

Unknown Stories

Costumes Representing Ethnicity in the Theatre Museum in Finland

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ABSTRACT

Performance costumes have long been a distinctive way to visualize explicit and implicit cultural and social hierarchies, as well as to identify characters on stage. Stereotypical characters representing different ethnicities were familiar in Finland by the end of the nineteenth century, established with the help of instantly recognizable costumes and make-up, often premised by an internalized racism inherent to historical practices of costume design. This article focuses on the representation of ethnicity and especially racialized characters on the Finnish stage through the study of extant costumes and, in particular, a case study of two surviving “Lapp character” costumes in the artefact collection of the Theatre Museum in Finland in Helsinki, which houses objects considered worthy of preservation and representative of Finnish theatre history. By focusing on a previously unexplored type of costume, it is possible to propose new ways by which to enhance the visibility of marginalized perspectives in the museum collection.

KEYWORDS

stage costume, representation, ethnicity, racialized characters, Sámi representations, Lapp character costume, museum collection, Theatre Museum in Finland

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Costumes Representing Ethnicity in the Theatre Museum in Finland¹

Performance costumes have long been a distinctive way to visualize explicit and implicit cultural and social hierarchies on stage, as well as to identify characters by age, gender, class, religion, nationality, economic, and ethnic background.² Visually distinguishing a stage character as “foreign” by means of a costume that is clearly different from the attire of the other characters, is a long-standing European tradition, present even in ancient Greek drama.³ Racialized⁴ characters, that is, stereotypical on-stage representations of people of colour, indigenous people, and ethnic minorities in plays, operettas, operas, and ballets performed in European and Anglo-American countries in the nineteenth and early twentieth century were also common in Finland. Scenes were set in places that were considered exotic, with characters in costumes representing the chosen ethnicity, as well as wearing blackface, yellowface, or redface makeup.⁵ However, “blackface”, “yellowface” and “redface” did not just consist of colouring skin with make-up and the use of certain garments. As Amanda Rogers points out, it also included an entire practice of facial and body movements, along with speech mannerisms to mark a character as being foreign, ethnically different, and (often) intended to be despised.⁶ Similarly, recurrent themes developed on the Finnish stage regarding the representation of indigenous Sámi people. This development of “Lapp characters”⁷ was established in the late nineteenth

1 Acknowledgments: The author would like to thank the curator of the artefact collection Sanna Brander and information service researcher Päivi Laine (Theatre Museum), The Finnish Cultural Foundation, PhD Hanna Suutela, PhD Donna Roberts, as well as two anonymous referees for their valuable comments in the process of writing this article.

2 See, for example, Weckman 2021, 42–3.

3 Kaimio 1980, 155; Mitchell 2021, 17.

4 I use the term “racialized” in reference to Robert Miles and Malcolm Brown (2003, 100–1), who has defined racialization as “a process of delineation of group boundaries and of allocation of persons within those boundaries by primary reference to (supposedly) inherent and/or biological (usually phenotypical) characteristics. (...) The concept refers to a process of categorization, a representational process of defining the Other, usually, but not exclusively, somatically.”

5 Suutela 2005, 28; Kačer 2016, 7–8, 10; Järvinen 2020a; Laakkonen 2010, 150–1; and Laakkonen 2021, 21–4. In my study relating to the interwar period 1918–1939 in Finland, I located 52 plays with racialized characters (Weckman 2018, 108–9, 127).

6 Rogers 2014, 452.

7 Until the mid-twentieth century, the Sámi were generally referred to as “Lapps”. This tradition was amended after political activism and the Sámi people renouncing the term as defamatory and colonialist (Isaksson 2001, 34–5; Lehtola 2005, 320). Of the stereotypical representations of Sámi people, I use the term “Lapp character” to highlight the fictional nature of the characters presented on stage, most of which reflect mainstream stereotypes that are akin, for example, to “Gypsy characters” in relation to Roma and “Indian characters” in relation to Native Americans.

and early twentieth century via conspicuous costumes that exaggerated particular features of Sámi dress, regardless of the original practices and customs related to gender, age or the diversity of regional Sámi cultures, leading to a recognizable trope of the “Lapp costume”. Stage representations of Sámi people were useful as a counterfoil to Finnish identity, serving to highlight an illusory blond-haired, blue-eyed Finnish ethnicity which was more aligned with the rest of Europe, to which an emerging Finnish nation was so eager to attach itself.⁸ Accordingly, the on stage depiction of specific ethnicities was not limited to characters portraying inhabitants of distant lands or domestic ethnic minorities, but also featured instantly recognizable characters representing “Finnish” and other Nordic ethnicities – often depicted with blond wigs – as well as other European ethnicities (Figure 1), in elaborate costumes that showcased regional and national attires associated with the traditional folk clothing worn by peasants from rural Europe.⁹



Figure 1. Aili Somersalmi as faithful Solveig wearing a blond wig and stage costume representing Norwegian Hardanger style folk costume in Peer Gynt, Finnish National Theatre 1916. Theatre Museum Archive, Finland. Photographer unknown.

