

# Time for the Divas

The team behind the Broadway revival of *Follies* talks about the time necessary to get this production right.



JOAN MARCUS

The *Follies* ensemble.

A few years ago, Eric Schaeffer, artistic director of Signature Theatre in New York, was chosen by the Kennedy Center for the daunting task of directing a revival of James Goldman and Stephen Sondheim's iconic musical, *Follies*. His production opened at the Kennedy Center in spring, then made a successful leap to Broadway this fall, with its 41-person cast and 28-member orchestra intact.

Schaeffer had directed *Follies* ten years prior to that in a less auspicious setting for Signature Theatre. Only half-joking, he reveals, "It was in a garage. That was the workshop production, and this is the real production." For this production he brought on Tony Award-winners Gregg Barnes as costume designer and Derek McLane as set designer. Working on this production was a dream come true for all three—albeit a dream that came with some serious pressure.

Everyone had high expectations of the production, expectations that rose even more once famous names like Bernadette Peters, Jan Maxwell, Elaine Paige, and Ron Raines, were attached. "We set out to do the best possible production we could," explains Schaeffer. "You have to block all that outside chatter and expectation

away. Go in a room and do the work.

"From the first day of rehearsal, we put everyone in tap shoes, and said, 'Here we go!' We did this for two reasons. One, because we had to start on 'Mirror, Mirror,' because that



Eric Schaeffer, director of the current revival of *Follies* on Broadway.

is a huge number. And two, because we wanted to level the playing field. We're all in this together. 'Let's all grab hands; let's all jump because we're about to do the monster of all musicals.' And it was really fantastic. You saw it created this world where people felt they could take risks and chances and try things, and they knew they were going to be safe. That's how we put this show together. And the cast was all fantastic, saying 'Absolutely, let's go!'"

## Seamless Characters

Schaeffer has been thinking about this production for a long time—and costumes have been on his mind from the start. "We started working on the show three or four years before we actually did it at the Kennedy Center. We started working on the sets and the costumes early

**ONLINE BONUS**  
To hear more from the production team and to check out a slideshow of production stills, visit [www.stage-directions.com/follies](http://www.stage-directions.com/follies)

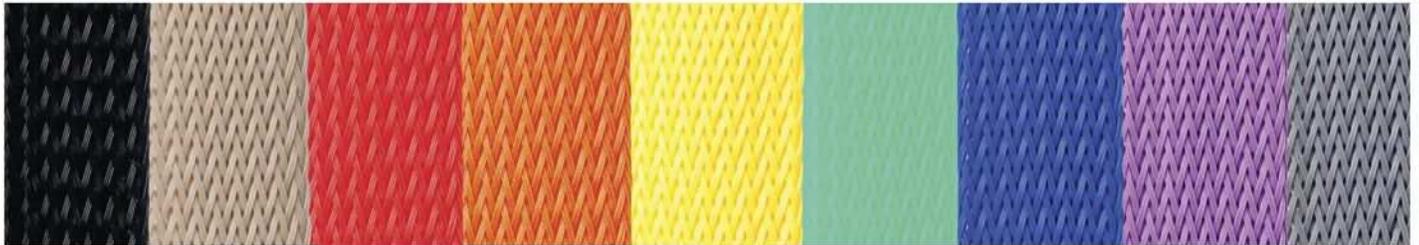


# New Online Shopping Cart

same great customer service



Heatshrink Tubing thousands of combinations in stock



Braided Sleeving hundreds of combinations in stock



Steinel® Heat Guns & Accessories imported from Germany

**heatshrink.com**  
Heat Shrink Tubing — Cutting — Printing

ph: 801-621-1501

fax: 801-627-6980



JOAN MARCUS

Rosalind Elias as Heidi Schiller and Leah Horowitz as Young Heidi in the 2011 Broadway revival of *Follies*.

because I think *Follies* is a show about the costumes. When they asked me about doing it, I said, 'We just have to have enough money to do the costumes right.' So

many times people try to do the show, but they don't have the money you really need to make those *Follies Ghosts* what they really were. And we were so thankful the Kennedy Center was so supportive and put the resources behind the show to make it what it is."

Looking to the past was on Barnes' mind as well when designing the costumes for *Follies*, which is a period show set in various decades. "I try to come up with an idea that is my point of view first, then I try to flesh that idea out by canvassing everything you can imagine: fine artists, illustrators, architecture, textiles—in this case, the actual *Follies*. So it becomes a stew of all these notions. In fact, I called Eric and said 'Before I sign on to take on this daunting project, can I do a few sketches to make sure we're on the same page? Let's ensure that I'm the right guy at the right time.'"

Clearly, Barnes was the right guy, recreating the stunning 1930s *Follies* costumes as well as the rest of the amazing wardrobe. But he is not one to be his own cheerleader during the design process or even the fittings. "I'm very quiet when they put the mock-up on because unless I see a glint of response from the actor—even if I think it's genius—I don't scream out 'Home run!'" he laughs. "I let the actor process it, and we go from there. Sometimes, things will significantly change from the fitting. And you have to go to the director and say, 'This took a turn.' So it's very collaborative."

A literature aficionado, Barnes approaches the designing of the costumes from how they will best serve the story. "I love when it's a really great story-telling skirt, otherwise, it doesn't have much meaning for me. So when the actor is connected to the design, that's when it's really satisfying."

