


Playing Dress-Up

The Broadway musical *Kinky Boots* debuted in 2013, starring actor Billy Porter as Lola, a drag queen who can't seem to find shoes that work well for her act, fit, or support her weight as she performs. Enter the local shoe factory owner, Charlie, whose business is failing. The two meet, and the shoe business undergoes a radical transformation as Charlie's factory starts making shoes fit for drag queens. The show went on to win six Tony Awards in 2013, including one for best lead actor, Billy Porter.

While Porter was clearly the star of the show, the wigs and makeup that helped complete his transformation into Lola were perfected down to a science. Onstage, under hot theater lights where the temperature can be well over 100 degrees Fahrenheit (38 degrees Celsius), Lola couldn't have her face melting away. Makeup artists had to find the right products and the right application to keep the makeup in place while not ruining Billy Porter's complexion. The makeup also had to be removed and reapplied several times over the course of the show, with Lola changing in and out of her stage persona. There were also around eighty wigs worn by Lola and



Actor Billy Porter (left) underwent multiple wig and makeup changes every show.

the show's other drag queens. The wigs required so much special care that they had their own staff. The wigs had to be styled before every performance, whether this involved pinning a curl to keep it in place or diving into the fray with a hot curling iron. Because of the crew's planning and coordination, the longest transformation from Billy to Lola only took eleven minutes.

The hair and makeup that brings a character to life onstage is an essential part of an actor's costume. Makeup not only transforms a man into Rum Tum Tugger for a performance of *Cats*, it also accentuates the actors' faces so that the audience can read their expressions more clearly, even from the seat farthest from the stage. A simple victory roll can take an actress's modern hairstyle and turn her into a 1940s pinup, and a good wig can transform an actor into almost anything or anyone. All it takes is skill, time, and a lot of dedication.

Hair and Makeup and You

As a high school student, you've likely taken part in a theater performance, either onstage or behind the scenes. And if you haven't been onstage, you've definitely put on a costume at Halloween or cosplayed as your favorite character at a comics convention.

Getting into a costume, donning a wig, and putting on a swipe of black-as-night lipstick might feel totally natural to you. If so, you might enjoy working with hair and makeup as part of a theater production. You might even consider it to be a good career option for the future. If you know you love the