8 Weckman 2021, 65–6.

9 Weckman 2018, 126; Korppi-Tommola 2010, 203; Suutela 2005, 35–6, 50, 80–3, 97–8.

This article continues the thematic perspective of my previous postdoctoral research projects, which explored historical make-up practices emphasizing characters' ethnicity, as well as the ways in which the Sámi were represented in early Finnish stage performances. This was contextualized within the social atmosphere of late nineteenth and early twentieth century Finland, influenced by nationalism, prejudice against ethnic minority groups, and eugenics, a prevalent Western ideology in the late 1800s.¹⁰ This article draws on Stuart Hall's theory of the construction of cultural identity. Hall indicates how stereotypes are created by the exaggeration and simplification of certain features, which establishes them without the possibility of change and development. Stereotypization maintains the social and symbolic order, excludes the apparently inappropriate and different, and helps to create imaginary "normal" communities.¹¹ Along with novels and newspapers,¹² theatres are also sites where such imaginary communities have been constructed and made visible for audiences.¹³ In addition, this article draws on current questions that are being raised by scholars within the field of museum studies in Finland that relate to decolonizing and the concept of marginalization, i.e. whose histories are preserved and told in Finnish museums and whose have been omitted? How can we enhance the visibility of marginalized perspectives in the Finnish museum collections?¹⁴

In general, I use "costume" as an inclusive term referring to the dress¹⁵ of a performer, used in the context of a performance. In this article, however, my analysis is more centred on materiality and the existing pieces of clothing in the Theatre Museum in Finland collection, which are no longer physically connected to a certain performer. Thus, costume can be an identified ensemble consisting of several (but not necessarily all original) parts that belong to the same outfit with one object number, as well as being either an identified or unidentified single item of clothing with its own object number or only a donation number (the latter refers to a large amount of uncatalogued artefacts given by a certain donor). To be more precise, costumes can also be divided into several types according to their use in historical and contemporary theatre genres, which has also created a concomitant mode of research.¹⁶ For example, "period costume" refers to the depiction of historical Western fashions, while "fantasy costume" emphasizes the fantastical and imaginative elements. However, during this study I encountered the particular challenge of how to identify costumes that have been used to highlight the representation of ethnicity on stage, and moreover, what terminology to apply to this unprecedented focus of costume research. In this article, I discuss the findings of my current research project, which examines how to identify and document a type of costume in the Theatre Museum in Finland archive that was designed to signify a certain ethnicity to a contemporary audience, and how to develop a useable term for those costumes upon which to build research into the representation of racialized stage characters in particular, who, owing to historical prejudices, conformed to ethnic stereotypes. As a case study, I take a closer look at the two surviving "Lapp character" costumes in the collection. I incorporate quantitative methods alongside an artefact-based investigation of extant costumes, as well as content analyses of photographs in the Theatre Museum archive and the archive of the Finnish National Theatre. To understand the ways in which racialized characters were presented in relation to the plot and other characters, I also undertake a close reading of newspaper reviews and play manuscripts.

In museum collections dedicated to performing arts, costumes are often among the main surviving artefacts from actual performances. The oldest extant performance costumes in Europe date back to the late seventeenth century.¹⁷ Despite the richness of this material archive, surviving costumes

10 Weckman 2018; Weckman 2021.

11 Hall 2002, 190–1; for the idea of nations as imaginary, thus constructed communities, see Anderson 2007.

12 Anderson 2007, 61.

13 Weckman 2018, 108.

14 Rastas et al. 2021, 24–5; of the importance of the representation of the past, e.g. Bennet 1995, 162.

15 According to Mary Ellen Roach-Higgins and Joanne B. Eicher (1992, 1), a "dress" is "an assemblage of body modifications and/or supplements displayed by a person in communicating with other human beings." Ingrid Mida and Alexandra Kim (2015, 12) define this as "clothing and accessories, including hats, footwear, jewellery, hairstyles, tattoos and other forms of body adornment."

16 See, for example, de Marly 1982; Isaac 2015; Weckman 2015; Bonds 2021.

17 See Dotlačilová 2020, 84–5; for extant opera costumes see Isaac 2015, 557–8.

have rarely been utilized as research material within the field of theatre studies. Nevertheless, for performance costume research, which is currently establishing its own disciplinary practices,¹⁸ it has already proven to be a rewarding material. Research into costumes has been influenced by artefact-based approaches utilized in studies of the history of dress, fashion, textiles, and material culture.¹⁹ This field of study has attracted growing scholarly interest since the turn of the twenty-first century.²⁰ Over the past decade an increasing interest in artefact-based approaches for the study of performance costumes has given rise to several important projects. For example, in a study by Donatella Barbieri in 2012, costumes were afforded a principal role as “participants” in a dialogue with a number of experts, including a dress historian, a costume designer and an artist. Barbieri also reminds us of the special gaze of the costume practitioners and the importance of subjective, intuitive responses.²¹ In addition to earlier research, my current study has benefitted from insights gained from three collection projects in the Theatre Museum in Finland, my postdoctoral study exploring extant stage and film costumes in museum collections, as well as my over twenty years of experience as a practising costume designer for theatre, opera, and dance.²² To my knowledge, however, this study is the first analysis of an entire museum costume collection, as well as the first to employ quantitative methods alongside an artefact-based investigation of extant costumes.

