

Sewing for Royalty (or any commission with a deadline)

Annisa Gabrieli, An Tir

Each year, we have two coronations. Quite reasonably, the Royal Heirs will want to ascend the thrones looking their best, in new and fabulous regal attire. Meanwhile, they will also have to gather and to some extent manage a retinue, determine charter and scroll texts and design concepts, learn a lot of rules and boundaries, develop court plans, and adapt to the many other responsibilities and duties of this great honor.

Whether they win Crown in July or September, there will be a lot to do in a short amount of time.

If you volunteer to help with the Royal wardrobe, here are a few tips to keep things progressing smoothly.

Responsibilities of the Wearers:

Be available to your clothing team. They will need:

A clear and realistic concept of what you want

Accurate and complete body measurements

Fabric and other materials

Design decisions during the process

At least two fittings. Best is four – 1. a preliminary meeting to take measurements, discuss the plan, and choose fabrics, 2. a fitting of mockups and discussion of trims, accessories and other details, 3. a fitting of the real fabric garments midway through the construction process, 4. a fitting to make final adjustments, mark hems, and any other final details. The final fitting should happen at least a week before the coronation event.

Say “thank you”. This may seem obvious, but in the stress of so many preparations, it is easy to make critical comments during a fitting before saying anything positive. Remember that your team is working very hard, and your gratitude is most likely their only pay.

Wear the clothes with pride. Even the most fabulous garments can only look truly royal on a person who wears them with a regal bearing. So put on all of the layers, adjust them properly, stand up straight, and be the King and Queen. And after coronation, wear the outfits again! Nobody wants their hard work to languish in the back of a closet.

A quote from the interwebs: “A person who feels appreciated will always do more than what is expected”. I have no idea who originally said this, but it’s true.

Responsibilities of the Makers:

Be honest about your time and abilities. It is far better to finish early and be available to help others as the deadline approaches, than to over-commit and cause stress to everyone involved. The deadline does not move. Plan your time and commitments accordingly, and re-assess often. Consider your event schedule, work schedule and other obligations (Twelfth Night preparation time is about a month shorter than it looks, because so many holidays happen during that span).

Write things down. Make a plan and schedule. List and draw the outfits and all of their components, so that everyone involved is 'on the same page' about the plans. Keep good records of fabric choices, trim desires, sources for materials, yardages needed, orders placed, shipping dates, etc. Keep a record of every person who helps, even a little bit.

Gather a crew. Artisans like to make art, and everyone likes to know that their skills are valued. Round up people who love to sew, or who are interested in the chosen time period, and give them the opportunity to create something fabulous.

A Coronation or other court appearance is a performance. The wearer is on stage, and is the center of attention for a large group of people. It is not fair to add into that situation the distraction of ill-fitting, unfinished or unstable clothing.

Have everything completed before the coronation event begins. Ideally they should be able to arrive and try on their wonderful new outfits on Friday evening, so that they can start their reign with confidence and the ability to focus on their ceremony and their populace.

At the Coronation:

If possible, one member of the team should be available during the preparation time, to help them dress. These new and often elaborate garments can be a bit more involved to get into, and having a calm and knowledgeable helper present to make sure all the pieces are in place can help ensure that they look their best and also keep the stress level down. Take a small sewing kit and some safety pins, just in case.

Give their Majesties your list of all of the people who worked on their clothes, so that they can recognize each one appropriately.

Write up care instructions- if any garments are washable, or must be dry-cleaned, or should not be stored on a hanger, or trims must be removed before cleaning- let them know. You've put a lot of time into these outfits, so help them get as much use as possible.