



Matilda the Musical

With one foot in the real world and the other firmly planted in the realm of Roald Dahl and West End musicals we had a design brief to relish and an opportunity to show off all the talents of the Art, Set Decorating and Graphics departments. Matilda the Musical is a gift to any design team and we were going to make the most of it.

From the pantomime of living with the Wormwood family, to the dark corners of Crunchem Hall and the splendour of a vividly imagined circus, the Art Department have created a richly layered and detailed world seen through the eyes of Matilda.

Designed, built and filmed at the height of the Covid pandemic, the project was as challenging as it was inspiring.

All of the interiors; the lurid and whimsical Wormwood household, the spectacular Circus and the gloomy corridors of Crunchem Hall were built at Shepperton Studios, at one point encompassing seven stages, busily accomodating Art Department, Visual Effects, Special Effects, Stunts and of course Choreography, all clamouring for rehearsal space.

The layout of each and every set had been tried and tested at Alexandra Palace, plans marked out, in various brightly coloured tapes on to the huge floors of the famous old venue. Doorways and temporary walls built to indicate classrooms and corridors, every dance step calculated, each doorway, staircase, chair and window placed in time and in step to the music, so that our final set build was in sync with an army of dancing children.

An eye for detail, essential it goes without saying, not just in terms of fixing door positions to the nearest millimetre. There is thought and imagination at every turn and by every member of the creative team. From every book cover in the Mobile Library, itself built from the chassis of a 1940's truck and was indeed (only just) mobile, to the compass scratchings, graffiti and stickers on the hand built desks in the classrooms. Desks especially reinforced to withstand stomping feet.

Our principle exterior was Crunchem Hall, a school turned into and intimidating bootcamp by the cruel and bitter Agatha Trunchbull. Bramshill House in Hampshire, an ex Police training college and Jacobean Manor House, was both institutional and architecturally interesting. It would give us plenty of ideas for the interior of the school, to be built on the stage. A strong symmetry from the front facade which, when emphasised with walls, gates and the dominating statue of Trunchbull was pure theatre.

We maintained the idea of symmetrical lines throughout; the corridors and refectory, Trunchbull's office and even the pink chairs, side by side in the Wormwood's. This theatrical device suited the graphic nature of the design and emphasised the strong shapes and lines of the choreography.

So put your dancing shoes on and enjoy the show and remember, "None of you are special"



















