

**COSTUME MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES IN AFRICAN THEATRICAL
PERFORMANCE: THE EXAMINATION OF NANABENYIN KWEKU
WARTEMBERG'S CORPSE'S COMEDY**

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Abstract

Costume Management is an indispensable art in the theatre as it reveals the aesthetic embedded in a theatrical production. This paper critically focuses on the analysis of the use of costume in the theatrical performance, the techniques and means of managing the costumes using the performance Nanabenyin Kweku Wartemberg "Corpses Comedy" as a micro-study with the objectives of examining the role of costumes in African play production. Through the adoption of performance analysis method of research, the paper discovers that costume management is an important aspect of play production which allows the costumier to effectively plan, control, coordinate and organize all the process of costume distribution during the performance. In conclusion, the paper recommends that for the achievement of any successful play production, the costumier must engage in proper costume management.

Keywords: Costume, Management, Techniques, and Theatrical Performance

Introduction

Theatre is an ancient art. Therefore, the art of costuming is as old as theatre itself. Costuming in theatrical performance has been an integral part of theatrical production which can never be put aside. This has increased the interest of upcoming theatre professionals and practitioners in gaining more educational knowledge in performing arts. Costume is also part of the major branches in the theatre. There has never been a naked theatre where the performers work through without a single cloth on them. This makes costuming as paramount as other branches of the theatre. Wilson (1998, p.361) in his contribution states that: costume indicates status in life, occupations, and personalities and shows the relationship between the characters separating the major character from the minor character. Costume was traditionally

used to describe appropriate clothing for certain activities or event. This brings about reflecting the gender, class/status, ethnic or tribe, profession, period, age and mood of a character in a theatrical production. Umukoro (2008, p.48) says that “A costume is usually a dress, which by some restriction, is set apart as a unit of its own, restrictions such as may be imposed by functionality or origin”. The way a person dresses is deeply meaningful and can reveal a lot about who they are. Basically, costuming is an act of designing and analyzing a particular role of a character. Costume is a cultural visual of the people. Also, it is the creation of clothing for the overall appearance of a character or performer. The costume to put on for a performance must fit perfectly with the period, season, and locality, time of day, occasion and mood of the scene. Costumes are specific outfits worn by performers during theatrical, film, or television productions. This costume definition is of course heavily simplified: many people also wear costumes outside of performances for their own enjoyment.

Evolution and Brief History of Costume

The history of costume in the sense of dressing up for various reasons is likely as old as human history. In the context of theatre, it dates back at least as far as the ancient Greeks, if not further as asserted in *Living Theatre* Edwin Wilson, (4th ed 18). Aeschylus, one of the most famous ancient Greek playwrights, staged plays where actors would wear elaborately carved masks while performing. The masks identified which character an actor was playing, as actors frequently played more than one role. They usually had exaggerated facial expressions to help make the character's emotions clearer to the audience. Today, some performances of ancient Greek plays (particularly tragedies) still have actors wearing masks in homage to the plays' origins.

Wearing of clothes originated in earlier times when animal skins were being used as wears before the advent of real cotton clothes. The history of costume in the sense of dressing up for various reasons is likely as old as human history. In the context of theatre, it dates back at least as far as the ancient Greeks, if not further. In particular, there is a long history of costume, meaning that what costumes consist of and how they function has not always been the same throughout the years. Human being made an attempt to meet one of his primal necessities (getting food), early man was forced to disguise himself to look like the animals he hunted. Using costumes and make-up he was able to show his fellow tribesmen how he made his instruments, implements and weapons, or how he was able to overcome and capture the animals he used for his meals. According to Baldwin (2009), “a costumer, often referred

to as a costume designer or wardrobe stylist, is a skilled professional involved in the creation, selection, and management of costumes for various forms of entertainment”. Costumers play a crucial role in the visual storytelling process by collaborating with directors, producers, and other members of the creative team to develop costumes that enhance the overall artistic vision of a production and help define the characters portrayed on stage or screen.

Costume designers are professionals who work hard to create costumes for actors to wear so that they can better portray their characters. Costume design is a complex process that can be approached in a variety of different ways. A costume designer uses skills to communicate the idea or message of a production to the audience. Costume is the first thing that speaks or tells more on a character even before action or anything else on stage or set. This is because as the performer appears, message has been sent to the mind of the audience and it enhances the action of a performer. In designing the costumes for any production, either for stage or screen, designers are not only responsible for choosing clothes that make an actor look like their character. They are also responsible for considering things like color symbolism, how the character changes throughout a piece, the overall aesthetic of the other characters, the set design, the cinematography or staging choices, and much more. Costume design can dramatically change the feeling of virtually any performance.

