

Seattle Children's Theatre

# ACTIVE AUDIENCE GUIDE



## THE **VERY HUNGRY CATERPILLAR** SHOW

BASED ON THE BOOK WRITTEN BY  
**ERIC CARLE**

CREATED AND DIRECTED BY  
**JONATHAN ROCKEFELLER**

**SEP 13 - OCT 21, 2018**

# A CHAT WITH EMILY MC LAUGHLIN

## Wardrobe Assistant and Visual Artist



### Please tell us about your working process as wardrobe assistant.

I'm so lucky to have two jobs at SCT, wardrobe assistant during the Mainstage Season and costume designer during the Drama School Summer Season. I am also a collage and mixed-media artist who works primarily with oil paint over papers and photographs.

Wardrobe staff/crew members are part of both the costume department and the backstage crew. We keep the story the costumes tell going, show after show, by keeping them in good condition, getting the actors into the costumes they need to be in at different times—sometimes very, very quickly—and helping the actors be as comfortable as possible in them. Costumes are often not very comfortable to wear, especially for 11 shows a week and production runs that can last almost two months! We are problem solvers and for some shows we have to be very quick on our feet, depending on how and when the actors need to change between looks or characters, and the nature of the costumes that the costume designer and director agree will fit the play best. Along with the set, props and lighting, costumes are part of the visual storytelling of a play, providing the actors and audience with a physical world to frame the ideas in the play. Like any physical object, the wigs, costumes and layers of clothes underneath can need repair, washing, restyling, upkeep, and can surprise you by breaking or misbehaving unexpectedly. I've heard many times from actors that the most stressful part of their show is their costume quick-

changes because no matter how much we organize and practice, something might go wrong, and changing many items of clothing (and sometimes wigs, fake facial hair and makeup) is hard when you must be onstage again soon for your next scene!

I enjoy my position as wardrobe assistant because although there's plenty of laundry and ironing to be done, I have a good amount of variety in what I do. Every show is different, and I learn how to take care of a different set of costumes and how to restyle and maintain wigs when the design calls for them. I learn what the dressers are doing backstage and in the dressing rooms to get the actors in and out of costume at the right time, which is timed and choreographed almost like a dance. I may go shopping for the theater or stitch for the costume shop to help with building the next show's costumes. Along with Erin, our wardrobe master, I help keep track of our budget, department money, inventory and tools, meetings, communication and what's going on from day to day. When understudies need to go on for the actors, we switch out the costumes and adjust them to fit their size. There are lots of lists to keep updated, emails for keeping up with what's happening, and leading up to opening a show there's paperwork to figure out how to organize who gets changed when, where, how much time they have and what costume pieces they're changing out of and into. I like working with creative people, which is important because wardrobe is all about interacting with people, often very intimately, as we are working with the things that they wear.

### What is a particularly interesting or unusual challenge of your job, and how do you set out to solve it?

Whether I'm working in the capacity of costume designer, wardrobe staff member, or artist, I'm challenged to communicate meaning through the manipulation of physical things. This means ways of thinking about what different things "feel" like or "say," how people interpret what they see, how they feel when they see it, the connections they make with other things they've seen before.

I have designed the costumes for other theaters' shows over the years, and I'm so happy to design shows for the Drama School Summer Season. I rather fell into costume design, and then costume work, because it feels to me like making a very large painting—choosing the right colors, textures, styles and materials—that you then set free to move and carry on the meanings of the story with a life of



*Detail from Emily's painting The Tree. The astronaut, star and moon are some of the pieces that are painted-over photographic images.*

its own. In particular, I am always most energized by collage work—from using different papers and photos incorporated into my paintings, to costumes made from recycled clothes and objects. To me, this allows more audience participation as people can recognize pieces of things that once existed independently of the artwork and bring their own experiences to the ideas I had.

In my art process, I often collage to canvas many altered parts of photos and other media, then add paint to them, uniting them into a central idea. Painted-over photographed images and purely painted images become hard to distinguish from each other, representing the melding together of facts, dreams, perceptions and memories. Images from the history of science and technology reflect my fascination with how our understanding of the world is related to the abilities and limitations of our tools.

#### **What in your childhood got you involved in theater and art and to where you are today?**

I really don't have any specific events in my childhood to recount—I've just always felt I had to make my life in the arts. Even when I was five years old I knew I wanted to be an artist. I was lucky enough to have a creative mother who was a preschool teacher and very encouraging of all the time I spent drawing and making things. I was also lucky enough to go to plays with my family—and I remember going to SCT productions with my elementary school! I did a bit of theater at Garfield High School, but I never wanted to act—it's just that there wasn't any technical theater available to do there at the time. Theater is a marvelous and important way to share and explore different possibilities. It has the potential to expand our abilities to live together as a society and community. As someone who loves to make things directly with my hands, I've always been drawn to the hands-on technical building of theater.

Meeting people in theater led to design jobs in small theaters, which then led to professional theater jobs. I didn't know how to sew when I started but I've been learning ever since—there are so many skills to learn and practice. I actually didn't study theater in school. It didn't occur to me that I could make a living doing professional costuming, but here I am. I majored in literature and both studio and art history, which if you collage all together is rather like theater.

*Born in Seattle, Emily has been painting and drawing in various ways since she can remember. Besides making her living in professional and educational costuming, her collage paintings have been part of gallery exhibits and digital displays across the country. Her pieces have been projected onto buildings in Long Island City and Times Square, NY, within art events and outdoor sculpture installations.*



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