

WINGING IT

“Even though in our heads we know that the wings are not a part of the actor’s body, when they are in them we expect them to control them like they are a part of their body,” Costume Designer Susan Hilferty explains. “In fact, the wings are completely separate, on a back pack, and the actors have to really be aware of them. They have to learn how to move with them and not knock into things.”



There are four different kinds of wings. The Act I Chistery wings or the “growing wings” that have a dramatic effect when he pulls a concealed cord, and they are revealed and open in stages as Elphaba gives him the power to fly. Once he has wings, his second act costume has a different style of

wing as he pulls one cord the wings go outward, then he pulls another for the reverse action to bring them in. The style that most of the monkeys wear functions opposite of Chistery’s wings. They pop open on their own when the sheaths are removed and are pulled closed with a cable when they need to be. The fourth style are called the “dead wings” because they don’t open or close and are strictly for the visual effect.

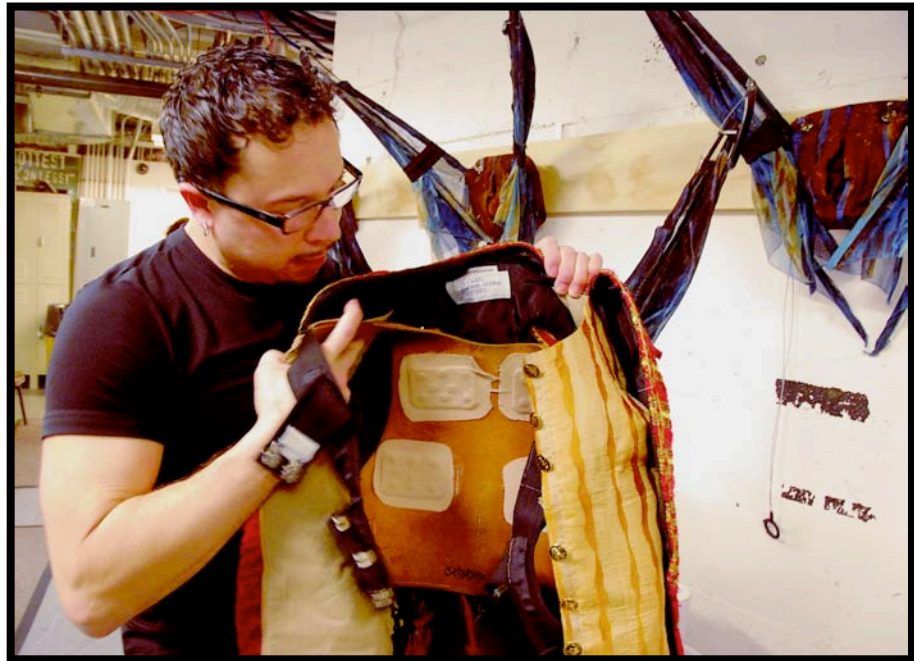
Originally, all the wings were cabled to pull open. After the pre-Broadway run at the Curran Theatre in 2003, Michael Curry suggested that it would be better for most of the monkeys to have wings that stayed open so that they wouldn’t have to pull on them to make them flap while they were trying to dance or fly at the same time. Chistery’s wings remained “pull to open” because he has to climb the various scenic elements and it was unsafe to have his wings pop open for those maneuvers.



WINGING IT Part 2



There are two types of monkey harnesses: the leather harness that attaches the wing pack to the actors back like the Chistery coat with wing pack that weighs about 20 pounds. (seen at right with dresser Mario Urena). The pop up harnesses worn by the other monkeys are stored held closed on the wall (right). The harnesses worn by the flying monkeys can be uncomfortable because they have to be very snug to be safe.



According to Associate Choreographer Corinne McFadden Herrera, who was a flying monkey in the original Broadway production, there is a two-point harness (two cords coming from each hip) and one-point harness (connected to just one cord over head). As an actor leans and turns, "It's trickier to fly with the one-point harness. You have more freedom of mobility but as a result you have to have a better sense of your body weight and how to control your movements."



San Francisco Wardrobe crewmember Mario Urena maintains the flock of wings. He

has an affinity for their mechanics and he knows how to repair them, especially under pressure — during a performance.



Special thanks to Susan Hilferty, Alyce Gilbert, Marion Urena, Gillian Kadish, Thom Widmann, David Lober, Corinne McFadden Herrera, Susan Sampliner and the SF *Wicked* crew. Photos: Cece Hugo