Presenting the Costume Portion of the Theatre Museum in Finland Artefact Collection

The Theatre Museum in Finland, founded in Helsinki in 1962, is the national repository for the performing arts in the country. The archive and artefact collections contain material from the 1830s onwards,²³ and house objects considered worthy of preservation and deemed representative of Finnish theatre history.²⁴ The collection offers tangible material for exhibitions that present the professional field and is an informative source for researchers. Currently, the collection contains approximately 2230 costumes that date from the late 1800s to the present day.²⁵ However, the older costumes are often incomplete and only individual parts of actual ensembles worn by performers still exist. The majority of such extant pieces include male characters’s jackets and female characters’ dresses. Shirts, trousers, headgear, undergarments, outergarments, and shoes can be found in the collection but are more scarce. Several older costumes are unidentified, although the theatre that donated them is known.²⁶

The composition of costumes in the collection of the Theatre Museum is structurally biased, with a clear emphasis on period costumes that principally derive from the four major theatre

18 See, for example, Barbieri & Pantouvaki 2016, 4–5; Isaac 2015, 553–63.

19 See, for example, Arnold 1972, 1973, 1977 and 1985; de la Haye and Wilson 1999; Palmer 2001, Taylor 2002, 2005; Paula Hohti research project 2016–2021 *Refashioning the Renaissance: Popular Groups and the Material and Cultural Significance of Clothing in Europe 1550–1650*, hosted by Aalto University’s School of Arts, Design and Architecture, funded by the European Research Council.

20 See, for example, Jaatinen 1998, 2000; Colombo & Silva 2003; Bergman, Harning & Norberg 2008.

21 Barbieri 2013, 285–287. Other initiatives have included Bate and Garland’s (2014) study of a Victorian coat owned by the Cosprop costume rental company, which looks at the process of evaluating an authentic historical garment that was employed as a costume; examination by Ingrid Mida (2016) of a tutu designed in 1953, Hanna Järvinen’s study (2020b, 2020c) into extant costumes from the 1913 production in Paris of *The Rite of Spring*; a study by Tua Helve (2020) of the costumes and the design process for the 2017 production of *Nature Theatre of Oblivia*, which were undertaken from the perspective of a practitioner-researcher; and a study by Petra Dotlačilová (2020) researching several extant costumes for her PhD thesis on the costume design in eighteenth-century ballet and opera by Louis-René Boquet.

22 Weckman 2013; Weckman 2015; Scholze 2014a, 2014b; Weckman (2015–2016) *Touching the Past – extant film costumes as mediators of historical costume practices*, post-doctoral research project undertaken at Aalto University School of Arts and Design in Helsinki as part of a larger research project entitled *Costume Methodologies* (2014–2018), funded by the Academy of Finland.

23 For more information, see Collections of The Theatre Museum.

24 For an overview of the content of the artefact collection, see The Theatre Museum: artefact collections; Teatterimuseo 2019, 15, 17.

25 Information courtesy of Sanna Brander, the curator of the artefact collection at The Theatre Museum, 12 April 2023.

26 Information is based on my estimation and research projects, discussions with curator Sanna Brander and Costume collection consulting project Weckman 2013 “Loppuraportti Pukukonsultointiprojekti 2013.” Unpublished document.

houses located in Helsinki,²⁷ despite the fact that a wide variety of theatre repertoire was performed nationwide. In my view, this bias is mainly due to the fact that the costumes have predominantly been accrued over time on the basis of donations initiated by individual theatres. Since the theatre companies were primarily responsible for financing period and fantasy costumes, as well as costumes considered “special”, such as folk costumes from the nineteenth century onwards,²⁸ these particular types of theatrical apparel have accumulated in theatre warehouses. However, period costumes depicting upper-class Western fashions seem to have been particularly valued over the years as items worthy of preservation. This is especially the case when the costumes can be linked to well-known actors and major roles in plays and operas considered classics.²⁹ For example, the very first major donation to the Theatre Museum in 1962, which formed the crux of the future collection, included a large quantity of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century period costumes from the Finnish National Theatre.³⁰ Nowadays, regional and institutional bias is recognized in the museum collection policy, with an emphasis placed on increasing the share of costumes deriving from small, contemporary, and regional theatre groups.³¹ However, detailed information on different types of costumes has not been taken into account thus far.

