

Virtual Soapbox



Theater, Bloody Theater!

Gail Wolfenden-Steib*

If your theatrical costuming plans include gaping wounds and buckets of blood, this advice from a professional theatrical costumer is for you!

Here are some things to consider when applying theatrical blood (temporary) or painted blood (permanent).

Fabric content of the garment

Man made vs. natural fibers effects how liquids spread/seep. Natural fibers work



the best if a good spread or seepage is desired. Man made fibers tend to hold the blood in one place.

Think of what happens when a paper towel is placed on a

spill—this is akin to painted blood with a low viscosity or theatrical blood on a natural fiber.

Weave of fabric

Brocades and textured or napped fabric have less of a seepage pattern. Wounds tend to stay localized.



Conversely, an interesting pattern may result when blood is applied to a textured fabric. A plain

weave will show the blood spread better than a fancy one.

Care and feeding of finished garment

Is it a skin? If the garment is next to the body it will need to be laundered during the run of the show.

Painted blood works well in this sort of situation. It is necessary to heat set all applied blood to prevent it from discharging into the garment during cleaning. Theatrical blood releases best from man made fibers.

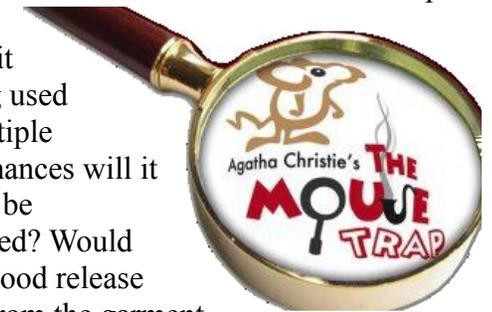


Will multiple garments be needed? In the case of long runs or an item that might not survive multiple launderings it is necessary to create multiple garments. If it is not possible to heat set the painted blood or the theatrical blood will not release during the cleaning process then this is the best alternative.

Will it ever be laundered? If an item will never be laundered it is possible to omit the heat setting of the paints. You do want to launder any item treated with theatrical blood as it is very sticky and will transfer to other items easily while wet.

Length of run

Is this for a one shot wonder performance or will it be used for a multiple week run? If it is being used for multiple performances will it need to be laundered? Would stage blood release easily from the garment being treated or will it permanently stain the garment in an unacceptable manner? Will theatrical blood get onto other actors' costumes? Assess the action happening on stage and address the situation, then select the type of blood best suited.



Lighting

Will the costume be seen in bright daylight or moody shadows? This will affect the color of the blood selected and the application. Bright daylight will require more realism (to a degree if this is the look the painter is trying to achieve).



Dark shadows will hide more of the work but might also require a heavier hand to be seen.

Anatomy of a Wound

Know your wound. Logic is important for a realistic wound—research is the key

- Where is it on the body? How will this affect the spread of the blood? What is the actor required to do while wounded? Think about these questions when researching the injury.



- How did the wound happen and who/what inflicted it? This is key in creating a realistic wound. A sharp knife creates different damage than an axe or whip.



- How fresh is the injury? Gloss medium is used to create shiny wet blood. This medium cannot be heat set. It will not retain the gloss effect after heat setting. It is not suitable for an item that will be laundered.



- Matte blood--Is the wound venous or arterial in nature? This will dictate color to a degree. Venous is 'blue red' due to oxygen depletion and arterial is a 'yellow red' because it is rich in oxygen. 'Brown red' is great for older wounds that have begun to oxidize or dry out.



- Is it a mortal wound or just a 'flesh wound'? How much blood is seen is important. A hang nail is not the gusher one sees with a slit throat. Too little or too much blood can ruin the effect.



Summary

Many factors effect the kind of blood you use and how you apply it, including the type and weave of the fabric, and the durability required for the length of the run. Lighting also plays a factor for the blood to read well from the audience. You also need to take the type of wound, how it is inflicted, its freshness, and the severity of the wound into account. By paying attention to these basic elements, you can create realistic wounds and blood effects for your next production.

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