Management

Management is highly essential in all aspects of human dealings. In general sense apart from theatrical perspective, it refers to the most functional aspect of any organization establishment. This is a skillful task that has been in existence since the creation of the world. Its effectiveness or ineffectiveness may make or mar any organization. This is also applicable to theatrical production whereby, if the managerial aspect of the production is faulty it would mar it and if it the other way round it would make it. Management is the act of running and controlling a business or similar organization. It is the act or skill of dealing with people or situations in a successful way. Management as defined by the Encyclopedia Britannica,(2012) “is a rational, structured approach for solving certain kinds of problems in business, government parastatals, arts and culture” Management is the planning, organization and controlling of certain kinds of working activity with the pursuit of specified organisational goals. It entails coordination through communication between people of different functions and groups. In addition to the concept of management, If Frederick Taylor is considered to be the father of management thought; Mary Parker Follett (1868–1933) serves as its mother. This is because most of her work on management and managers behavior to workers was a

response to her concern that Taylor was ignoring the human side of the organization. Mary pointed out that management often overlooks the multitude of ways in which employees can contribute to the organization when managers allow them to participate and exercise initiative in their everyday work lives. This involvement occurs in the costume management of the convocation play. This means that Management is applicable to all sphere of life. Management is charged with the responsibility of ensuring that the aims and objectives of an organization are realized. Peter Drucker (1954) defines management as, “The organ of institutions, the organ that converts a mob into an organization and human effort into performance”.

“Management is as human organization and all kingdoms succeeded at different levels and periods in history through different forms of management depending on how it was applied. It is the accomplishment of objectives through the use of man, materials and machines” (Clementina, 2002). This means 3M’s in management are Man, Money and Machines. Ralph and Alan (1977), in their work, says that “Fayol developed a series of principles which would aid in the job of management. These principles are still important guides to management”. Management scientifically involves process of planning, organizing, leading, controlling and staffing in order to attain organizational objectives.

Theatre Management

Looking at management in theatrical performance, which is applicable to all specialties in theatrical production. Theatre management according to OluAkomolafe (1981), involves running the financial, marketing, human resources and sales activities of a performance. Stephen Langley (1980, p.27) states theatrically that for any performance to occur, certain elements are necessary: (1) creative raw material (2) A person to refine the material (3) A place to refine the material (4) An audience to witness the presentation. Celestine (1988) opines that “there is no human endeavour that does not require proper management for its proper functioning. All types of organisations, government establishment, business enterprises, hospitals, cooperatives, churches, whether profit making or non-profit making requires good management to function effectively. Managing is one of the most important human activities that permeate all organisations”.

Costume Management

Costume management involves all the aspect of designing and achieving a costume concept that must perfectly fit in a character without losing it savour. Costume designers are

responsible for creation, designing a costume and overseeing the physical look of the performer towards the development the production and development of the characters. In other words, costume can be thought of as an entire package that creates a character, rather than just clothing. Umukoro (2008, p.48) says that “A costume is usually a dress, which by some restriction, is set apart as a unit of its own, restrictions such as may be imposed by functionality or origin”. The way a person dresses is deeply meaningful and can reveal a lot about who they are. What someone chooses to wear, how they style their hair, and what accessories they choose can all provide clues about their personality, identity, and background. Therefore, dress is a powerful form of self-expression. According to Gillette (2002,p.389), “theatrical costumes may be faithful to their historical period, or the costume designer may choose to use history as a reference point from which to create a design that is more meaningful to the production concept for a particular play”.

Gillette depicts that it is important for the costume designer to strike a balance between historical accuracy and contemporary appeal. The costumes should be convincing and realistic for a modern audience, while still being rooted in the historical period that is being depicted. This requires creative thinking on the part of the designer, in order to find the right balance. Costume also differentiates the characters, for instance master to servant. This can also be seen in the convocation play, the costumes worn by Esi the maid is different from the costume worn my Selina Mr. Hagan’s daughter; being the girls at home. Wilson (1998, p.361) in his contribution states that: costume indicates status in life, occupations, and personalities and shows the relationship between the characters separating the major character from the minor character. The design of a successful theatrical costume involves an insight into the dramatic character's development, an ability to blend with the visual style of the scenic design, recognition of the director's vision of the staging and a special individual flair or style that is the costume designer's alone. The costume designer enhances the actor's physical and expressive ability through the cut, draping, choice of fabric and ornamentation, creating an appropriate effect with silhouette, line and color. OlapejuShuaib (2009,p.2) asserts that “the artistic skills of sketching and color rendering, a strong sense of historical period and style, a comprehensive knowledge of the practices and techniques of costume technology and good communication, interpersonal and organizational skills are essential to augment the designer's natural talent”. Costume technology involves the realization of the costume designer's sketches, samples, notes research and fabric swatches into practical, effective and affordable costumes for a theatrical production on stage, television or film. Knowledge of the design process, historical periods and styles and familiarity with the dramatic or lyric work

