

In stage world, Bembridge's career is all set

Stage Flight—part of a series on local arts personalities.

Brian Sidney Bembridge graduated from college with a degree in set design—but it was the Muppets who gave his career a boost.

After he designed sets for the \$40-million movie "Muppets in Space," it was much easier to convince off-Loop theaters he could make something magical happen with their \$500 budgets.

Now Bembridge is one of the city's omnipresent set and lighting designers. This month his work can be seen at Bailiwick (where he's done sets for "Marlowe") and Noble Fool (where he's designed "The Mikado Version 2.005's" set and lighting).

"Bembridge is in demand because he's a smart guy who can visually crystallize a play," said David Zak, artistic director of Bailiwick and director of "Marlowe." "He has a very unique sensibility to be able to distill stuff down that not only works for the play, but also for the theater, and the budget that you're working in."

At one local career day presentation, one of his peers told

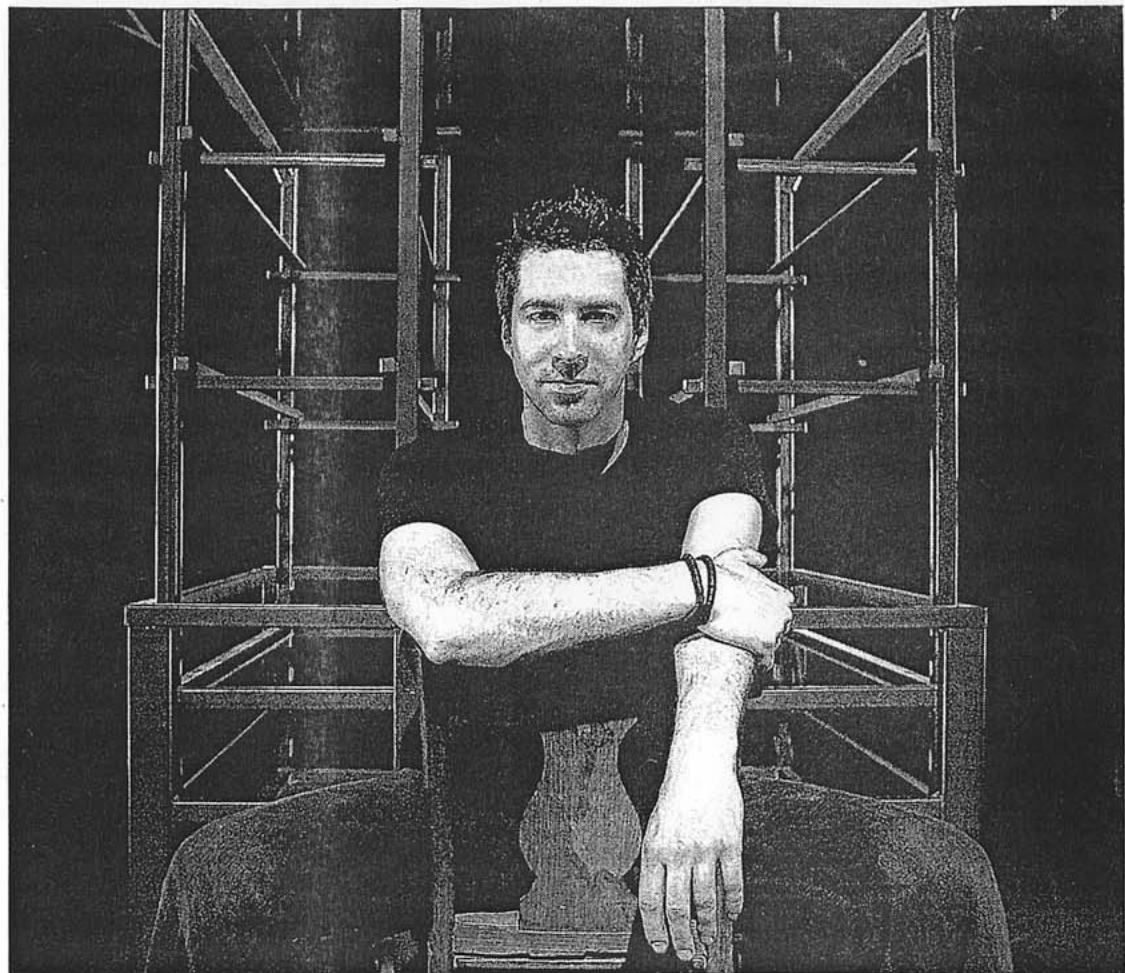
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the students, "The one way to get work in this town is to kill Brian Bembridge."

Bembridge tells the story with a hearty laugh, adding, "It's tough for me to turn down work, really, because I have such a wide range of work in terms of what a job is paying." For instance, he can make \$300 on one show and \$3,000 on another. "One thing you never want to do is figure out your hours in theater. It will make you very depressed, very quickly."

To supplement his income, Bembridge has taken on all manner of odd jobs. He's lit or interior-designed hair salons and restaurants (even making 6-foot chili peppers), and created elaborate environments for parties. For one child's birthday he transformed a coach house into a dark haven for oversized bugs glowing in black lighting.

Even as he designs for the theater, Bembridge also consults on



Brian Sidney Bembridge crafts sets for leading Chicago theater companies.

lights for a mall playground that needs to "pop more" at night and on cloudy days.

Asked what special skills he offers, Bembridge quickly answers, "insanity." He says he introduces most of his ideas with, "This is going to sound crazy..." before outlining the meat of his concept. "I always joke with the-

ater companies—I may not be the smartest, but I'll be the most creative you'll find."

Being able to design both sets and lights also helps Bembridge stay busy. "I love them both," he said. "They both have their own greatness."

"Marlowe" runs through July 17 at the Bailiwick Arts Center,

1229 W. Belmont Ave. \$22- \$25; 773-883-1090 or visit www.bailiwick.org. "The Mikado Version 2.005" opens in previews Thursday at Noble Fool in Pheasant Run Resort, 4051 E. Main St., St. Charles. Tickets start at \$27; 630-584-6342 or visit www.noblefool.org.

—Jenn Q. Goddu