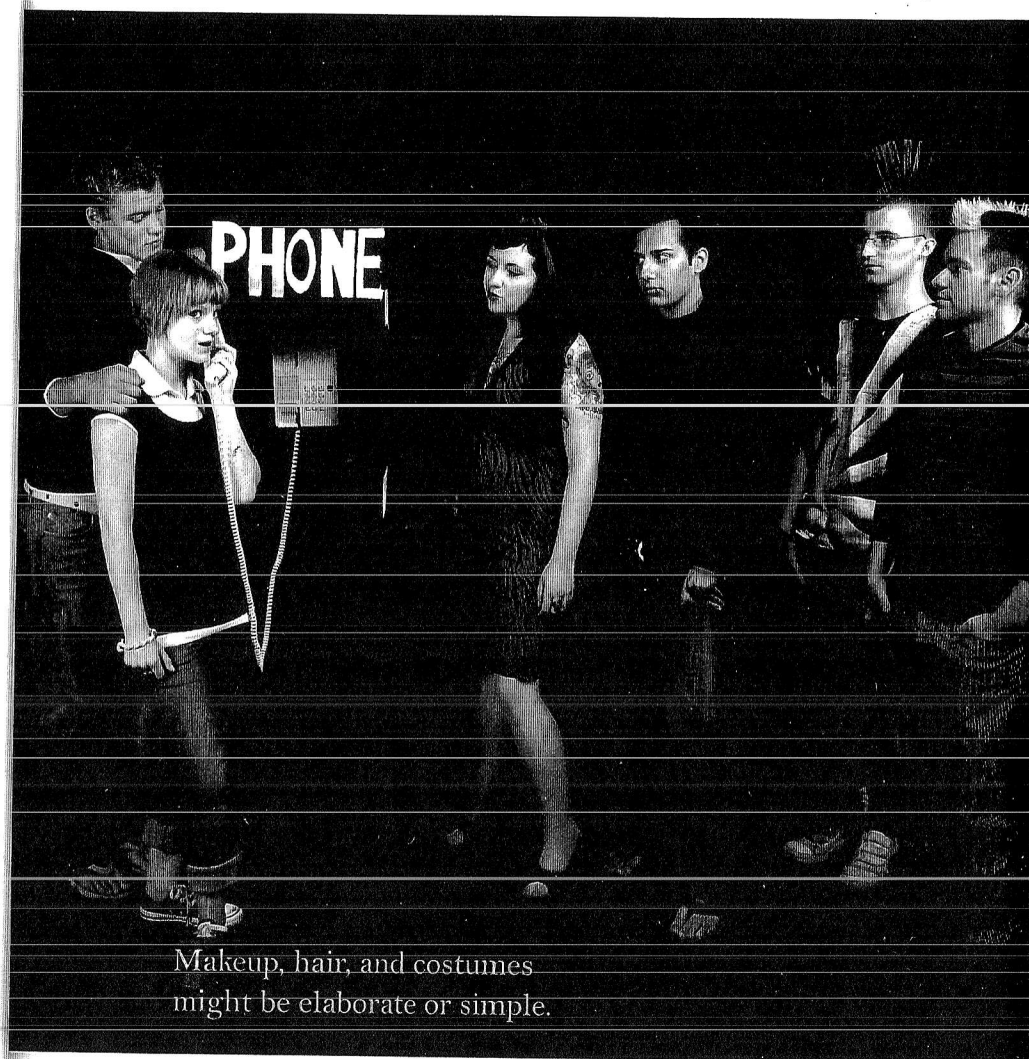
Cosplayers often use wigs and makeup to transform themselves into their favorite characters from TV, comics, video games, anime, and more.

theater, but you haven't quite found your niche, that's OK, too. There are a lot of ways to be involved with the theater. Hair and makeup is just one of them!

The good news is that the skills required for working with hair and makeup are simply an interest in hair and makeup, and some chutzpah to make your dreams come true. Anyone with the willingness and patience to learn can train to be a stylist for the stage.

When it comes to makeup, there is a lot to know beyond just application. You have to know a little bit about general skin care. If an actor has a naturally oily complexion, you might want to find a particular brand of **foundation** that won't exacerbate the problem and cause breakouts. An actor who suffers from **rosacea**, a natural redness of the skin, needs his or her makeup applied in a manner that helps cover the redness. Every actor's skin is different, and each one will have different needs. A good makeup artist will come prepared for that. Luckily, there are classes that you can take online to help get the training you need, but many makeup artists are self-taught. All of the different makeup trends and products are changing daily, so you'll want to follow popular beauty blogs and YouTube channels dedicated to all things makeup. You may even want to start a channel or blog of your own to get your name out there before you even leave high school.

As a makeup artist for the stage, you'll also need to know a little something about makeup styles throughout history and ways to imitate them using modern makeup products. You'll want to understand how makeup has changed, even over the past decade,



Makeup, hair, and costumes might be elaborate or simple.

and know how to recreate a look. Luckily, the internet is full of classic makeup looks to use as an inspiration. There are also theater history courses available at the college level that might provide some extra insight.

Creativity is an important part of being a makeup artist. A **director** for a theater production might have a particular look for the performance in mind,

MAKEUP ... ON ME?

If you're a guy, you might be thinking, "Makeup? On me? No way." Perhaps it's because makeup seems like something that's exclusively for girls. (Even if you are a girl or gender nonconforming, you might feel some trepidation about putting on makeup because it doesn't feel quite "you.") Historically, makeup has been worn by males and females. King Tutankhamun wore black kohl liner around his eyes. Englishmen of the eighteenth century were frequently found wearing makeup to whiten their skin and rouge their cheeks. Today, celebrities like Johnny Depp, Jared Leto, and Russell Brand have made wearing makeup part of their daily routine. David Bowie built his career around his makeup-wearing alter ego Ziggy Stardust. Makeup is cool, it's transformative, and it opens up the wearer for a lot of possibilities on the stage.

