Because professional stage managers are usually members of Actors' Equity Association, their official job duties are clearly defined by the union. They include calling all rehearsals, assembling and maintaining

the prompt book, ensuring the "form and discipline" of both rehearsals and performances, maintaining the artistic intentions of the director after opening, and much more.

Union affiliation: If they are union members, professional stage managers belong to Actors' Equity Association (AEA). This is because a stage manager is the most direct link between performers and technicians, designers, and directors. The stage manager is also in charge of rehearsals and performances and, therefore, an actor's immediate supervisor.

Training: There is no shortage of training programs for stage managers in the United States. Apprentice and intern programs for aspiring stage managers are also common, though typically quite competitive.

Range of compensation: AEA stage managers are guaranteed a minimum weekly salary based on the type of contract they are working underand there are dozens, including SPT (Small Professional Theatre), LORT (League of Resident Theatres), and COST (Council of Stock Theatres). Within these types, there are yet more tiers and categories of salary requirements based on the number of performances per week. Depending on where a stage manager is working, he or she could make as little as \$200 or as much as \$2,500 per week. Of the twenty-eight stage managers surveyed for this article, nearly half of them reported an annual income between \$20,000 and \$35,000; six reported an income over \$35,000, but only one listed yearly income as over \$50,000.

Technical Director

a.k.a. TD

Job description: This job title is one of the more fluid on this list.

While technical directors are sometimes lumped together with production managers (especially in smaller organizations), they are ideally much more narrowly focused in their work on the scenery department. People under their direct supervision—depending on the size



Joel Herrera and Christy Penny create a tree for Of Mice and Men in Seattle Rep's prop shop.

and budget of the organization—include scenic carpenters, shop supervisors, scenic artists, and sometimes the entire props department as well.

TDs are charged with bringing a scene designer's vision into reality; they rely on their expertise in construction, engineering, and related technology to get the job done.

Union affiliation: Some TDs are members of IATSE, depending on where they work.

Training: Training to become a TD is perhaps one of the more common tracks for those interested in technical production and is available at most levels of academia; however, many working TDs trained on the job.

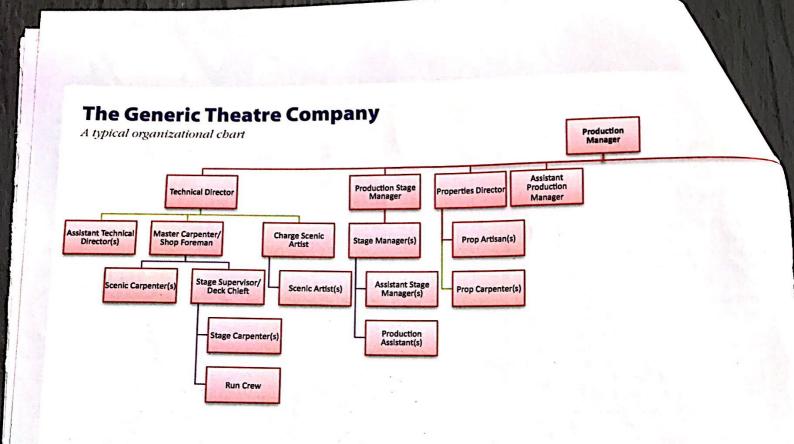
Range of compensation: Of the fifty technical directors surveyed for this article, the income was evenly spread among most of them between \$20,000 and \$75,000. Of the remaining TDs who responded, six reported earning less than \$20,000, while three bring home more than \$100,000 per year.

Why it's a dream job: "It's like a new game every day. Give me an idea, let me tinker with it for a while until I get it to work, and I'll produce it in full scale



for you." —Adam Maxfield, technical director, PlayMakers Repertory Company, Chapel Hill, North Carolina

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Scene Designer

a.k.a. Set Designer, Scenery Designer, Scenographer

Job description: Scene designers are responsible for designing the physical environment in which a performance will take place. They work closely with the director, writer, choreographer, and full design team to create an onstage world that evokes the proper moods, themes, and physical necessities of the piece. Once a concept is developed, designers will share ideas with the rest of the project's creative team, using sketches, computer modeling, and research images and textures gleaned from books, magazines, and the Internet. Once final ideas have been agreed upon, the scene designer must create the prototypes (renderings, models, elevations) required for carpenters, scenic artists, prop artisans, and others to engineer and build the production's scenic ele-

Union affiliation: If they are union members, scene designers belong to United Scenic Artists (USA).

