

Feature



Basic Black: Maleficent Rae Bradbury-Enslin

The ring-leader of the “Basic Black” masquerade entry at Costume-Con 31 talks about the idea behind the entry and her take on “Maleficent” from Disney’s “Sleeping Beauty” animated feature.

The idea to do “Basic Black” occurred to me when Disney’s *Aladdin* hit theaters. I loved the notion of finding out what some of the most evil villains from the classic Disney movies might do if they wanted to dress it down a bit. You know, if they went clubbing or something.

The twenty years that passed before we actually accomplished the idea was simply the amount of time it took for me to meet: a) someone who could do justice to the role of “Jafar” in drag, and b) was willing to be seen in public that way. It was just one of those ideas that stayed in the back of my head until the right group of people came along. Once we had the people, the presentation came into existence fairly quickly.

Originally the concept included “Cruella de Vil,” but it was decided that her costume wasn’t the same iconic black dress base as all the others. We opted to go with the “Evil Queen” from *Snow White*, “Ursula” from *The*

Little Mermaid, “Maleficent” from *Sleeping Beauty*, and “Jafar” from *Aladdin*. (It did not escape my notice that in the years between concept and execution, *Hercules* was released with another black dress-wearing villain, but putting “Hades” in drag as well as “Jafar” seemed like overkill.)

In the presentation, the three women are on stage as the lights go up, and the song “[Little Black Dress](#),” from the 1981 musical *Shock Treatment* starts playing. In the skit, first the “Evil Queen”, and then the other two of us sexily strip off our outer robes to reveal scantier “little black dresses” just as “Jafar” enters. He scolds us, but then one of us pulls off his robe to reveal a corset, short black skirt, fishnets and high heels. He tries to cover himself in embarrassment as the three of us exit.

We all had to imagine how our characters would dress under their various robes, and designing the dresses was a large part of the fun. Although we used the song “Little Black Dress,” we felt it would be boring to go all black, so each of us tried to bring in accent colors from our character’s outfit.



Reagan McHugh as the “Evil Queen,” William Kennedy as “Jafar,” Lisa Ashton as “Ursula,” Rae Bradbury-Enslin as “Maleficent.” Photo: Don Searle.

I ended up taking the role of “Maleficent.” She was the character who interested me the most and best matched my height and body type. Here are descriptions of the various parts of my costume.

Body suit.

I decided that I wasn’t up to the challenge of doing full body makeup for her minty complexion. Instead I made a lycra bodysuit that mimicked her skin tone. I wore black gloves, leaving only my face in need of green makeup. I managed to find a bodysuit pattern online, I think. It wasn’t very good, so I had to make several alterations.

I have a wonderful sewing machine with a kick-ass stretch stitch, and that’s what I always use for stretch fabrics. I’m not sure how the body suit ended up fitting so well. It may have just been really nice lycra to work with. I’ve done a suit since that one that I don’t think fit as well, but the fabric was different. I have a fair amount of experience working with lycra. When I first started costuming I did a lot of comic book super heroine costumes, and I was comfortable working with stretch fabrics long before I heard they were terrible to work with.



One of my favorite patterns was from a commercial suit that I carefully cut along the seams, used as a pattern, and then sewed back together. I still have that pattern, although it no longer fits me as well as it did when I was nineteen. I still have it mainly because I eventually want to resize it. It was a great pattern because it had a single back seam and a seam along the

inside of the legs. No side seams anywhere means it works better if you’re trying to make it look like skin.

Mini-skirt and corset.

I opted for a lavender and fuchsia mini-skirt combined with a black leather corset and neck corset. I don’t actually suspect that “Maleficent” wore a pink tutu under her robes, but for me it was more about making it as funny as possible. The costume doesn’t make a lot of sense to people who didn’t see the presentation, so I’ve also made a slinkier black dress (left) that gives me an excuse to wear the costume to other conventions.



My corsets were made from a nice quality garment leather with rhinestone trim that carried the white lines from the animated Maleficent’s headpiece down into the under-costume.

Outer robe.

Since the outer robe was just going to end up in a pile on the floor, I opted for a simple black satin cape. It was cost-effective, slipped easily off my shoulders and gave the proper flat look for a cartoon character. The lining was lavender satin, with four or five yards of each color.

