

ON 7TH JUNE 2026, A NOËL COWARD
PLAY CLOSED ON BROADWAY FOR THE
FIRST TIME SINCE 2017. LATER THAT
EVENING, COSTUME DESIGNER JEFF
MAHSHIE WON A TONY. WE CAUGHT
UP WITH BROADWAY'S BEST DRESSER
TO TALK SCOTT ELLIS' PRODUCTION OF
FALLEN ANGELS.



Dressing Fallen Angels

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I have to say, that was kind of an unusual evening.”

When Jeff Mahshie and I speak, the costume designer has already earned the “Tony Award-winning” epithet that’ll precede his name for the rest of his life. But on the night of Broadway’s biggest party, he was running late.

The ceremony was only the second significant event of the day. That afternoon, Scott Ellis’ production of *Fallen Angels* had taken its final bows, the matinee leading neatly into the do at the iconic Radio City Music Hall.

“I wanted to see the last performance of the play,” Mahshie says. “That finished around three-thirty. [Then] Scott’s like, ‘you have to stay for the champagne toast, so that was four...’

This, I suggest, sounds stressful. As the clock ticked down to showtime, the designer was still talking to the great and good of the New York press.

“I was literally still in the press line when they called my category,” he says. Then, with remarkably good humour: “It will make for a good story, years down the road.”

WITH BENEFITS

Mahshie’s *Fallen Angels* journey started in 2023, when Ellis asked for his services for a Coward play benefit reading with Rose Byrne and Kelli O’Hara. “I was really quite arrogant,” Mahshie laughs. “[I said] ‘of course, I know all Noël Coward.’” Ellis gave him the name of the play. “Oh, I don’t know that’.

He won’t have been the only one. Since its Broadway bow in March, reactions to Ellis’ Tony-winning production have praised the script as a lost classic over the

pond. Written in 1924 but not crossing the Atlantic until 1927, *Fallen Angels* has reappeared in New York only a handful of times since. This production marks its first Broadway run since 1956.

Having plugged the gap in his Coward knowledge, though, Mahshie set to dressing Byrne and O’Hara “with a nod to the 20s”. The benefit went well. “I was speaking with Scott and [set designer] David Rockwell,” Mahshie says of the show’s after party, “and we kind of just looked at each other. “That was funny, wasn’t it?” [It had] a modern sensibility to it... At that point I knew that Scott was really thinking about doing it.”

Once Byrne and O’Hara’s schedules were lined up, thinking turned into doing, with most of the key creative players reprising the roles they’d played in the benefit. What was once one of Coward’s underseen classics was about to get its first Broadway production in almost 70 years. For Mahshie, it was time to get to work.

DATE TROUBLE

“I remember going over to David’s incredible studio,” Mahshie says. “He does extensive work and presentation, so there’s a whole room set up with boards of his interiors and exteriors and furniture and references. He was quite taken with it being set in the Art Deco period, which began in 1925 in Paris.”

The International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts (an event in desperate need of a nickname) might have taken a Parisian aesthetic movement global – but to reach over the Channel into Julia’s living room, it might logically need a bit of a run up.

“If this play takes place in 1925 sometime in the fall, this means that Julia has managed to have her whole entire home done in the latest Parisian style in three months,” Mahshie says. “In a play, of course, you can suspend disbelief a little



bit, but as I went through David's research, I noticed some of the inspiration he was leaning towards: it's 1927, 1929, 1931.

"To be honest with you, the interiors kind of evolve [gradually]. You could keep it in 1925/26 and get the look that David's going for. [But] the fashions of that period don't catch up until later in the decade. If we shift it a few years, we can go from this drop-waisted silhouette of the mid-20s to the more seductive, bias cut of the late 20s, early 30s. I did a presentation of women's clothing from [both], and it was very, very clear, you know, it was much more attractive [and] seductive."

JUST A SPLASH

With a period nailed down and mood boards creaking under the weight of research, it was time to start selecting fabrics. The finished designs are explosions of colour: elegant lilacs and greens contrasting with some bold stockings for Fred and Will's golfing trip. It wasn't always this way.

"Art Deco could be black, white, silver, and gold, or it involves soft colours as well," Mahshie explains. "I'd met with David, and he [wanted to] lean into this slightly more feminine vibe [with the set]. Which made perfect sense, because the lead is set by Julia; she rules the roost, so to speak.

Julia's Act Two dress – the elegant violet number pictured above – accordingly took its hue from the apartment walls in Rockwell's designs.

"At one point I thought Julia would be in icy and silver," Mahshie says, "and then Jane would be in a pale gold, to echo the Art Deco. [But] Scott had asked if I could make it a colour... I took cues from the set: I just loved the idea of her living and owning her space."

When it came to choosing Jane's outfit, the original palette was pushed further



under the carpet - literally. "It came off the carpeting of [the] stairs," Mahshie reveals. "There was an olive, and I thought the violet and the olive look really beautifully together."

These two colours would come to define Jane and Julia's wardrobe across all three acts. "Rose comes in in a greenish tweed and Kelly wears a pale grey with a touch of violet... I wanted to, as the play intensified, have the colours intensify."

In the theatre, though, any costume is more than just an aesthetic choice. For this production, with pratfalls, flying stage-champagne and the unorthodox use of stairs, this was especially true.

"I had no idea those clothes were going to experience that kind of activity," Mahshie says. "We were just very, very lucky that they managed to be able to achieve that. There's not a knee pad, not anything... Both those actors were very, very adept at creating what they needed to do within the parameters of the set, the script and those clothes."

BE DIRECT

After a three-month run and a rapturous reception from critics and audiences alike, the show was all set for a fairytale ending. *Fallen Angels* shared its final performance with Broadway's biggest night of the year. Mahshie, Rockwell, Ellis, O'Hara and Byrne were all nominated for Tonys. And though Mahshie wasn't able to give a speech on the stage, backstage press gave him a chance to thank the team that made the show possible – starting with director Scott Ellis.

"He's such a brilliant storyteller. I've had the pleasure of working with him a number of times now," he says. "When [any] designer [or] actor comes off as brilliant, that's only ever because of a director - the direction of how they want it to look, and also the freedom and the trust of being able to do what you do."

Fallen Angels is streaming now on Broadway HD.