are also required. There are skills that are more efficient in managing a costume in a theatrical production according to the book *The Theory and Practice of Management*. These skills are:

Technical skills: these are acquired through education and training and it is a specialized knowledge used in day-to-day activities and problems. Adedeji (2005) asserts that, “technical skills involve the knowledge, methods and techniques. In *Corpses Comedy*, the costume designers gather some technical ideas on Ghanaian costumes in the year 1970. This is done through research and other information from people of like- minds.

Human skills: this involves working with other people amicably because dealing with human being is the most sensitive area in management. In the book, *Management: Theory and Practice*, human skills are seen to involve patience, trust and genuine involvement in interpersonal relationships. With the experience of theatre production, especially dealing with theatre student as a costume designer has been hell. In the said convocation production, the picture of human averting problem was seeing but with the professional knowledge of the designer, everything was solved.

Analytical skills: since effective and right decision making are the most important function of management, correct analysis of a particular situation must be made and it depends on the problem and the situation. In *Theory and Practice Management* book, “it is said that the wrong but crucial decision could make the difference between success and failure”. This made the costumier to possess the analytical skill involving the ability to logically, objectively and scientifically analyse the problems and opportunities to arrive at feasible and optima solutions. Costumier in the convocation play analyse some costumes towards achieving the set goals for the department of performing arts OOU.

Conceptual skills: In the book *Management: Theory and Practice*; this usually depend upon the organized thinking process which deals with understanding of various functions of an organization, their interdependence, the relationship of the organization with external environment and recognizing the opportunities and challenges. This entails knowing the concept of the director and on each character so as to know the best costume to put on which must go in line with the directorial approach, set design.

Corpses’s Comedy: A Performance Synopsis

In *Corpse’s Comedy*, there is a kind of psycho-emotional relief not just about the message that it portrays but also within the context and the form in which it occurs. Artistic Director

stresses further that “we want the University Community to come relax and laugh out stress. Eventually, we are able to achieve that with the choice of play *Corpse’s Comedy*”.

There are themes of selfishness, greed, deceit and love in the play as portrayed by the playwright Nanabenyin Wartemberg. The theme of selfish interest is paramount in the play. There is a rich farmer called Mr. Hagan. He is planning to marry Delali- a widow with a son. She agrees to marry him and also Selina, Hagan's daughter is in love with Stanley- the son of Delali. Stanley and Selina love each other but Martha insist that it is not possible for her to marry her step brother so she plans to lie to her mother that her father had a car accident that claimed his life to the extent of exaggerating that he was burnt to ashes. Their plan worked all in the name of love. Likewise, Richard a brother to Selina love Esi their maid but the mother insisted that her son stoops so low in having affair with their maid. Few days after the announcement of the accident, Mr Hagan's cousin Andoh and Essien came to ask for their share in Mr Hagan's properties which they say is part of their custom. Martha was highly disappointed in them. But she does not have any say because they are his family member. After they came for the properties, Mr Hagan that was said to have died in accident appeared suddenly which made them to run away believing he is a ghost. Mr Hagan's son brought in a spiritualist to cast out his father's spirit from the house but the spiritualist has been deceiving them with the character of scamming them that he has done the necessary things to cast away the ghost so as not to torment them again. Mr Hagan's cousin also brought in a fake traditional priest to Mr. Hagans house just to stop the ghost from tormenting them. Whenever Mr. Hagan appeared they will all run away thinking that he is a ghost. Eventually, Esi summon courage to wait for Mr. Hagan when next he appears. The truth was now revealed that all because of love, Selina Sacrifices her Family’s mental health because of the love she has for Richard, she agrees to lie about her father’s death so that she will be allowed to marry her lover. As the old adage goes, love is blind. When you’re falling in love, everything your love does and says is interesting and amazing. Every word uttered from his or her mouth, and every move he or she makes, is magical. Love made Mr Hagan fall in love with the wrong person; Delali loved Mr. Hagan because of his money. This shows the theme of deceit because she later denounced him after the rumour that Hagan is dead. Real Love could give someone the ability to endure struggles, work hard, and make sacrifices. This was shown in the character of Martha; she loves him even to the extent of mourning him. Selfishness, greediness and deceit are destructive forces in society, causing division and harm to both individuals and communities. They are pervasive problem that affects all areas of life, from personal relationships to the global economy.

