

# Jeffrey B. Cunningham MFA

1300 Jefferson Street Kerrville Texas 78028

JBCunningham75@gmail.com

(830) 329-2940

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## Biography as a Scene Designer

At the age of 14, I was invited to assist a high school theatre teacher with the scenic decisions for the 1991 Senior Musical “Pippin.” He explained what a scenery and set design entailed. I had been in theatre all my life (church plays, boy scout skits, etc.), but my relationship became official and permanent when a 6<sup>th</sup>-grade English teacher threw me at the junior high drama coach. In addition to that, I was a Lego and Crayola kid. So, when the worlds of drama, coloring, and building Venn diagrammed into something called ‘Scene Design’ I was hooked.

I studied under the late Dr. Daniel L. Hannon at Southwest Texas State University. Hannon was brilliant, gifted, and demanding. I am one of the luckiest set designers in the world for having studied under him. He helped get me to Temple University in Philadelphia when I earned an MFA in theatre. My wife and I returned to Central Texas, where I spent three years as a stagehand and scenic painter.

In 2003, we moved to Kerrville Texas based on an offer to help run a new performing arts venue and community theatre company. As is often the case, that job ended. We continued to work in Kerrville area theatres including the Hill Country Arts Foundation’s Point Theatre (the oldest continuously running outdoor theatre company in Texas) My wife worked her way through the public school system to become a middle school drama teacher and I am, as of 2022, the Director of Theatre at Schreiner University.

## Future Plans as a Scene Designer

I have worked in community and educational theatre for over twenty years. It has been very rewarding, sharing the art and discipline of the stage with newcomers who might not otherwise experience it. Working with groups that have had limited resources and budgets has created a unique set of challenges not covered in most University theatre programs (certainly not the two in which I was a part). Amateur and volunteer artists relying on stock materials with limited time, money, and skill, cause one to develop new forms of economy and creativity.

In addition to working with limited resources, I’ve also been subject to limited understanding and appreciation. While many in a small town, or small liberal arts campus love theatre, they don’t always fully understand its true value or importance.

As I get older, I would really like the opportunity to design and teach design in an environment where we enjoyed sufficient resources to execute excellent design work. More importantly, I’d like to work for and with individuals who already had a full sense of the value and importance of the work we were doing, so that I do not have to constantly beg others to understand our work enough to invest in it.

To see design concepts contribute to an excellent production idea and have that idea realized by well-trained committed professionals with reasonable access to all necessary theatre resources would be a dream come true. To participate in the process and to bring invested and focused theatre students along with me, is my future goal