Thespis, an actor in ancient Greece, was one of the first men to wear makeup onstage. He wanted to

stand out from the Greek chorus. The Peking Opera has been around since the 1600s, with actors using heavy swirls of black, red, blue, and white makeup to help convey to the audience what motivates their character. Since men played all of the parts in Shakespeare's England, to prepare for female roles, the actors painted their faces pale with makeup made from powdered hogs' bones mixed with poppy oil.

If you're headed to the stage for the first time and you're nervous about wearing makeup, it's OK. There are a lot of online tutorials about how to apply stage makeup to all different types of faces. Get a friend who is a makeup expert and have him or her help you with the application. After a while, putting on makeup to prepare for a show will feel totally normal. Just be sure to wash your face well after the performance and apply some moisturizer. Heavy stage makeup has been known to cause breakouts!

and it is your role to find ways to make that look a reality, using only makeup. The look might be subtle, or it might be dramatic. It might be your job to age a character thirty years or make her look sick. Within the budget you are given, how can you find ways to achieve that particular look? Sometimes all it takes is a creative approach.

You will also need to know how to work as part of a team. You will be working alongside the director, actors, **costume designer**, set designer, and more. And you'll all be working within a limited timeline. It's important to know when to share your ideas and when to listen to other people's ideas. You may find yourself working alongside people who don't deliver

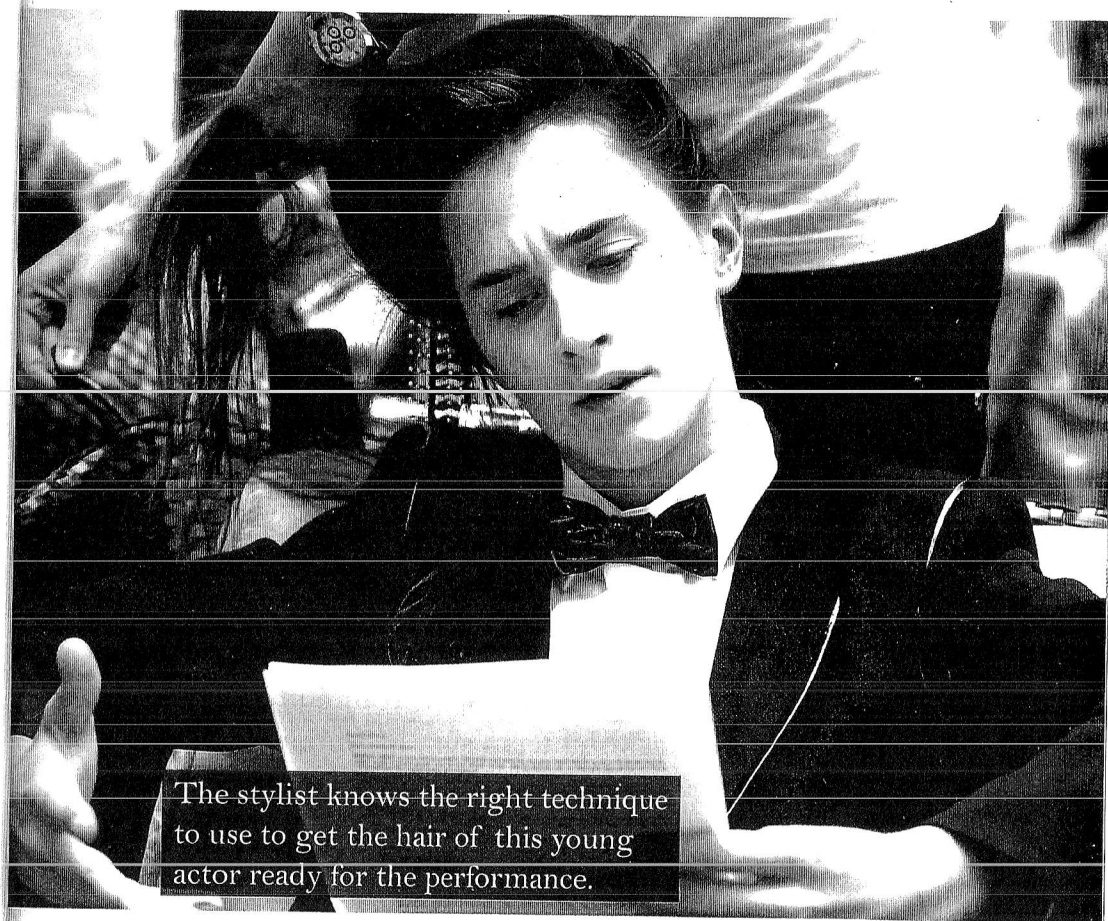
criticism constructively or who seem to change their minds daily. Learning how to deal with any number of unforeseen situations is an important skill.

