

Ada and the Engine

A play by Lauren Gunderson
Costume Design by Rosalie Olson

Concept

The costumes for *Ada and the Engine* serve many purposes within the production. They establish period and character, illustrate the passage of time within the play, and connect the realistic and conceptual aspects of the production. The costumes also introduce each character and connect them to their scenic environment. Early on, the director and I decided the costumes needed to give the audience a sense of time and place. The play shifts effortlessly between scenes as it transports us through seventeen years of Ada's life. Ada has five separate looks as she transitions from a debutante under her mother's power to a strong woman who has come into her own. Each other character represents a driving force in Ada's life. For instance, her mother remains an opposing and controlling influence throughout the show. Restricting the costumes changes to Ada was an elegant solution to the passage of time and character evolution without disrupting the play's fluidity.

Incorporating binary and mathematical motifs in the fabric supports Ada's journey and character relationships. In addition to her roles as wife, mother, and daughter, Ada grapples with what it means to be a brilliant mathematician at a time when women were seldom recognized for their intellectual achievements. The unconventional prints, such as the abacus design on Ada's second and third dresses and Babbage's machine vest, were strategically placed. The intellectually driven characters, Ada, Babbage, and Mary, all have a mathematical or mechanical reference somewhere on their costumes. The poet, Lord Byron, has pants printed with handwriting, while Lady Anabella and Lord Lovelace, who are more societally driven, have more conventional fabric choices. As Ada leaves her mother's influence behind, her costumes become increasingly mathematical and the color choices more closely resemble Babbage. Even though illness robbed her of much of her life, her contributions to computer science live on after her. As she explores her life after death in the last scene, her nightgown glows to reveal the binary code that she created as she becomes a part of the machine.



Ada Byron Lovelace
First Countess of Lovelace

Ada: Act 1, Scenes 1-3



Ada: Act 1, Scenes 3-5



Ada: Act 1, Sc. 6-8. Act 2, Sc. 1



Ada: Act 2, Scene 2 (p. 65-77)



Babbage visits Ada on her deathbed.
Act 2, Scene 2

Ada confronts Anabella. Act 1, Scene 1



Photo by Tyrone Marshall



Babbage shows Ada punched cards.
Act 1, Scene 4

Photo by Tyrone Marshall

Ada and Babbage explain the engine to Lord Lovelace.
Act 1, Scene 7



Photo by Tyrone Marshall

Ada: Act 2, Scene 2 (p. 78-91)



Ada: Act 2, Scene 2 (p. 78-91)



Ada programs the engine with song. Act 2, Scene 2



Ada meets her father, Lord Byron, in the afterlife.
Act 2, Scene 2



Photo by Tyrone Marshall

Ada and Babbage embrace. Act 1, Scene 8



Photo by Tyrone Marshall

Mary scolds Babbage. Act 1, Scene 3



Photo by Tyrone Marshall

