

INTERVIEW WITH ALICIA CLEMENTS

Costume Designer for *The White Divers of Broome*



Black Swan: The costume design for *The White Divers of Broome* is not just about getting the period right or the diver's costumes historically accurate. As described by you in the design presentation, it's also a strategic play with colour. Can you please explain this to us in more detail?

Alicia Clements: We have maintained a very tight colour palette for this production, which helps to highlight the separation between the wealthy English pearlers and the vibrant ethnic communities that vie for space in the small town. Our English characters wear almost exclusively black, white and grey, while the colours of the earth and water – so iconic of Broome – are reflected in the garb of the Malay and Japanese workers.

BS: There are a lot of characters to costume in this play, with many of them requiring quite elaborate clothing. Can you explain a bit about costume budgets and how you would distribute your budget between the roles and their requirements?

AC: Naturally, a greater share of the budget is, where possible, allocated to more important characters, however there are also numerous very small characters in this play who must appear wealthy and well-dressed. To tackle this conundrum, we have hired pre-existing costumes from Melbourne Theatre Company for these minor roles, as it is simply not possible or affordable to construct such a large number of new costumes.

BS: What's your favourite part about designing for theatre? Is it your preferred genre to work in?

AC: Certainly, I would say theatre is my favourite genre to work in – however I have to admit I've done very little film! I love the immediacy of seeing actors wearing my costumes live on stage and hearing the audience responses, as well as collaborating with lighting and set designers to achieve a desired effect.

BS: What has been the biggest challenge for you with this production, *The White Divers of Broome*? Why?

AC: The breadth of research required for this production has been complex but also incredibly rewarding. Not only are we dealing with an unusual period in western costume history (as pre-WWI fashions were a transitory phase between two radically different periods), but we also had to research the intricacies of Japanese traditional dress, Malaysian peasant workers and 1900's diving suits and apparatus. Given the specific year and unusual location, there is also only a small amount of reference material available, which meant we had to take some liberties when filling in certain gaps in information.

BS: What's next for you after this production? Is it a busy 2012 for you?

AC: My next production is Black Swan's *Arcadia* – another big period show – for which I am designing the set and costumes. After that I have a couple of small shows in the works as well as a trip to the UK to meet and work with several wonderful designers!