

L.A. FASHION WEEK

Three's an in-crowd

L.A. can't match Paris and Milan, but it still has pull for these designers.

By EMILI VESILIND
Times Staff Writer

IF the fashion weeks held in New York, London, Milan and Paris could be compared to a four-course gourmet meal (London being the ho-hum albacore dish), L.A. Fashion Week might be the cupcake at the end — frivolous in comparison, but still tasty.

Since L.A. Fashion Week's 2002 inception, its shows have failed to lure big-shot retail buyers or the global fashion media. And in turn, they've failed to anchor the city's talent. More established local designers such as Magda Berliner, Grey Ant's Grant Krajecki and Jenni Kayne have chosen to stage presentations in New York, where the industry's heavy-hitters are seated ringside.

But by now, everyone involved in L.A. Fashion Week knows the score. Wrangle a clutch of celebrity attendees and enjoy the barrage of tabloid-style media coverage that ensues. For those not willing (or able) to shell out tens of thousands of dollars to show at New York's Bryant Park, it's a low-cost way to build buzz (and if you're a red-carpet gown designer such as Kevan Hall or Sue Wong, showing in L.A. is a form of front-line marketing).

For the second consecutive season, IMG's Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week at Smashbox Studios — which runs from Sunday to Thursday in Culver City — is competing for designers with BOXeight, a nonprofit organization offering designers time slots in downtown venues, at no cost to them. BOXeight's schedule kicks off tonight at a majestic new downtown venue, the former St. Vibiana's Cathedral. (It's really a one-night affair, with a free-form evening of music, dance and spoken-word performances planned for Saturday.)

The no-cost trend has also extended to Smashbox Studios this season, where the pay-to-play atmosphere of seasons past — where it seemed like anyone with an imprintable T-shirt com-



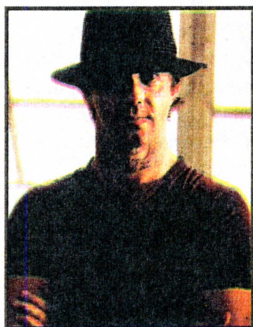
ROBERT FERRONE *Jeffrey Sebelia's*
TIE IT: *Sebelia's*
V-neck kimono-sleeve dress.



CARLOS REYES
DYE IT: *Gregory Parkinson*
dyes his dresses himself.



KIRK MCKOY *Los Angeles Times*
FLOOR IT: *Jeremy Scott*
takes street fashion literally.



ROBERT LACHMAN *Los Angeles Times*
NEWBIE: *Sebelia* got his
break on "Project Runway."



ROBERT LACHMAN *Los Angeles Times*
NEW LOOK: *Parkinson* is
moving away from basics.



KIRK MCKOY *Los Angeles Times*
PROUD: *L.A. is no fashion*
capital but it's home, says Scott.

pany could score a spot in the tents if they had the green — is being turned on its ear, as more notable local designers are being offered gratis spots, courtesy of corporate sponsorships (Smashbox itself is sponsoring a number of shows).

So whose collections are worth the life-draining valet lines that seem to go hand-in-hand

with Fashion Week? We caught up with Gregory Parkinson and Jeremy Scott, proven talents who are returning to the fold with shows this week at Smashbox Studios. We also checked in with Fashion Week newbie Jeffrey Sebelia of Cosa Nostra, who will kick off the BOXeight shows tonight.

Pack your flask and check

your impatience at the door. It's showtime in L.A.

Gregory Parkinson

Gregory Parkinson would normally be in South America this time of year, overseeing the production of knitwear and embroidery for his 15-year-old namesake collection. But the British designer thinks a trium-

phant return to his adopted home city is in order. Parkinson will return to L.A. Fashion Week this season — after many years of showing solely in New York — with a runway show scheduled for Tuesday afternoon at Smashbox Studios. (He also presented the line in New York weeks ago.)

"All of a sudden I became aware of how much goodwill there is toward me here," says Parkinson, perched on a stool next to rolling racks of his Technicolor spring collection in his downtown studio. "I think people are rooting for me." (Sweetening the pot is the fact that Parkinson's show is fully sponsored.)

THOUGH Parkinson has been on the L.A. scene for years, he's still relatively unknown to those outside the fashion community — another reason to show in L.A. "Just to become visible again locally is a great thing," he says.

The designer says he's most inspired by how his friends put themselves together — an illustrious group (in that low-key L.A. way) that includes handbag designer Brigitte Romanek, Jacquie Getty, stylist Jane Ross and his unofficial muse, jewelry designer Liseanne Frankfurt. "The best-dressed women in the world live here," he says, adding, "I'm looking forward to everyone who's supported me for 15 years sitting in the audience."

