

Abstract

Title of Thesis: COSTUME DESIGN OF *BOOM*
WOOLLY MAMMOTH THEATRE COMPANY
641 D ST NW, WASHINGTON, DC 20004
NOVEMBER 12TH – DECEMBER 7TH, 2008

Ivania Maria Stack, Master of Fine Arts 2009

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The purpose of this thesis is to provide all of the paperwork, supporting research, renderings, and production photographs that document the costume design for *Boom* at the Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company in Washington DC. This thesis contains the following: research images collected from a variety of sources to help develop the design for the show and communicate to the director, actors and other designers conceptual ideas for the production (e.g. color palette, clothing silhouette and style); initial rough sketches; final color renderings created during the design development and rehearsal processes; fabric dye samples and swatches for garments built for the production; hair style research that was used to help the actor's develop the play's characters; and periodical reviews of the show. Finally, archival production photos are included to visually document the completed design.

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By
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Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
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of the requirements for the degree of
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1] Concept Statement and Description of Design Process:

The beauty of this particular play, is the completely original way in which it blends science, theatre, apocalyptic tragedy, and humor. The play begins on the evening of a meteor's imminent crash into the Earth. A woman in a booth high above the stage, frenetically beats a timpani, causing a dazzling cacophony sound that starts the show. As she raises a lever on the wall, the lights come up to reveal two people on the stage below. With another crank of the lever, the people below are jump-started into motion and their story begins. A Biology graduate student, Jules, has invited a young college student Jo, into his basement laboratory/ housing for what we believe will be a quick internet hook up. Within the first ten minutes of the play, we discover that he has in fact, invited Jo to be his reproductive life partner for the rest of their post-meteor crash existence. This reality is further complicated by the fact that Jo has no intention of bearing his children, does not particularly like Jules (or anyone for that matter), is violently depressed and angry, and has an unfortunate habit of passing out periodically. Over the

course of the play, the relationship between these two characters and the god-like woman above them (Barbara) develops in surprising ways.

When I first read the script, I was entranced by the way the play carefully unfurled each layer of new information. The characters are eccentric to begin with, and each new revelation gives an explanation for some part of that oddness. It is not, however, until the end, that the puzzle is clear, and this makes the reader feel like they have travelled the surprising path of an almost scientific discovery. This sense of surprise held the largest influence over my design for the production of *Boom*. It was important to me that the audience experience the play as I did on my first read, never getting the next bit of information until the right moment.

There were a couple ways to accomplish this through clothing. The first way was to do no harm. If I was careful, I could avoid putting things into the design that revealed too much about the character. Barbara, for example, appears from the beginning to be an eccentric, intelligent museum docent. It is not until the end, that it is revealed that she has in fact, like all of her fellow beings, evolved from fish. It is only then that

we learn that the play takes place several million years into the future. This then, factored early on into my conversations with the director, John Vreeke. We posed the question: “Should Barbara look like she is descended from fish”? “Should she look like she comes from the future”? I felt strongly that although the suggestion of these things could be incorporated into the costume design for Barbara, it was more important that she look like what we first assume her to be, an eccentric science museum docent. The eccentricity of her look was another way in which I selectively revealed character information. The shape of her coat, for example was very important. Did it look more like an artistic, well-dressed docent’s coat? Or should it reflect her scientific background by resembling a lab coat? How can the choice of color and fabric for this coat make it unique to this character without revealing too much about her?

Many of these questions about costume could not be answered until after the initial design process merged into the rehearsal process. The director and I decided that the best way to costume *Boom* was to develop the designs as the actors developed their characters. This did change some initial costume ideas, but in a way that best served the

play. My impression of Jo's character changed dramatically after watching Kimberly Gilbert portray her in the read-through and rehearsals. As evident in my preliminary renderings, I had initially thought the character was a more feminine and put-together young woman. After discussing the character with Kimberly, we decided that Jo would be a much darker, more awkward personality. This is reflected in my later sketches for the character. The actor playing Jules, Aubrey Deeker and I found ourselves on the same page regarding his character. Peter Sinn Nactrieb gives a clear description of Jules's initial costume look, and Aubrey and I spent some time finding the right clothing pieces to fit this description.