The Search for Costumes Representing Ethnicity in the Theatre Museum Collection

The selection of costume material was essential for the outcomes presented in this article. I will thus describe my methodology in detail. My initial interest in the amount and quality of extant costumes clearly intended to portray ethnicity in the Theatre Museum collection was kindled during my earlier projects.³² While searching for stage productions that contained roles portraying Finnish ethnic minorities, I noted the conspicuous lack of previous research in Finland related to racialized stage characters. In 2020, I was forwarded an inquiry sent to the Theatre Museum concerning the number of such costumes utilized when portraying any “exotic” characters in the Theatre Museum collection.³³ Even as an independent costume specialist well acquainted with the museum collection, I could not answer the question and was thus prompted to study the topic in more detail. At the time, the Theatre Museum had no relevant statistics or methods by which to produce a comprehensive list. Arguably, this was due to the common challenges faced by museums, such as insufficient resources for up-to-date cataloguing of the donated material. Neither terminology nor key words upon which the existing Theatre Museum database IDA had been built, were of any help with this particular inquiry. This problem pertains to a broader question within critical museum studies. In Finland, it has been addressed by Sanna Särkelä, for example, who has pointed out that language is a central tool for people working in museums. The collection policy guidelines, the historical classification of collections into sub-collections, the interpretation of objects and of what and who they represent, as well as the scientific and aesthetic traditions and concepts are entwined.³⁴ However, with the help of various wordings found in earlier descriptions, I collated an indicative list of catalogued material relating to costumes representing ethnicity which had been exported into the museum database by the autumn of 2020.

In 2022, to achieve a comprehensive understanding of all the current costume material, including the uncatalogued costumes in the artefact collection, I had to decide upon the manner in which such extant costumes should be located. This research task was made more complex by the fact that the IDA Theatre Museum database was completely inoperative due to ongoing modifications. Furthermore, it was necessary to define how to visually identify costumes and to classify which costumes should be included or excluded from the research material. This turned out to be a multi-step hermeneutic learning process.

I decided to search through the entire museum textile collection warehouse in person. Costumes are stored either in cardboard boxes designed for museum use and are kept on storage

27 Finnish National Opera and Ballet, Finnish National Theatre, Swedish Theatre and Helsinki City Theatre.

28 Weckman 2015, 41.

29 Weckman 2013; of the dominant Western conceptual framework, see Warren 1993, 11–12.

30 TeaME 0030 Donation of the Finnish National Theatre.

31 Teatterimuseo 2019, 10–12.

32 Weckman 2015; Weckman 2018 and Weckman 2021.

33 Koivunen 2021, 115–36.

34 Särkelä 2021, 59; see also Kunst 2018, 29–30; Turner 2020, 158.

shelves, or, if well preserved, on padded hangers in mobile, steel costume cabinets. Each object stored in a box contains an information tag pasted on the side of the box. Information tags include the object number, often accompanied by a photograph, production information, the name of the character, and the donor. In the case of the costumes in the mobile cabinets, the information tag is attached to the hanger. Prior knowledge of dress and costume history, as well as the visual costume features, stage characters, and productions that were connected to the representation of a specific ethnicity was necessary in order to distinguish costumes.³⁵ Walking through the aisles, I selected and photographed costumes based on both their visual appearance and on the character and production information.³⁶ Furthermore, as a result of the experience of this hands-on selection phase, more costumes were sourced with the help of documentation photographs from “The Theatre Museum costume collection project” of 2013, from information garnered from the aforementioned IDA database in 2020, and from discussions with the curator of the artefact collection, Sanna Brander.³⁷

The second selection phase was undertaken when all the costume material was listed and I had achieved an understanding of the data. After carrying out thorough research on the stage characters, plays, and the productions relating to the selected costumes, they were reevaluated and, after reflection, some were excluded. For example, from a cultural appropriation perspective, the selection could have also included a fantasy costume designed for a fairy-tale character, inspired by clothing of the Sámi.³⁸ This led me to consider the porous and shifting boundaries of the construction of ethnicity through the guise of performance costume.

This process led to a final summary being produced and defining the specific, as well as the shared visual features of the selected costumes. At this point, based on the extant costume material in particular, I designated the working term “ethnic-type costume” as an equivalent to “period costume” or “fantasy costume”, to refer to items which show clear signs of having been designed specifically to highlight a character’s ethnicity over other stylistic considerations, such as historical epoch or a character’s emotional state.

Based on this study, it is possible to reach several conclusions regarding the visual features of costumes used in Finland to represent the on-stage ethnicity of both quite a precisely defined (e.g. “Finnish”) or very vague (e.g. “Oriental”) nature between the late nineteenth century and the late twentieth century, thereby assisting in the identification of such costumes in the future. This study systematically identified the following three factors. Regardless of the period in which events are set, when storylines were situated in regions in rural Europe or outside the continent, and/or the identity of a character in a play is explicitly established as a European peasant, Asian, African, Arab, Jewish, Roma or indigenous such as Sámi or Native American, costume features commonly comprised:

- 1) dress characteristics considered traditional and associated with specific nations, regions, and minorities, such as multi-piece, layered folk and national costumes often with full skirts, fitted vests, and baggy sleeves, or loose and (often) full-length robes, tunics, and caftans. Interpretations of such attire were combined with small vests, baggy or narrow pants, and preferably impressive headgear, as well as footwear which often featured an upturned tip of the shoe or sandals; and/or
 - 2) fabrics with striking colour combinations, colourful stripes, or bold printed patterns, embroidery or appliques that contained paisley designs, animals, and plants or certain repeated decorative motifs, such as bold, sparkling, and colourful decorations with glittering coins or artificial gemstones, serrated ribbons and fringes; and/or
 - 3) pieces of clothing which when on stage, refer to implicitly “primitive” ways of life, depicted by articles such as loincloths, fur and leather, feathers in accessories and headgear.
- Consequently, encountering such “ethnic-type” costume features in surviving unidentified

35 See, for example, Weckman 2015; Weckman 2018; Weckman 2021.

36 Joanna Weckman. Documentation in the Theatre Museum textile warehouse 6.4.2022, file: TeaMu pukukokoelma käynti 6.4.2022 kuvat. Private archive of the author.

