Rachel Hibler

Director’s Statement

Descendants The Musical

**Seed**: Expectations

* How do we grapple with parental expectations?
* How do we find our own identities in a world already decided for us?
* How can we be unexpected?

**WOP**: Auradon, present day

**Director’s Statement**

Disney’s Descendants the Musical is based on the popular film of the same name. Therefore, there will be audience expectations on our production to meet the design already set in the film. I want to seamlessly integrate audience expectation with original design by using the idea of “Expectations” as our design concept. The theme of “Expectations” will be considered in all design elements as well as character choices. We will consider expectations on two levels: audience expectations for the look of the show and story/character expectations. Our production should meet some audience expectations but must explore how we can break expectations and be surprising.

We want to be recognizable by audiences to the film and look of each character. However, we don’t want to copy Disney’s entire design. Use it as inspiration and decide what are absolutes that must be the same but feel free to take the next step in the design.

**Color Design**

Disney is known for its use of bold, primary colors. Please use bold colors in all choices. We will honor the color choices for each character and location. For example: Auradon is blue and gold. Isle of the Lost is green and black. This will not be a muted palette in any choices.

**Character Design**

Each character has expectations put on them by their parents for who they should be and were “meant” to be. I want character designs and actors’ choices to consider those expectations and how the characters meet or break them. Each character should have something surprising in their design and interpretation that breaks expectations. Unexpected facial and physical choices should be explored, especially as characters begin to find themselves and their courage to make their own choices.

**Set Design**

The show requires several locations, all of which are familiar to the film audience. The set needs to be transformative to create all locations with minimal set pieces. We will use two sided flats and wagons to add locations. Entire set locations are not necessary except perhaps at Auradon Prep and The Isle of the Lost. The set should suggest this is a magical place and things can change quickly and seamlessly. I want the set to be surprising and unexpected when it moves and transforms to a new location.

**Costume Design**

This is the area I think audiences will expect the most traditional looks. I want to keep the basic looks of each character. For example: Mal will have her purple hair, Evie will have her blue. Colors are very important to each character, especially in their costuming. But each costume should have something surprising and unexpected about it. Each character has moments when they grapple with expectations and their identities, give them something in their costume to help show their personalities. Honor the color choices from the film while also exploring new ways to interpret each character through costume. One of my favorite costume design elements from the film is each character seems to have lots of layers on them when we first meet them. Clothing is almost used as their armor from the world. I’d like to explore how we can strip those layers away as each character finds their voice and breaks free.

**Props Design**

Here is another element that has quite a bit of audience expectation on it. Evie’s mirror, Mal’s spell book, the Fairy’s Wand all need to be recognizable. Honor the design of each element provided by Disney while also considering how we can add something unexpected to it. The expectation is we have two of every prop.

**Lighting Design**

The Disney colors will be considered heavily in this design element. Auradon will be bright, welcoming, and flooded with light. The Isle of the Lost will be shadowed and tinged green. The lighting will follow Mal’s journey as she discovers who she is and will change with her. As she “lightens” up in her realization of who she is, so does the light around her. The lighting must start by creating a mood of heaviness. The weight of despair, of lost hope will all be felt. But as we learn who we are and begin making choices for ourselves, we become the light in our world, a beacon of hope for our own lives.

**Sound Design**

The music is fun, upbeat, and exciting and I certainly want to keep the energy of the show. However, I don’t want to lose moments of powerful silence. Especially in Mal’s story. We will find beats of silence as characters make choices and grow. Music can be a distraction from character development, so I want to balance those elements. The music will be used to push plot and character forward, but always give the characters a moment prior to or after their song. Our music and sound will be unexpected when they pause for beats.