It was most important that Sarah Marshall, the actress playing Barbara, and I have steady communication regarding her character. There were many aspects of this character that merged with Sarah's own personality in brilliant ways. She definitely embodied this character, and it was said that this part could have been created for her. For me as the costume designer, it meant that my greatest research avenue into the design for Barbara was to talk to Sarah herself, as well as watching her develop the character in rehearsal. Over the course of rehearsal, I

worked with Sarah as her ideas about Barbara's costume evolved. At one point, she questioned whether or not Barbara should look very futuristic. At another point, she felt that this character should recede into her booth much like a stage manager, and wear the dark, unassuming garb of that office. Eventually, we came back to the idea of Barbara as an odd scientist and docent, inexplicably peculiar and funny. Costume designing a play with as many questions and surprises as *Boom* had to follow this kind of organic process.

The design team as a whole found the concept for the production by embracing the scientific and futuristic aspects of the play, with the goal of not revealing too much. This play is set so far into the future that it would have been distracting to create an entirely new world. Instead, by keeping the production mostly contemporary and recognizable, in all design areas, the focus was shifted back where it should be, to the relationship between these characters. Based on the team's decision, I designed with a focus on the personality of the characters, rather than their origin.

1.) RESEARCH

Most of the research for this costume design came from contemporary sources, although they do range from the late 1950's to today. It was important to find images that not only represented possible clothing items, but also showed my sense about each character. The pose, facial expression, and composition of the picture all played a part in why a particular picture was chosen for a character.

The last group of research images are more focused on specific costume pieces. They were used to give the actors a sense of what they would actually be wearing. In a contemporary, character-driven show like *Boom*, a lot of research goes into finding exactly the right costume piece, whether it be a white t-shirt, a hooded sweatshirt, or a hand-made silk coat.

1a.) Jo Research

In my original perception of Jo, I believed her to be a feminine, put-together college student. I developed this idea from her lines about wishing to be a journalist because of the power of "Newscaster hair."

After I watched the actress in the first read through, as well as the first couple rehearsals, she and I shifted the character into a darker, more withdrawn direction.

Initial Research for Jo:



Initial Research for Jo (con't)



Revised Research for Jo (done after the rehearsal process began):

