

UNDERCOVER

BELOW

Jim McFarlane (b. 1955)
Portrait of Kristian Fredrikson
with a Mouse, during the Making
of Film Sequences for Graeme
Murphy's Nutcracker at the
National Theatre, St Kilda 1992
b&w photograph; 40.2 x 27.5 cm
Pictures Collection
nla.gov.au/nla.pic-vn3098377

OPPOSITE PAGE FROM LEFT
Pages 10–11 in *The Berlei Review*, October–November 1929
Australian Collection
nla.gov.au/nla.cat-vn1428827

Kristian Fredrikson (1940–2005)
Costume Designs for the Production Undercover
in *Papers of Kristian Fredrikson*, c. 1960–c. 2005
Manuscripts Collection
nla.gov.au/nla.cat-vn3969578

DRAWINGS MADE BY COSTUME DESIGNER KRISTIAN FREDRIKSON FOR HIS FIRST FILM COMMISSION PROVIDE AN INTIMATE GLIMPSE INTO HIS PROCESS AND PRACTICE, AS MICHELLE POTTER REVEALS

KRISTIAN FREDRIKSON (1940–2005) is perhaps best known for his groundbreaking collaborations in the theatre, notably with choreographer and director Graeme Murphy. For Murphy, Fredrikson designed costumes for a series of productions by major dance and opera companies in Australia and New Zealand. His input often extended beyond the realm of design to include the co-creation of new narratives for old texts. New texts for Australian Ballet productions of *Swan Lake* and *The Nutcracker* led the way in terms of reimaged narratives from the Murphy–Fredrikson stable.

During a career that spanned just over 40 years, Fredrikson also worked alongside many other theatrical luminaries in Australia, New Zealand (where he was born) and Houston, Texas. Over the years Fredrikson's collaborative colleagues included directors John Bell, Wal Cherry, Judy Davis, Sir Tyrone Guthrie, Robyn Nevin, George Ogilvie and John Sumner; choreographers

Sir Frederick Ashton, John Butler, Russell Kerr, Gray Veredon and Stanton Welch; and conductors Richard Bonynge, Richard Divall and Patrick Thomas. He also worked with world-renowned performers, dressing Cate Blanchett, Sir Robert Helpmann, Deborah Kerr, Nicole Kidman, Leo McKern, Keith Michell, Dame Joan Sutherland, Anthony Warlow, Googie Withers and many others.

The work he did in film and television is a lesser known aspect of Fredrikson's career, but it is one that sheds light on the diversity of his practice. Fredrikson designed costumes for film and television productions that took in a wide range of settings, from Redfern (with *Short Changed*, a film based on a father's attempt to gain custody of his child) to the outback (with *The Shiralee*, a television series based on the novel by D'Arcy Niland). The productions on which he worked spanned an array of subjects and historical eras: from nineteenth-century Australia in *Dirtwater Dynasty*, which depicted one man's efforts to establish a cattle ranch and an empire, to 1960s Australia and the jungles of Asia in *Vietnam*, another miniseries for television. In other work for film and television he ventured into the realms of science fiction and puppetry.

Fredrikson received a number of design commissions for television early in his career, largely for ballets for ABC TV, including, in 1965, *The Lovers of Verona* and *The Awakening*. His first film commission, however, came in 1982 with the movie *Undercover*. Directed by David Stevens and produced by David



DESIGNS

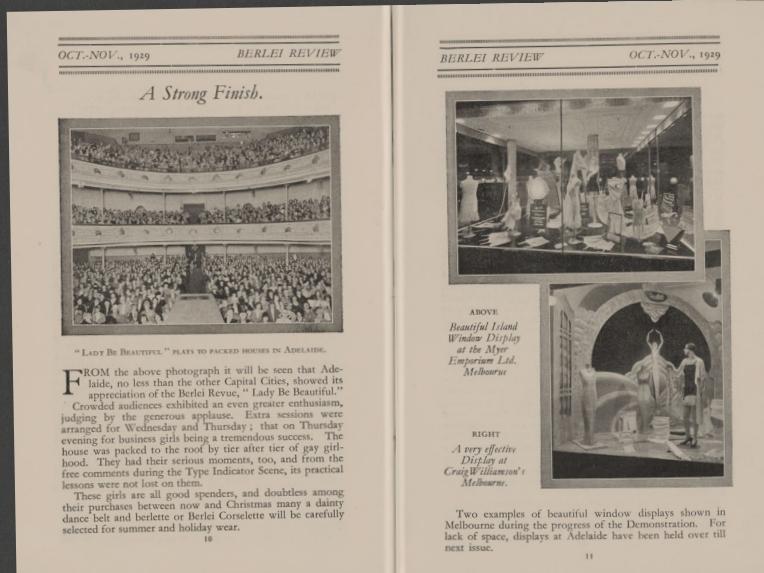
Elfick for Palm Beach Pictures, *Undercover* was released in 1983. While its title suggests a spy movie, it was, in fact, the story behind the growth of the Berlei undergarment business. Set in the 1920s, the movie was filmed, in part, in Sydney's Queen Victoria Building before its restoration, and in the Regent Theatre, a heritage-listed building in George Street, Sydney, which was eventually demolished. The film follows the story of Fred Burley and his brother Arthur, founders of the Berlei enterprise. It highlights their ongoing efforts to improve their undergarments, especially corsets, by making them lighter and less constraining, using new fabrics and ideas to create a product that would appeal to the 'modern woman'.

