

PUBLISHING SPOTLIGHT

Kristian Fredrikson: Designer Review

When you attend a dance or theatre performance, or watch television or a film, you may not realise the importance of set and costume designers to the success of the production. Kristian Fredrikson noted late in his career: 'Designers are victims in the theatre world, unless you are an incredible designer who has become a household name ... [designers] are used and thrown away'.

Kristian Fredrikson, born Frederick John Sams in 1940 in New Zealand, created his first successful costume when he was 15 years old, for his young brother.

When he was 22, he was commissioned to design between 70 and 100 costumes, headdresses and wigs for *A Night in Venice* by Johann Strauss, which was being performed by amateur company Opera-Technique Inc. That year he changed his name to Kristian A. Fredrikson and moved to Sydney.

Fredrikson made very detailed designs, which milliners and others found easy to interpret. They showed a painterly approach, and often had fabric swatches attached. He provided detailed descriptions: 'blue leather boots with white pleated turnovers, pearl decorations' (boots for the Puss in Boots costume for *Aurora's Wedding*, November 1962).

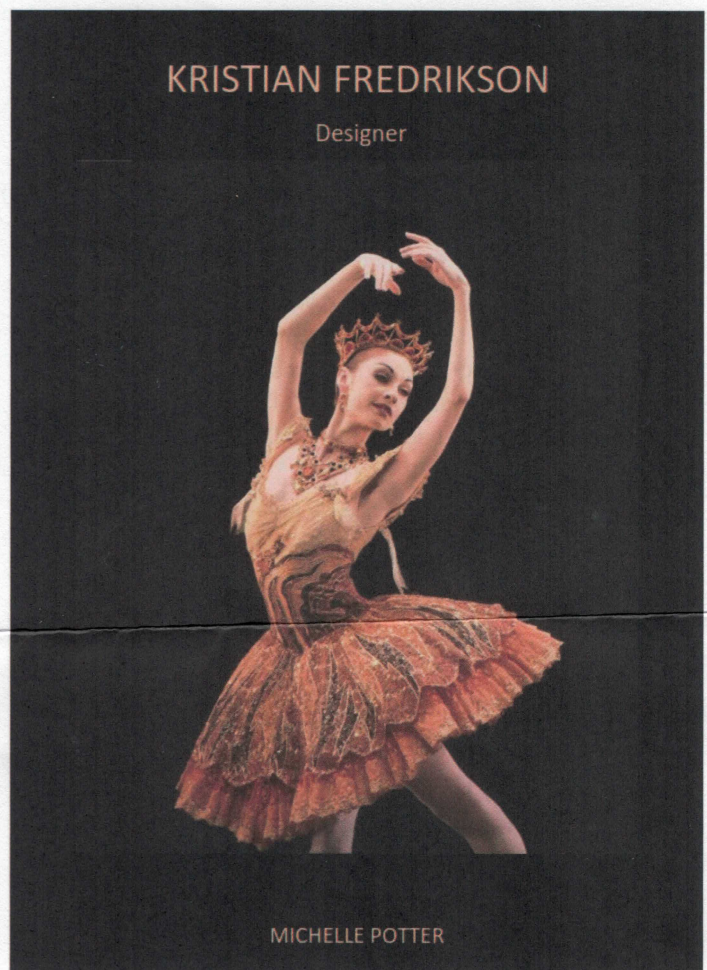
In 1965, at the Union Theatre Repertory Company, Fredrikson began an association and friendship with director George Ogilvie. He was Ogilvie's favourite designer for the next 40 years.

Fredrikson was a thorough researcher, analysing the structure and characters of each production, whether on stage or on screen. Gailene Stock, who danced Cinderella for the 1972 Australian Ballet production, said: 'you thought you were Cinderella being transported to the ball, not just a dancer in a costume'.

In her new book examining Fredrikson's life and career, Michelle Potter describes in detail the sumptuous production of *Shéhérazade* that premiered at the Sydney Opera House in 1979, including the wafts of Christian Dior perfume that filled the auditorium. The performance, directed and choreographed by Graeme Murphy, artistic director of the Dance Company (NSW), led to the company's name changing to the Sydney Dance Company. It continues to be one of the most admired and seductive works in the Murphy/Fredrikson repertoire.

Murphy and Fredrikson worked together on at least 17 works for a number of companies. Fredrikson said: 'Graeme is like some magic thing that happened to me in my career'. He claimed to have some special affinity for designing for dance, and Murphy provided him with many opportunities. Two highlights of their collaborations were a new *Nutcracker*, where they worked backwards in time, creating *Nutcracker: The Story of Clara* in 1992 and *Swan Lake* in 2000.

Fredrikson thought Murphy was constantly exploring the possibilities of costume and sets as integral elements to his ballets. Their skills complemented each other with 'mutual respect and an ability to interchange ideas in an adrenaline rush', characteristics which were clearly noticeable to performers.



Cover of *Kristian Fredrikson: Designer* by Michelle Potter.

Fredrikson's work in film and television is less well known, but he worked on six major film and television productions, giving further reign to his imaginative powers. His ability to work across art forms was invaluable to directors; he understood camera angles and was able to work within a specific brief.

Fredrikson developed his own design aesthetic, creating his own style, which had a number of traits throughout his career, particularly in historical accuracy.

In a handwritten document held by the Library, Fredrikson wrote, 'As far as I am concerned, I will probably design until I drop'. And, unfortunately, he did, in 2005, aged 65.

This book celebrates the importance of designers to performances by describing the rich and successful career of Kristian Fredrikson. It is lush, with many superb illustrations of Fredrikson's designs and the costumes made from his designs. Potter has undertaken a considerable amount of research and the resultant publication is a testament to her knowledge of the national and international dance world.

Meredith Hinchliffe | 2020 Friends Committee member

Kristian Fredrikson: Designer by Michelle Potter (Melbourne Books, 2020, \$59.95) is available from the National Library Bookshop. Use the discount code **FRSUMMER2021** at the checkout to receive your Friends 15 per cent discount online or show your Friends membership card in store.