Creating a Database for Western University's Opera Program at the Don Wright Faculty of Music
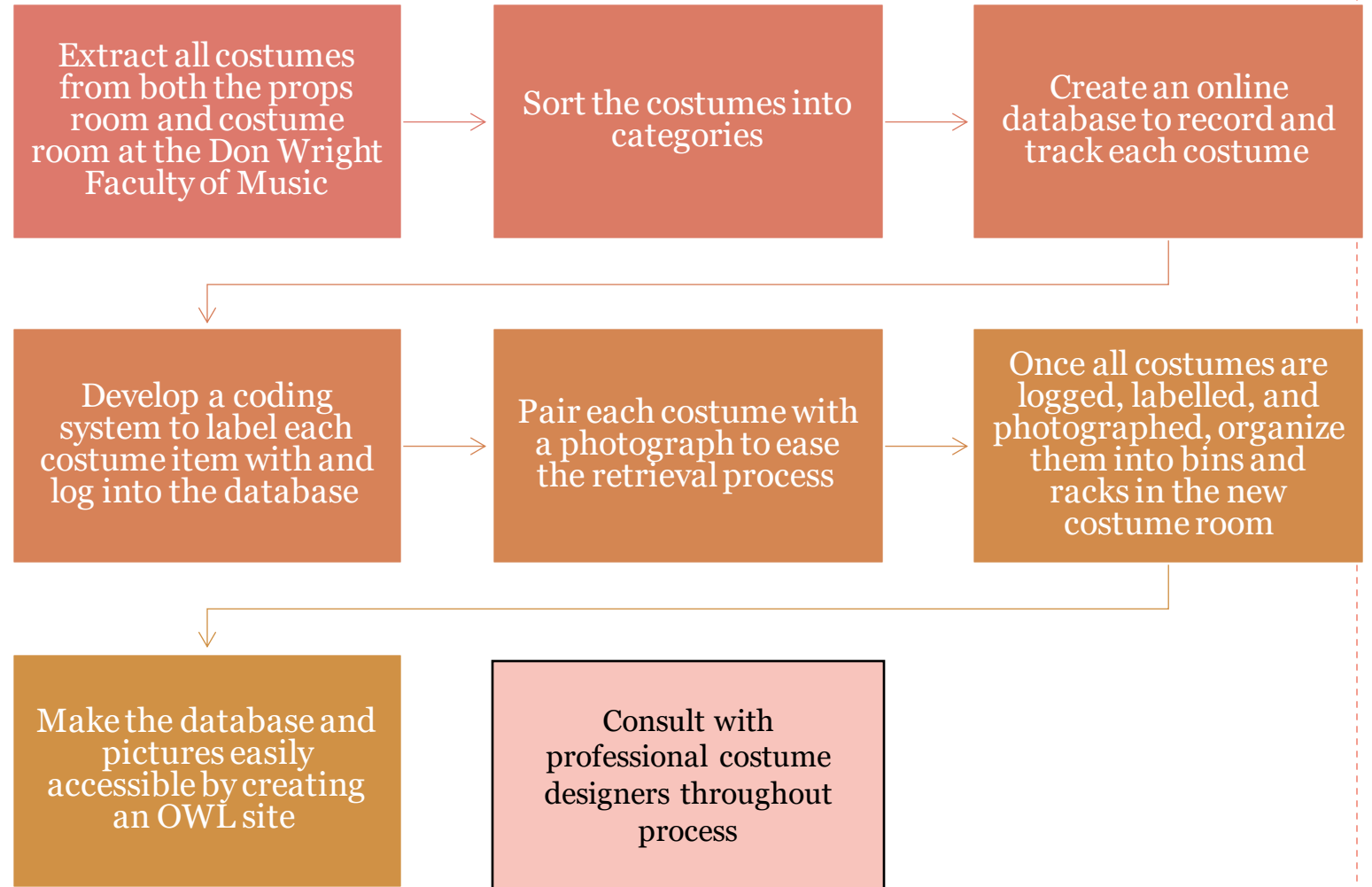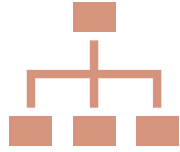

- USRI Internship: May - August 2021

  - Intern: Ashley Carpenter

  - Supervisor: Dr. Sophie Roland

Timeline of Tasks

Extract all costumes from both the props room and costume room at the Don Wright Faculty of Music

