

Careers in the Arts

Theater Set Design

Beowulf Borritt

Beowulf Borritt is a Tony-award nominated set designer. His sets have been featured in shows throughout the country.



What is a day in the life of a set designer like?

I don't have an average day. I work out of a studio in my home, unless I am at a theatre doing technical rehearsals for a show. So, every day is a little different. Some days I'm home drawing, or building a model of a set. Some days I'm in rehearsals for a show in NY, and some days I'm travelling to another city or country to do a set for a show there.

What prepared you for a career in set design?

I always liked drawing and theatre, and that's what got me started as a set designer. I interned at a summer theatre when I was in high school and I loved it, so I majored in theatre in college, and then went to graduate school in New York to study set design specifically.

What advice do you have for students?

Theatre is a fun career, it's always different, and it allows a lot of creativity. However, it's very competitive, and luck is more important than talent, unfortunately, in determining success. It's also a lot of work. I work an average of 60 to 80 hours a week, so it's more hours than a lot of professions.

Can you describe a time when you had to collaborate with someone else to execute the vision of the production?

For the [Tony-winning Broadway show] *Scottsboro Boys*, the director wanted to make the set just be a circle of chairs which could be stacked up to create a sort of jungle gym which could be lots of different things- a train, a jail cell, a bus, and many other things. It was very challenging, and very exciting to work out the design.

What special considerations do you have to keep in mind knowing that the actors will be interacting with the world you create?

Ideally the set serves to allow the actors to tell the story of the play. It can't overpower them, and it can't make it impossible for them to move around. If it's a show with dancing, the floor must be large enough, and smooth enough to allow dancing. It can't be heavy or ungainly so that they can't function on it.

Interview conducted in 2014.