

MOVIES: Leonardo DiCaprio, Mark Ruffalo star in Martin Scorsese-directed 'Shutter Island' **PAGE F4**

MUSIC: Alkaline Trio moves past its straight-ahead rock sound, back to punkish roots **PAGE F11**

DINING OUT: Atrium Lounge aims to be an art, music and dining mecca in downtown Vancouver **PAGE F25**

The Columbian

Weekend

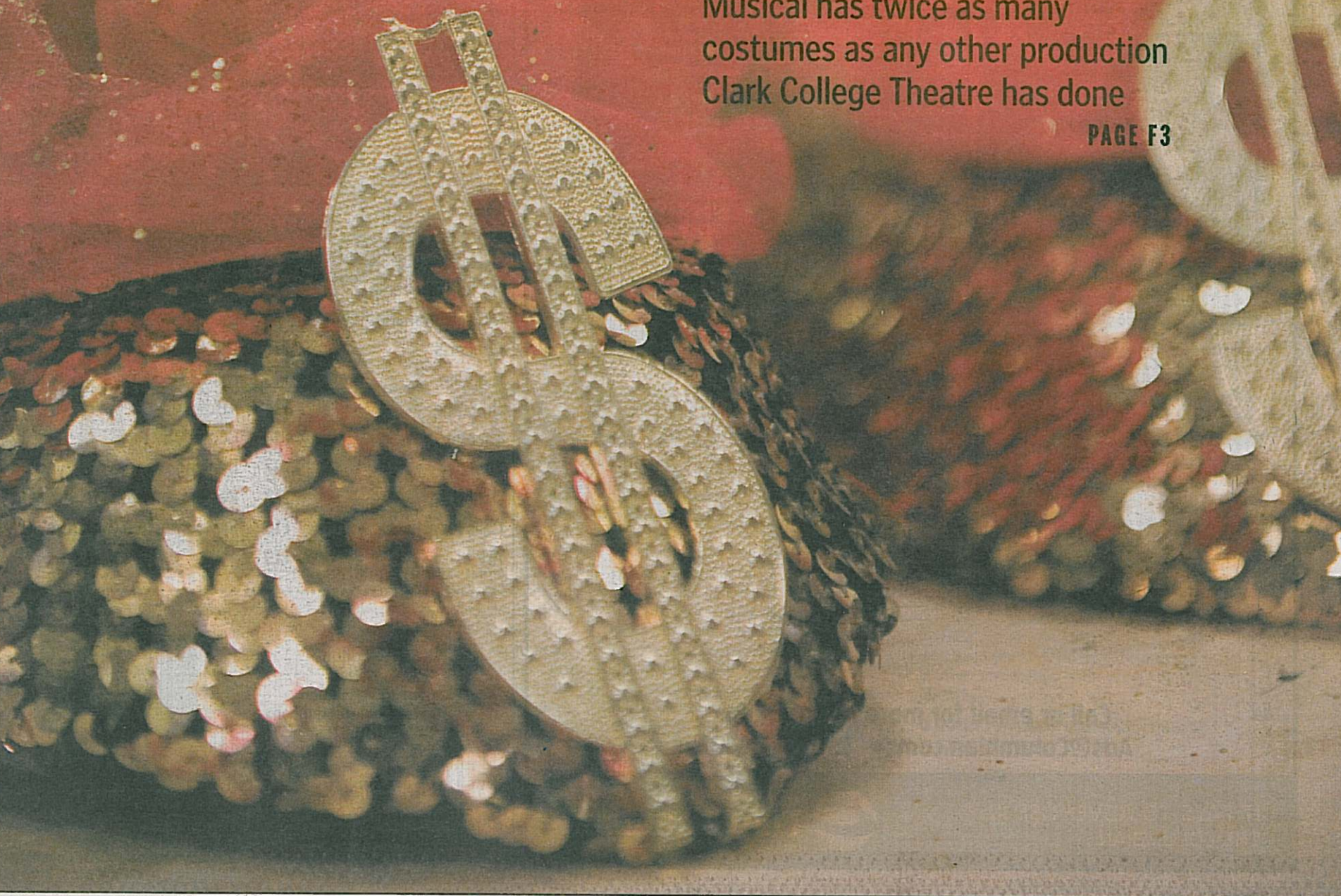
and beyond

Friday, February 19, 2010

Big 'Producers'