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Training: While some working designers trained on the job, it seems more common in American theatre for scene designers to have some level of college education. There are dozens of programs out there that focus specifically on this discipline, from small state universities to large, prestigious conservatories. Range of compensation: Members of USA are entitled to certain fee minimums as well as health and pension benefits. Rates depend on many factors for union designers, including geographic location of project, type and size of theatre, type of show, and design discipline. A USA scene designer can earn \$2,000 or much more on a single project. Union designers working under LORT contracts will earn between \$3,300 and \$7,900 per project, depending on the category of theatre (based mainly on the seating capacity of the venue). Broadway designer's fees range from about \$11,000 to \$21,000 per show.

For those not associated with the union, pay varies even more widely—and since only five people identifying

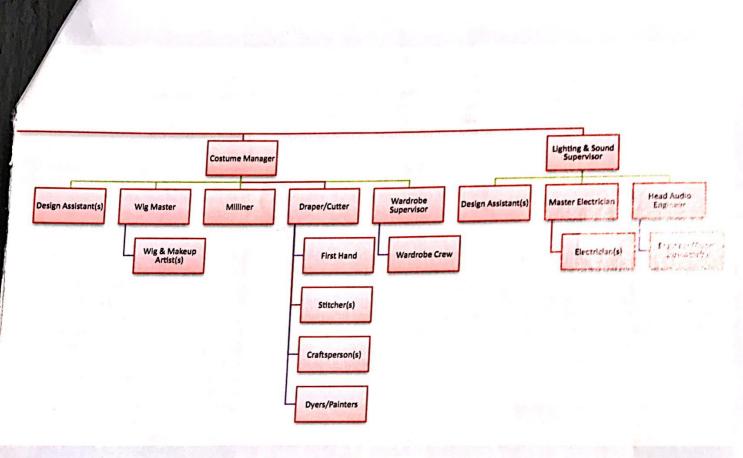
themselves as scene designers responded to the survey, it's difficult to extrapolate much information.

Why it's a dream job: "I love the challenge of solving the issues of a play, creating a space that takes the audience to a place where our story can begin. I am also amazed to walk around on a set that, just months ago, levisted only in months.

walk around on a set that, just a few months ago, [existed only] in my head." —Sarah Hunt-Frank, freelance scene designer

Scenic Artist

a.k.a. Charge Artist, Scenic Charge, Lead Scenic, Set Painter, "Scenic" Job description: Scenic artists are responsible for much of a production's color and texture. This includes not only paint but also application of a variety of textural materials. A charge artist is the scenic artist in charge of this department, supervising all other painters on a project or production.



Training: Becoming a scenic artist requires a strong background in visual art and illustration. Many of the scenic artists I've known in my career have also been active and trained visual artists. There are also training programs designed specifically for the entertainment industry scenic artist, such as Cobalt Studios in White Lake, New York.

Range of compensation: While only a handful of scenic artists have responded to my survey so far, the responses are solidly in the middle of the curve between \$35,000 and \$50,000 per year.

Union affiliation: If they are union members, scene designers typically belong to United Scenic Artists (USA), although many are members of IA-TSE.

Why it's a dream job: "Each set design brings a new or different problem that I need to resolve. Scenic art also uses all that fine art background that I had." —Judy Allen, lead scenic artist, South Coast Repertory, Costa Mesa, California

Scene Shop Staff

a.k.a. Assistant Technical Director, Shop Carpenter, Shop Supervisor, Scenic Carpenter, "Master carp," ATD Job description: The scene shop is a mash-up of roles and duties, the titles of which often overlap. Large theatres will have many working positions in the scene shop, while smaller organizations will have fewer people that have to do about the same amount of work.

Union affiliation: If they are union members, master carpenters are typically members of IATSE.

Training: A general training in technical theatre and scenery construction can be had in a college environment or on the job.

Range of compensation: Pay for these roles varies widely, depending on a range of factors.

Why it's a dream job: "Each day at work I use a set of skills and techniques to meld together a pile of lumber and metal to create, in three dimensions, a world that previously existed only in the imagination of

a designer. Each project is different, with its own unique set of problems to be solved; monotony is not a common word in my vocabulary."



—Amy Dunn, master carpenter, Oregon Contemporary Theatre, Eugene, Oregon

Properties Director

a.k.a. Props Master/Mistress, Props Manager, Properties Manager

Job description: The head of the props department is responsible for overseeing a department of specialists who will build, find, rent, borrow, or pull from stock the needed props for a production. Sometimes this is a one-person operation, though often a props manager has a small staff of prop artisans ranging from those capable of building furniture from scratch to those with skills creating soft-goods props.

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Union affiliation: If they are union members, props directors are typically members of IATSE.