→

Sort the costumes into categories

→

Create an online database to record and track each costume

Develop a coding system to label each costume item with and log into the database

→

Pair each costume with a photograph to ease the retrieval process

→

Once all costumes are logged, labelled, and photographed, organize them into bins and racks in the new costume room

Make the database and pictures easily accessible by creating an OWL site

Consult with professional costume designers throughout process

Extraction Phase

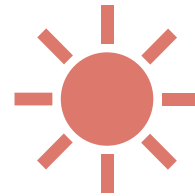Lengthy process as there was no sense of organization

Imagine 3,000 costume items scattered and buried under set pieces and props across two rooms

Items were thrown in bags, boxes, and even left on the floor

The costume room had not been organized for at least 20 years prior to this summer

During this phase of the internship, many items that had been damaged beyond repair had to be thrown away

Sorting Phase

Developed a hierarchy for the costume collection; categories, subcategory, identifying feature, individual item

Ex. Shoes: high heels, slippers, men's dress shoes, boots, men's casual shoes, and women's casual shoes

Ex. Dresses: casual dresses, formal dresses, gowns, and wedding gowns.

Creation Phase

Culminated with the creation of the online database

An Excel spreadsheet on Microsoft Teams was selected as the medium for the database

There was no precedent for the system, thus there was full freedom during conception and implementation

Primary Purpose: digitize every item, new territory for the opera costume collection

Secondary Purpose: make the online system easily accessible for incoming costume designers

Tertiary Purpose: create a system that would be sustainable over time as collection grows and changes

Database

❖ Costume database consists of numerous detailed headings:
  ❖ Main category
  ❖ Secondary (sub) category
  ❖ ID
  ❖ Gender
  ❖ Size
  ❖ Colour
  ❖ Material
  ❖ Condition
  ❖ Period - if it is associated with a specific era
  ❖ Number in set
  ❖ Show - what opera Western has done with the costume or, if it is a donated item, what show it came from
  ❖ Description of item
  ❖ Location - what bin or rack it is on
  ❖ Picture - a link to its picture on OWL
  ❖ Cleaning instructions - if it needs to be washed, ironed, sewn, etc.

Main	Secondary	ID	Gender	Size	Colour	Material	Condition	Period	Number in set	Show	Notes	Location	Picture	Cleaning Instruction
Accessories	Aprons	AA1	Unisex	Medium	White	Cotton	Good	N/A	1	N/A	Apron skirt	Bin 23	Yes, https://owl.uwo.ca/access/content/group/be30c9d6-259c-4cbc-ae4f-06140a00984c/Bin%2023%3A%20Aprons/AA1.jpg	N/A
Accessories	Belts	AB3	Unisex	Varied Sizes	Khaki	Polyester	Good	N/A	17	N/A	Gold Buckle, Adjustable waistband	Bin 2	Yes, https://owl.uwo.ca/portal/site/be30c9d6-259c-4cbc-ae4f-06140a00984c/tool/05a67794-4f24-4c4a-9299-bf7fce5fd772?panel=Main#	N/A
Dresses	Casual Dresses	DC5	Womens	Medium	Black	Silk	Gently worn	N/A	1	N/A	Velvet waist tie, sheer short sleeves	Rack 1	Yes, https://owl.uwo.ca/portal/site/be30c9d6-259c-4cbc-ae4f-06140a00984c/tool/05a67794-4f24-4c4a-9299-bf7fce5fd772?panel=Main#	Needs to be washed
Tops	Button up shirts	TBU17	Mens	Neck 16.5, 42	Purple	Cotton polyester blend	Gently worn	N/A	1	N/A	Some puckering on collar	Rack 3	Yes, https://owl.uwo.ca/portal/site/be30c9d6-259c-4cbc-ae4f-06140a00984c/tool/05a67794-4f24-4c4a-9299-bf7fce5fd772?panel=Main#	N/A

Development Phase

Phase included the development of a coding system to physically label the items, then log them into the database

The code was developed by using the first letter of its main category, the first letter of its secondary category and a number

Code Legend

Main Codes

- A = Accessories
- U = Undergarments
- HA = Hair Accessories
- B = bottoms
- PW = Period wear
- O = outerwear
- T = tops
- E = ensembles
- D = dresses
- SC = special collections
- SI = specialty items
- F = footwear
- AJ = Accessories - Jewelry