Undercover also focuses on the relentless efforts of Fred Burley to promote the Berlei brand. Burley was at the forefront of the concept of 'Australian made' and was the founding president of the organisation known as the Australian-Made Preference League.

His promotional activities included taking Berlei goods around regional Australia on a train known as the Great White Train. The Berlei company also produced a journal, *The Berlei Review*, first published in 1922 and then (at least initially) monthly, until the 1950s. It contained news and photographs of the many promotional activities undertaken by the company, which, in the 1920s, included elaborate shop-window displays, competitions, fashion parades, musical shows and, eventually, 'talkies' featuring and promoting the Berlei product. The musical shows, which attracted large and enthusiastic audiences around Australia, included *Youth Triumphant* in 1924, *So This Is Elegance* in 1925, *Radiant Woman—At Beauty's Shrine* in 1926 and *Lady Be Beautiful* in 1929.

Fredrikson's input into *Undercover*

included the design of a number of 1920s-style outfits for the characters in the story, especially for the leading lady, Libby (played by Geneviève Picot), who comes from out of town to Sydney to seek a better life for herself and ends up with the Berlei organisation, and Nina (played by Sandy Gore) the imposing head designer for Berlei. The National Library's collection of Fredrikson designs for *Undercover* includes sketches for every imaginable accessory,



Two examples of beautiful window displays shown in Melbourne during the progress of the Demonstration. For lack of space, displays at Adelaide have been held over till next issue.

- DRESS
PLEATED
HORIZONTAL
TRIM ON
MIDI-BLOUSE

DRESS ITAL CARDIGAN

COLLAR TOP
& TIE,
CUFFS
ON TOP





ABOVE
Copies of pages from *Pictorial Review* and Foy & Gibson catalogues in *Papers of Kristian Fredrikson*, c. 1960–c. 2005
Manuscripts Collection nla.gov.au/nla.cat-vn3969578

ILLUSTRATIONS
Kristian Fredrikson (1940–2005)
Costume Designs for the Production Undercover in *Papers of Kristian Fredrikson*, c. 1960–c. 2005
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including millinery and shawls, in addition to day and evening wear for men and women. Fredrikson rendered his designs carefully on heavy black paper with detailed instructions regarding the making of the costumes: 'make dress in two parts', 'split is diagonally cut front'. He also stipulated the kinds of material and trim from which he wanted the items made: 'ombré chiffon, sequined', 'organza with