Training: There are few programs in the United States that focus solely on props (though they do exist). Generally, props directors and artisans come from scene design or general theatre backgrounds. They are a passionate species, in my experience, and performing arts organizations with highly skilled props people on staff are able to raise the level of production values quite high.

Range of compensation: This is another position for which it's difficult to pin down a common pay range. While only eleven props directors responded to the survey conducted for this article, all but one of them reported being on staff at performing arts organizations. Ten of them reported an annual income of at least \$20,000, but none bring in more than \$50,000.

Why it's a dream job: "I never stop learning new things. It's never boring. I'm in constant physical and mental motion, problemsolving and updating my intellectual



toolbox in terms of history, period styles, art, literature, science, technology, tools, materials, and resources. I get to collaborate with a team of smart, talented, and creative people pursuing the common goal of delivering the play's message and telling the best, most entertaining story possible." —Jim Guy, properties director, Milwaukee Repertory Theatre, Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Stagehand

a.k.a. Hand

Job description: This job category is perhaps the most elusive to define, because it includes people who specialize in all sorts of areas of entertainment technology, including sound, lights, costumes, hair and makeup, scenery, props, projections, and just about anything else you can imagine. Most members of IATSE are consid-

ered stagehands but have an area of specialty for which they are typically hired.

Union affiliation: Stagehands belong to local chapters of IATSE.

Training: The IATSE Entertainment & Exhibition Industries Training Trust Fund assists local chapters and members in keeping up with safety and technology advances.

Range of compensation: Stagehands who are members of IATSE are guaranteed a certain rate of pay (depending on the type of work they do and where) and access to benefits like health insurance and pensions. Here again, compensation varies widely depending on location and affiliations, but stagehands working in large metro areas with established posts can make a very good living. The small number of survey respondents in this category demonstrated the wide range of income possible—from \$10,000 of paid work annually all the way up to \$100,000 or more.

Why it's a dream job: "The collaboration between art and technology, light and sound, and especially, the mechanical and the musical." — Yanna



Kiriacopoulos, member IATSE Local 23, Providence, Rhode Island

Lighting Designer

a.k.a. LD

Job description: Lighting designers determine how the environment on stage will be seen (or not), through the use of illumination, texture, and color. As with all members of the design team, lighting designers collaborate with the director and others to serve the story and the director's vision. Once a concept is developed, designers will share ideas—using sketches, computer modeling, and research images and textures gleaned from various sources—with the creative team of the project. When final ideas have been agreed upon, the LD will create a light plot detailing the types of instruments required, their

location, and other pertinent information such as color, pattern, dimmer, and accessories.

Union affiliation: If they are union members, lighting designers are typically members of USA.

Training: Most lighting designers have some level of college education—programs in this discipline are widespread, with degrees offered at both undergraduate and graduate lestels—although as with scene designers, a few LDs are self-taught, having trained on the job.

Range of compensation: Twenty-four LDs responded to the earnings survey conducted for this article. The majority were freelance designers, but only a small number were members of USA. Nearly 40 percent reported earning at least \$75,000 each year. Fees for USA-member designers working in LORT theatres range from about \$2,700 to \$6,000 per project, while the rates in Broadway theatres range from about \$8,400 to \$15,600. Why it's a dream job: "No day is

Why it's a dream job: "No day is ever the same. I lit thirty-eight productions in 2013, and every one of them was unique and required something different from me. No other career will give you the satisfaction or at least closure of a project at the end of every week." —Jason Fassl, freelance lighting designer

Sound Designer

Job description: Sound designers are responsible for creating the aural atmosphere of the performance. They work closely with the director, writer, choreographer, music director, and others to bring the sounds of the performance to life and find a sound-scape that supports the story. Sound designers are often composers of original music as well as finders and recorders of sound effects.

Union affiliation: If they are union members, sound designers are typically members of USA.

Training: Based on my experience and research, most professional sound designers have at least an undergradeate degree in theatre or music. While breaking into the field can be done

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without this level of education, it is more difficult.

Range of compensation: Contract fees for USA sound designers in LORT theatres range from about \$2,700 to \$6,000 per project. The rates in Broadway theatres range from about \$6,500 to \$11,800 and can include royalty payments for original music as well. Earnings for sound designers not affiliated with USA can fall within the above ranges but generally fall in the lower range of the LORT rates (or less).

Why it's a dream job: "I love my job because the challenge of experiencing life through another person's eyes and ears is something that inspires me every day."



—Lindsay Jones, freelance sound designer/composer

Master Electrician

a.k.a. Production Electrician, Lighting Supervisor, Electrics Manager, ME

Job description: This is the person responsible for putting a lighting designer's plot into action. The ME supervises lighting crews to prepare, hang, circuit, program, focus, and maintain lighting instruments, accessories, and onstage practicals such as table lamps or lanterns.

