

Creative Conversations: Alanna Maniscalco, Company Properties Manager

By Sabrina Custer



Props are key to bringing a story to life. It takes creativity, imagination and skill to take ideas from the page to the stage, and our Properties Manager, Alanna Maniscalco has an abundance of all three! We had the opportunity to sit down and talk about her experience working in theatre and get some insight into her process for making the props you see in our productions – check it out below!

Q: How long have you been working in theatre? How did you get started?

Maniscalco: I've been getting paid to work in theatre since 2009. I started volunteering my time working on Charlotte's Web, in 6th grade, I helped paint the set. In 8th grade I was backstage during the performances of *The Jungle Book* throwing bananas to my friend on stage. 9th, 10th, 11th grade I helped paint the set a bit and helped take tickets during performances. In 12th grade I happened to be asked to be the Prop Manager for the musical *The Sound of Music*. Little did I know all of this would make an impact on my future.

Q: How do you visualize and plan props?

Maniscalco: First, I start by reading the script and writing a list of what props are mentioned in the script. Then I will have a chat with the designer and the director to ask about each prop on the list and each element of furniture or decor. I'll ask if there is something special about that prop to get a better understanding of how it might be used. Just some examples are, does it get thrown, does it get stood on, does it need to have casters? Next, I typically make a list of things to build, things or supplies to buy, what to pull from the furniture warehouse and from the hand prop loft, what will eventually need paint, sometimes we need to rethink how to build a piece and re-draft that before we can build it. Then we start trying to make what needs to be made.

Q: What does your creation process look like?

Maniscalco: There's a lot of thinking that is involved to create a prop, it has to fit in the correct time period. I have to know how it is used to understand what material to make it

out of. Sometimes it needs to be drafted. For large items the designer makes a rendering or gives reference photos for what things should look like or what color it should be. For smaller items I can ask the designer for their opinion if I think it is important, but I can also make educated decisions.

Q: If you weren't working in theatre, what would you be doing?

Maniscalco: I've always thought it would be fun to be a florist and make floral arrangements or work with plants.



Q: What is your favorite prop you've made?

Maniscalco: Probably a light up TSA style wand "muscle scanner" that shot confetti from it. I used a lightsaber, took it apart and added a CO2 cartridge and pull trigger, and added a new acrylic tube.

Q: What is your dream show to make props for?

Maniscalco: The Little Mermaid

Q: When planning props do you prefer to hand making them or buying them?

Maniscalco: It is more satisfying to make props by hand, but at Phoenix Theatre we really have to balance the time it takes to make something and the time we actually have to do it.

Q: What's your favorite material to work with?

Maniscalco: I enjoy making small electrical circuits for lights/candlesticks. But I think I enjoy working on small hand props in general.

Q: What show are you most looking forward to working on this season at The Phoenix Theatre Company?

Maniscalco: *Sweeney Todd* should be fun.

Q: What past show was your favorite to work on at The Phoenix Theatre Company?

Maniscalco: *Seussical* was a fun show to work on, it was so colorful.