I didn’t use a pattern. In fact, I simplified the design significantly, because I knew it was meant to be removed and discarded. I removed some details at the neckline for fear of them catching on other parts of my costume. After that it was a pretty simple shape, so it was just draped. The collar is stiffened with plastic boning, and there are a few snaps that hold it closed down the front. If I were going to do a full recreation, I would have put a lot more time into the shape and details of the cloak.

Body suit, mini-skirt and corset. (far left) Outer robe (right). Photos: Don Searle. Alternate slinky black dress for other conventions. (center) Photo: Author.

I sewed the outer cape and lining right-sides together and then turned the entire thing right-side out. The trickiest part was getting all the dags at the edges to turn. To do that, I trimmed the edges really tightly after sewing. After turning the cape right-side out, I poked and stabbed the corners of the dags with sharp pointy things until I was happy with them.

“Maleficent” had a few flashes of fuchsia in her cape, so I just cut slashes in the cape out in those spots and just tacked it in. Again, if I were going for a full recreation, I would have done it very differently. It’s the only area that I wasn’t really happy with.

Headdress. The headdress was a black lycra skull cap with foam horns, and a neck corset. For the cap I just traced around a styrofoam head. It’s two pieces and there’s a seam that runs from the middle of my forehead to the back of my neck. (Technically the lycra does go down over my neck, but the neck corset covers it.) The neck corset is from a pattern that I found online and absolutely love. It’s made of the same leather as the body corset.

I didn’t do a muslin for the skull cap. When I’m working in stretch fabrics, a muslin doesn’t really help because you can’t stretch it to fit the same way. I had also done numerous skull caps before, so I knew it would fit. It just needed minor tweaking for the widow’s peak shape.

If I’m doing a piece in lycra that I’m not familiar with, I will often get cheap lycra to do

Headdress with foam horns wrapped in spirals of thread, with beads and rhinestones. (left) Interior of horn shows cavity in foam that will be stuffed with paper towel to fill out the shape. (top right)

a test fit. More often than not, though, if I make it a little large and then pin it on my body to fit better, I’m usually pretty safe. Lycra is very forgiving as long as you don’t make it too small to begin with. Unlike most costumers, I really love working with it.

I made horns by rolling 1/2” foam into cones, hot gluing them at the seams, then shaping them with an interior wire to achieve the curve of Maleficent’s horns. I usually use whatever wire is on hand, which means that my supply of wire coat hangers is dwindling. The wire is hot glued along the inside edge of the horn. It doesn’t come down to the bottom edge of the horn, so it doesn’t scrape my head. It was only necessary to shape the top parts of the curves.

The horns were then spray-painted black, inserted into the headpiece to come out holes in the skullcap, and sewn in place. I wrapped each horn in spirals of thread, to give them a ram’s horn look, and then covered the threads with strands of sparkly bugle beads. Individually glued rhinestones filled in the remaining lines. I wanted just a bit of glitz without making the whole costume too ornate, since “Jafar’s” reveal was to be the truly sparkly part of the presentation.



Makeup. I’m a Mehron girl. 90% of my stage makeup comes from their product line. I use green and white cream sticks, which I just blend on my face until it matches the bodysuit. I use the straight green to shade my cheekbones and the sides of my nose, and black for the eyebrows, which are applied using a brush and a wonderful set of eyebrow stencils that I found on Ebay. (I’m terrible at making my eyebrows symmetrical.) The purple is regular eyeshadow from the cosmetics counter.

I like to think the audience had as much fun as we did. We used an upbeat piece of music and the crowd was laughing along with us as we shed our evil personas for more mischievous ones. I’ve always enjoyed getting a laugh out of the audience, and this presentation brought many. Apparently we weren’t the only ones who thought it was funny to see what was under all those ominous robes.

Rae Bradbury-Enslin is a self-taught Master-level costumer who has built a large body of work – drawing from historical, mythological, media, and fantasy themes. Some of these costumes are reproductions of specific characters, but most are her own design. Since 1989 she has competed and taken awards at numerous events and conventions, including the elite masquerades at the World Science Fiction convention and CostumeCon. She has costumed professionally for comic book and electronic games companies, but mostly makes her living creating cameo jewelry. Visit her [website](#) to learn more.