Costume Management Techniques in Corpse's Comedy

The art of managing costumes in any theatrical performance is imbibed in 2024 OOU convocation play under the direction of the Artistic Director and the Costume Manager. Ghanaian clothing is full of African Pattern where drafting, cutting, draping, and stitching form the core of the craft, with additional craft work in fabric painting, weaving, leather and mask work. Responsibilities for the costume management of productions range from the costing, construction and fitting phases, to material, equipment and costume inventory control, to fast changes backstage and wardrobe maintenance during the production. In achieving the goal of the production, the costumier undergoes different techniques in managing the costumes. These are:

- *Character interpretation and collaboration:* The costumier collaborates with directors and actors to interpret the characters' personalities, backgrounds, and development arcs. Costume design requires that the creativity, communication and deep understanding of the story and characters. The achievement of this strategy deals with the close work of the director and production designers together with the costumiers. The use of clothing history understanding, psychology, and aesthetics to create costumes that enhance character depth was imbibed. Costumiers work closely with other members of the production team, including set designers, makeup artists, and lighting designers, to ensure a cohesive visual presentation.
- *Research:* Costumiers conduct thorough research to accurately represent the time period, culture, and historical context of the production. Being a Ghanaian production, more information was gathered online and from experienced people around. The costumiers get visual references, analyze clothing styles, and conceptualize costume designs that align with the production's overall vision. The study of characters' personalities, motivations and relationships helps in creating costumes that reflect their individuality.
- *Design Creation:* Using their artistic skills, costumers sketch and design costumes that reflect the characters and story. They consider colour palettes, fabric textures, and silhouettes to convey emotions, social status, and narrative themes. Sketches and art concept presentation to the director and other production designers for approval helps in achieving the set goal for the production.

- *Budget Analysis:* This deals with the estimate of what needs to be used. There is a labour budget and material budget. For the material budget, a rough estimate is made of the amount of money allocated to each costume. This is described as creative financing. Exhaustive discussion was held in which each of the Ghanaian costumes were broken down into its various components. Costumiers often work within the approved budget and need to make cost-effective choices while maintaining the quality and authenticity of the costumes.
- *Fabric and Material Selection:* after the budgeting, shopping for the selected material was made. Not all the costumes were purchased, because the department had some of the costumes used and most of the actors had their personal wears that fit the role they are playing. Costumers choose fabrics, materials, and textiles that are appropriate for the characters and the setting. They consider factors such as durability, comfort, historical accuracy, and visual impact. Being a Ghanaian production, the African prints Ankara fabrics were used with other fancy materials and colourful trimmings.
- *Cutting and sewing of the materials:* The fashion designers began their work-term by discussing technical and practical aspect of the production. The materials gotten were sewn in the costume room with the aid of departmental machine and distributed to the actors. Attending rehearsals to see if the director made any changes on the character.
- *Fittings and Alterations:* Costumers conduct fittings with actors to ensure that costumes fit well and are comfortable for performances. They make necessary alterations and adjustments to achieve the desired look and functionality. The costume designer make
- *Making special effect on some actors.* From the play *Corpse's Comedy*, special effect costumes were done on the special characters like spiritualist and the fetish priest.
- *Problem Solving:* Throughout the production process, costumiers solve challenges related to costume logistics, actor mobility, and other practical concerns.
- *Periodic Maintenance, Collection and dry cleaning:* They supervise the care and maintenance of costumes during the production run, making repairs and adjustments as needed. Maintenance, collection and dry cleaning of the costumes were done after the whole production so as to make sure that all the costumes are returned in good condition.

- *Safe keeping in the wardrobe:* The costumes collected were well arranged in the wardrobe for subsequent productions.

In a nutshell, researches are made to gather more information about Ghanaian before the involvement of Henri Fayol principles of management - Organization, controlling, directing and staffing. Proposed budget and approval financially by the university serves as a way of helping the achievement of the set goal of the production.