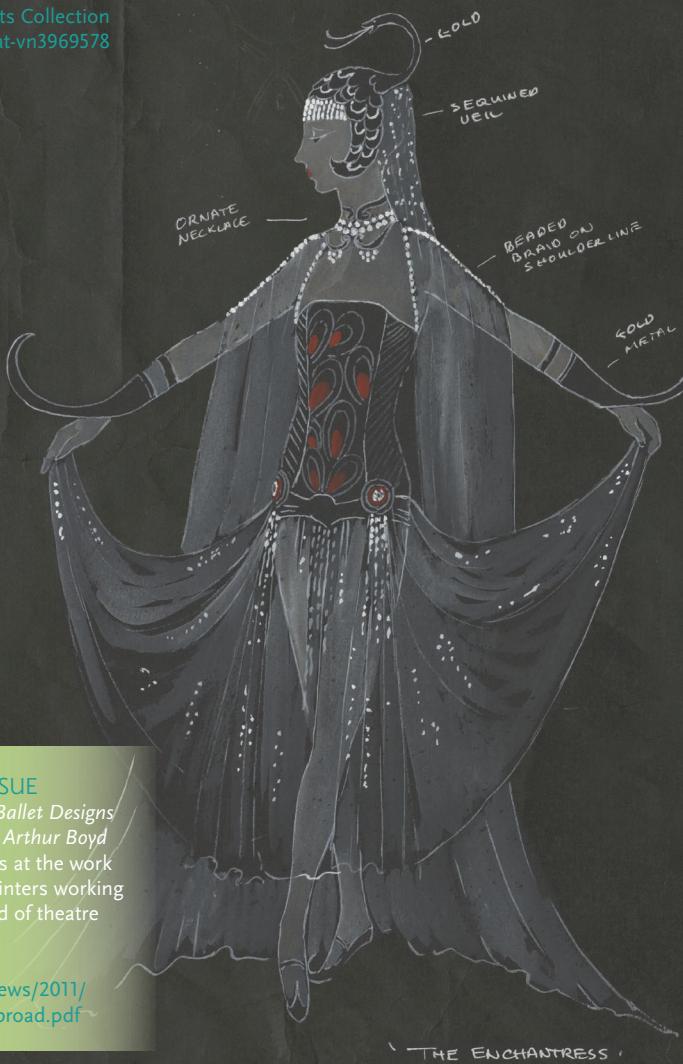


satin ribbon trim'. He even gave instructions to the production team on occasions: 'Note: Chorines' (that is, ladies of the chorus) 'must be bound to minimise bust'.

Fredrikson looked at 1920s fashion catalogues for inspiration when creating his *Undercover* designs. His personal papers include pages from the catalogues of Foy & Gibson—one of Australia's earliest department stores, reputedly modelled on Le Bon Marché in Paris—and from American fashion magazines popular in the 1920s, such as *Pictorial Review*. Like his designs for theatre, Fredrikson's drawings for *Undercover* demonstrate his insistence on historical accuracy. Fredrikson also had access, as did the entire production team for *Undercover*, to archival material held by the Berlei organisation, including copies of *The Berlei Review*, and film and photographic material.

Of particular interest are Fredrikson's designs for the theatrical extravaganza with which *Undercover* concludes. It is partly modelled on the 1926 *Radiant Woman* production, which was reported in *The Berlei Review* in September 1926. *Radiant Woman* included the Berlei Beauty Ballet in several items, including *Dance of the Sprites*, *Fan Dance* and *Jewel Ballet*. It also featured an 'Enchantress' into whose cauldron is placed all that is necessary to produce the radiant woman (including a Berlei Corselette). *Undercover*'s concluding sequences feature similar items and characters, including the Enchantress, played by Isabelle Anderson.

The photographs and drawings featured in *The Berlei Review* were clearly a visual starting point for Fredrikson's own designs for the closing moments of *Undercover*. His design for *Undercover*'s Enchantress, for example, follows, almost exactly, a line drawing for the same character reproduced in the *Review*. The *Review* also contains a photograph of a line of women performing *Dance of the Sprites* in the



IN A PREVIOUS ISSUE

Australians Abroad: Ballet Designs by Sidney Nolan and Arthur Boyd
Michelle Potter looks at the work of two Australian painters working overseas in the world of theatre and dance

* December 2011

nla.gov.au/pub/nlanews/2011/dec11/Australians-Abroad.pdf

first act of *Radiant Woman*. They are dressed in flowing tunics of the kind frequently worn by dancers of the 1920s engaged in the kind of dancing familiarly known as 'Grecian' or 'free' dancing. The women hold balls in the air and their tunics are draped with garlands of flowers. Fredrikson's design for *Undercover's* version of *Dance of the Sprites* shows a more sophisticated design, but one that certainly owes its origins to the *Berlei Review* photograph.

Fredrikson seems to have loved what he uncovered while working on *Undercover*; he used the 1920s-inspired designs elsewhere over the following years. A drawing of the jewelled headdress for one of the Berlei Beauty Ballet dancers was a starting point for Fredrikson's designs for the Berlei Dolls in *Undercover*, who enter tap dancing and singing in the final moments of the show. Fredrikson recycled this design idea, albeit in a more glitzy manner, for showgirls in *Tivoli*, a collaboration between Fredrikson and Murphy that first took the stage as a joint Australian Ballet and Sydney Dance Company production in 2001. Fredrikson also created a variation on the Berlei Dolls costume for characters in his ballet *Peter Pan*, made for the Royal New Zealand Ballet in 1999.

Undercover presents what is, perhaps, a little known aspect of Australian business

and fashion history with a touch of glamour and extravagance—and a splash of introduced romance. Yet it is when the National Library's extensive Fredrikson collection is brought into play that a picture emerges of his meticulous and hands-on approach to design and his constant striving for historical accuracy. The extent of the Library's collection also enables Fredrikson's work on *Undercover* to be seen in the wider context of his ongoing commissions, and to be examined for the influence it had on his later designs.

DR MICHELLE POTTER is an independent arts writer, curator and historian. Her research into the film and television commissions of Kristian Fredrikson was facilitated by a 2012 Scholars and Artists in Residence Fellowship at the National Film and Sound Archive

