Costume design - Iolanthe

Object: Costume design
Place of origin: Great Britain (designed)
Date: 1924 (designed)
Artist/Maker: Wilkinson, Norman (of Four Oaks), born 1882 - died 1934 (designer)
Materials and Techniques: Watercolour and bodycolour over pencil on paper
Credit Line: Given by Dame Bridget D'Oyly Carte.
The V&A wishes to acknowledge the generous support given by The Gladys Krieble Delmas Foundation, which facilitated the cataloguing of the D'Oyly Carte Archive designs in 2015/16.
Museum number: S.2375-2015
Gallery location: In Storage

Public access description
Iolanthe, or, The Peer and The Peri by W.S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan was produced at the Savoy Theatre under the management of Richard D'Oyly Carte on Saturday 25th November 1882, until Tuesday 1st January 1884.

Sullivan was reluctant to be more famous for comic opera than for classical composition, but since he enjoyed the lifestyle it financed, began work on a score for Gilbert's new libretto during the summer of 1882. Originally titled Perola and changed to Iolanthe at the last minute to maintain secrecy, Gilbert's new libretto indulged his whimsical penchant bringing fairies to Westminster, whilst satirising the British parliamentary system, especially the House of Lords. As ever Gilbert meticulously planned the contrasting stage pictures made by his settings and characters including a fairy chorus and their Queen, a chorus of Peers, the Lord Chancellor, the banished fairy Iolanthe, and her half human son Strephon in love with the beautiful shepherdess Phyllis, the Lord Chancellor's ward. With Sullivan's equally contrasting pastoral and stirring music, brilliant lyrics and the added surprise of electric lights on the fairies' foreheads, Iolanthe was another hit in London and New York, where D'Oyly Carte opened a production at the Standard Theatre the same night.

The artist, illustrator and theatre designer Norman Wilkinson (1882-1934) who called himself 'Norman Wilkinson of Four Oaks' to distinguish himself from the contemporary marine painter of the same name, was born in Four Oaks, a residential area of Birmingham, and studied at Birmingham School of Art from 1900-1903. He shared a studio in Paris with Maxwell Armfeld, and did book illustration as well as theatre design. He worked for Charles Frohman at the Duke of York's Theatre in 1910 but became better known for his work on Harley Granville Barker's productions at the Savoy Theatre, including Twelfth Night (1912), and A Midsummer Night's Dream (1914). He also provided designs for productions by Nigel Playfair at the Lyric Theatre Hammersmith and for C.B. Cochran, the Phoenix Society and the Stage Society.

In 1924 Wilkinson designed new costumes for Phyllis, Strephon and the Fairies for Rupert D'Oyly Carte's new production of Iolanthe at the Prince's Theatre. He went on to become a governor of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre for whom he designed A Midsummer Night's Dream (1932), and Romeo and Juliet (1933).

Descriptive line
Costume design by Norman Wilkinson for Iolanthe in Iolanthe, Princes Theatre, 1924

Dimensions
Height: 38.8 cm approximately, Width: 28.2 cm approximately

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URL
http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1347215/iolanthe-costume-design-wilkinson-norman-of/