Musical has twice as many costumes as any other production Clark College Theatre has done

PAGE F3



COVER STORY



ZACHARY KAUFMAN/The Columbian

Clark College costume designer Patricia Rohrbach shows a dress that will be part of "The Producers." She and her team created 400 costume pieces on a \$3,000 budget.

Producer of one wondrous wardrobe

Costuming for 'The Producers' takes theater to new level

By BRETT OPPEGAARD
for The Columbian

They started putting this together in June. Clark College Theatre's costume designer Patricia Rohrbach and several assistants knew "The Producers" would be unlike any show they had worked on before, but it wasn't until they began making specific plans together over the summer that they fully realized the magnitude of their undertaking. Even the

college's biggest musicals in the past, such as "Fiddler on the Roof," didn't involve more than 200 or so costume pieces. "The Producers," opening Feb. 19th, has 400.

That has driven the 64-year-old Rohrbach to work at least 50 hours a week on this production for the past seven months, in addition to her primary job as the theater program's coordinator. She rarely has taken a day off during that time, and her assistants, including Tony Bump, jokingly have started to call her garage, where most of the costume construction takes place, "Pat's Sweat Shop."

"The Producers" was created by Mel Brooks — famous for such

films as "Blazing Saddles," "Young Frankenstein" and "History of the World, Part 1" — as a remake of sorts of his 1968 movie of the same name. The musical version tells a similar tale, of a desperate Broadway producer, Max Bialystock, who determines he could make more money on a flop than a hit. He just has to sell 25,000 percent ownership in the piece and make it so bad it closes immediately, before any investor starts thinking about returns. To make that plan work, though, he has to locate a guaranteed loser. He thinks he hits the jackpot when he finds the script

If you go

■ **What:** Clark College Theatre presents "The Producers," the Tony Award-winning musical created by Mel Brooks.

■ **When:** 7:30 p.m. Feb. 19-20 as well as Feb. 26-27, with dinner catered by Applewood Northwest; nondinner performances will be offered Feb. 25 and March 4-6.

■ **Where:** Clark College's Gaiser Hall, 1933 Fort Vancouver Way, Vancouver.

■ **Admission:** \$33, \$15 for nondinner shows.

■ **Information:** 360-992-2815; <http://www.clark.edu>.

See PRODUCERS/ON PAGE F6

Clark's cascade of costume changes

Here is a glimpse at three crucial costume designs in the show, through Clark College Theatre's costume designer Patricia Rohrbach's perspective:

Scene: The "Springtime for Hitler" performance, the musical within the musical.

Challenges: Maybe the most critical juncture in the plot, in which Nazi Germany has to appear light and funny in a huge song and dance number that includes iconic German symbols as well as historical characters, such as Adolph Hitler and Eva Braun.

Rohrbach's approach: "The scene starts with Bavarian dancers, demonstrating sort of the traditional values of Germany, with peasant blouses and lederhosen. I wanted lots of color, lots of patterns, really to make a splash. The stormtrooper girls then come out in brown shirts and black shorts. They don't really look like stormtroopers, of course, but I picture this as something that makes fun of the Nazis. Later in the scene, the icon girls parade out like showgirls. One is decorated with a beer stein, another with pretzels, another with bratwurst. Making headpieces balance properly is really hard to do. The shape of them. They can be too heavy. They need to be weighted evenly on each side. For the girls in this scene, we eventually had to tie them on with ribbons to keep them on."

■■■

Scene: Any involving Ulla, the flirty secretary.

Challenges: She has to look great but also be able to perform athletic dance moves.

