

A Grand Opportunity

By Kaitlyn Lonnee



My meeting with Natalie Tsang (Props Buyer/Builder) and Natalie Kearns (Head of Props) in Victoria Park, one of only a few in-person interviews.

This past year has been... *difficult* (the understatement of the century, I know). I can say with certainty that I'm not where I expected to find myself come spring 2021—I don't think anyone really is. However, as I wrap up my fourth year at Western University and bid a fond farewell to my wonderful SASAH cohort, I find myself looking back on the year as a whole, not just the anxious, terrifying parts that I'd much rather forget. As clichéd as it sounds, in every cloud there is a silver lining, and I can honestly say that I've really come into my own over the past twelve months. I have a lot of things to credit for that, not the least of which is the continued support of my family, friends, and professors as I venture further into young adulthood. But professionally, one of the most impactful experiences on me this past year has been my internship at London's Grand Theatre.

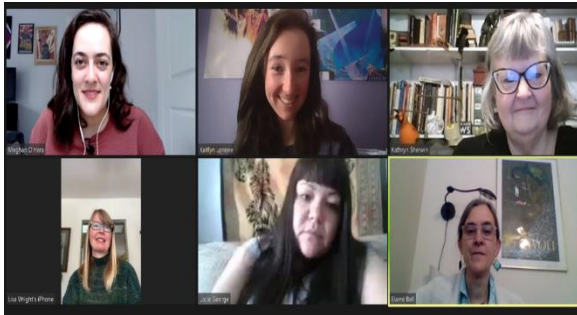
It was the fall of 2019, the first semester of the third year of my Honours Specialization in Creative Writing and English Language and Literature, and I had been kicking around for an experiential opportunity for

several months without any luck. Most internship placements and co-ops I had previously seen advertised from Western didn't necessarily have anything to do with my degree, my interests, or my ideas for a future career: editing and/or publishing. I wasn't really interested in marketing or public relations in the communications sector, and I dreaded the thought of being a stereotypical intern in an office fetching coffee and stapling papers together.

However, that December, SASAH sent out a call for applicants that caught my eye—the Grand Theatre here in London was hiring students to help document its upcoming historic multimillion-dollar renovation and modernization. I immediately knew that this was the sort of thing I had been searching for. As a native Londoner, I had always been deeply curious about the Grand, ever since my parents first took me to a show there. The thought of all the moving parts behind the scenes that I would never know about was fascinating and yet frustrating, as I never thought I would have the chance to see beyond the stage since I wasn't much of a theatre kid. This internship was my chance to see what made the theatre tick while, at the same time, gain valuable work experience in a field that was along the lines of what I was interested in—I couldn't have asked for a better opportunity. Excited and eager, I applied and, eventually, with great delight, was fortunate enough to be offered a position as a student intern.

Of course, when the pandemic arrived in Canada, everything ground to a halt. The Grand closed its doors, and at the time of my

writing this, they've been shut for over thirteen months now. The arts industry has suffered a devastating blow from which it will require years to recover. But arts people are resilient—strong, inventive, creative, and so, so passionate—and after this year, after finding a way to continue my internship and interviewing over a dozen Grand staff members who have demonstrated that resiliency time and again, I can definitely say that I've never been more proud to be part of the arts and humanities community.



My meeting with my supervisor (Meghan O'Hara, Education Coordinator) and the wardrobe team (Lisa Wright, Head of Wardrobe; Elaine Ball, Assistant Head of Wardrobe and Accessories Builder; Kathryn Sherwin, Wardrobe Cutter; and Lacie George, Sewer) over Zoom.

During my internship at the Grand, I have learned organization secrets, been regaled with tales of ghostly encounters, laughed at behind-the-scenes mishaps, gotten teary-eyed at heartwarming stories, discussed the importance of equity and anti-racism in theatre, forged bonds with a variety of amazing people, heard a lot more about plumbing than I ever thought I would, and just thoroughly enjoyed myself. I have been provided with various opportunities through my work to improve on my “soft” skills, such as active listening, critical thinking, interpersonal connectivity, and organization—you know, the things career advisors are always talking about. Though every occupation demands some of these “soft” qualities, in the arts and humanities fields

particularly, these skillsets are essential to success, and my time at the Grand has proved to be abundant with occasions for me to use and develop abilities that I know will continue to benefit me well into my future.

That said, my biggest takeaway from this internship—and the reason why I would recommend everyone participate in some sort of an internship, co-op placement, CEL project, or experiential-learning opportunity before they leave university—has been an increased and more realistic sense of confidence and a better and more compassionate understanding of myself and my capabilities. We don't give ourselves nearly enough credit for all that we do and accomplish, nor are we gentle with ourselves when we reach the limits of what we are capable of. We heap responsibilities onto our plates until they're much too heavy to carry and beat ourselves up about being unable to shoulder the weight—at least, I know I do. But this internship managed to show me how big my plate was and made me feel rewarded without needing to go unhealthily above and beyond, a place with which I'm sure many perfectionists are familiar.

In short, I've come out of this placement knowing myself better, and I can't say enough good things about my internship with the Grand and the incredible people I met and worked with. The experience has taught me that good things come to those who persist, and for all of us continuing to live and thrive and create in these difficult times, good things will come again—I promise.