Parkinson's spring collection is defined by pastel and jewel-toned silk tops and dresses — all in a tank silhouette — that he delicately tie-dyes himself ("It's not a messy, Venice Beach tie-dye"). It's a fashion-forward departure for the Manchester native, who in recent years has offered knitwear and revved-up basics, i.e. simple skirts and dresses featuring lace overlays that seemed geared toward an older customer. The shift away from basics to more directional looks makes good business sense, says Parkinson. "My consistent customers have a wardrobe of my clothes, so unless I give them something different, there's no reason to buy more. And no one can say this collection isn't spirited."

Jeremy Scott

Jeremy Scott has more L.A. pride than most, but he's emphatic about one thing — Los Angeles is not a true fashion

capital. "The fashion community doesn't go to L.A.," says the designer, on the phone from Paris, where he staged a runway show for the second consecutive season two weeks ago. "It's not legitimate. I don't mean to be rude about it. Even London has always been a little 'eh.' It's New York, Paris and Milan. This has been set in stone way before any of us were here. I'm just playing by rules."

This won't stop Scott from rehasing his show — fully sponsored by Davis Factor, co-owner of Smashbox Studios — in Smashbox main tent on Wednesday night. But the ever-affable designer, who last showed in L.A. four years ago and has also shown in New York in the past, says he isn't taking the freebie for granted. "I'm proud to call L.A. my home," says Scott, 31. "When this was brought to me, I thought, 'Yes, let's show my community what I'm up to these days.' It's nice to support L.A."

Scott's designs are often purposely absurd, but are always steeped in the brief history of urban street fashion — from Tokyo to Paris to Silver Lake. His penchant for illustrations, words and signage on clothes extends into his spring collection, which was inspired by construction sites and "waste and back alleys," he says.

Expect to see models working the runway with skid marks painted on their legs and faces, clad in dresses covered in a prints of mashed street signs and tire tracks. Talk about fashion roadkill. "I wanted to take all these elements that are brute and dirty and nasty and turn them into something beautiful and elegant," he says.

The designer sells to stores such as Colette in Paris, Loveless in Tokyo and Opening Ceremony and Scout in Los Angeles and says he would eventually like to open his own shop. "That's a huge undertaking," he says, "but it would be amazing."

Jeffrey Sebelia

Jeffrey Sebelia may be an upstart in the fashion world, but he's the only L.A. designer who gets stopped by fans on the street on a daily basis. As the most recent winner of the "Project Runway" reality TV show, Sebelia went from small-time designer (for his punk-inspired Cosa Nostra label) to a household name.

Still, parlaying reality infamy into real-world success has been no small feat. And the heavily-tattooed designer

Fashion Week

Although most of Los Angeles Fashion Week is by invitation only, a few things are open to the public if you get reservations.

7 to 11 p.m. Friday: Gen Art presents its 10th annual Fresh Faces in Fashion and after-party, and the good news is a limited number of seats are open. The not-so-good news: Reserved seating tickets with VIP access are \$100 per person; standing tickets are \$40. Perhaps it's time to wear sensible shoes.

Petersen Automotive Museum, 6060 Wilshire Blvd., L.A., www.genart.org

4 p.m. Saturday to 2 a.m. Sunday: BOXeight delivers its EcoNouveau showcase at the former St. Vibiana's Cathedral in downtown L.A. Events include fashion shows, spoken word and an after-party with the DJ collective Dublab. It's \$200 for a seated VIP ticket, \$75 for a standing-room ticket and \$10 for the Dublab after-party.

Vibiana, 210 S. Main St., downtown L.A., www.econouveau.com

still views himself as a neophyte in the industry. "I don't know if [fame] makes life any easier," says Sebelia. It's the week before his debut at L.A. Fashion Week, where he will open the renegade BOXeight shows. "It's really hard to get people to answer your calls as a young designer either way." (Sebelia staged his first post-"Project" show in February in a downtown loft, but a week after the Smashbox shows.)

SEBELIA says he chose to show with BOXeight instead of at Smashbox because it was free. "I was trying to show at St. Vibiana's anyway," he says. "Then this was offered, and I said, 'Perfect.'"

His spring Cosa Nostra collection was inspired by "Into the Wild," the Jon Krakauer book about a young, upper-middle-class idealist who takes a Kerouacian trip into the Alaskan wilderness (the movie, directed by Sean Penn, opened last week). "It was inspired by [lead character] Chris McCandless' whole life journey, especially the time he spent in the desert," says Sebelia. "The color palette came from that. And he ended up in Alaska, and that was [fitting] because I wanted everything to be silvery and white."

