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OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

**MEMORIAL RESOLUTION**

**DOUGLAS A. RUSSELL**

**(1927-1991)**

Professor Douglas A. Russell of the Department of Drama, an internationally known authority on costume design and theater history, died of a heart attack on March 4, 1991 while walking in the greenbelt near his campus home. Russell, who had been a member of the Department of Drama for thirty years, earned his bachelor's degree at Stanford in 1949 and his master's in theater the following year. He joined the Stanford faculty in 1961 after receiving a Master of Fine Arts degree in theater that same year from Yale University.

Born in Berkeley February 9, 1927, he grew up in Santa Rosa before coming to Stanford as an undergraduate. In a 1982 interview he remembered doing scrapbooks on costume at the age of 8 and at 12 studying all day in the library making costume drawings. While he probably could have become an outstanding designer of contemporary clothing, his scholarly interests were always theatrical and historical. He soon discovered that he especially enjoyed working in an academic environment and in regional theaters where he could use his vast knowledge of historic styles to design a wide variety of classic plays.

After receiving his master's degree from Stanford in 1950, he worked for a year as an instructor in stage costuming at Carnegie Institute of Technology and then taught public speaking and costuming for three years at Florida State University. In 1954-55 he was a Fulbright Scholar at the Shakespeare Institute in Stratford-on-Avon. From 1955-59 he was an Assistant Professor at the University of Kansas City, returning to Stanford in 1961 where he became an Associate Professor in 1965 and Professor in 1977.

Among other academic appointments, he was Visiting Professor of Costume Design at the University of Victoria in 1965, and Visiting Professor at Stanford-in-

Austria three times as well as at Stanford campuses in France and Great Britain. He also served as a distinguished guest professor of Theater Arts at UC-Santa Cruz, Cecil Green Distinguished Visiting Professor at Texas Christian University, and most recently as Fulbright Senior Lecturer at the University of Vienna.

Each summer from 1948 through 1961 he was director of costume at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, designing and supervising sixty different productions. He also designed costumes for San Francisco Actors Workshop; Victoria Renaissance Festival; American Conservatory Theatre; Carmel Bach Festival; Old Globe Theatre in San Diego; Missouri Repertory Theatre in Kansas City; Santa Rosa Summer Repertory; TheatreWorks of Palo Alto; Berkeley Shakespeare Festival; and West Bay Opera of Palo Alto. Since 1973 he has lectured on costume and stage history at the American Conservatory Theatre in San Francisco and acted as costume consultant for many ACT productions. In recent years he also lectured at the Louise Salinger Academy of Fashion in San Francisco.

At Stanford, in addition to teaching history of costume, costume design, and theater history, he had taught history of world painting in the Department of Art. In the Great Works track of the Western Culture Program he interpreted literature from the prospective of period and style. For the Drama Department he designed costumes for at least two campus productions each year. With his encyclopedic knowledge of costume history, he always enjoyed designing for Shakespeare and other performances of period plays. Among his favorites were operas done in cooperation with the Department of Music, which provided opportunities for unusual or elaborate costumes.

Nationally, Russell was perhaps best known for his books on style and costume design which were used extensively by drama classes and community theaters. Among his published works are *Stage Costume Design: Theory, Technique, and Style* (1973, revised 1983); *Theatrical Style: A Visual Approach to the Theatre* (1976); *Period Style for the Theatre* (1980); and *Costume History and Style* (1983). Out of his fascination with Viennese culture came *An Anthology of Austrian Drama* (1982).

Beginning in 1953 he published numerous articles in *Educational Theater Journal*, *Shakespeare Survey*, *Players Magazine*, *Theatre Crafts* and elsewhere. His books and articles reflected his insistence that costumers must be knowledgeable about the social and cultural characteristics of a period which influenced the ways in which people behaved and dressed. Only then could designers understand the details of the period paintings upon which their designs were based. By studying the society

of a particular period the designer could then decide how selected costume details could best represent and interpret that period for a present day audience. When Russell began more than thirty years ago to use this approach to teaching costuming, it was an innovative method which has since become very influential on other writers and designers in the field. At the time of his death, Russell was completing a new book, *Humanities and Western Culture: Understanding Period Style*. In progress were other works on period movement through painting, a monograph on American scene designer Lee Simonson, and a reference book on Shakespearean costume design for which he had received a Stanford research grant.

In American academic theater, Russell was well known as a conference speaker and organizer of theater design panels at American Theater Association Conventions and at conferences of the United States Institute of Theater Technology. In California he planned a series of design exhibitions in San Diego, Oakland, Hayward, and San Francisco, and was a guest lecturer at various museums in San Francisco.

Douglas A. Russell was one of those rare individuals in whom the roles of scholar and artist combine. His work as a professional designer reached, perhaps, its greatest peak in his awe-inspiring, complexly-constructed costumes for the Stanford Repertory Theater's production of *Prometheus Bound* in 1966. At that point, early in the short-lived history of the Stanford Repertory Theater, Russell's skill as a designer became a major resource for the University as Stanford took on the role of the producer of a major professional repertory theater.

The influence of Russell's scholarly work made a strong impact on theater training nationally. No single work on design and technique in costume has been more extensively used than Russell's basic text; and his work on *Theatrical Style* has provided countless designers and directors with the methodology with which they can ground their designs in cultural history. His own work as designer, and his skill as a teacher of design, always took the historical as a starting point. Russell was no slave to historical literalism but, rather, emphasized the need to transform the materials of scholarly research into the imagery of a highly theatrical world.

Russell's students agree on the basic strength of his teaching, his scrupulous attention to detail, his conscientious work with the available material, his emphasis on the relationship between scholarship and the practical needs of the theater, and his conviction that you can never study enough, see enough, nor imagine enough. His insistence on drawing upon the resources of painting, architecture, and the

decorative arts for cultural knowledge made the artists he taught become knowledgeable, functional scholars who put their education into practical use. Russell firmly believed in the phenomenon of talent, but he demanded that the talented learn how to develop and to use their basic gifts.

It is difficult to know, ultimately, how to characterize Douglas Russell since his impact as a teacher came as much through his success as an artist as it did through his considerable ability as a scholar and teacher. Russell firmly believed in the need for artists in the University, and our awareness of the absence created by his death offers proof of the validity of his conviction.

Russell is survived by his wife Marilyn, two children, and two grandchildren.

Wendell Cole, Chair  
Michael F. Ramsaur  
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