

Costuming for Movies
Jodi Baldwin, Costume Supervisor, IATSE
April 8, 2020

Summary by Christina Adamo

Behind every film, every TV show, and theater performance are people dedicated to the creation and execution of costuming. Jodi Baldwin is one of these people, a lifelong lover of historic costume, and a seasoned member of the industry. From a young age, she knew she wanted to work on costumes for movies, but was unsure of how to break into the field. She started her journey at the University of Rhode Island, where she studied historic fashion and worked with the theater department on various productions. In her freshman year, she participated in a period film set in the 1970s. In the theater department, she designed and made costumes for “The Crucible”. Baldwin particularly liked the preciseness and accuracy of period dress in film, and favored this to theater. And so, after graduating, she set her sights on the film industry.

After graduation, she heard about the filming of *Mona Lisa Smile* nearby, and drove until she found the armory where the movie was being shot. She was able to work on the film, which was set in the 1950s, much to her delight as a lover of historic costume. This was the job that helped her enter the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, Moving Picture Technicians, Artists and Allied Crafts of the United States (IATSE) union. The movie industry works slowly, but Baldwin was able to build her resume with time by working on independent films and TV.

A film or television project typically lasts from two to ten months, and there are many different types of costuming jobs for each one. The head of the department is the Costume Designer, or the one who picks and designs the costumes. Next in line is the Assistant Designer, who conducts research and communicates with the director and producer for what is needed for the vision. The Designer and Assistant Designers do not make choices in regards to what is worn, and ultimately they listen to the direction of the director and producers. There are also shoppers, who find purchased ready-made pieces to buy, and tailors, who make pieces to order. Outside of the design process, there is the Wardrobe Supervisor, the job that Baldwin takes up most often. This is the person who is the manager of the department; she/he organizes the team and makes schedules so the filming process stays flowing. Costumers are hired by the Wardrobe Supervisor, and they are the ones dealing with the actors on set. They make sure continuity is correct and make last minute fixes to costumes before a scene is shot. The number of costumers depends on the size of the production, but usually they are the largest number of workers.

Baldwin emphasized the importance of joining a union like IATSE to be able to find work in film and television. This process begins with working as a Production Assistant for a number of projects so relationships can be formed with supervisors who can sponsor a position in the union. Once in the union, the real work can begin, and higher positions can be earned with time. Ultimately, Baldwin stressed that working in film and television can be very rewarding, and a great way to work on a number of vastly different projects.