37 Costume collection project in 2013 encompassed a survey of approximately 500 unidentified costumes along with an analysis of their condition, construction, and provenance, Weckman 2013; Joanna Weckman. TeaMu kuvat_pukukonsultointiprojekti_2013; TeaMu museon etniset puvut 16.9.2020. Private archive of the author.

38 TeaME 1289:47 a-d.

costumes suggests that they were very likely used for a stage depictions of European peasants, or Asian, African, Arab, Jewish, Roma or indigenous people such as Sámi and Native Americans.

Analysis of “Ethnic-type” Costumes

By the end of the project in the spring of 2023, I had designated approximately 145 costumes³⁹ as being of “ethnic-type”. This equates to roughly seven percent of the 2230 costumes currently in the artefact collection of the Theatre Museum in Finland. Approximately half of the 145 costumes were previously connected to a certain production and half of them were unidentified. During the course of this study, I was able to either connect the formerly unidentified costumes with a certain production and a precise year of performance, or at least date them by a time interval of a decade or several decades based on archival research, the style and material of the costumes, as well as the time period when the performer or a theatre group connected to them had been active.

An examination of the “ethnic-type” costumes identified in the Theatre Museum collection indicated that the oldest such artefact dated from 1911 and that the most recent item dates from 2008. It is also possible to date sixty-nine “ethnic-type” costumes to the first half of the twentieth century, whereas sixty-one were produced during the second half of the twentieth century. However, the estimated time-frame for fifteen costumes spans several decades, with the largest cluster of such costumes in the museum collection being made in the middle of the twentieth century.⁴⁰ Consequently, the older the costumes are, the less likely they are to be connected to a specific production. The majority of the costumes were likely made in theatre costume workshops. Apparently only one costume was originally a piece of clothing used by a person who did actually belong to an ethnic minority, Roma. It was gifted to a choreographer-dancer and subsequently used as a performance costume.⁴¹

The present study indicates that the majority (110 of 145) of the “ethnic-type” costumes housed at the Theatre Museum in Finland were donated by different theatre houses and companies, mostly from well-established institutions.⁴² Thirty-five such costumes were donated by individuals – dancers, choreographers, and actors – frequently freelance performers, who had financial responsibility for their own costumes. After 145 “ethnic-type” costumes had been categorized more precisely, only twenty-five (17%) costumes (mostly single items of clothing) remained unclassified. In my opinion, these unclassified items may have been used to portray several different ethnicities depending on the combination with other items and choice of accessories. However, the passage of time must be taken into account – the personnel in early twentieth-century costume workshops may have been able to accurately identify the costumes with more success than me or any contemporary researcher. In addition, I designated quite a large part (fifty-four, or 37%), as being European and North American peasant folk dress style stage costumes. Consequently, sixty-six (or 46%) of the total 145 “ethnic-type” costumes, were ones that I interpreted as costumes used by racialized characters, representing people of colour, indigenous people, and ethnic minorities on the stage. In the context of the 2230 costumes in the entire current collection, this equals 3%. The majority (42/66) of these were either representations of Chinese and Japanese clothing (21), or costumes meant to signify that the character was from India or the Middle-East (21). The remaining costumes were eight “Gypsy character” costumes, six South American-style costumes, five “Lapp character” costumes, four costumes portraying Native Americans, and one costume that was used to portray a Jewish character. The proportion of “ethnic-type” costumes in the collection is indeed marginal, which would suggest that such costumes were not deemed to have sufficiently significant cultural value to be preserved in the museum.

39 As mentioned earlier, a “costume” in the Theatre Museum in Finland collection can be an identified ensemble consisting of several (but not necessarily all original) parts that belong to the same outfit with one object number, as well as being either an identified or unidentified single item of clothing with its own object number or only a donation number (the latter refers to a large amount of uncatalogued artefacts from a certain donor).

40 More specifically, the most identified “ethnic-type” costumes date from the 1950s (16), followed by the 1970s (15) and the 1940s and 1960s (12 each).

41 TeaME 1645 uncatalogued donation. Elli Hagert (1909–1986) gave a Roma lace shirt and a jacket to Ritva Kasurinen, who wore them in performances in the 1980s. Information from an e-mail by Sanna Brander 4.4.2023.