Union affiliation: If they are

union-affiliated, master carpenters are typically members of IATSE. **Training:** Many MEs are also working lighting designers, and it is common for those working in the field to have some level of training in design.

Range of compensation: Of the sixteen respondents in this category, the majority earn between \$20,000 and \$50,000 per year.

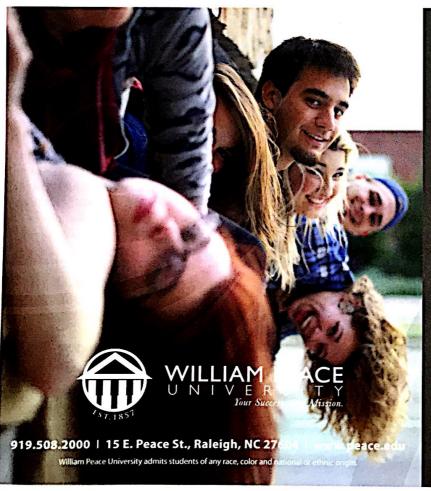
Audio Engineer

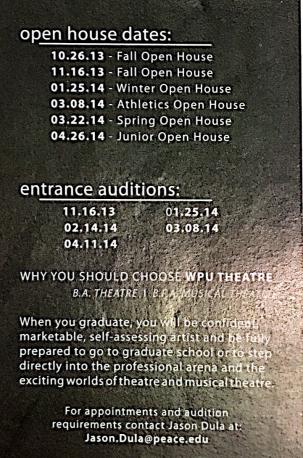
a.k.a. Sound Engineer, Sound Supervisor, Audio or Sound Operator

Job description: Things need to be heard in the theatre, and the audio engineer is the person who assists the sound designer to be sure things are. Much like the relationship between a master electrician and lighting designer, audio engineers are responsible for putting the sound plot in place in preparation for production and often also for operating audio equipment in performances.

Union affiliation: Most typically IATSE, although those who are also designers may belong to USA.

Training: Because there is so much opportunity for good audio engineers in a range of industries, training choices are wide and deep. They include traditional theatre programs as well as recording and music programs both in a university setting and





in private, specialized schools such as Full Sail.

Range of compensation: Of the twenty in this position who responded to the survey, about a third earn between \$35,000 and \$50,000 per year, and another third earn between \$50,000 and \$75,000 per year. The rest earn at least \$10,000, and some as much as \$100,000.

Why it's a dream job: "I never have to wear pantyhose!" —Holly Blakely, production sound engineer, Alliance Theatre Company, Atlanta, Georgia

Projection Designer

a.k.a. Video Designer, Multimedia Designer

Job description: Projection or multimedia designers are responsible for creating and often implementing video and other media that will be part of a production. As with fellow members of the design team, they work closely with the director, writer, choreographer, and others to effectively use media to tell the story.

Union affiliation: If they are union members, projection designers are typically members of USA.

Training: Several institutions around the country now have programs in video and multimedia for theatre and entertainment, including CalArts, Yale, Arizona State, and Carnegie Mellon.

Range of compensation: Projection design is still a growing field, so there's not the standard fee structure that exists for other design fields (USA-member projection designers, for instance, are not guaranteed minimum rates for their work in LORT or Broadway theatres).

Why it's a dream job: "My deepest passion within the theatre is to push the limits of storytelling—and for me, right now, projection design has that



potential, and we've only begun to tap into its power to collaborate with lights, sound, scenic, and costumes."

—Jared Mezzocchi, freelance projection designer

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Costume Designer

Job description: A costume designer is charged with creating all the garments and accessories worn in a production, including things we wouldn't consider clothing (think animals or fantastical settings), to support the look and feel of the director's vision. He or she also frequently designs hair and makeup when those roles are not part of the production team. Once a concept is developed, costume designers will share ideas with the rest of the creative team, using sketches, computer modeling, and research images and textures. When final ideas have been agreed upon, the costumer will create detailed drawings and collect color and texture samples.

Union affiliation: If they are union members, costume designers are typically members of USA.

Training: There are a hundreds of programs out there that focus specifically on this discipline, from small state universities to large, prestigious private schools. Most professionals have at least an undergraduate degree in costume design, and many have M.F.A.s.

Range of compensation: USA-member designers working under LORT contracts will earn between \$3,300 and \$7,900 per project, depending on the category of theatre. The fees in Broadway theatres for costume designers are based mainly on the number of characters in the production. ranging from about \$8,000 for one to seven characters to nearly \$18,000 for shows with more than thirty-six characters. Earnings for designers not affiliated with USA can fall within the above ranges but are generally at the lower end of LORT rates (and often less).

