

Antrix Update

The last few months have proved to be rather interesting here at Antrix. Although the cost of living crisis continues to affect household incomes, this has not stopped people wanting to celebrate. However, what we have noticed is a marked trend for individuals wanting to hire parts of costumes, rather than complete outfits. This is not a problem. Some regular customers will already know that we have always operated a mix and match service. This is where we take different elements from various costumes, in order to create the desired look.

Since our Summer newsletter, there has been a marked increase in the number of costume requests for 1950s outfits & accessories. We normally expect this during September, but mainly in relation to the Revival Event held on the Goodwood estate in Sussex. This season, the 1950s parties started in August (normally a quiet month on the costuming front) and continued through into October, with various anniversary and birthday celebrations taking place, as well as a Showaddywaddy concert.

As we headed towards October, our thoughts naturally turned towards Halloween 2023. The past two years have seen October being our busiest month of the year. Prior to the pandemic, December had traditionally been the most intense period. However, we are noticing a gradual trend away from people wanting costumes for Christmas and New Year dressup. Whether this will continue to be the case for 2023, only time will tell.

Halloween in the UK is also starting to follow the American tradition, where standard fancy dress outfits, rather than specifically scary horror costumes, are being required to help celebrate the spooky season. With Halloween taking place on a Tuesday this year, there is the potential for three specific party time frames: Saturday 28 October, Tuesday 31 October (mainly Trick & Treating) & Saturday 4th November.

With Halloween in mind, we have also been revamping the Halloween section of our website. If you have not visited www.antrixcostumesmaidstone.co.uk for a while and have some spare time, we would appreciate any feedback you might have.

Artificial Intelligence

Back in the 1980s, with computers more accessible to all, there were some fanciful movie concepts of the consequences: 1983 saw 'War Games', with a video-gamer accidentally accessing an international missile defence system. In 1985 'Weird Science', where two teenage boys use a computer to design their dream girl using a Barbie doll (she gets everywhere!). Fast forward to the 2020s, and AI and its possibilities (and hazards) are a reality. The Weird Science concept has been re-realised in a recent film 'M3GAN' (although it also channels 'Annabelle', 'Chucky' and others in the devil doll genre).

So how can AI be used in the costuming environment? Well, given that there are those who visit costume sites such as ours looking for ideas and inspiration, using AI for images can be a surreal experience. Many of the AI creator sites currently offer a wealth of free images, with a simple search facility. If you do not find quite what you want, you can even try creating your own pictures. Here, you do not use drawing tools as such, and the key is to explain in as much detail as possible ('Prompt') what you want to see: This is a reversal on 'pictures that paint a thousand words' - you give a multitude of info and the picture is generated. Also, you have to detail what you do not want to see because, with the AI generator having no real concept of things we take for granted - people having two hands with five fingers, which are essentially a mirror image of each other - there can be some strange results.

AI Costume & character images can be impressive, but show a lack of the restraints that considerations of cost, materials and practicality might bring in the real world. That said, many of the images can spark ideas of costume construction and make-up design which could be quite show-stopping and, with some compromise, could well be do-able.

So, can AI enhance our ability to show off our outfits? Not really. Unless we are so inspired by an AI image that we decide to make the outfit, AI cannot recreate costumes we already have and, although it can sometimes come up with more interesting backgrounds than we might have available, there is no substitute for real people modelling our outfits.

Anniversaries - Classic Albums

In our March & Summer newsletters, we mentioned that a number of Classic Vinyl Records celebrate 50 years since their original release in 1973. Here are the final three of the Top 10 Classic Albums, originally released in Autumn/Winter 1973.

8. Genesis, *Selling England by the Pound* (13 Oct)
9. John Lennon, *Mind Games* (29 Oct)
10. Black Sabbath, *Sabbath Bloody Sabbath* (3 Dec)

Autumn Trends

As mentioned in our update, Americans tend to treat **Halloween** as a general dress-up event (although they excel in the tradition of seasonal 'Horror Houses and Venues'). At Antrix, we have a vested interest in the spooky season, as it's when we made our first costumes, back in the 1970s. We have always tried to offer alternative suggestions to the routine Halloween outfits, and a few novel variations on the theme for those seeking to Do Something Different, hence the special theme off-shoots such as **Scary Movies**, **Tarot** and **Fears & Phobia**. This Halloween season brings the rising trend of Dia de Muertos - **The Day of the Dead**.

Current films and streaming programs can also be influential for costume trends, but with more such sources of inspiration around, internet suppliers may be limited in what they offer. Whilst there are some excellent specialist cosplay firms online, they are not necessarily geared to mass-market demand, so prices are higher and delivery times may be longer.

Variations on a Theme or few

Those who have explored the wider aspects of our website will have noted that we offer collections of suggestions for costumes, for over sixty themes. Some of these are the result of regular requests, such as the various decades of the Twentieth Century, and other historical eras, notably Medieval, (and its off-shoots), seasonal events and enduring themes, such as Pirates and, oddly making a bit of a comeback, Cowboys (but usually without the Native American element of yesteryear).

Decade and Letter-based events ('Come dressed in an outfit with the same letter as your name') form most costume requests, but there are also the more off-the-wall theme ideas. Thirty plus years in the business has brought a wide range of theme costume requests, some no longer PC (such as Doctors & Nurses or Vicars & Tarts), some enjoying a revival every so often - When the Boat Went Down was particularly popular during the Titanic film era; and others that are just plain strange (Your Favourite Disease).

These theme areas are part of a larger theme resource we have, involving Briefing Sheets and Packs on several hundred topics. Some of these have found a place within our website, but they are a throwback to the days when the Internet was not what it is today and we were offering costume information newsletters to the then much larger costume hire trade. Nowadays, such information is usually widely available through the Net, so the resource is potentially obsolete, but useful to ourselves and others when an IT access is not available or helpful. Unfortunately the development of the Internet has led to the demise of those other resources of yesteryear, especially in the retail sector eg. fabric shops and, dare we say, high street hire shops. But with aspects of internet services also taking time to recover from the pandemic period, when the Internet cannot deliver (sometimes literally), the would-be cosplayer has to fall-back either on the likes of ourselves or on DIY and ingenuity. Below we give an example of a surprisingly popular theme that meets such criteria.

Pushing the Creative Envelope (but remaining Station-ary)

The ideal theme offers opportunities both for those who want to hire/buy an outfit and for those who want to do their own thing and get creative. Although it is a bit location specific, the **London Underground** (Name of a Station) theme offers an example of such opportunities. Some station 'outfits' are simple to do at little cost - Blackfriars, Angel; some offer use for existing outfits in a different context - Waterloo (Napoleon), Warren Street (Rabbit); some work with puns or accessory concepts - Canada Water (Mountie with a watering can); and some allow you to make-up a concept - Thurnham Green or Oxford Circus (A Clown in a Gown). Admittedly there is a risk you might have to be explaining your witty creation occasionally, unless you have had the foresight to create a LTB roundel for your station, but it's a good potential icebreaker at events, and, if you convince enough people of your ingenuity, you might win a prize, if such things are on offer.

Meanwhile, recent developments have enabled us to suggest a use for some of our newer costumes in this theme area, - hence Barbie-Ken. (Okay, not original - they temporarily rebranded Barbican station for the Barbie movie publicity, but our original suggestion involved an Australian (corked hat) with barbecue tools and a can of Fosters lager - Barbie & Ken work better, and also give us a new couples suggestion!). To explore further, the London Underground Theme can be found on our A-Z of Themes list.