42 The Finnish National Opera and Ballet, The Swedish Theatre in Helsinki and Helsinki City Theatre.

A Case Study of Two “Lapp Character” Costumes

I selected two of the five “Lapp character” costumes in the Theatre Museum collection for closer examination. These costumes were known to have been owned and worn by Lucia Nifontova (1913–1987) and Arvo Martikainen (1905–1946), both well-known Finnish dancers who enjoyed domestic and international ballet careers.⁴³ However, neither the time nor place of these performances or the designer(s) of the costumes were known.

The detailed investigation included four phases that were developed during my earlier projects and which bear some resemblance to the observation phase introduced by Ingrid Mida and Alexandra Kim.⁴⁴ First, on opening the costume box I simply observed the costume for a while without touching it. Next, I measured the visible front part of the costume to form an impression of the proportions. After this, I sought to trace and interpret the genealogy of the costumes by endeavouring to identify the fabrics, analyzing the construction and determining whether any alterations had been made. I also attempted to estimate the age by examining the seams and fastenings and identifying the style of the item. Thereafter, I examined the other side of the costumes using the above steps. To avoid unnecessary contact with the artefacts, my observations were recorded and the costumes were documented as the investigation progressed. I photographed the costumes from the front and the back, paying attention to details, such as decorations, collars, sleeves, the reverse side of the costume, seams, fastenings and the hem of a skirt or the bottom of trousers, as well as the outer and inner parts of headwear.

Engaging with a costume takes time. Detailed observation, as outlined by Mida and Kim,⁴⁵ is essential because it provides an opportunity to unearth various significant clues that may otherwise go unnoticed. At the same time, as Barbieri notes, one must remember from the outset to be aware of and to appreciate the subjective responses evoked by a costume.⁴⁶ I argue that the examination of a costume at close proximity can be compared to an interview with a person. Both take about the same time – often between one and two hours – to become acquainted with the subject. When encountering an artefact at an intimate level, one creates a relationship with it, even if it may not have initially appeared particularly interesting.



Figure 2. Lucia Nifontova’s “Lapp” costume in 2023, Theatre Museum in Finland artefact collection. Photograph and copyright: Joanna Weckman.

43 Laakkonen 2021, 28.

44 Mida & Kim 2015, 28–9.

45 Mida & Kim 2015, 28–9.

46 Barbieri 2013, 285–7.

Both costumes worn by Nifontova and Martikainen are made of a blue, wool-type fabric with a lightly felted surface. The top of Nifontova's costume is quite form-fitting, with a thin orange-yellow silk-chiffon shawl collar attached to the neckline. The shawl collar has delicate, probably hand-painted patterns with hand-appliquéd blue and red fabric scraps. From a distance, it resembles a separate scarf, tucked under the sewn-on red waistband. The upper parts of the sleeves are made of a blue-based, striped fabric with small triple puffs. The lower part of the sleeves are made of the same blue fabric as the rest of the costume. At the elbows, the sleeves are surrounded by a red, plush fringe band, which would have been effective in emphasizing hand movements. Yellow and red decorative ribbons surround the cuffs. The pleated short skirt has a bouncy hem with the same yellow and red ribbon decoration as the cuffs. Underneath the skirt is a ruffled petticoat made of turquoise tarlatan and short pants also covered in tarlatan. On top of the skirt is a two-part, apron-like garment made of the same striped fabric as the upper sleeves and the same red plush fringe band at the hem as at the elbows. The costume has a long slit in the front, with metal clasps to close it, which enabled a quick change without an assistant.⁴⁷



Figure 3. The tunic of Arvo Martikainen's "Lapp" costume in 2023, Theatre Museum in Finland artefact collection. Photograph and copyright: Joanna Weckman.

Martikainen's costume (Figure 3) consists of four separate parts: a tunic, trousers, a hat and a belt. The blue tunic has a small stand-up collar, and its front slit is surrounded by a red front patch made of a wool-type fabric, with a light green serrated decorative ribbon and a loop decoration made of yellow ribbon. The shoulder seams are covered by light green patches made of a wool-type fabric and decorated with red serrated ribbons and yellow ribbons. The armhole seams are covered with red ribbon. Slightly baggy sleeves end with cuffs decorated with grey faux fur and red serrated ribbon on a green background. The tunic was tied at the waist with a belt made of the same yellow and red ribbon used in both costumes. The pants are full-length, with a fitted, body-hugging upper part and slightly baggy legs that end in grey faux fur ankle cuffs with red serrated decorations. The four-pointed blue hat has a flat top and red decorations on the seams below, with a headband of grey faux fur and red serrated ribbon.⁴⁸

The costumes were donated separately but I was able to connect them to the same performance through a small, hazy photograph entitled "Lighting rehearsal in the National Theatre" from an old photo album that had belonged to Lucia Nifontova (Figure 4). This only

47 TeaME 1511:4.

48 TeaME 1448:7.

existing image of the performance shows both Nifontova and Martikainen in their costumes.⁴⁹ The two dancers are seen bowing forward towards each other with their hands behind their backs, pretending to blow a kiss. When comparing the extant costumes with the photograph, all the parts that belong to Martikainen's costume have been preserved unaltered. Unfortunately, the Sámi women's *ládjogahpir*⁵⁰ -style hat with a curvy upper part and the leotards used by Nifontova are missing. Footwear is not shown in the photograph, nor were they part of the donations.

