

# Feature



## Transformations: A Special Task

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William Kennedy,  
and Sharyn Eirich**



*A team of costumers transforms themselves into Santa Clause, Lock, Shock, and Barrel: Inspired by Tim Burton's "The Nightmare Before Christmas."*



*The Nightmare before Christmas is a 1993 Disney film that takes place in a fantasy environment where*

each holiday has its own magical and wonderful world. The Song "Kidnap the Sandy Claws" inspired us to do a recreation costume presentation named "A Special Task" using the song from the film. It was originally presented at Arisia 2014 and again at Costume Con 33.

The costumes were originally worn at Arisia by William Kennedy (Sandy Claws), Gaia Eirich (Shock), Sharyn Eirich (Barrel), and Zach Perkins (Lock). The presentation set was reprised at Costume Con 33 with Leslie Johnston (Barrel) and Reagan McHugh (Lock).



Lock, Santa, Barrel, and Shock. Costume-Con 33 photo: Ken Warren.



Lock, Santa, Barrel, and Shock. *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, Buena Vista, 1993.

One of the things that we decided at the beginning of this project was that we wanted this costume set to be as accurate to the movie as possible. The Claymation style characters are very iconic and we wanted to make sure that they were portrayed as accurately as possible.

### **The Masks**

One of the key pieces to the Lock, Shock, and Barrel characters is that they have masks that they took on and off during the film. There were no straps holding them on (they just stuck to their faces) and we wanted to keep that fun "because it was Claymation" feature. The character's faces also read as "human" but were very stylized. The masks were collectively created by Gaia, Sharyn, and Zach.

With this in mind, we decided to create two masks for each costume (except Sandy Claws). This allowed us to reshape our own faces to match the characters and the second mask was held on with magnets to give us the effect we wanted. The faces were not to scale with our own faces. For example, the nose of Shock lined up with my mouth under the mask to make sure we got the right scale for the character. We realized at the beginning of this project that if we did not have the same base to build the masks from for each character, there would be no way to get the two layers similar enough for a nice fit without driving all of us crazy.



Lock, Barrel, and Shock. Costume-Con 33 photo: Ken Warren.



Lock, Barrel and Shock. *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, Buena Vista, 1993

We began by taking some very cheap Styrofoam and carving it into the shape of each face (this was done by Sharyn and they looked amazing even just starting in foam). This allowed us to play with scale and shapes with very cheap (free) materials. We used some paper mache as another layer on top of the foam to give us a smooth surface (it also protected the foam from the hot worbla). We decided to use worbla for our mask bases as it would be durable and gave us the option to sand the layers down to give us more of the smooth look of the characters faces, plus it was nicely malleable.

We used our Styrofoam base to put together our worbla masks. The foam base allowed the pieces of warmed worbla (heat gun) to cool without sagging and for us to build up difficult areas as needed. We could also heat pieces of worbla and blend them together at the few places we needed things to have a joint, such as around some of the large noses.

We created the same mask twice for each character, then trimmed the edges on the top mask to make sure it did not completely cover the “face” at the edges, like a real costume mask would. We swiftly realized that the top mask would have to be a bit larger. We heated and gently stretched the worbla to give us the extra space we needed for a nice firm fit. We also had to leave some space for the magnets between the

two masks. We also created one form for all of the ears which saved us a lot of time.

Once each pair of masks were created, we sanded down any lumps and bumps. We then used gesso on each layer as a primer. When gesso dries, you can also sand it. There was a lot of gesso/dry/sand/gessoing going on with these masks to get layers as smooth as possible. I couldn't even tell you how much we used or how much sanding we did (thanks to Zach for much of the manual labor on this).



Inner and outer masks for Lock, Barrel, and Shock.

The magnets were adhered to the inside of both mask pairs. This means there magnets against our real faces, and on the inside of second, removable mask, and they adhered through the worbla of the face layer. It also meant that they were not seen by the audience. The magnets were glued to the worbla with E6000, then a layer of scrap fabric was used to anchor the magnet and the area around it (I think we used rubber cement to glue the fabric down).

Without the fabric layer around the magnet we found that the magnets would just rip straight off the worbla, no matter what we did. In the case of the top layer mask, the entire inside was painted black, including the fabric/magnets, so when we took them off and waved them around, they were just black, as in the movie. As a bonus, the magnets provided a small bump out, so the masks only touched in the half a dozen or places from the removable mask layer.