Rohrbach's approach: "Right from the top of the show, Ulla has a white dress that has to be cut enough to do the leg splits but also low enough to show off her (other physical assets). Every Ulla outfit has to do something like that. In the 'Springtime for Hitler' number, she first appears as the German Imperial Eagle, with a large cape, decorated with a big swastika edged in black feathers, held up by dowels. She returns later in the scene as Eva Braun, in a black-and-silver evening gown. She has a pink satin ballroom dress in one scene that needs to twirl, and in another, she's doing the samba with a hat."

■■■

Scene: The director of "Springtime for Hitler," Roger DeBris, introduces his artistic team.

Challenges: Usually, costume designers support the show. This scene is one of those rare cases in which costumes are supposed to steal the moment and provide most of the laughs.

Rohrbach's approach: "We could just go wild, and that was a fun thing to do. But the most important consideration for designers is the body you are dressing. If the actor isn't comfortable in the costume, that person is not going to perform well. My goal here was to make them look damn good. Roger comes out, for example, in a dress that is supposed to resemble the Chrysler building. Our actor is naturally very masculine looking, so I wanted to cover his arms as much as possible, to make him look more effeminate. I also used a lot of flowing material, to give the dress movement as he walked, to make it dance, even when he wasn't. ... The rest of the team had a Village People theme. One of them is wearing black leather motorcycle chaps and a vest, with no shirt. The cowboy has a purple scarf, animal print cuffs and a bolo tie, with fringed chaps and tight jeans."

—Brett Oppegaard



ZACHARY KAUFMAN/The Columbian

"I tend to look at what Broadway did and try to get as close to that as I can on my budget."

Patricia Rohrbach
Clark College costume designer

Clark College costume designer Patricia Rohrbach, right, finishes a fitting for Carla Kendall-Bray, who plays Ulla in the community college's production of "The Producers." Ulla requires a new costume for every scene.

PRODUCERS

From Page F3

"Springtime for Hitler." But that's when everything starts to backfire for Bialystock.

The unusual staging of the work and large cast (30 in the Clark version) require at least a half-dozen costume changes for the chorus, switching back and forth between the 1940s and 1950s, to differentiate the musical within the musical. The lead female character, ditzy secretary Ulla, has a new costume for every scene, and there are numerous cameos of historical characters that need to create instant recognition in the audience. Rohrbach said, "Professional designers even comment that this is the biggest show ever for costumes."

"The Producers" won a record 12 Tony awards in 2001, and the Broadway version toured through

Portland soon afterward, in 2003. That New York-based company hasn't returned, but The Lakewood Theatre Company spent more than \$10,000 just to rent the costumes for a production last summer in Lake Oswego, Ore. Rohrbach's budget to create all of the costumes for Clark from scratch: \$3,000.

Rohrbach, who dabbled in drama in high school, started volunteering for local theater companies 25 years ago, as a way to support the interests of her daughter, Rebecca Kramer, who is now the board president at The Old Slocum House Theatre Company in Vancouver. The retired optician acknowledges she didn't own a sewing machine and didn't even know how to thread a needle when she found herself helping Clark recover from a costume design disaster a decade ago, just before the opening night of "Cabaret." She learned quickly, though, and her hard work and dedication salvaging that show earned her the job. She since has

designed costumes for a variety of local and regional troupes, including Washougal's Blue Parrot Theatre, Portland's Quintessence and Lakewood. When "The Producers" closed at Lakewood, Rohrbach helped to collect and ship the costumes back to their owners, giving her a chance to get a first-hand look at the techniques used by those designers. She also has done extensive research, on the Internet and through books, examining every other approach she can find to try to create the highest impact she can, considering the resources she has.

"I tend to look at what Broadway did and try to get as close to that as I can on my budget," she said. "Or if I find someone else's idea, on a tighter budget, that looks good, I'll do that, too. There are some costumes that just have to be done a certain way, because that's what the audience expects. Then, there are other places where I can put in my own imagination."