Extant costumes provide information that is difficult or even impossible to obtain from any other source. For example, since most of the performance photographs before the 1970s are in black and white, it is possible to note some of the colour scheme of the production through the costumes. The physical dimensions of the performer are also revealed. Both of these "Lapp costumes" are made for slender individuals. When looking more closely at the manufacturing methods used to make the costumes, one can note that they demonstrate quite rough sewing with only random inside-seam finishings. I got the impression that the costumes were made in a hurry, with some of the materials being recycled from previous performance costumes as well as from other clothing. For example, there was evidently an insufficient quantity of the red plush band to go completely around both Nifontova's sleeves. In addition, the blue-based striped fabric that was used in the upper sleeves and the apron-like front part of Nifontova's costume turned out to be reused fabric of the national dress skirt of the Munsala area.⁵¹ What appears to be the original finishing of the national dress hem is still visible and forms the hemline of the apron-like front part of Nifontova's costume.

Archival research revealed that these costumes were used immediately after the Finnish Continuation War with the Soviet Union (1941–1944). Hundreds of thousands of people, mainly Karelians but also Sámi, had been evacuated from the areas lost in the war and relocated in Finland. This tested the established norms, hierarchy, and socio-economic order of the existing communities, and the newcomers were often subjected to repetitive, controlling treatment and social stigma.⁵² This was also a time of poverty and fabric rationing in Finland, when materials were scarce and old clothes were recycled. Even before the war, dancers on individual tours frequently performed routines entitled, for example, *Mexican*, *Spanish*, or *Hungarian dance*. In so doing they chose to adopt costumes and makeup styles that aimed to evoke the respective regions.⁵³ Nifontova and Martikainen performed the *Lapp dance* as one of the several choreographed routines on their personal tour of Finland in 1944–1945. It appears that the photograph was taken before the Finnish National Theatre performance in Helsinki on 12 February 1945. The tour was advertised and reviewed in several newspapers.⁵⁴ Alexander Saxelin, the ballet master of the Finnish Opera, was cited as the choreographer of this "new dance," which was performed with the piano version of music composed by Sulho Ranta.⁵⁵ One of the newspaper articles also revealed that "colourful and original" costumes had been designed by Regina Backberg,⁵⁶ one of the few pioneers of Finnish costume design during this era. Backberg was a freelance costume designer and a skilled maker who had her own fashion atelier during the 1930s.⁵⁷ I consider it possible that she not only designed, but also made the costumes for Nifontova and Martikainen, either from the materials that they purchased or of her own fabric.

49 Personal archive of Lucia Nifontova, Theatre Museum Archive.

50 Term in northern Sámi language. On *ládjogahpir*-hats, see Pieski & Harlin, 2020.

51 Munsala national dress skirt fabric sample; of the history of Munsala national dress, see Valkeapää 2023, 149–51.

52 Kananen 2010, 257–8.

53 Costumes TeaME 1448:2, TeaME 1511:6, 1511:5 in Theatre Museum collection; Laakkonen 2010, 139–40; Korppi-Tommola 2010, 194, 198.

54 See, for example, Åbo Underrättelser 8.12.1944; Åbo Underrättelser 12.12.1944; *Tammerfors aftonbladet* 13.12.1944; *Nya Pressen* 13.2.1945; *Hufvudstadsbladet* 14.2.1945; *Vasabladet* 1.8.1945.

55 *Nord-Österbotten* 5.8.1945; *Poronkellopolska* (Reindeer bell polka) from Sulho Ranta, final part of the national romantic orchestra series *Kainuun kuvia* from 1933 could possibly be the music of the dance choreography. Sulho Ranta 1933: *Poronkellopolska*. Areena 2011.

56 *Nya Pressen* 13.2.1945.

57 Weckman 2005, 226; Weckman 2015, 63–5.



Figure 4. Lighting rehearsal of the Lapp dance in the National Theatre in February 1945. Arvo Martikainen and Lucia Nifontova. Theatre Museum Archive, Finland. Photographer unknown.

In Finland, the performance of racialized characters has been used as proof of an actor's versatile professional skills and adaptability.⁵⁸ Reviewers of the *Lapp dance* in 1944–1945 described the characters as “doll-like”⁵⁹ “children of nature”,⁶⁰ who displayed “genuine and natural insolence, directness, and cheerfulness”⁶¹. The reviewers also highlighted the “ethnographic stylization”⁶², the “grotesque Lapp dance”,⁶³ dance that “brought out a different image of the performers than previously”.⁶⁴ However, the choreography itself was criticized to partly resemble a “Finnish country polka” which left the critic longing for “more imaginative Lappish motifs”.⁶⁵ Based on the extant costumes, as well as photograph evidence, the visual difference in contrast to the “normal” appearance of the performers was also brought out and highlighted through the shape, cut, colour, and decoration of the costumes. Derek Fewster has suggested that the ethnic marker for ancient Finnishness within the visual arts was the

58 Weckman 2018, 125–7, 129; Suutela 2005, 50.

59 *Nya Pressen* 13.2.1945.