Secondary Codes

- AB = Belt
- AS = Suspenders
- ABT = Bowties
- AT = Ties
- ASG = Sunglasses
- AG = Glasses
- AA = Aprons
- ASC = Scarves and collars
- ASH = Shawls
- AFB = Feather Boa

- AM = Masks
- AH = Hats
- AJB= Bracelets
- AJN= Necklaces
- AK = Kneepads
- AGL = Gloves
- US = Socks
- USD = Slip dress
- UT = Tights
- HAW= Wigs
- HAC = Clips
- HAHB = Headbands
- HAHT = Hair Ties
- HACR = Crowns
- BSP = sweat pants
- BCP = pants
- BO = Overalls
- BJ = Jeans
- BMP = Military Pants
- BDP = Dress pants
- BCP = casual pants
- BS and BSH = shorts
- PWB = bloomers
- OC = coats and jackets
- TSJ = suit jackets
- TV = vests
- TBU = button up shirts
- PWC = cravats
- TDS = dress shirts
- TWDS = Women's dress shirt
- EWS = women's suits
- TB = Blazers
- EPJ = Pajamas
- TTS = Tshirts

- TS = Sweaters
- EMW = Medical wear
- DC = casual dresses
- BSK = Skirts
- DF = formal dresses
- PWSK = period skirts
- PWC = period wear coats and jackets
- OJJ = Jean Jackets
- TTT- Tank tops
- PWV = period wear vests
- AHC = head pieces and collars
- FWS = Women's shoes
- TCWT = Casual Women's Tops
- FB = boots
- FH = high heels
- FMS = men's shoes
- FMDS = men's dress shoes
- FSL = slippers
- FSA = sandals
- BSH = shorts
- ER = robes
- DG = gowns
- OC = capes
- EMS = men's suits
- APS = pocket squares and Cummerbunds
- ALW= Leg Warmers
- DT = tunics
- UB = Bras and bandeaus
- HAB = combs and brushes
- PWP = period wear pants
- PWS = period wear shirts
- DWG = Wedding gowns
- OCA = Capes
- PWD = Period wear dresses
- PWE = Period wear ensembles

Photography Phase

Plethora of obstacles arose during this phase: it was not possible to put the pictures directly into the excel spreadsheet as the files were too large, the photo collection process had many iterations

Alexander Quiqero was a main contact that assisted with the collection, proper upload, and accommodation of the extensive costume collection

OneDrive was selected as the intermediary between the physical item and the OWL site, where the photo link for the spreadsheet was generated

Folders on OneDrive were created for the different bin categories (Bin 2 - Belts) and rack categories (Rack 1 - Casual Dresses)

OneDrive Files

📁 Bin 10 - Men's dress shoes	June 25	Ashley June Ellen Carp...	13 items
📁 Bin 11 - Men's Shoes	June 25	Mabel Wonnacott	12 items
📁 Bin 12- Hats (Straw Hats and Cowboy Hats)	June 29	Ashley June Ellen Carp...	10 items
📁 Bin 13 - Men's shoes B	June 25	Ashley June Ellen Carp...	7 items
📁 Bin 14 - High heels	June 28	Ashley June Ellen Carp...	18 items
📁 Bin 15 - Women's Shoes A	July 7	Mabel Wonnacott	24 items
📁 Bin 16 - Slippers	July 2	Ashley June Ellen Carp...	7 items
📁 Bin 18 - Boots	August 5	Mabel Wonnacott	10 items
📁 Bin 18 B - Boots	August 4	Ashley June Ellen Carp...	6 items
📁 Bin 19 - Straw Hats B & Flat caps	June 29	Mabel Wonnacott	23 items
📁 Bin 2 - belts	June 25	Ashley June Ellen Carp...	69 items
📁 Bin 20- Hats (Winter Hats, Toques, Ball Cap...	June 29	Ashley June Ellen Carp...	21 items
📁 Bin 21 - Ties and Bowties	June 29	Mabel Wonnacott	52 items
📁 Bin 22 - Feather Boas	June 30	Ashley June Ellen Carp...	6 items

