W hen Melissa Leo first saw her wardrobe for the film _The Fighter_—hangs of tight tops, short skirts, and flashy blazers with big shoulder pads circa the early 1990s—the veteran character actress was skeptical. But once they were on, Leo soon transformed into the gruff andotics mother-in-law who would later earn her an Academy Award. “Suddenly it all came together and a third person emerged in the fitting room,” costume designer Mark Bridges (TSAO ’87) recalls. “When we started, there had only been the two of us, and then her Alice Ward appeared.”

Tackled with bringing the people on the page to life, Bridges searches for a character nearly as deeply as the actor does, making his job as much about anthropology as it is about fashion. In a preliminary meeting with director Michel Hazanavicius, the designer referenced the 1928 film _The Artist_—last year’s silent, black-and-white tribute to the Golden Age of Hollywood. The concept was a gamble, but Bridges believed in it from the start: “I thought, in this time when film so heavily relies on CGI and 3-D, maybe what we really need is to get back to basics, and to telling a story instead of whipping everybody into a frenzy with all these other gadgets.” The old-fashioned format, however, came with some unusual filmmaking challenges. Most fabric patterns looked like mush in black and white, so Bridges used sequins, satins, brocades, and spangles to catch the light and compensate for the lack of color and definition. These adjustments were essential, Bridges says, on a film stripped of dialogue. “It’s like if a person loses their sight, their other senses become more acute,” he explains. “Once you didn’t have the language, then you became more aware of all the visual. So between texture and contrast, that’s how we told a story without any words.”

The film opens with leading man George Valentin in stark black-and-white tails at the height of his fame, but the suits fade to a more gray value as his career plummets with the arrival of talkies. Meanwhile fresh-faced dancer Peppy Miller starts out simple and sweet in flat textured dresses that put his hands on clothing, just trying to find actual garments to inspire me,” says Bridges, who dons scores thrill shops once he’s on location. “You won’t even be looking for things or know that you’re looking—you’ll just stumble upon it and it will turn out to be one of the greatest finds.”

Although the ladies’ silk gowns become more elaborate and luxurious with her rise as Hollywood’s hottest new starlet. By the end, Peppy dons an extraordinary black coat trimmed in monkey fur, surviving piece from the 1920s that, along with the hats and background clothes, Bridges discovered at the Los Angeles costume shop. “One of the first things I do is go and Bond-girl bikinis get most of the attention, Bridges relishes the challenge of menswear. The versatile medium forces him to be extra creative, such as with the bright-blue suit Adam Sandler wears throughout all of _Punch-Drunk Love_, and Johnny Depp’s white safari jacket and rubber boots in _Finding Neverland_.

So it’s fitting that after more than 20 years of telling stories through clothing, Bridges won an Oscar earlier this year for Best Achievement in Costume Design on perhaps the most challenging period piece in decades—_The Artist_.

When Bridges took the stage and thanked the Academy “for making a lifelong dream come true,” he meant it literally. As kid growing up in Niagara Falls, he spent a lot of time at the movies to escape the long, icy winters of Western New York’s snowbelt and fell in love with silent films at a local revival theater. “I just became really fascinated at an early age,” he says. “I still have a book report from seventh grade that I did on silent-movie actor [Buster] Chaplin and Douglas Fairbanks.”

For a film fanatic who also loved drawing, painting, and fabrics, costume making proved a natural fit. He’d grown up watching his grand-

mother sew and began making his own Halloween costumes around age 9. “It’s really a job that combines everything I was naturally good at or drawn to,” he says. After earning an MFA in costume design from the Tisch School of the Arts, Bridges got his big break in 1988 on the Coen Brothers Prohibition-era drama _Miller’s Crossing_.

He was hired for just a few days of taping clothes, but his hard work prompted costume designer Richard Hornung to keep Bridges as his assistant for the duration of the shoot—as well as eight more films after that, including _The Giflen, Barton Fink_, and _Nixon_.

But it was Bridges’ love of classic cinema that helped land him the most important film of his career. In a preliminary meeting with director Michel Hazanavicius, the designer referenced the 1928 film _The Artist_—last year’s silent, black-and-white tribute to the Golden Age of Hollywood. The concept was a gamble, but Bridges believed in it from the start: “I thought, in this time when film so heavily relies on CGI and 3-D, maybe what we really need is to get back to basics, and to telling a story instead of whipping everybody into a frenzy with all these other gadgets.” The old-fashioned format, however, came with some unusual filmmaking challenges. Most fabric patterns looked like mush in black and white, so Bridges used sequins, satins, brocades, and spangles to catch the light and compensate for the lack of color and definition. These adjustments were essential, Bridges says, on a film stripped of dialogue. “It’s like if a person loses their sight, their other senses become more acute,” he explains. “Once you didn’t have the language, then you became more aware of all the visual. So between texture and contrast, that’s how we told a story without any words.”