Cosa Nostra's most requested piece is still the flirty

striped dress zigzagged with zippers that he first created for the "Project Runway" finale, and dresses continue to inspire the designer (this season, he experiments with voluminous silhouettes and kimono-sleeved styles). Sebelia's love of all things punk rock also lives on — through skintight skinny jeans and long, slinky blazers for men and women.

But the 37-year-old designer also steps out strongly this season with sportswear, including travel-friendly pieces such as military coats, bomber-inspired jackets and (could it be?) preppy V-neck sweaters. Does it all recollect the harrowing "Into the Wild" story? Perhaps not outside of Sebelia's mind, but the cohesive collection is a leap forward from his previous efforts — which were, at times, on the chaotic side.

As for future plans, Sebelia is keeping himself open. (Plans to open a store earlier this year were scrapped after complications with a financial backer arose.) "I want to go wherever [the business] takes me," he said. "The fashion business changes from week to week, and you really just have to allow yourself to see where it takes you. If I have some set path, I feel like I'll close myself off to things, as cliché as that sounds."

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QUICK TAKES

Bobby Brown recovering from heart attack

Singer Bobby Brown left Tarzana Regional Medical Center on Wednesday after being admitted the night before for a mild heart attack, his attorney said.

"They attributed [it] to stress and diet," lawyer Phaedra Parks said.

She said the 38-year-old R&B singer and former husband of Whitney Houston was in "great spirits" and hoped to perform as scheduled Saturday at the Taste of Soul concert on Crenshaw Boulevard in Los Angeles.

From the Associated Press

'Survivor' head has Asian plans

Seven years after shooting the first season of "Survivor" on Borneo Island, Mark Burnett is returning to Asia to develop and distribute new reality TV series and game shows.

Burnett's Los Angeles-based production firm and Asian leisure group Genting International plan to invest up to \$20 million in a joint venture. A new company, Mark Burnett Productions Asia, will operate on Singapore's Sentosa island, where Genting plans to open a casino-resort that will include a Universal Studios theme park and film production facilities by 2010, the companies said.

Production on the first series, probably will start in early 2008, most likely in Singapore, said Krist Boo, an official at Genting's Resorts World in Sentosa. He said Burnett plans three to five productions for the first year.

From the Associated Press

Staff suspended for Clooney files

More than two dozen hospital staffers have been suspended for four weeks after allegedly peeking at George Clooney's confidential medical information after he was hurt in a motorcycle accident last month.

Clooney, 46, suffered a broken rib and scrapes in the Sept. 21 crash, while his passenger, Sarah Larson, 28, injured her foot. Both

were treated at Palisades Medical Center in North Bergen, N.J.

No physicians employed by the hospital were among the 27 employees suspended, Eurice Rojas, the hospital's vice president of external affairs, said Wednesday.

The investigation was initiated after an audit revealed that employees had looked at the records without authorization, Rojas said. The suspensions began last week and continued this week, he said.

Clooney issued a statement saying that, "while I very much believe in a patient's right to privacy, I would hope that this could be settled without suspending medical workers."

From the Associated Press

Randy Owen tries solo effort

Randy Owen is recording a solo album after more than 25 years of hits with country band Alabama.

His album doesn't have a name or release date yet, but Owen said it could be out as early as January. The 57-year-old performer said he's writing and co-writing songs for the project, and John Rich of Big and Rich is producing.

Alabama gave its farewell performance in 2003.

From the Associated Press

Game shows get hall of fame

Baseball has one, of course; so do most other sports, rock 'n' roll and even the beer and trucking industries. Come Saturday, there will also be an American TV Game Show Hall of Fame.

The first inductees will be veteran game show hosts Monty Hall of "Let's Make a Deal," Peter Marshall of "Hollywood Squares," Wink Martindale of "Tic Tac Dough" and Hugh Downs of "Concentration."

The ceremony will be at the Las Vegas Hilton, where the hall will be located until a permanent site is found, a spokesman said Wednesday.

From a Times staff writer

Spears' album date moved up

Britney Spears' "Blackout" is coming sooner than expected.

The pop star's new album will be released Oct. 30, Jive Records announced Wednesday, citing Internet leaks as the reason the date was moved up from Nov. 13.

Jive said it "is doing everything possible to prevent and avoid any further illegal distribution of songs," including the leaking of "unfinished material and demos represented as completed legitimate songs."

From the Associated Press