

Hello!

My name is Claire, and I am normally a Wardrobe Mistress/Manager in the West End. When the pandemic hit, I was Wardrobe Manager at Harry Potter and the Cursed Child.

However, I was lucky enough to have worked for Regent's Park Open Air Theatre in the past and when they decided to go ahead with a Covid adapted production of *Jesus Christ Superstar* this summer, they invited a team of previous employees in to run the show. The idea was to have a socially distanced 'concert' version of the show using a combination of the casts that had performed in the various productions since 2016's first outing of JCS at the Park. With all the changes in government restrictions on public performances, the time between getting the go-ahead for doing a live performance and being onstage was very limited so everyone jumped in to gather as much information on making it as safe and workable as possible.

Andy Beardmore, the Technical Director, gathered all the government advice together and then liaised with each department to formulate a site-specific plan to bring a safe, live show together.

We did not have testing but had to declare our health status before starting the contract. Then everybody had to declare their current health status upon arrival, every day, and temperatures were taken. Masks were compulsory and had to be '**worn at all times**' on site unless onstage performing.

Hand sanitizing stations were clearly visible all around the site and an extra hand washing unit was installed near the CB entrance to the stage.

The whole site was divided into separate areas consisting of inside spaces such as 'technical', 'office', 'Wardrobe and dressing rooms' and 'rehearsal spaces' and then outside spaces such as 'stage', 'auditorium and FOH'. There were one-way routes around the site and the key cards would only allow you into your particular inside space – in our case Wardrobe and dressing rooms. The front of house and

rear of house were not allowed to mingle and once the site was open to the public no-one was allowed to cross the pass doors. Even the sound No1, DSM and camera operator had a dedicated route that avoided crossing any 'public' space.

In our block, we had the Wardrobe rooms, dressing rooms and green room with an outside patio. All soft furnishings were removed, including any padded seating, so everything was easy to wipe down and many of the chairs were removed from the green room and outside area to encourage social distancing.

In the dressing rooms, we had small rooms that normally seat 2 people and they became solo rooms apart from 2 co-habiting couples who could share - as they already lived together. The larger rooms would normally have been filled with ensemble. These were set up with 2 metre distancing and screens were built to stop the normal 'dressing room spread' which reduced the capacity by half. All the rooms had natural ventilation (windows), basins and plenty of rail space so we could keep costumes separated too.

In Wardrobe we set up the work room to allow 2metre distancing between each full-timer and wipes to clean the equipment before and after use. We also made sure the cutting table was clear for break times so we could eat with suitable distancing.

In laundry (blessed to have a separate laundry) we used one sink for costume washing and one for hands, dishes, etc and everyone in Wardrobe had their own (socially distanced) hook for a towel and tea towel which were washed every day. We also kept surfaces clear and cleaned them after every process. Cleaning became a big part of our everyday routine!

During a very speedy rehearsal period, the cast were allocated numbered or lettered 'stations' for when they were offstage, all 2 metres apart, and this is where they had to stand as they waited to go on. The wonderful DSM gave us a breakdown of who needed to be where for each scene entrance so we could either set pieces of costume next to the number/letter or organize quick changes

close to that entrance number. We ended up having 3 quick change areas – SR, CB and SL with named chairs and baskets for those artists doing a complete costume change and using hooks by the numbered areas for partial changes ie adding or removing layers. We even labelled hangers so there was no chance of costume mix-ups where costumes looked similar to each other.

Costumes fittings were done with just the Supervisor and a single performer in the large green room. Maker's had single fittings with the Supervisor standing 2 metres away. When the designer wanted to check, he stood on the patio outside and passed his wisdom through the open doors. Because the show had been done before, the Supervisor was able to choose combinations of clothing for each artist prior to fittings. This was invaluable as there was very little time to try one outfit on and then have to quarantine it before either trying it on someone else or returning. Sadly, all the previous costumes had been sent to the States, so she was building a complete show from scratch and we only had 3 weeks to put a show on. Everybody had to wear masks, but we added a visor to the supervisor and makers for added protection as there would be close contact. Hand washing was compulsory for anyone entering the area and surfaces were cleaned between artists. We did have disposable gloves available but found they were hard to work in, so we opted for enhanced hand cleaning. We also asked the performer to keep their personal items on a chair to one side of the fitting area and to get in and out of the fitting costumes on their own unless there was a particular issue such as rear fastenings or too many pins!

During the run of show, we would make sure all the laundry and costumes were set and checked in the dressing rooms before the cast arrived and had all the costumes ready for preset out of the rooms and in a holding area. We didn't actually do the preset too early as we had weather considerations.

We would check in with our artists after warm-up and some performers needed additional help, for example putting mic packs into the back of bras though most were very self-sufficient. Any help was always given from behind the artist and

face-to-face help was avoided. Cast had to do their own hair and make-up apart from a few 'design' features which were done in the wigs room with mask and visor being worn by Wham. All make-up, hair products, cleansers etc had to be named and allocated to each performer that needed it.

Full quick changes were all distanced and with allocated chairs and baskets. The hardest bit was standing back when they struggled getting sweaty clothing on and off, but we had to. We would only step in for bits that we could do from behind such as helping put robes on or straightening some twisted pieces. Hands had to be sanitized between artists. Even for the huge bloodying of Jesus, he did his own face and front with Wham doing his back and arms and his dresser did his legs and feet (from behind).

Once changes were completed, we could tidy up and put stuff either into wash or put away. We tried to make sure we only returned pieces to the rooms when they were artist free. Most of the show got washed every night. Many of the basic pieces were washed every show which made the turn around on matinee days quite heavy. We had doubles of all the underwear but there just wasn't the budget to double-costume and it was a sweaty show for the ensemble.

Post show, we collected all the washing and sorted it by colour for washing. All the baskets and trugs that were in contact with 'used' or dirty costumes were completely sanitized before putting away or used for 'clean' costumes. We ended up with more washing than we would have had on a pre-covid show as once it had been worn, it was contaminated. The few items that were not washed were sprayed and hotboxed for 15 minutes or more at the highest temperature.

Once the dressing rooms were cast free, we re-hung the wonky costumes and checked shoes were in the right places. The cast were quite good, but some were better than others!

We also had dressing rooms swap –overs for our 3 leads as there were 2 artists for each role and they had different shows each week. One set of costumes got moved out and stored. The room cleaned and the new set of costumes moved in. We did this post show to get it done when we were cast free. On matinee days the first show performer had to vacate by a certain time and the second show performer was not allowed in the room until a set time later, so we had the space and time to swap over and clean. We did try using the in-house cleaners but hit problems with extra people in the block and spacing so it was quicker and easier to whip the rooms around ourselves.

Basics we followed

Always wear a face covering.

Clean hands all the time.

Keep clean and 'used' items separate.

Clean anything 'used' or anything touched by a 'used' item

Keep 2ms apart. (Aim for 2 as 1metre + is harder for some reason) If you must be closer, try to be behind the artist and keep the time minimal. Swoop in and out! Stay out of their' breathing zone'.

Clean all 'high touch areas' as you use them such as sewing machine controls, washing machine door handles and drawers, hot box door handles.

Keep areas well ventilated.

Issues we had

People! They relax into shows and sometimes forget the rules. Cast get used to not wearing a mask onstage and the next minute you find them wandering between dressing rooms, maskless and mingling!

Creatives trying to come to the DR block for notes.

Band members leaving it to the last minute (after their set time) to get to their space and hitting cast traffic.

Finding the best time for the cleaners to properly clean.

The weather – but then that is a given in an open air theatre!