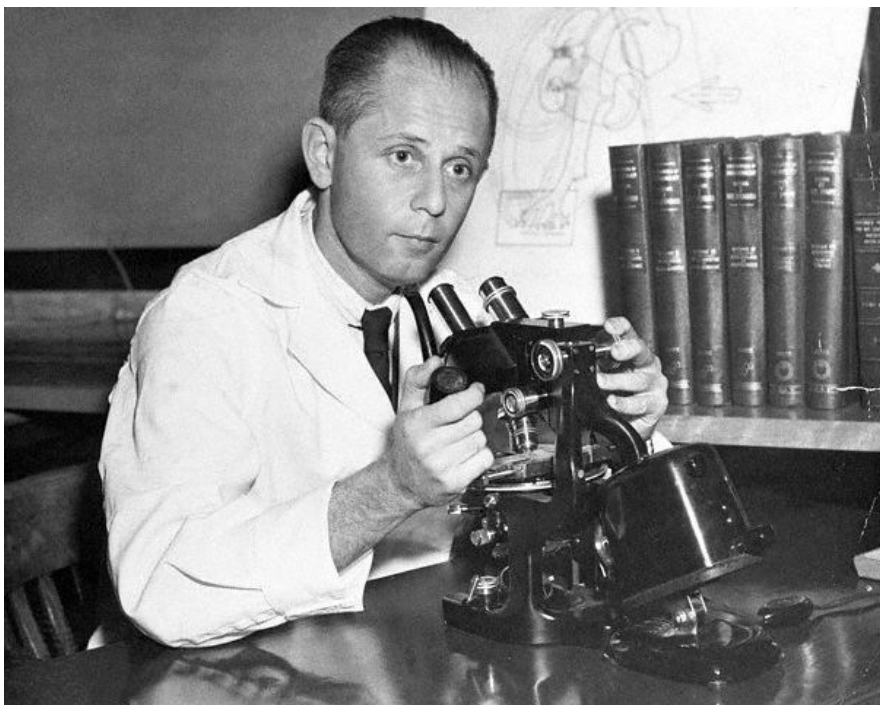


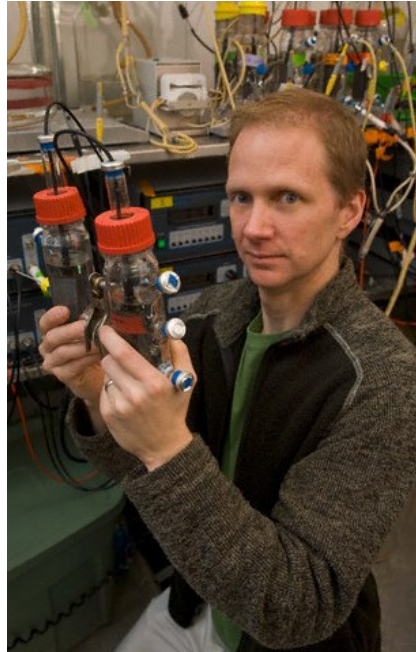
1b.) Jules Research

The play describes Jules as 28ish, uncomfortable, excitable, literal. In the first scene he mentions that his dress shirt comes from "Old Navy." It is clear that the playwright had a definite idea of Jules, and it was important that I work within those parameters. My way into research for Jules was to look for images of men who could be scientific graduate students from today as well as from the 1950's. Jules describes his work as a marine biologist with some detail, so I researched a bit to find what they look like when they are doing their field work. This did not play into Jules's costume look for *Boom* (other than his watch), but it did inform my sense of him. It helped me decide what kinds of clothes he would buy for himself.

Initial Research for Jules:







1c.) Barbara Research

My initial research for Barbara focused on the idea of her as a museum docent. At one point the design team thought that this might involve blazer/ uniform issued by the museum. This changed when John Vreeke, the director, mentioned the kinds of intelligent, high-class women who serve as the docents for Smithsonian museums. There is a certain quality to their clothing that reflects their artistic, scientific, or other interests. Although I wanted the fact that she is descended from a fish and from the future to be hinted at, I favored research that showed contemporary women.

Initial Research Images for Barbara:







1d.) Docent Research

Early on in the process, it was decided that costuming the Assistant Stage Managers would be an important part of our design concept.

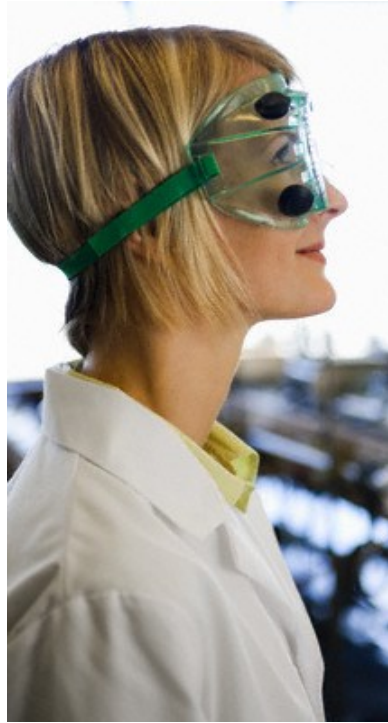
Because they were necessary to make the "boom" scene change happen, it gave us an opportunity to say more about the world of the play through their costume. I brought a variety of research to the table for them, as it was difficult to pinpoint exactly what kind of docents they were. In the end, the issue was solved through rendering.

Initial research for the Docents:





Revised research took the docents into more of a janitorial, laboratory assistant direction:





1e.) Specific research for Costume items:

Jo:

These were the research images used to show the actress what her sweatshirt and t-shirt would look like with the understanding that the color would be black or dark grey:



Jules:

It is specifically mentioned in the script that Jules is wearing an Old Navy brand dress shirt. These images were used to narrow down the choices of color and pattern for this shirt. The final choice was found while shopping, and not online.



Barbara :

It was decided early on that Barbara's coat would need to be built, so that it could be tailored to fit the actress's needs. Some images were found to show Sarah Marshall what the quality of the final garment would look like. The first image was the preferred style:



2.) Rough Sketches

These sketches (some are in color) were created for the preliminary design meetings, and evolved over the course of the design/ rehearsal process:

Jo :

These sketches show how the costume design for Jo's character evolved from a feminine, dressed for a one-night stand student, to a darker, more covered person. The sketch of Jo "after time has passed," in her distressed look, was created the night of the first read through, after seeing Kimberly Gilbert's first characterization of the role. The sketches are presented in the order they were created:





Jo
Boom



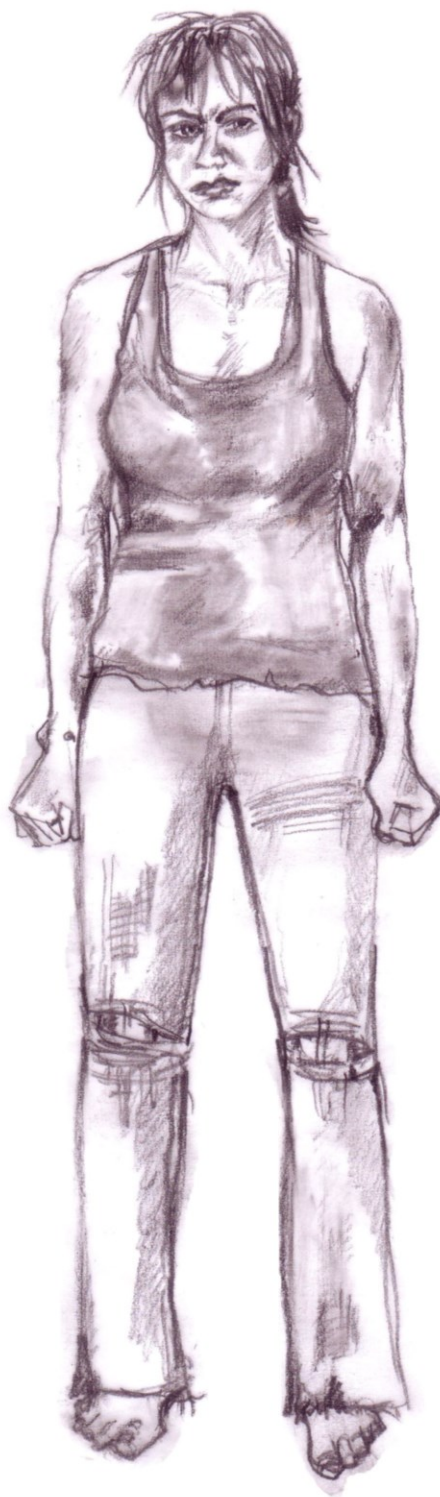
Jo
Boom



Jo
Boom



Jo
Before the Boom
Boom



Jo
After Time Has Passed
Boom

Jules:

The following sketches for Jules did not undergo as much as an evolution as the ideas for Jo, but there was some removal of unnecessary details between the first and second sketches. This was based on director input. The final sketch, for Jules "after time has passed" was also created after the first read through.