OneDrive Files

	Name ∨	Modified ∨	Modified By ∨	File size ∨	Sharing
🖼	FH11.jpg	July 8	Ashley June Ellen Carp...	3.59 MB	⟲ Shared
🖼	FH12.jpg	July 8	Ashley June Ellen Carp...	3.57 MB	⟲ Shared
🖼	FH13.jpg	July 8	Ashley June Ellen Carp...	4.24 MB	⟲ Shared
🖼	FH14.jpg	July 8	Ashley June Ellen Carp...	3.35 MB	⟲ Shared
🖼	FH22.jpg	July 8	Ashley June Ellen Carp...	4.19 MB	⟲ Shared
🖼	FH23.jpg	July 8	Ashley June Ellen Carp...	3.94 MB	⟲ Shared
🖼	FH24.jpg	July 8	Ashley June Ellen Carp...	4.50 MB	⟲ Shared
🖼	FH25.jpg	July 8	Ashley June Ellen Carp...	3.89 MB	⟲ Shared
🖼	FH26.jpg	July 8	Ashley June Ellen Carp...	3.66 MB	⟲ Shared
🖼	FH27.jpg	July 8	Ashley June Ellen Carp...	4.17 MB	⟲ Shared
🖼	FH28.jpg	July 8	Ashley June Ellen Carp...	3.95 MB	⟲ Shared
🖼	FH29.jpg	July 8	Ashley June Ellen Carp...	4.09 MB	⟲ Shared

Organization Phase

Once the costumes were logged and labelled, the organization phase included putting items into their new permanent homes in bins and racks

This phase also included moving to a new costume room

This phase involved the manual transportation of the racks from the old costume room in the basement to the new room on the third floor

Coordination with Lou, Brian, and Megan from the faculty was necessary as the new costume room had to be cleared out prior to the relocation and installation of the collection

Website Creation Phase

Final step in the process was the development of the OWL site with a focus on ease of accessibility

Creation of the identification system and paired OWL site will assist costume designers in their arrangement and creatin of costumes for upcoming opera productions

OWL site will lead to a cut down on the purchasing of already-owned materials due to ease of location, a previously common, extremely expensive practice
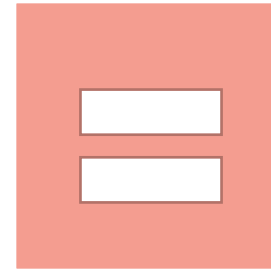
The development of the site is also important for future TA's of the opera program as they can ensure that all items stay in the same condition at the end of a show and go back in the right place
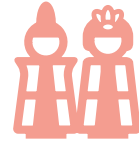
Consultation Phase

The consultation phase took place over the course of the internship

This was my first time working with costumes and backstage operations in opera and so, consulting with professionals throughout the stages of development to implementation of this new and innovative costume identification system was paramount

Consultations with Julie McGill, the Western opera productions costume designer, and Lisa Wright, the head of wardrobe at the Grand Theatre in London were extremely informative

Consultation with Lisa Wright from the Grand Theatre

- I reached out to Lisa at the beginning of my internship, acquiring information about how to best organize a professional costume room, how to store costumes to keep them in good condition, how to repair and clean damaged costumes, and how to digitize a collection

- It was extremely informative as The Grand Theatre is currently undergoing a similar process to Western in that they are trying to digitize their collection for the first time

- I was able to tour the costume room in July and was able to see what a day on the job working as a costume designer is like

- Lisa was very helpful on how to organize items on the racks. For example, she was the one who suggested organizing women's dresses by period or colour, men's suits by size, men's shirts by colour, etc.

- Lisa also suggested having clear bins for accessories such as belts, suspenders, gloves and smaller clear bins for jewelry.

- Lisa provided lots of tips on how to keep costumes clean such as spraying clothes with vodka and through the OWL site, these tips and tricks for costume upkeep will be passed on to future TA's

Moving Forward / Benefits of This Internship

Moving forward, it is hoped that the work done to the costume collection this summer will be beneficial to the opera program at Western in many ways:

A resource for future TA's; the OWL site is equipped with the costume collection database, photographs of the items, tips and tricks for costume upkeep, and a sign out sheet for the costume to make it easier to track and return costumes

A resource for costume designers and directors working on the opera productions

An economic impact to the Don Wright Faculty of Music; making use of current items will cut costs of buying new costumes, newly digitized collection offer opportunity of renting out costumes to other universities and theatre companies

1957 Military Jacket from Vietnam War

- ❖ Authentic military jacket from 1957
  - ❖ Patches and Awards on chest
- ❖ Corps of royal and electrical and mechanical engineers
    - ❖ British military
    - ❖ Army green cotton
      - ❖ Size medium
- ❖ Donated from Drayton Entertainment where it was used in 42nd street
    - ❖ Used in Western Opera 2012