Some costumes that are available were borrowed and some of the actors were asked to bring related costumes that they have. Costumier got other materials at market, kente fabrics, and other props that are useful for the production. Costume manager oversees the patterning of African wear, cutting of some fabrics to fit in for the roles of performers, and construction of costumes for the fetish priest, she also monitor the schedule and supervise all fittings in coordination with the Artistic Directors. Painting was also made.

Analysis of Some Character's Costumes in the Stage Play

The costume for Corpses Comedy consists of the different attire in Ghana during 1970 i.e 20th century. This involves old school English wears and kente clothes full of African prints. The major actor Mr Hagan which was described as a rich farmer is attired in old school wear with kangol caps and suspender.



Fig. 1 Mr. Hagan seriously disturbed when he sees his family members running away for him.

His housewife Martha is attired in 1970 kente sewn in beautiful boubou gown in some appearance and black shinning material for the period where she mourned her husband. Andoh and Essien are the ones that really showed the selfish interest in the production so they

are dressed differently with pot belly, suspender, kangol cap, three quarter trousers and shirts. This made them to fit in the role and it helps them to enter character easily.



Fig 2: Andoh, Martha and Essien shown in the picture respectively



Fig 3: Essien and Andoh

Essien and Andoh planning to take all the property of Mr. Hagan without leaving anything for the family. This shows the theme of selfishness.

Delali the side chick of Mr. Hagan is gorgeously dressed in a flowing armless gown with high-heeled shoe. Her hairdo is decorated with afro style of the olden days with flashy make-up on her face. Sam is another brilliant actor, who always antagonize the opinion of Andoh and Essien including the Fetish Priest and spiritualist. He is dressed in kente top with trousers and application of beards on his chin with a kangol cap depicting the real Ghanaian man.



Fig 4: *Delali the side chick and Sam-a brother to Martha Hagan*

Stanley the son of Delali and Selina showed the typical Ghanaian boy and girl with their kente boot cut and palazzo sokoto. These two are the genesis of the whole scenario all because of love. They tried to elope with the aim of tellin lie and sending a telegram that Mr Hagan that travelled had an accident that claimed his life with the exaggeration of burning to ashes.



Fig 5: *Stanley and Selina*

Esi the maid is attired in normal top, scarf, free skirt and apron just to depict that she is a maid. In the production, she plays an important role in serving as a savior to Mr Hagan's Family. In her characterization, she played an intelligent role by summoning courage to touch his boss just to confirm that Hagan is alive. And all the deceit and lies come to an end.



Fig 6: Esi the Maid

Furthermore, the spiritualist and fetish priest are other predominant actors in the convocation play. These actors really made the production a comic genre with their lines, action and costumes put on. The fake spiritualist is dressed in purple garment being a fake spiritualist with red cape and red cap designed with cross, having big bible and big candle as props.



Fig 7: Spiritualist

Also, the fetish priests look differently. Fetish priests are dressed in raffia with different charms tied round their arm, ankles and other part of their body. Painting was done on their bare chest and back so as to make them more horrible. The fetish priestess was costumed with red wrapper and red scarf with designed paintings on her chest carrying calabash full of leaf.



Fig 8: *Fetish Priests and Priestess*

There is creation of the orchestra due to the directorial approach used. The costumes for the orchestra are colourful with beautiful beads and flashy trimmings which depict the real singers and dancers from Ghana.



Fig 9: *The Orchestras*

Conclusion

This study has the motive of examining the Costume Management Techniques in African Theatrical Performance. Costumes designers are not only responsible for choosing clothes that make an actor look like their character. They are also responsible for considering things like color symbolism, how the character changes throughout a piece, the overall aesthetic of the other characters, the set design, the cinematography or staging choices, and much more. Costumes are not only used for indicating age, social status locale, and historical signs but preserving the cultural heritage. The script, script reading, character analysis, research, costume plot, sketching, budgeting, buying, cutting and sewing, fittings, dress rehearsals and maintenance of the costume after production were looked into in managing the costume techniques in a theatrical performance. Likewise, the thorough research of costuming with consultation with the director and other production designers help the costumier to achieve and accomplish the set goal. This study will aid any scholar that wants to venture in process, managing and techniques of costuming in theatrical production.

This study involves the use of costume managerial skills: analytical, technical, human and conceptual skills in achieving the set goals of the university 2024 convocation play – Corpses Comedy.

Recommendation

A costumier can hire or borrow costume for any production if the fund on ground is not enough to get new costumes. All the equipment and instrument needed for any theatrical performance must be intact so as to avoid any serious challenges during production.

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