Why it's a dream job: "I like the level of personal interaction, and I like the types of problems that need to be solved."—Monica Butler, freelance costume designer



Wig and Makeup Artist

a.k.a. Wig Master, Wig Supervisor

Job description: While hair and
makeup may fall under the duties of a
costume designer, these elements are
just as often the specific responsibility of a wig and makeup designer or
artist. These pros approach their work
in much the same way as any other
designer, while collaborating closely
with the costumer.

Union affiliation: If they are union members, wig and makeup artists are typically members of IATSE.

Training: There aren't many programs producing wig and makeup artists for the entertainment industry, though they do exist (at North Carolina School of the Arts and the University of Cincinnati, for example). Those working in this field are just as likely to be trained on the job or come from a fashion background.

Range of compensation: Too wide to pin down.

Why it's a dream job: "Live performance is my passion. I contribute to a once-in-a-lifetime experience for the audience." —Roger Stricker, makeup, bair, and wig supervisor, Cirque du Soleil Zumanity, Las Vegas, Nevada

Media Specialist

a.k.a. Media Technologist

Job description: This is an emerging field in the entertainment industry and is still in its infancy as a position all on its own. The handful of media specialists working in staff positions are usually responsible for any media needed or used onstage that does not fall under the auspices of other departments, including video, interactive media, and any instances where performers are using or interfacing with computers during a performance.

Union affiliation: If they are union members, media specialists are typically members of IATSE.

Training: Several institutions around the country now have programs in video and multimedia for theatre and entertainment, including CalArts, Yale, and Carnegie Mellon.

Range of compensation: Here again, too wide to pin down.

ostume Shop

k.a. First Hand, Cutter, Draper, spitcher, Craftsperson, Milliner (bat/ beadwear specialist), Wardrobe, Dresser, "Costume Studio"

Job description: There are many different positions within a large costume shop. Here's a basic, not exhaustive, breakdown.

The Shop Manager (also known as shop supervisor or costume director) oversees the operations of a costume shop, including hiring, budgets, schedules, and advising other production personnel. He or she might have an Assistant Shop Manager working alongside.

The Cutter or Draper is responsible for making all patterns for costumes requiring shop construction, as well as supervising most of the following positions during the build process: First Hand, Stitcher, Craftsperson (creates specialized accessories and costume props), and Dyer or Painter (responsible for coloring and distressing costumes).

Wardrobe maintains, repairs, tracks, and cleans costumes once production begins and supervises any crew required for performances). Dressers are members of the wardrobe crew who assist performers with costume changes.

Wig, hair, and makeup personnel are also generally included under the costume shop umbrella.

Union affiliation: Not typically union members, but costume shop workers in certain areas of the business will belong to IATSE.

Training: Several universities offer programs specifically in costume production or costume technology, where students focus on the work of costume shops rather than on costume design. Range of compensation: Obviously compensation depends on which of the positions in the costume shop is held. About twenty non-designer costumers responded to my survey. Nearly half of them reported an annual income between \$20,000 and \$35,000; about a third were staff members at LORT theatres. Interestingly, the survey I conducted for my book in 2006 contains almost identical data.

Design Assistant

Job description: There are two kinds of design assistants. On-staff design assistants are provided by and work for performing arts organizations to facilitate the design process for both the organization and the designer. They help coordinate schedules, do much of the legwork required to complete a design (fittings and measurements for costumers, drafting and drawing for scene designers), and generally relieve some portion of the detail work of designing. Perhaps more frequently in use is the design assistant who works directly for the designer at his or her home base. The duties are much the same in both cases, with the work itself being dictated less by the variety of designers and more by the variety of projects in play. Union affiliation: Many (but not all) design assistants are designers themselves and may belong to USA.

Training: Simply working for a time as an assistant is a very good way to

receive top-level training, both in design and in more practical things like handling the business side and collaborating with other artists. Still, assistants must have a foundation of training in their chosen disciplines. At times, assistants are actually more competent in some aspect of the design process, such as computer-aided drafting or model-making, than the designers they work for—and highly skilled design assistants are usually in high demand, especially in larger markets such as New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago.

Range of compensation: All over the map.

Why it's a dream job: "I love my job as a design assistant because I get to participate in and facilitate common nication between different groups to the theatre: mainly, my designer, the costume shop, stage management and the actors," —Kimberly Newbord, on-staff costume design assistant, Seattle Repertory Theatre, Seattle, Washington. ▼