Jules
Boom



Jules
Boom



Jules
Boom

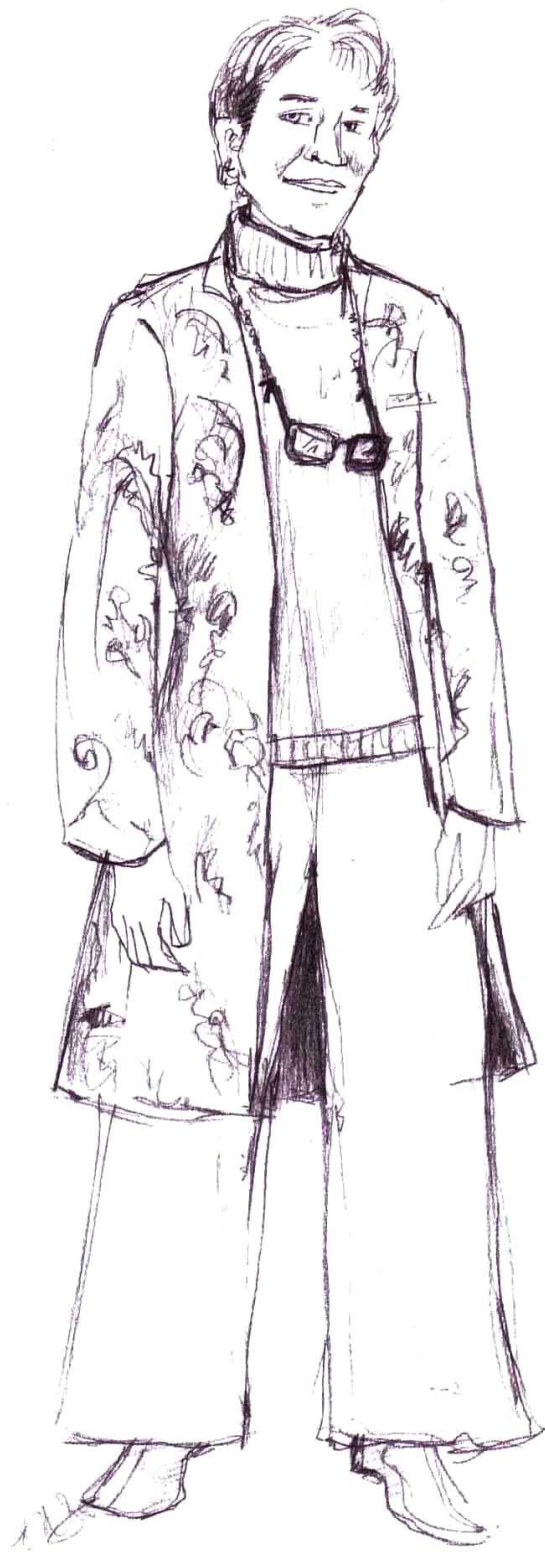


Jules
After Time Has Passed
Boom

Barbara:

The idea for Barbara's costume design underwent dramatic revision over the course of the design process, well into the build period. The silhouette for Barbara started sleeker, more contemporary and narrow, changed to a wider look, and ultimately went back to the first, narrower idea. At one point in the design process, Barbara's pants and coat hem became very full, but after gauging tasteful proportion in the fitting process, this idea was pulled back. Her silhouette was also heavily discussed in conjunction with the ideas for the assistant stage manager/docents, so that they would look like they came from the same world. This is the explanation for the second sketch, of Barbara in a jumpsuit. The final, very rough sketch, was quickly drawn during the build period to figure out what kind of shirt Barbara should have under her coat. Ultimately, I chose a simpler garment that made the actress feel the most comfortable.

All of the following sketches are in the order they were created:



BARBARA
BOON



Barbara
Boom



Barbara
Boom



Barbara
Boom

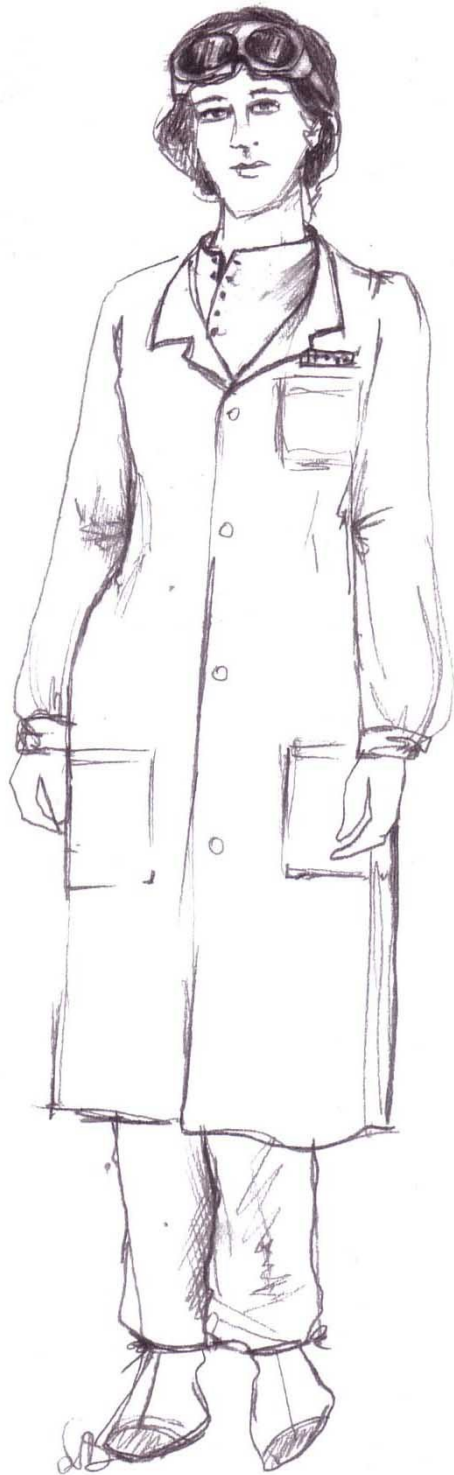


Barbara
Boom

Docents:

Once it was decided that the assistant stage managers were going to be costumed, the design team and I understood that these particular costumes, although only seen during the quick changes, would say something about the world of the play. After one meeting, when it was decided that the sound designer, Neil McFadden, had chosen the song: "Also Sprach Zarathustra," for the boom scene change, I decided that the docents should echo the epic, science fiction, weirdness of this particular music. I also designed the docents in response to the style of the set created by Thomas Kamm, and the funny, hokey, un-graceful way in which the set transforms during the boom scene change.