Each layer was painted with acrylic paint. This gave Sharyn a very easy medium to add all the details and shading that she needed to make these masks accurate to the movie and to make sure that they did not read as “flat” from stage or in photography. The acrylic was sealed as well. The final details, such as the teeth and lips, were added last and were painted fun foam and colored wire. The eye sockets were backed with white cotton organza, which was fine enough

that we could see through it, and pupils drawn in with sharpie.

We used this same technique for a half mask for Sandy Claws. We wanted to make



**Above:** Inside mask magnets. **Below:** Magnets inside outer mask.



sure that we all looked like we were from the same universe. As William was not available in person for much of this, it was decided to do a half mask for him to make sure it would fit. William did some amazing things with several fake beards stitched together and backed by felt to give Sandy Claws his over exaggerated beard.

The mask base layer was held to our heads by elastic which was just tied to the edges of the mask using holes punched into the worbla. We had elastic that went over as well as around our heads, almost like a stretchy helmet. They had to be fairly tight over our heads, otherwise the masks snapped back and hit our faces when we pulled the top mask off. The masks are actually stored on the original foam bases for stability and durability, with a piece of parchment paper between the two mask layers to maintain the paint job.

Barrel's wig is pretty much a half sphere made of two layers of buckram, a bowl (for shape), and the heat gun. Green upholstery foam was then cut into little wedges with scissors and hot glued to the buckram. Green acrylic was used to add texture to the wig and the deeper areas were painted in with black to create his iconic hairstyle. The wig lined up perfectly with the edge of the mask and was velcroed to a hood used to cover the hair and neck and to create the right skin tone to match the mask.



Shock's costume was also worn with a hood painted to the same color as the face mask. Lock was the natural hair of the wearer. We decided the character's hair was short enough and

naturally enough colored that a wig was not worth it.

## The Costumes

The stop motion characters featured in film were no more than four to seven inches in height. Though wonderfully detailed on screen, things needed to be adjusted and extrapolated a bit to add additional texture and detail to convey to a human sized version of the character without the costume looking flat or boring.

For Sandy Claws (Santa Claus), completing the transformation from a 195lb William into a well over 300lb Sandy Claws as portrayed in the film was no easy task! The costume was made in its entirety by William and began with huge pile of foam. I was luckily enough to obtain a huge amount of foam from a defunct bed that my parents no longer wanted. I had the forethought to harvest the glorious foam two years before this costume came to fruition knowing I would do something spectacular with it.

I begin by looking at the shape of Sandy Claws. I got together with my

wonderful friend Rae Bradbury-Enslin. Her experience in working with foam helped me shape and learn how to properly work with the foam. To determine the silhouette I wanted for this character, I studied multiple stills from the film. He looks like a large bell shaped figure, but I decided a large pear shape was much more appropriate. As I began the design I realized that under the large robe was a pair of mistletoe-decorated bloomers and a shapely lower posterior, and that a pear shape would both be easier to move in and give me the shape on the bottom that I wanted.

I cut the foam like a pear shape and the sides were large ovals, which formed the narrow shoulder area and the very wide posterior. I cut and shaped the foam pieces to look like a belly and buttocks to make it as realistic as possible. The foam was hand sewn together with heavy duty fishing line and glued together with contact cement in several places. I did not create any padding for the legs or arms as the comedic effect in the film shows him having skinny legs and arms. Given my body proportions were in line with the size of the fat suit, padding in the arms or legs was not necessary as the suite dwarfed my limbs as I had planned.



Left: William Kennedy as Santa Claus.. Right: Santa Claus from *Nightmare Before Christmas*, Buena Vista, 1993.



Side view of fat suit showing oval shapes to achieve the sides and overall pear shape.

The frame for the foam comprised of two large plastic hula-hoops with re-purposed backpack straps connecting to a harness over my shoulders. This made the entire suit sit comfortably on my shoulders and allowed for natural movement. The hoops were sewn inside the foam to help keep its shape and were anchored using heavy duty fishing line.

One of the key concepts to making the fat move realistically in the belly and the buttocks was layering the foam as well as having extra padding that I stuffed inside when I was in the full costume. All of this

allowed for realistic movement of the "fat" that Sandy Claws carries in the film.

The suit wound up with a waistline of 135" (3.5m) and the buttocks coming in at a whopping 165" (4.2m). Despite this, I could move freely, including dance in the suit. During the presentation Santa gets knocked down and his bloomers go on display for the audience (an action recreated from the movie), which created a very dramatic effect that delighted the audience.



Big altered tummy. Under flap is a couple of shaped layers of foam to get the appropriate Santa belly.



