

SHOWCASE

ON THE PROWL FOR

Crown jewels, corgis and two very regal chairs — one theater prop designer's shopping list as Drury Lane stages British royalty play 'The Audience'

BY STEFANO ESPOSITO,
STAFF REPORTER

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Cassy Schillo will beg — not steal, of course — or borrow to get what she must have.

She's also not above a little innocent deception if her haggling falls short because she unintentionally irked the seller.

"If that is the perfect piece — and I need that piece — then I will have my fiancé or assistant reach out as a completely separate [person] and offer the asking price," says Schillo. "They're getting their money and I'm not trying to offend anyone."

The "perfect piece" could be anything from a 1950s Polaroid camera to a box of fake cigarette lighters to a full-size replica Egyptian sarcophagus.

Such is the unique and exacting work of a theater props designer.

Schillo, who works for Drury Lane Theatre in Oakbrook Terrace, describes herself as part detective, mechanic, artist and, yes, artful haggler.

A perfectionist, too.

"If something is inaccurate, I couldn't even imagine being more embarrassed," she said.

Like many props artists, Schillo often begins her hunt in a warehouse. Little about Drury Lane's drab brick building in Villa Park hints at what's inside — except perhaps the faux Venus de Milo statue or the pair of female manikins spray painted gold that can be seen through dusty windows.

On a muggy day in early July, Schillo was on a royal scavenger hunt. She was trying to flesh out the setting for "The Audience," a play that opens Aug. 28 at Drury Lane and tells the story of Queen Elizabeth II and the private meetings she held with her prime ministers at Buckingham Palace and Balmoral Castle, the royal family's Scottish home.



PATNAONG/SUNTIMES PHOTOS

Cassy Schillo, who is in charge of props for Drury Lane Theatre productions, searches the theater's warehouse for objects she can use in the production of "The Audience."

"I feel like I'm living and breathing Queen Elizabeth right now," Schillo said.

Peter Morgan, the playwright, also created the wildly popular TV series "The Crown."

Schillo's task feels Herculean. The script calls for, among many other things, two early 18th century chairs, each with an oval back and upholstered in yellow Dupioni silk. Some of the items in the rooms get updated during the show because the play takes place over a span of several decades. And one more wrinkle: Many in the audience will have watched "The Crown" and already know the exact rooms Schillo is trying to recre-



You never know quite what you'll find in the props warehouse in Villa Park, says Schillo.

ate. So they have expectations.

"You want to scratch that itch for the audience," Schillo says.

A thin layer of sawdust covers almost everything inside the cavernous warehouse. There are dummies in suits dangling from a second-floor balcony, a huge net filled with dozens of faux pumpkins — but no suitable chairs.

Schillo will also scour the internet for deals (she has a total budget of about \$8,000 for this show). For another show, Schillo needed a 1960s manual vacuum. She found one online and called the seller. Schillo explained that she was a props designer. The seller immediately upped the price.

PROPS



Aisles of props and costumes await Cassy Schillo inside Drury Lane's warehouse.

"You can't get this little vacuum unless you give me another \$50 because I need new back teeth," the woman told Schillo.

Schillo needed the vacuum. So she paid up.

Sometimes, a theater will acquire a family heirloom.

'THE AUDIENCE'

When: Aug. 28-Oct. 20

Where: Drury Lane Theatre, 100 Drury Lane, Oakbrook Terrace.

Tickets: \$52.95-\$105.45

Info: drurylanetheatre.com

Sally Zack, the props designer at Marriott Theatre in Lincolnshire, found a hand-carved rocking chair for a recent production of "The Music Man." The seller told Zack it had belonged to her grandmother. As is her way, Zack didn't want to pry about why it was being sold. But she wanted the chair.

"This was three generations in a family ... and now it's going to be part of our show," Zack remembered telling the cast of "The Music Man." "It's going to live in our stock forever."

Antique shops are also on Schillo's list. In mid-July, she was still on the lookout for the chairs, as well as some tchotchkes of the Queen's beloved corgis.

Plenty of other dog breeds — and cats with demon eyes — but no corgis inside Broadway Antique

Market's labyrinthine, two-story shop on the North Side.

"That's fantastic! That's fantastic, too!" she says, peering into a glass cabinet at two Parker fountain pens that just might, she says, work for the show. The tiniest details matter. Even if no one in the audience can actually see the item.

Finally, on the second floor, she spies a pair of chairs in the shape and style she needs. But, oh, the color, which Schillo describes as "molten olive."

"It's heinously vinyl," she says. "That's the closest we've come. I'll take a picture, but I really don't want to. I hope I come across something else."

The trip isn't a total loss. She finds three tiny trinket boxes, one of which will serve as the buzzer the Queen used to summon the help.

No need to panic yet. Rehearsals don't start for another month.

What, you wonder, will Schillo do for perhaps the best-known, most gaudy piece of royal paraphernalia: the crown?

She's already got that one figured out. The basic shape will come to life on a 3-D printer. Then it's a matter of gluing on hundreds of faux jewels, both individually and in strips.

"I think I'll be spending the rest of my life bedazzling every inch of that plastic crown with rhinestones," she jokes.



CeeLo Green is set to headline Taste of Chicago in September. DEREK WHITE/GETTY IMAGES

CeeLo Green, Yahritza y Su Esencia, Atlas Genius to headline Taste of Chicago

**BY MIRIAM DI NUNZIO,
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Grammy winner CeeLo Green, regional Mexican music stars Yahritza y Su Esencia and Australian alt rockers Atlas Genius are the headliners set for Taste of Chicago.

The full lineup of music and food vendors for the festival, running Sept. 6-8 in Grant Park, was announced Friday by the city's Department of Cultural Affairs

and Special Events (DCASE). Other artists across the three-day festival include queer Palestinian American singer-songwriter Amira Jazeera, singer-songwriter-producer Asha Imuno, EDM/reggaeton star MJ Nebreda and Chicago singer-songwriter Gabacho.

In addition, 40 food vendors and an additional complement of food trucks will provide the feasting for the event, which also features plenty of family fun.

Ahead of the lakefront event,

two more neighborhood "mini-Tastes" will be held — in Marquette Park (6743 S. Kedzie Ave.) from noon-9 p.m. Saturday, and from noon-8 p.m. Aug. 17 at Pullman Park (11101 S. Cottage Grove Ave.). These events will feature an assortment of food vendors/food trucks, music, Chicago Summer-Dance lessons and a kids' area.

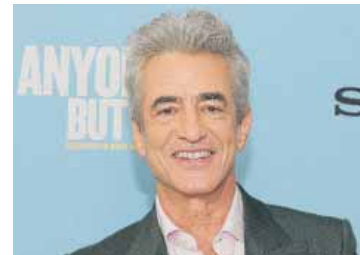
The complete music and restaurant lineup and full details about Taste can be found at TasteofChicago.us.

Dermot Mulroney to play chief on 'Chicago Fire'

**BY MIRIAM DI NUNZIO
AND DAREL JEVENS**
Staff Reporters

There's a new chief in town. Dermot Mulroney is heading to Chicago — "Chicago Fire" — having just been cast as the new chief on the hit NBC series, the network said Thursday.

Mulroney will portray Chief Dom Pascal as the show kicks off its 13th season this fall. Mulroney's character replaces the beloved Battalion Chief Wallace Boden, portrayed by Eamonn Walker for 12 seasons. Last season Boden was promoted to deputy commissioner



Dermot Mulroney will play Chief Dom Pascal on Season 13 of "Chicago Fire."
GETTY IMAGES

of the Chicago Fire Department and Walker left the series.

The job brings Mulroney, a

Virginia native and Northwestern grad, back to Chicago, where he co-starred in the hit rom-com "My Best Friend's Wedding" (1997) and the short-lived NBC series "Crisis." His other film credits include "Angels in the Outfield" (1994), "About Schmidt" (2002), "August: Osage County" (2013) and last year's rom-com hit "Anyone But You."

He also got a taste of working on a firefighting show with a recurring role on Season 2 of ABC's "Station 19."

"Chicago Fire" begins its new season Sept. 25.