The following sketches are presented in the order they were created:



DOCENT
BOOM



Docent
Boom

3.) Final Color Renderings

Jo:



Jo
Before the Boom
Boom



Jo
After Time Has Passed
Boom



Jules
Boom



Jules
After Time Has Passed
Boom



Barbara
Boom



Docent
Boom

4.) Costume Plot/ Piece List:

<i>Costume Plot/ Piece List: Boom Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company</i>				
Actor	Character	Scene	Item	Notes
Sarah Marshall	Barbara	Top of Show	Navy Blue long sleeve t-shirt	
			Blue/ Grey Dyed raw silk pants	Steam
			Green Dyed raw silk coat	Dry clean only
			Green/ yellow small neck scarf	
			Black socks	
			Black "Clarks" shoes	
			Round tortoiseshell glasses	
Kimberly Gilbert	Jo	Top of Show	White tank top/ A-shirt	
			Black lace bra	
			Black 3/4 sleeve t-shirt	
			Black front zip hooded sweatshirt	
			Dark (Black or Grey) fitted jeans	
			Black socks	
			Black Ankle height lace up boots	Hers
			Messenger bag	
Kimberly Gilbert	Jo	Time has passed - p. 61	Distressed white tank top	
			Same bra	
			Distressed, rolled up dark jeans	
			Same socks	
			Distressed black boots	
			Add Bruise makeup/ hair pomade/ under eye shadows	
Aubrey Deeker	Jules	Top of Show	White t-shirt	
			Plaid boxers	
			Blue plaid "Old Navy" dress shirt	

<i>Costume Plot/ Piece List: Boom Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company</i>				
Actor	Character	Scene	Item	Notes
			Kakhi pants	ironed
			Brown/ Tan socks	
			Brown slip on loafers	
			Watch w/ velcro strap	
Aubrey Deeker	Jules	Time has passed - p. 61	Distressed white t-shirt	
			Keep Boxers	
			Ripped/ Distressed Kakhi pants	Missing one lower leg
			Leg bandage	
			Distressed socks	
			Distressed Brown shoes	
			Hair pomade/ Under eye shadows/ Dirt	
	Docents (2)	Top of Show	Dyed Green Unitards	
			Grey fitted jumpsuits	
			High top converse sneakers	
			Headset belt clip	
			Goggles	

5.) Fitting Photos

The following photos were taken during fittings at the Woolly Mammoth Theatre Costume Shop in Washington, DC.

Jo (Kimberly Gilbert):

1. - Jo's look before the boom



2. - Jo after time has passed (costume has not been distressed yet)



Jules (Aubrey Deeker):

These were the final two shirt options considered. The second shirt was used in the final production.



Barbara:

The following photographs were taken for Sarah Marshall's mock up fitting. I patterned and built the mock up coat and pants, and this pattern was fit and adjusted for the final garment by Emily Hoem (University of Maryland draper).

The right side of the coat is the side that was fit to Sarah Marshall.





6.) Fabric Swatches

The following fabrics were considered for the built costumes for the show, Barbara's coat and pants.



Barbara - coat
Fabric Swatches
Boom

It was ultimately decided that a good quality, natural color raw silk would be hand dyed and used for both the jacket and pants.

7.) Production Photos

All of the following images were taken during a performance of the show, by photographer Stan Barough.



Show Opening: Barbara begins the show by playing the timpani



Jo and Jules' personalities clash within the first moments of the play



Jules tries to set Jo at ease with his "mad scientist" impression



Jo questions why God has given her the misfortune of passing out repeatedly and inexplicably



Jo discovers that although Jules solicited her through the internet for sex, he is in fact homosexual.



During the Boom: Museum Docent Barbara pauses the boom to explain this "historical" event to the audience



During the Boom: Barbara remembers that she is not supposed to talk to the audience, and holds up the required sign instead. This picture is a clear example of how projections were used to present Barbara as god-like to the audience.



Jo realizes that the earth has been struck by a comet, everyone she knows is dead, and that she is stuck with Jules for the rest of her life.



After Time Has Passed: Barbara observes the painful decline of Jo and Jules. They have been stuck in this basement laboratory for 9 months with very little food or water. Their costumes were distressed based on the particulars of their situation: environment, behavior, and length of time spent in this clothing.