Men's WWII Genuine Military Jacket with Matching Pants

❖Size Small
❖Green Wool
❖Period wear Piece
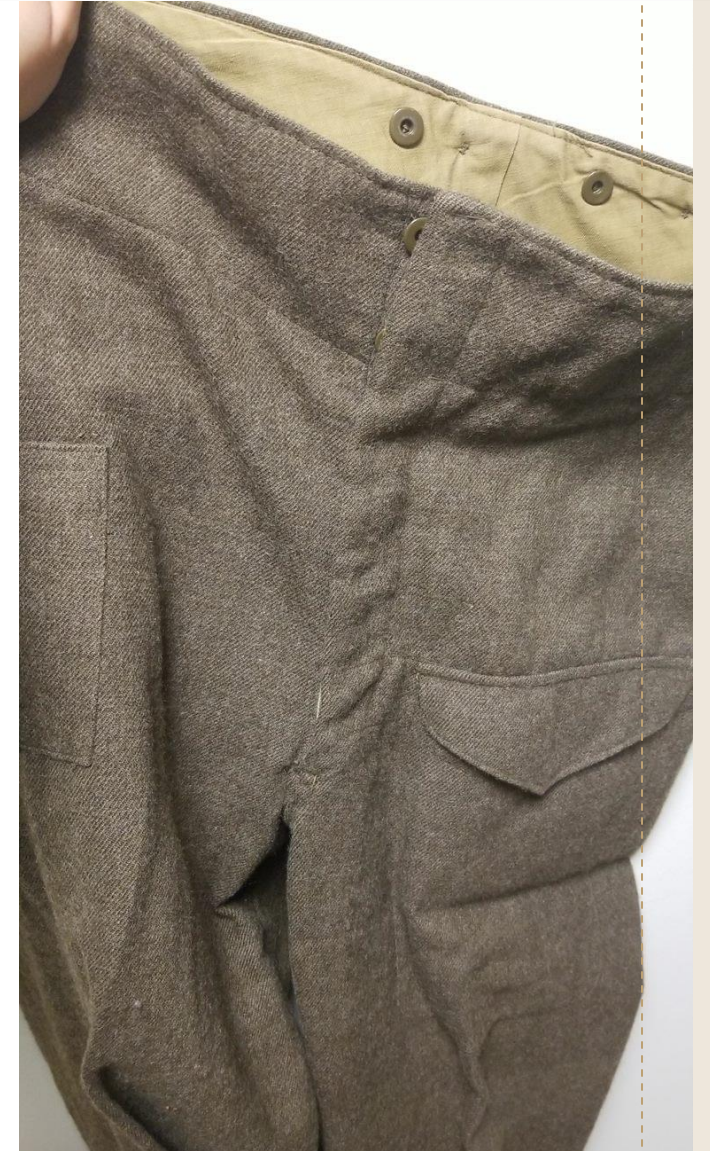
Royal Canadian Ordnance Corps Military Jacket

