

Royal Opera House Workshops. 31st January 2020.

On January 31st the group visited the Bob and Tamar Manoukian Workshops in Thurrock on a guided tour. It is the scenery and costume making venue.

The site opened in 2011 after being relocated from the Olympic Park site. It had been a site earmarked for regeneration on old farm land just north of the Thames at Thurrock. It is purpose built and has a high crescent shaped roof and span to accommodate large internal lifts for scenery creation and shifting. It also has large floor areas for creation of backdrops on the floor. The roof is covered in moss over cedar panels and the external walls are cedar clad for winter and summer heat regulation. The lighting on the internal steel crescent beams is automatically regulated to provide the same level of light at all times with no shadows.

We were shown the carpentry workshop from an internal balcony. It has the floor area of the stage at the ROH in Covent Garden. All the parts are moved by internal hoists from the girders. We could see a small stage being created from wood. Then from another balcony we could see over the painting workshop where a vertical backdrop was being painted with trees. 2 large vertical backdrops were being created horizontally also. The walls of the room were hung with previously designed and painted panels which displayed the potentials for creation. The ground floor metal workshop is where they fabricate frames to create scenery supports using aluminium tubing which is much lighter than wood. All finished set parts are carefully weighed and identified on the back then put in to open crates on trailers to be transported to Covent Garden or storage in Aberdare, Wales. They are always kept together in performance sets. 2 trailers were parked outside and into these would go the packed crates moved on rollers in the building and then again on rollers in the trucks.

The costume workshop next door houses the South Essex College costume design department on the first floor. On the ground floor costumes are created for all the productions. In the foyer there were a few old, now unused costumes displaying the skills and artistry of the dress makers. One could envisage an opera singer wearing one of these creations. The costume store is kept cold to prevent moths invading. All costumes coming back from Aberdare are put through a decontamination unit to kill any insects. In the main workshop we saw dresses being made for a variety of shows. We particularly looked at a tutu made for Swan Lake with its feathers stitched over the top of the skirt. Another tutu was being made with all the stiff net. It takes the dress makers a day to make one.

I left the site with a completely new understanding of the sets and costumes that one sees at the Royal Opera House and how much time and effort goes into the creating of them.



How Things Work Group



Costumes



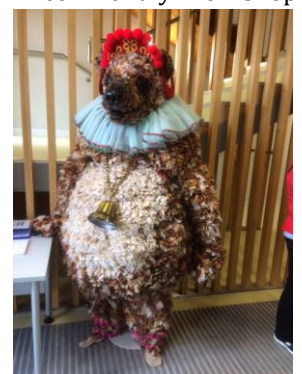
Eco Friendly Workshop



Costume



Our Group with our Tour Guide



Bear