Final Scene: Barbara plays the timpani as Jo and Jules make the decision to open the door and leave, no matter what the comet ravaged Earth has in store for them.





Final Scene/ Epilogue: Barbara comes down to the stage for the first time. She explains to the audience that it is not in fact Jo and Jules who are our ancestors, it is in fact the fish and the fish tank. This image is a good representation of the texture and silhouette of her costume.

9) PERIODICAL REVIEWS OF THE PRODUCTION

The Washington Post

The Elements Unite to Create Woolly's 'Boom'

Production Crackles With Quirky Writing, Earnest Characters

By Nelson Pressley

Special to The Washington Post Wednesday, November 12, 2008; C0

Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company must have fun sorting through the latest batch of weird, because they've unearthed a grandly wacked-out apocalypse fantasy in Peter Sinn Nachtrieb's "Boom." This is boy-meets-girl stuff that's not just twisted, but gleefully torqued.

Jules is a lonely marine biology grad student who's just placed a racy personal ad online; Jo is the randy journalism major who's answered the call. Yet Jules is oddly reluctant, and the offbeat, high-strung Jo keeps passing out as she tries to leave his strange biology lab-cum-dorm room.

Oh, and there's a crazy lady on a balcony, who's overhead pulling levers and occasionally talking to us like a "Twilight Zone" version of the Stage Manager in "Our Town."

That is enough to send director John Vreeke and his inspired team heavenward, for the designers and the three spot-on performers seem to catch every pensive and hilarious

breeze that blows through Nachtrieb's science-fictiony script. That the production is thinking big is clear even in the pre-show music, which gets grins just by pumping in such classical chestnuts as the "William Tell" Overture and the "Anvil Chorus" from "Il Trovatore." (Beethoven and Samuel Barber get serious shout-outs as the story unfolds; whether this puckish musical upscaling of emotions is Vreeke's or Nachtrieb's, it works.)

Designer Thomas Kamm makes beautiful use of the Woolly space, provocatively angling a video screen over a stage that thrusts well into the audience. That screen gives us close-ups of Barbara, the docent whose connection to the not-quite-romantic story she's supervising gets more interesting all the time -- and not just because of Sarah Marshall's delectable, characteristically intense oddball turn in the role.

At first, Barbara seems like an unwelcome interruption of the hip screwball dialogue that Nachtrieb pens for Jules and Jo. Their "meet cute" does indeed fall on a globally cataclysmic day that, um, complicates their hookup. (Plus in the ad, he didn't mention that he's gay.) The script's high-flying banter is glib, ironic, profane -- pure catnip for Aubrey Deeker and Kimberly Gilbert, two of the busiest and most resourceful young actors in town.

Deeker is ideally cast as the peculiar scientist who's potentially creepy but probably okay. His Jules is painfully earnest; the character's wooing is inept but thoughtful, in an end-of-days kind of way. Deeker is terrific with everything from Jules's iffy kissing to the academic vindication he feels when his disaster prediction comes true. His performance is tender and funny, with just the right streak of bizarre.

Gilbert, meanwhile, is a terror as Jo, who sours quickly once she realizes she won't get the hot evening she came for. Jo has an appealing ferocity that eventually has shades of Linda Hamilton in "Terminator 2," even with those pesky sudden blackouts. (Along with everything else, that eventually gets explained in Nachtrieb's crazy-logical script.)

Gilbert, like Decker, not only nails the quirky lines, but also leaps boldly into Vreeke's escalating physical staging as Barbara's role begins to make sense and "Boom's" cosmic take on beginnings and endings rounds into view.

It's a happy fit all around, one of those charmed evenings when a company finds a play that's squarely in its wheelhouse and gets just the right people involved. The writing is terribly smart -- Nachtrieb knows his science well enough to goof off skillfully while retaining a healthy sense of wonder -- and Vreeke and company match that standard with savvy of their own. Boom, indeed.

Boom, by Peter Sinn Nachtrieb. Directed by John Vreeke. About 100 minutes. Lighting design, Colin K. Bills; sound, Neil McFadden; costumes, Ivania Stack. Through Dec. 7 at Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company, 641 D St. NW. Call 202-393-3939 or visit <http://www.woollymammoth.net>.



Boom: Blow Up the Outside World

Sparks fly—really—when a fish researcher and a journalist wait out the apocalypse.

