

Front Row Seat

PERFORMING ARTS

Rock of Ages gets sparkle from music—and its savvy costumer

By Maribel Howard Hultman
maribel.hultman@naplespress.com

When you see the violet hair, the rhinestones and the flowing dress, you know TheatreZone's *Rock of Ages* is going to be one colorful musical.

And you haven't even seen the costumes yet.

Kathleen Kolacz, wardrobe mistress for TheatreZone, is an admitted devotee of creative dress. By the time she was in high school, Kolacz could sew up a new outfit a day. During her college years she worked helping to costume Michigan Opera. She opened a bridal-plus custom dress shop, in which she and a friend designed every garment—and it's still operating.

"I was design and build. We didn't have any ready-made," she said.

Kolacz isn't with the shop now. In a 180-degree turn, she decided to get a law degree, after studying political science and history in college, with a minor in French. Of course.

Today she's a trademark attorney.

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—Kathleen Kolacz, wardrobe mistress for TheatreZone

for the federal government by day, pursuing her other passion in the evening as wardrobe mistress for TheatreZone.

Everyone knows the '80s

Despite the general appeal of creating the look of 1980s hair bands, Kolacz said this one has to be designed with close attention to authenticity.

"Sometimes you do shows, and people don't know. They aren't familiar with the 'Thirties necessarily," she said of musicals including *Of Thee I Sing*, a past production there. People generally only have a concept of the period's silhouettes,

such as the long slender chemise look of the early 1930s.

"But this one, I'd say a lot of people have memories of the Eighties. I'm trying to get it so people go, yeah, yeah, yeah—that's what I remember. That's what I know."

Rock of Ages, an unapologetic juke box musical, is brimming with such '80s hits as "Can't Fight This Feeling," "Hit Me With Your Best Shot," "I Hate Myself for Loving You" and "Oh Sherrif." Many Neapolitans, who skew toward the baby boom and melting Gen X era, will remember them.

They'll also remember the big hair and mullets. Shine was a dai-

ly imperative and workout wear in colors a peacock would envy was de rigueur.

Kolacz, too, remembers the era. She had adopted goth fashion, the genre with raccoon eyes and studded black clothing, in high school.

"I have my memories of the Eighties, mostly terrifying my mother," she recalled, laughing.

She also didn't impress the high school drama department, whom she said didn't take her offer to help make costumes seriously. So Kolacz bypassed the theater at University of Michigan and went straight to Michigan Opera, who responded to her phone call.

"They thought I was some bored-at-home housewife. And then I showed up, and they said, 'Wait a second. You're 18!'"

But they took Kolacz up on her offer, and she has worked with them since. She also does occasional costuming for Opera Pacific. Kolacz has handled every show for TheatreZone since its founding; she had known its artistic and associate artistic directors, Mark Danni and Karen Molnar-Danni, when all of them worked for The Naples Players.

Fortunately for this show, a few characteristics of the 1980s are back in demand.

"You can buy things that are from the Eighties or look like the Eighties," she observed. The demands go further than that, however: Side characters come from various occupations, and this particular day Kolacz was inspecting several colors of mountaineer hats suitable for the wannabe German chocolatier in the musical.

The feet fest

The exception to findability is shoes. The platform soles, the lace-to-the-knee boots, are gone.

"Shoes are just a challenge in general—shoes that people feel comfortable in, that work," Kolacz said. "There's a lot of dancing and we have very short rehearsal time. We have six days. The shoes have to be right."

Some of the dances demand what's called character shoes, the Mary Jane style with modified high heels for the women. But for some of the simpler dances, the shoes will fit the era.

Everything in a musical requires close attention, and occasional alterations, during rehearsals, she said. When skirts or jackets flip during a dance, they can blind a partner who is expected to catch and carry another dancer. Breakaway clothes, shirts and skirts that rip off effortlessly, pose their own dilemma: "Velcro makes noise. Magnets don't work as smoothly."

The fabrics, too, are important: "If they're getting picked up, it can't be too slippery. They're going to sweat."

Her work isn't even finished on opening night: Costumes are washed each weekend. "I can be doing nine loads of wash," Kolacz said with a sigh.

Her chief concern last week, however, was whether to choose gold cube-print pants or silver ones for an actor. Kolacz felt confident that *Rock of Ages* costumes would match the beloved '80s music in glitz. It won't come close to the complexities of the toughest she's done: *Little Women* and *Sweeney Todd*.

"When they did *Little Women*, I was finishing Donna's dress for the end of intermission."



Costume designer Kathleen Kolacz helps the actors try on costumes for a production of *School of Rock* by TheatreZone at the Community School of Naples. Photos by Dariusz K. Silva

