

## Antrix Updates The Season of the 'Mask'

In what continues to be an extremely challenging year for all and with Halloween just a few days away, things are going to be very different in the traditional run up to the party season.

The Rule of Six (in theory) should have put a stop to many social activities. In practice this is not always happening, with various people finding loopholes in the legislation, or just ignoring it altogether.

Fortunately, those people we have had visiting us for costumes, (have, as far as we know) been abiding by the rules, by having home-based family parties with small numbers, or 'bigger events', via Zoom.

Here at Antrix, we have spent the last few months concentrating on our costume collection and reviewing the 2000+ costumes we hold in stock. Having decided we need to create more space in our house, we have started to weed out some of the less popular ones, and offer others for sale. However, the stock at present has not really lessened, with social events not happening, people have also been sorting out their wardrobes and finding items that they "think we might like!"

The 30th birthday of our business takes place next month. Normally, we would hold a party to celebrate, but as with so many things, this is not going to be feasible in 2020. So, we have been looking at various other ways to mark the occasion. See overleaf.

### Coming in the Winter Issue

30th Birthday Retrospective, including Most Popular Costumes and our particular favourites, plus Looking Forward to 2021

Traditionally, of course, the wearing of masks is usually quite common when it comes to Halloween. With full overhead masks there can be issues with seeing out of them, especially in the dark. Plus eating the treats is slightly harder.

This year the wearing of masks is obligatory in several circumstances - some areas have stricter rules on wearing masks outdoors, but these are the same areas which have the limits on meeting outside anyway, or have suggested banning Trick or Treating entirely.

Previously, the thing with Halloween masks used to be to have half-face styles. These left the mouth free to eat, drink, speak etc. Conversely this year the requirement is to have the lower face covered, so the industry has risen to the challenge with a range of character/cartoon styles. Not being a shop, and with the masks being plentiful from Internet sources, we are not stocking these, but we have seen everything from Fred Flintstone and Marge Simpson to The Mask and Jack Skellington (from 'Nightmare Before Christmas'). At a time when your Halloween make-up creation might need to incorporate the ability to wear a safety mask without loss of effect, these pre-printed items offer a good starting point, although some, such as those based on Day of the Dead designs, may pose a creative challenge.



This is Edweena. She is probably one of the most impressive masks in the Antrix collection. Looks good, but like all overhead masks, not very practical when it comes to eating, drinking and seeing where you are going. Very 'on message' on face-covering though!

Moving on from Halloween, celebrating Mexico's Day of the Dead (Nov 2 this year) is also going to be a restrained affair. Despite protests about Cultural Appropriation and Stereotyping when people wear sombreros, this post-Halloween festival is being increasingly used as a further excuse to party, being a rather more colourful affair. Because of the elaborate Sugar Skull face designs which are a central part of the celebrations, facial masks are a more common feature here, but COVID rules on gatherings and groups will severely restrict activities in Mexico itself and elsewhere.

November usually brings the possibility of masked balls, but probably not so much this year - well, not in their normal form anyway: Leaving aside the rules on gatherings and group-size, the typical Venetian-style events are based on the wearing of eye-masks and of course these will not do in current circumstances. There are some Venetian styles which do cover the whole face - the bauta costume concept involves a full-face white mask (modern variations were seen in the 'Eyes Wide Shut' film) and the more decorative Arlecchino (Harlequin) mask. Ironically, the beak-like Medico del peste (Plague Doctor) mask, derived from days when Venetians suffered disease from living close to an infested lagoon, does not quite cut the mustard on lower face covering.

The Venetians use their masks to hide identity (and sometimes gender), as does many a superhero of nowadays. With mask-wearing becoming the new norm, much of the potential mystique of the mask is being lost. Back in the day, the masked Lone Ranger righted wrongs in the Wild West - nowadays those dispensing the law are more likely to ask "Who was that unmasked man?"

# FUNdraising

October/November are traditionally fundraising months for the costume sector. We have already mentioned about masked balls, but 'Wear it Pink' day in support of Breast Cancer, plus Children in Need and Movember also normally play their part, when it comes to fundraising and costumes. At present, as with other businesses in the hospitality and Leisure sector, costuming is not exactly in the forefront of people's minds.

Even prior to the restrictions caused by the COVID lock-down, fundraising has been increasingly moving online through Just Giving and similar arrangements. Although we are obviously biased, we used to say that when it came to tin-shaking on the streets for charities and worthy causes, wearing a costume gave you a higher profile and, hopefully, better response, but why bother when you can go to the more massive audience on the Internet?

The past few months have seen amazing feats of individual fundraising, notably from the likes of Captain Sir Tom Moore, and many charities have benefited. Unfortunately, like businesses, there are numerous other charities who have suffered because their normal income streams have been restricted, or dried up, and they have had to try to embrace aspects of the virtual world, such as the Annual Poppy Appeal suggesting you buy poppy merchandise online or download poppy posters to show support.

The other traditional fundraising event of this time of the year is Children in Need. Whereas costumes used to be an essential element for this annual event, this is not so much the case nowadays, with people looking at other alternatives: To minimise outlay, people may improvise their outfits, wear outlandish clothes items or just find other ways raising money such as cake sales, etc. Most of the costume requests we receive for Children in Need tend to focus on whether we have a Pudsey Bear for hire. We do **not** have one of these, as BBC own the rights.



Another annual event affected by COVID was the London Marathon, initially postponed from the Spring and then run only by the elite athletes in protected circumstances. Luckily there was still a way in which fundraising 'fun-runners' could do their thing, making their own arrangements to cover the distance in whatever way they wished within the day in question. As we have mentioned before, there are usually Guinness records at stake for costumed competitors - Fastest dressed as a Tree, Fastest as a Fruit etc. and, last year, there was controversy over 'Fastest Nurse', who was initially disallowed for wearing scrubs, rather than a more traditional outfit, but reinstated on appeal. In all 38 such records were broken in 2019, but chances are that, due to the lack of controlled circumstances and observers most records were unchallenged this year. Notwithstanding, Lloyd Scott, known for completing the Marathon in a 130lb (58.9kg) Deep-Sea Diving Suit (and holding the record for the Longest Time to Complete a few years ago) has recently accomplished a climb of the UK's three highest peaks in the same suit, saying this is the pinnacle of his costumed fundraising career having raised over five million pounds over thirty years!



## Wall of Costumes?

During December, we will be 'celebrating' the birth of our business 30 years ago. In the winter newsletter we will be having a retrospective of how the costuming market has changed during that time.

Two of the most common questions we are asked when it comes to costumes, is "What is your most popular costume?" and "What is your favourite costume?". Therefore, both in the newsletter and on our website, we will be showcasing the popular ones from various years and some of our favourites.

We will also be inviting anyone who has been to a fancy-dress event from 1990 to present day, to send in their favourite costume photo, to go on a "30th Anniversary wall" of our website. The costumes do not necessarily have to be ones you have hired from us. Please Note:- All pictures posted on the website will remain anonymous,

If you are interested in getting involved, contact us with your picture, approximate year of the event, plus for a chance to win a prize, don't forget your contact details.