The lighter foam is the upper body chest area, that was much thinner than the lower body... this was achieved by following the contour of my own shape.

The costume that Santa is depicted as wearing in the film is a traditional floor length coat that is a bit tight. I used whopping seven yards (6.5m) of red velvet to create the costume and three full yards (3m) of fur to trim the bottom. The fur was all hand stitched in place. The bottom circumference of Sandy Clause's coat was 15 feet (4.5m) around. I used poles from an old camping tent to maintain the perfect teardrop shape the character had when he walked.



The suit all layed out.. FYI i have a size 12.5 Shoe... so that is how giant this thing is.



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To keep the character and costume from being flat, I added further details to the costume that were not in the film. One of the primary things I changed was that I embossed the velvet around the entire hem of the coat – all 15 feet (4.5m) of hem. Images are sunk into the pile of the velvet so that you get a textural as well as visual effect, and often the embossing process means images take on an iridescent quality.

This was achieved with a rubber stamp and a household iron and a spray bottle. I simply placed the rubber stamp face up, layered the velvet face down on the stamp, sprayed the back of the velvet, and placed a cloth over the velvet. I then applied the iron,



**Left:** Believe it or not, the glove pattern was an old Darth Vader Costume pattern – perfect for the Santa. **Above:** Santa's Hat with elastic strap as he takes a good fall on stage.



Embossed Velvet with crystal.





Dude Bloomers... So large they do not fit on the table.. and to be accurate I painted each leaf by hand and each berry has a red Swarovski crystal on it.



Santa Claus falls over and shows his bloomers.

hit the steam button, and held it on the velvet for 10 seconds.

Please note: the technique seems easy, but if you try it for yourself make sure you do test scraps first as velvet can burn or melt (depending on composition) in an instant. I embellished the embossing by adding several hundred Swarovski Crystals (I used E6000 to glue them down). The costume was finished with an 8 foot (2.5m) long beard (many beards sewn together backed with felt) a leather belt and gloves.

The costumes for Lock, Shock, and Barrel were made by Gaia, and carefully patterned to try and maintain the shape of the original characters and to trick the eye away from the human form wearing them. There were small details added to all three

costumes to give them life and depth from a distance. The bones on Barrel's tunic are all applied in a textured upholstery fabric and have a second layer of shading to make them pop off the costume. The fabric for Barrel was carefully picked for its stiffness to give the right shape and to hide the fact that it was a woman wearing the costume. Gloves, a foam core lollipop, and clawed tennis shoe covers completed the costume.

Shock's dress is two layers of fabric to get the perfect shade of purple used in the movie. The top layer is semi-sheer and textured with stripes and it is backed by pink duck cloth to help keep the cone shape of her dress, then the layers were quilted together with large swirls which you only see when up close. The hat was created

using poster board and fabric so it could be broken down for travel and the brim was collapsible memory wire. Her hair was just strands of cord glued to the inside of the hat liner. Shoe covers over tennis shoes were made, and gloves and tights were also worn to maintain the skin tone.

Lock is made of velour which reflects light differently and detailed with flames

(fabric paint, free handed) in the same color as the fabric. Similarly, shoe covers to match the costume but no gloves completed the natural skin tones of this character.

All-in-all, we tried to bring to life iconic characters in such a way that would make us feel that we had done the original characters justice by putting our love of the film and our love of costuming together.



Santa Claus, Barrel, Lock, and Shock on stage during Sci-fi/Fantasy Masquerade at Costume-Con 33.

**Gaia Eirich** is a Master costumer and has been costuming for well over 20 years. She has been creating costumes and commissions in a wide variety of forms including fantasy, historical, anime, theater, belly dance costumes for a studio, wedding dresses, accessories, and basic quilt-making. She is also the secretary of the Greater Columbia Fantasy Costumer's Guild (GCFCG), the local chapter of the International Costumer's Guild (ICG).

**William Kennedy** began costuming in 2010 and now competes in the Master category. In his professional life, William is a Social Worker. However, when he is not protecting youth and working with families, William spends his time scaring the "yell" out of them. William has done make-up, costume, set designs and builds for various Haunted attractions such as Spooky World Theme Park and is currently an artistic contributor, costume, makeup and actor at Haunted Overload located in Lee, NH. His alter ego, "Tickles the Clown," has run for the U.S. Presidency, and can be found at Haunted Overload making grown men cry and picking small children out of his teeth. Truly a delightful individual.

**Sharyn Eirich** can frequently be found collaborating with her sister Gaia, William Kennedy, and others at conventions such as Balticon and Costume-Con.