60 *Hufvudstadsbladet* 14.2.1945.

61 *Åbo Underrättelser* 12.12.1944.

62 *Hufvudstadsbladet* 14.2.1945.

63 *Nord-Österbotten* 5.8.1945.

64 *Åbo Underrättelser* 12.12.1944.

65 *Nya Pressen* 13.2.1945.

skull cap known as a “patalakki”.⁶⁶ I have suggested that similar repetitive visual cues – tall headgear, curly-tipped shoes and overcoats with high vertical collars, serrated decorations, and the use of animal skin and fur – were utilized on stage when Sámi were represented as a “Lapp character”, regardless of the original practices and customs related to the gender, age, and the diversity of regional Sámi culture.⁶⁷ The two “Lapp costumes” examined show several of the key visual characteristics connected with earlier representations of Sámi, such as the serrated and faux fur decorations, as well as the four-pointed hat of Martikainen’s costume, one of the most popular ethnic markers of a male “Lapp character” seen in old stage photographs.⁶⁸ The instantly recognizable, brightly coloured costumes supported the interpretation of Sámi as generic and stereotypical “children of nature”.

Interestingly enough, these two, along with three other “Lapp costumes” in the Theatre Museum collection, were all connected to individual dancers and choreographers and were donated by freelance performers, not major institutions. In my study of early Sámi representations, I located six pre-1917 plays that contained “Lapp characters”.⁶⁹ However, a recent addition to this list is *Kyypron prinsessa (The Princess of Cyprus)*, which premiered in 1860⁷⁰ and predates the earlier discovery of the first representation of Sámi on stage by twenty years. The play includes a cunning “Lapp slave” who belongs to the main character, Lemminkäinen and who is ultimately also responsible for his master’s death.⁷¹ In this study, six later plays that depicted “Lapp characters” were discovered.⁷² Hence, in total this amounts to thirteen plays, which have been staged approximately seventy times between 1860–1983.⁷³ However, no “Lapp character” costumes from any of these seventy theatre productions feature in the current collection of approximately 2230 costumes.

Conclusion

The surviving costumes in the Theatre Museum in Finland artefact collection represent theatre repertoires as well as objects that have been considered valuable and worthy of preservation in Finland. This study indicates that the proportion of “ethnic-type” costumes in the collection is marginal. I argue that this does not correspond to the presence of such characters in theatre repertoires in Finland, as several dozen premieres of plays with such characters have been located in this and earlier studies. Instead, this indicates that such costumes have been undervalued: recognizing “ethnic-type” costumes and especially those related to racialized characters – stereotypical representations of people of colour, indigenous people, and ethnic minorities – as worthy of donating to a museum collection has been rare. Such costumes have been reused over years for often vague depictions of a character’s ethnicity, regardless of the original practices and customs relating to gender, age, and diversity. The surviving “ethnic-type” costumes in the Theatre Museum collection are valuable evidence and material representatives of ideologies and costume practices pertaining to the creation and repetition of ethnic stereotypes. The two closely examined “Lapp character” costumes turned out to be rare and informative objects, conveying new knowledge of the performance practices of 1940s Finland, of the values and ideals of the respective era, as well as materiality and implementation practices that were used to instantly create recognizable ethnicity on stage. Such costume practices connected with individual theatres and their in-house costume workshops still need further investigation.

66 Fewster 2006, 106–7.

67 Weckman 2021, 65–6.

68 See, for example, Weckman 2018, 106.

69 Weckman 2021, 65.

70 Paavolainen 2014, 132–7. Later, the play was staged at least in 1897 and 1908. Ilona teatterin esitystietokanta: *Kyypron/ Kypron prinsessa*.

71 Topelius 1901.

72 *Kuninkaan rannerengas, Lapin profeetta, Lemmin poika, Solens återkomst, Velisurmaajat, Wala* Manuscripts in the Theatre Museum Archive and Library.

73 The figures are indicative and show the minimum number of productions, based on information from the Ilona Theatre database, which has some limitations. For example, the performances from the Swedish language theatres in Finland are only covered from the 1960s onwards. For more on this coverage, see: Ilona Theatre Database.

The major priority nowadays when accepting a donation to a museum collection is the known context of an already identified object. However, in relation to many “ethnic-type” costumes, in particular the ones used to portray racialized characters, this would often mean that they would have no place in the collection. Such costumes are often unidentified, rarely connected to well-known actors in major roles, but rather with side characters in minor roles or as anonymous extras in the background. The visual and conceptual tools developed during this study can be utilized to enhance the recognizability of such formerly undefined costumes. This would help to provide balance to museum collections and facilitate greater accessibility of the extant costume material for later studies. As noted in my previous studies, by examining the practices related to the representation of ethnicity and racialized stage characters, it is not only possible to expand our understanding of early Finnish theatre and its substructures, but also to identify and make visible the historical strategies of exclusionary performance practices.

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