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Throughout this past fall,}
At the 2012 Tony Awards, NINA ARIANDA (TSOA ’09) won Best Performance by an Actress in a Leading Role in a Play for the raucous comedy Venus in Fur, while composer ALAN MENKEN (ARTS ’72, HON ’00) took home Best Original Score for Disney’s Never. Best Performance by an Actor in a Leading Role in a Musical went to STEVE KAZEE (TSAO ’05), who stars alongside CRISTIN MILIOTI (TSAO ’07) in Once, based on the Oscar-winning drama. DON VAYL WERLE (TSAO ’02) earned Best Scenic Design of a Play for the whimsical Peter and the Starcatcher, produced by ADAM S. GORDON (TSAO ’89). GREGG BARNES (TSAO ’83) scored Best Costume Design of a Musical for the revival of Stephen Sondheim classic Follies. NIC ROULEAU (STEIN-HARDT ’09) has taken the lead as missionary Elder Price in The Book of Mormon, which dominated last year’s Tonys... Funnym an JAMES ROODY (TSAO ’90) returns for the seventh season of the detective comedy Psych, making it the USA Network’s longest-running series... ZACH WOODS (GAL ’07) is back at The Office on NBC, while SIMON HELBERG (TSAO ’02) reprises his geek role on CBS’s The Big Bang Theory...
BROADWAY PRODUCER BARBARA WHITMAN TALKS ABOUT STEERING SHOWS TO THE BIG STAGE

by Justin Warner

IN HANDBANDO HARDBODY, BARBARA WHITMAN BROWN A LONG- STANDING TEXAS COMPETITION TO THE BROADWAY STAGE.

Like the Hardbody characters, Whitman has always been a “hands-on” producer, and likes to be a part of a show’s earliest development. Perhaps that’s because she understands evolution. As a singer and actress in New York in the 1980s, Whitman mostly landed traveling shows while dance-heavy musicals were all the rage. But when she saw a world I’d never seen before in a Broadway musical—with characters I’d never seen before in a Broadway musical—she was hooked.

“When you first saw it in the New York workshop, it was a world I’d never seen before in a Broadway musical, with characters I’d never seen before in a Broadway musical.”

WHAT ATTRACTIONS YOU TO HARDBODY WHEN YOU FIRST SAW IT IN THE NEW YORK WORKSHOP?

It was a world I’d never seen before in a Broadway musical, with characters I’d never seen before in a Broadway musical. They’re blue-collar Texans, and they’re treated with such respect and love and care. And it’s fascinating to me that for these people, to win a $23,000 truck would truly change the circumstances of their lives.

I’M A SHOW IN WHICH PEOPLE SING AND DANCE WHILE KEEPING ONE HAND ON A TRUCK. WAS THAT THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE?

Certainly, the tricky part for me is explaining what it is because people say, “Really? They just hold the truck?” And I say, “No, they really do move. They’re kind of speaking into the truck.”

DO YOU INVEST IN YOUR SHOWS OR JUST RAISE THE MONEY?

I’ve always invested in my shows. I don’t think it would be fair to say, “You put your money at risk, but I won’t put mine.” There’s certainly no obligation to do it, but I do.

WHAT MAKES YOU WANT TO SEE THE ONES YOU HAVE PRODUCED?

I wasn’t a theater person at all when I started doing this, but the first scene, it would be the thought in their heads: The mother would say, “Oh, I’d better make the sandwiches.” And then you could click to hear the opening number. We had over a million followers for a long time. That’s unusual for Broadway.

N EW YORK TIMES

WHAT’S ON COMPOSER JULIA WOLFE’S iPOD? by Eileen Reynolds / GSAS ’11

F or Julia Wolfe, co-founder of the genre-busting, experimental music organization Bang On A Can, no instrument or musical style is off-limits. She’s written for everything from drum sets to bagpipes to string orchestras, and her chamber work Steel Hammer—based on the Appalachian folk legend of John Henry—was a finalist for the 2010 Pulitzer Prize.

But where does Wolfe, an assistant professor in the Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development, turn for inspiration? To James Brown, for one (“an amazingly expressive musician,” she says), and to minimalist composer Steve Reich, whose Music for 18 Musicians anchors her list of “music that has rocked my world.” John Adams’ Shaker Loops also makes the cut, along with works by contemporary composers Terry Riley, Meredith Monk, and—of course—Wolfe’s husband, Michael Gordon.

She’s also a “huge fan” of Led Zeppelin and has been known to rock out to Aretha Franklin while doing the dishes. As part of her research for Steel Hammer and other folk-inspired compositions, Wolfe devoured the old-time music of fiddler Bruce Molsky. And lately, as inspiration for a percussion concerto she’s writing, she’s been scouring YouTube for videos of people using their bodies as instruments.

Wolfe occasionally breaks out a well-worn recording of Glenn Gould playing Bach, though she says the classics aren’t usually part of her “daily meal.” Rounding out her omnivorous musical diet are a few top-40 selections from her 18-year-old daughter’s iPod. Mom’s favorite? Adele, though she also concedes that Rihanna is a “great performer.”

WHEN YOU FIRST SAW IT IN THE NEW YORK WORKSHOP, WHAT MAKES THE MOST?

Music for 18 Musicians

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WHAT MAKES YOU WANT TO GET BEHIND A SHOW? IS THERE A COMMON THEME?

They really do move. It’s kind of like saying, “What do they do in A Chorus Line?” Well, they stand in this line and talk about their lives. It doesn’t sound so interesting.

What I love about the show now is that the audience is so caught up in the story, that when the contestants start falling, you’ll hear gasps, because they don’t see it coming, and they like these people.

WHAT MAKES YOU WANT TO SEE THE ONES YOU HAVE PRODUCED?

I was a world I’d never seen before in a Broadway musical, with characters I’d never seen before in a Broadway musical.”

WHY NOT SMITH?

It’s also a show in which people sing and dance while keeping one hand on a truck. Was that the biggest challenge? Certainly, the tricky part for me is explaining what it is because people say, “Really? They just hold the truck?” And I say, “No, they really do move.”