- ❖ Army Green
  - ❖ Wool
- ❖ Size Medium
- ❖ Authentic jacket

English Civil War Helmet

- ❖ 17th century
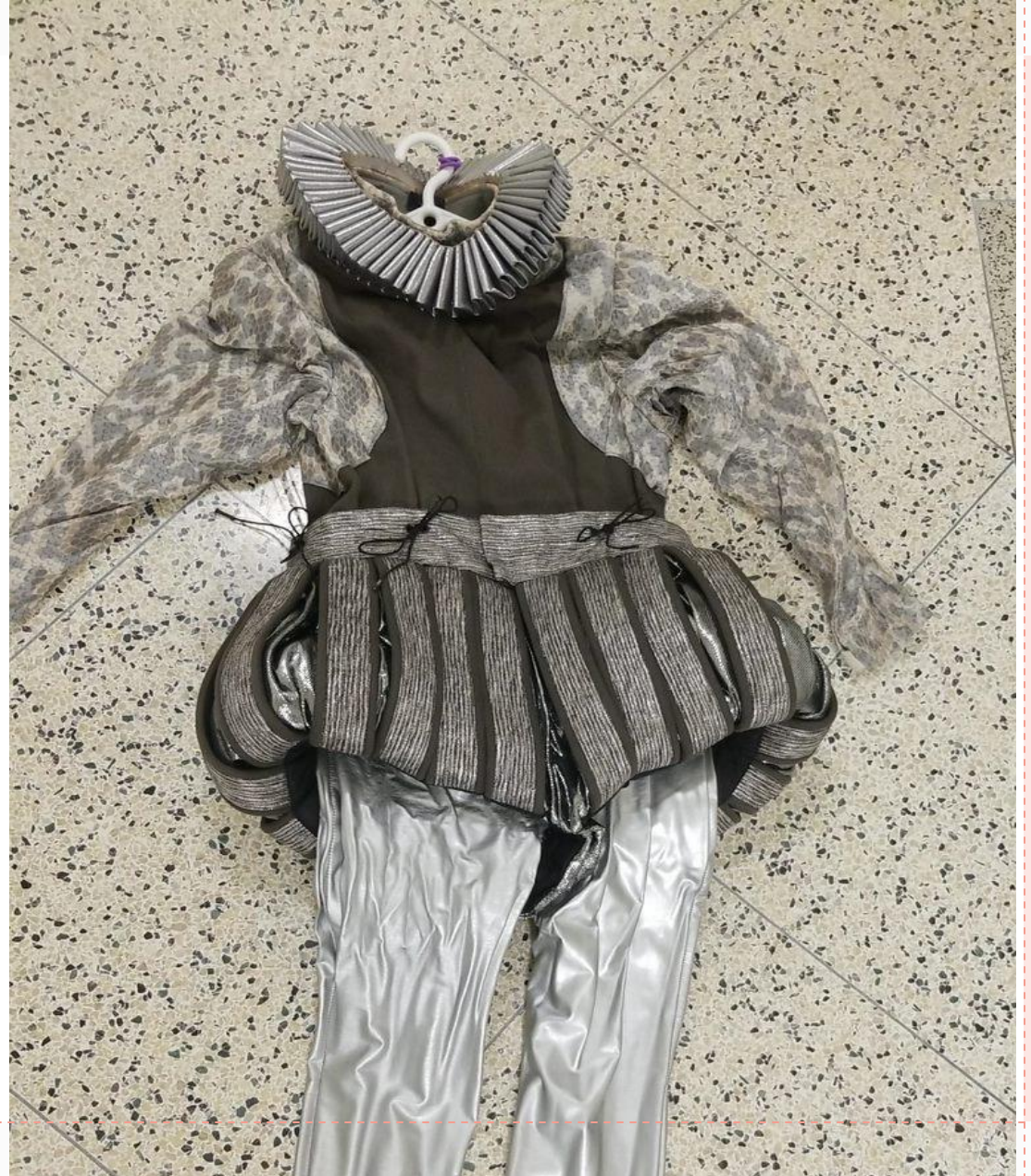- ❖ Dark army green
- ❖ Period wear piece

WWII Military Helmet

- 1930s, 1940s
- Military helmet
- Period wear piece
- Army Green
- Metal

Men's Shakespearean Outfit

- ❖ Elizabethan era
- ❖ 1500s, 1600s
- ❖ Has silver removable collar
- ❖ Has trunk hose
- ❖ Silver and grey polyester
- ❖ Period wear piece

An Assortment of Wedding Dresses

1900's Women's Half Coat

- ❖ Period wear piece
- ❖ Coral pink silk
- ❖ Lace Detail
- ❖ Pearly white buttons
- ❖ Long puffed sleeves

Special Item: Dress with Functioning LED Lights

❖ Blue, gold, and silver

❖ Mesh

❖ Dress/poncho

Women's Cape

- Black and gold
- Satin
- Used in Western Opera's *Suor Angelica* 2021
- Donated from Glen Gould School and used in their production of *Suor Angelica* in 2021
- Floor length dramatic cape/cloak
- Large Hood
- Large metal belt closure at the front
- Gold embroidery detailing

Special Item: Kids Girl Guide Uniforms

❖Junior Auxiliary of the Anglican church of Canada children's uniforms

❖20 skirts, 17 hats, 11 ties

❖1960s style

❖Forest Green

❖Cotton

❖Donated from the church

An Assortment of Wigs

Special Collection: Amahl and the Night Visitors

❖ Western is home to the entire collection for the opera *Amahl and the Night Visitors*

   ❖ This collection has over 100 pieces

   ❖ It was donated from Opera Lyra

❖ In the collection are numerous tunics, scarves, long coats, robes, jewelry, headpieces, hats, ponchos, and shawls