Hair Know-How

When it comes to styling hair for the stage, there is a lot to know and a lot to learn for an aspiring stylist. Sometimes stylists will have the ability to work with an actor's real hair, if it can be styled appropriately or doesn't require a specific look. Sometimes a quick and simple change to an existing hairstyle can be made between acts. Other times, to achieve a specific look, a stylist might require the use of a wig or a variety of wigs. Therefore, the most important skill that an aspiring stylist can acquire is some "hair know-how."

Different types and textures of hair require different techniques. Is it easier to achieve a certain look when the hair is wet or dry, dirty or clean? Which products are best to use to keep every hair in place from the moment the actors take the stage to their final bow? Do you know your victory rolls from your French twists? These are things you learn through time, research, and practice. You can experiment with different hairstyles on your friends and family members, even on yourself. Styling a wig can be a very similar experience, without the body accompanying the hairstyle. The type of fibers used to make the wig will determine how you style, clean, and maintain a wig, so a firm knowledge of wigs is important as well.

An aspiring hair stylist will also need to be extremely organized. Most theaters will have a



The stylist knows the right technique to use to get the hair of this young actor ready for the performance.

collection of wigs that have been used in previous productions. Keeping the wigs organized so that they can be easily located and assigned to each actor is important. So is knowing when a hairstyle or wig needs to change mid-performance and finding the best way to get the job done seamlessly.

As with the skills required for an aspiring makeup artist, a hair stylist will need to be able to work well with others and be prepared to work within a specific deadline and budget.

Getting Involved

One of the best ways to gain some experience and extra skill, whether you are interested in hair, makeup, or both, is to jump right in and volunteer to work on a theater production. Your school might have a **drama club**, so get involved with that if you can. If there isn't a drama club, check into starting one. Pass around a sign-up sheet to gauge the interest of other students, post flyers, talk to your English or music teacher to see if they would be willing to be your faculty sponsor, or start a group on **social media** to talk about your plan with your fellow students. You'll be surprised how many other students will want to join.

There might also be a local community theater near you in need of volunteers. Some community theaters will even let volunteers sign up online. Don't lose heart if they don't specifically need volunteers to help with hair and makeup. Building sets, making costumes, or even passing out **playbills** is a great way to just get backstage and learn the process of staging a performance. You never know what you might learn. And if you can show yourself to be a capable volunteer for one production, you'll definitely be invited back for the next production.

If a theater doesn't exist in your area, then it might be up to you to find a way to showcase your talents. Make a movie or web series with a group of friends and a video camera. Check with your local department of parks and recreation to find out about potential venues that might be available for

free or for a small fee and might be open to a group of young performers to stage a production. (They might require that you apply for a permit, so keep that in mind.)

There are other ways to gain experience with makeup. Department stores need people who understand makeup and can apply it to customers to sell products. Fashion shows also need people skilled with makeup. Hair salons can provide training in styling and dealing with different types of hair. You might have to get a little bit creative to make your theater dreams a reality, but it will be worth it.