By Trey Graham Nov. 13 - 19, 2008 (Vol. 28, #46)

Boom: By Peter Sinn Nachtrieb; Directed by John Vreeke

Woolly Mammoth to Dec. 7

It will tell you something about Woolly Mammoth's *Boom*, perhaps, that my first thought upon seeing the set was: "Kettle drums? Really?"

It will tell you a bit more, I hope, if I say that it's the serenely loopy Sarah Marshall who strolls on to play them, as well as a large gong, and once or twice a triangle, as the action commences.

And that despite Marshall's constant, cacophonous presence, Peter Sinn Nachtrieb's pixilated post-apocalyptic comedy—or is it a soaring, wonder-filled creation myth?—centers mostly on a queer virgin marine biologist and a journeywoman journalist with anger-management issues and an unfortunate propensity to die (though only briefly) at the oddest moments.

A more unlikely Adam and Eve I've yet to meet.

So this is what folks mean, you'll be thinking 'round about now, when they talk about "a

Woolly play?” Well, yes, despite the conspicuous absence of incest—or indeed sex of any kind aside from the implied, or the hoped-for, or the piscine. There’s no murder, either, though the entire planet does eventually get wiped out—which as you might imagine inspires a certain amount of panicky introspection among our lone-survivor heroes.

So yes, *Boom*—an uproariously funny study of two misfits stranded at world’s end, wondering what on earth selected them for singularity and whether they can possibly measure up—is every inch a Woolly play: It’s literate, coarse, thoughtful, sweet, scabrously inappropriate, wracked by existential anxiety, and wonderfully humane. Actually it’s mostly just wonderful: I haven’t had quite so much fun at the theater, or been quite so consistently surprised, in who knows when.

Nachtrieb’s script employs something like the familiar rhythms of situation comedy, but nearly every setup-punch-line combination comes with a kind of topspin that keeps things feeling fresh. John Vreeke’s staging attends carefully to those rhythms, tightening the pace when the playwright is pouring on the funny and stepping back to let the richer moments breathe.

And the cast—Marshall as a kind of ringmaster-cum-narrator, pulling levers and throwing switches overhead, plus Aubrey Deeker as the researcher and Kimberly Gilbert as the would-be magazine writer—has found the story’s sweet spot, which lies precisely at the intersection of madcap and heartfelt. Not much that happens in *Boom* would make the slightest sense in what we think of as the real world, but this crew creates a space in which it’s not just OK to laugh along as the absurdities pile up but essential to chuck the

skepticism and buy right on in. Which means that when things go wrong (and oh, do they go wrong), it actually stings a bit.

What things? Well, Jules (Deeker) has a family history of extinction—they've all met different fates, but the bottom line is that Mom "couldn't have picked a worse time to go on a tour of un-reinforced masonry in California." So when his tropical-island research uncovers fish behavior signaling the imminent end of the world, he's understandably disposed to take evasive action. Retreating to a supply-stocked basement lab, he posts a personal ad on Craigslist. Jules' hope: That a well-timed one-night stand will become not just an extended visit but an opportunity to repopulate the planet. (The facts of his gayness and his virginity don't seem to have occurred to him as hurdles.)

But then every science experiment comes with unanticipated variables, and in this one they include a critical miscalculation involving the location of the food stash and the resolutely anti-childbirth posture of the deeply messed-up woman who responds to his ad. ("You don't want eggs from this basket," seethes Gilbert's Jo. "They're cracked.") Can Jules convince her otherwise? Will Jo's recurring blackouts, or her cynicism about humanity's stewardship of the planet, overrule her survival impulse? Will the Jack Daniels run out before the oxygen supply?

Conception and its unlikelihood being critical to the story at hand, Marshall's narrator character (her name is Barbara, and she is singularly, strangely marvelous) gets a moment in the spotlight to spin a highly colorful tale about her own. It's an anecdote, and an impulse, that make no sense at all in context, but that seem perfectly, whimsically wonderful once you realize that Boom's larger concern is our twinned eternal hungers for

hard historical facts and for holistic creation stories—for I-was-there scientific research and for deeper metaphors that help bind our data to our sense of self.

That showstopper of a creation myth—Barbara admits, cheerfully, to embellishing it—comes packaged in language as grand and gaudy as anything King James' scribes ever translated from the Vulgate, and it's rather more joyful and exuberant besides. Good words, both, for Boom; its anxieties and its ambiguities and its accidents notwithstanding, this is one end-of-the-world story that's likely to leave you grinning from ear to ear.

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