

We spoke with Roger Stretton, long-time Lyceum Theatre Oldham set-builder, about how he turns the Director's vision into reality and co-ordinates a team of enthusiastic volunteers to build the theatre's award-winning and remarkably realistic sets. Roger is a joiner by trade.

### **How do you practically turn the design into something that fits on stage?**

Lyceum Theatre Oldham has a very small stage and we often want a set to look bigger, particularly the one for BLACK CHIFFON, which is meant to be a large London drawing room.

There are two ways of making it look bigger. We can take out the tabs (the curtains at the front of the stage) to make the stage feel wider. We can make the back of the stage narrower than the front. This is called isometric vision and makes the back look much further away than it really is.

We also have to work closely with the Director to make sure the set will work on our stage in a practical way, perhaps by altering the design so windows and doors line up with our openings and by making sure that the construction doesn't cause any lighting problems by having big bits of set in the way of the lighting rig.

### **How long does it take to create the set?**

I am normally thinking about how to build it weeks before we start and in most cases have ordered and got in stock the materials.

We can't start to build until the play before has finished. It can then take two work nights\* to remove the old set. Then four to five work nights to build the new one.

\*We have a work night every Monday at the theatre. It's the night when all the different areas of work are done - marketing, front of house, bar and back stage are all in working together.

Most of the work is done with my team on a Monday, but I quite often come in during the day to do the more detailed finishings.

### **How many people are involved and what different jobs are there? Do you have enough help?**

On average there are 6 to 7 people involved. The jobs vary, depending on the set but include wall-paper stripping, taking down the old set in gangs of two, moving and stacking of materials. There's a lot of cleaning up!

Then there's a lot of joinery work to make sure the new set is safe and sturdy. Once the structure is in place, there's painting and wallpapering.

We always welcome new volunteers. All we ask is that they have some skills, enthusiasm and they must be able to work on their own initiative and also work as a team player.

### **Do you ever re-use old sets?**

Yes, we do, but it is very rare we leave part of the last set up. It is quicker to have a fresh start, rather than trying to work round other people's ideas.

### **What are the biggest challenges of the Black Chiffon?**

The windows and curtains are very big. This is the main feature which I need to scale down but still make sure they look impressive. This set has the tabs in, which means a lot less floor space so many features will be inset. Decorating is really important as the room needs elegance.