**THE NEXT GENERATION  
OF FULL DUPLEX WIRELESS**



Performance of a rack mounted system - at a fraction of the cost!

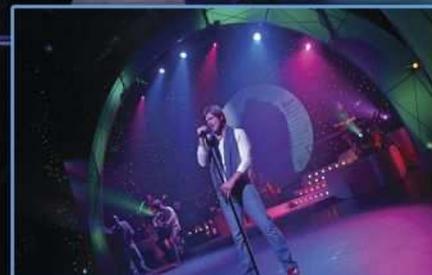
- 8 people communicate simultaneously.
- Dual channel with party line switching.
- Self-contained headsets - **no beltpacks!**
- Portable for on-location use.
- Range up to 800 yards.




1.800.399.5994 [www.eartec.com](http://www.eartec.com)

*Scenery First* provides top quality sets, props and backdrops to the leading theatrical and entertainment companies around the world. Our client list includes: Extreme Makeover Home Edition, Philadelphia Theater Company, American Music Theater, Pacific Coast Presentations and Curtis Institute, to name a few.

# Scenery First



*Scenery First* has been in business since 1992. Whether you need design or construction or installation or training our staff of carpenters, welders, artists, crafters, sculptors, draftsmen and designers can handle your project. We have 20,000 sq. ft of shop and rehearsal space equipped to handle all of your creativity.

[www.SceneryFirst.com](http://www.SceneryFirst.com)

**Scenery First, Inc.**  
207 Elmwood Avenue  
Sharon Hill, PA 19079  
TEL: 610.532.5600

Current Clients:





Derek McLane, set designer for *Follies*

### Big Enough for Memories

*Follies* had tongues wagging from the first press release when it was announced the show would involve a cast of 41. Designing a set that would accommodate them all was McLane's challenge: "In some ways, the empty stage floor is suited to big dance numbers, but that can also be kind of dull. So I also designed a lot of other levels in the form of balconies and catwalks. There are several tiers on the set that you might find backstage in an old Broadway theatre."

Function and serving the story were paramount to the design. "Eric and I talked about how finding places to put the Ghosts on stage throughout the show, maybe have them in places where they're in a separate place from the live action," says McLane.

Schaeffer had a clear vision, "I wanted to envelope the whole theatre, wrapping it into a whole world. So the audience feels like it's not just at a show, they're in a world. From day one, I said if I picked one word for the show, I want it to be 'haunting.' The characters are haunted by the return, the memories that live there, what could have been, and what is now. We stuck to that

from the set, to the costumes, and the lighting."

Schaeffer and McLane pondered the aesthetic of the very modern theatre of the Kennedy Center and later the Marriott Marquis. McLane remembers their initial thoughts. "Both theatres, the Kennedy Center and at the Marriott Marquis, are both totally modern, new-looking theatres, which is completely wrong for *Follies*. *Follies* takes place at an old, dilapidated theatre that is to be torn down the next day. It really wants to be in a theatre that has a lot of history, a lot of ghosts, and feels really ancient."

To give the audience that feeling of stepping into another place and time, McLane's job as set designer eventually extended to designing out the theatre in which the show was being presented in a dramatic reverse facelift. "We wanted to make the modern walls disappear. We draped gray drop cloths and tarps all over the walls and ceilings; and we even took the Marriott Marquis sconces down and replaced them with worklights. We wanted to create an atmosphere that worked."

### The Diva Show

This production of *Follies* has a special place in the hearts of all involved, especially Schaeffer. "I don't know if you'll ever see another production of *Follies* like this. Because this is what they wrote, what Steve originally wrote, and it's so great to see it revived to its original form.

"As a director, it's such an honor to be able to have all those tools at your disposal, to have all those people, and all those resources. It's just so exciting to see theatre how it was envisioned. That's really exciting in today's world."

When asked if he appreciates Sondheim more now

than when did *Follies* 10 years ago, Schaeffer waxes philosophical. "I think when you live life a little longer, the show has a different meaning. The show had a lot more depth to it than when I did it the first time—between the relationships and the broken dreams and having them and living with them. We didn't shy away from that. We tried to make that a huge part of the experience."

Schaeffer remembers others' reactions when he told them he was about to tackle *Follies* for the Kennedy Center. "People said, 'Oh, *Follies*. You're going to have all these problems because that's the 'Diva Show.' But everyone has been nothing but a joy to work with. I think you see that on the stage. It was one of those experiences where we were all there for the same reason, and that was to do a great show." **SD**

# WIGS & HAIR

## CHICAGO

THE SECRETS OF STAGE HAIR

**WHC DRESSING & MAINTENANCE CERTIFICATE PROGRAM**  
June 11-15, 2012

**WHC PRODUCTION I CERTIFICATE PROGRAM**  
June 18-22, 2012

**WHC PRODUCTION II CERTIFICATE PROGRAM**  
June 25-29, 2012

**A ONE-OF-A-KIND PROGRAM**  
Rick Jarvie of Lyric Opera of Chicago teams with Nan Zabriskie of The Theatre School at DePaul University to teach these one-of-a-kind professional courses. Learn everything you need to know to design, create and maintain wigs, beards and any hair worn on stage.

For more information, contact Moses Hudson at (312) 362-6292 or visit our website at [www.cpe.depaul.edu/whc](http://www.cpe.depaul.edu/whc).

**DEPAUL UNIVERSITY**  
CONTINUING AND PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION