

## Douglas A. Russell (1927-1991)

In a bad year for the arts, as giants like Martha Graham leave the scene, we run the risk of underestimating more surprising losses. When Douglas Russell, Professor of Drama at Stanford University, suffered a fatal heart attack on 4 March 1991, he was just finishing his sixth book, a general study of period style in western culture that continues his long project in artistic styles and the iconography of costume. There were other books in process, too, one about Lee Simonson, one on period movement, and a reference work on Shakespearean costume design that will be sorely missed.

Getting from theory to practice (and back again) still represents a kind of ideal to most drama schools, with faculties who routinely wish they had more time for study, or more experience in the profession. Doug Russell had the kind of career that makes the dream of a scholar/artist seem possible. A designer of enormous enthusiasm, he practiced his art at many of our best theatres, including the Oregon Shakespeare Festival (where he designed and supervised more than 60 different productions, mostly from 1948-1961), and the American Conservatory Theater (where he also lectured since 1973). Though he could design almost anywhere, it was the work itself that seemed to interest him the most. I remember vividly how his lively designs and emotional support were vital to a 1984 musical production of Stoppard's *On the Razzle*, at Palo Alto's semi-professional Theatreworks; when it won a Bay Area theatre award later that year, everyone seemed surprised but Doug, who knew it was good work, worth doing, all along.

It was Doug's example of artful design and careful historical scholarship that helped to make the Stanford PhD in Scenography and Theatre History seem plausible, too, despite a market that rests content with the MFA. His books attempt the sort of comprehension that seems impossible to most of us in a new "period style" of skepticism and indeterminacy, yet they are also the books that theoretically adventurous scholars tend to go back to, after their imaginative work, to find out whether they might have embarrassed themselves by getting their facts crossed up. Especially in the many works on historical styles, such as *Period Style for the Theater*, *Theatrical Style*, *Costume History and Style*, and the long section on styles in *Stage Costume Design*, Doug Russell combined a strong knowledge of historical materials, a keen appreciation of art historical style and a rigorous understanding of the potential complexity of theatre production, writing-accessible, intelligent guides to understanding that will continue to shape his field for years to come.

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