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Stella McCartney's party will go down in fashion history

London fashion week enjoys triumphant return as elite show turns eveningwear elegance into interactive performance art

[In pictures: Stella McCartney's autumn/winter 2012 collection](#)

Jess Cartner-Morley, fashion editor
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Stella McCartney with the singer Rihanna at the British designer's London fashion week show that many believe may be hard to top. Photograph: Dave M. Benett/Getty Images Europe

With Milan and Paris [fashion weeks](#) not yet begun, it is perhaps a little early in the catwalk season to be handing out honours. But the [fashion](#) spectacular presented by [Stella McCartney](#) at [London Fashion Week](#) on Saturday night will be hard to beat as the event of the season.

What was billed as a formal event with a black-tie dress code segued into a piece of interactive performance art. Beginning at 8pm with a sit-down dinner it had become, by 11pm, a circus starring supermodels. "This is [London](#)," said McCartney. "I wanted to do something bold."

This was McCartney's first London catwalk show in 16 years. After being hired by the French label Chloé in her early 20s, McCartney has shown her collections on the Paris catwalks. The Stella McCartney label, now a decade old, is presented at the Paris Opera. But in a coup for London Fashion Week, McCartney decided to celebrate her role designing for Team GB in this summer's Olympics with this one-off return to London, presenting a collection of evening wear.

Thickly embossed cream invitations arrived with a novelty London bus keyring attached, the only hint that anything other than an elegant Saturday evening was in store. In a deconsecrated Mayfair church lit with Parisian-style globe lamps, Ronnie Scott's orchestra played jazz standards as waiters in traditional black linen aprons circulated with champagne.

Round tables were laid with white linen and decorated with silver bowls of Lily of the Valley, a flower of which McCartney is fond, it having been a favourite of her mother Linda.

Models dressed in McCartney's marble-printed silk evening wear took their places among the guests, so each table hosted one outfit from the new collection. McCartney loves to mix things up – when she shows at the Paris Opera, the chandeliers rattle alarmingly to the volume of the hip hop soundtrack – and the guest list was no exception.

Rihanna mingled with Zaha Hadid, Kate Moss with Peter Blake, Twiggy with Bianca Jagger, Kanye West with Richard E Grant. A six-course vegetarian dinner, honouring the designer's commitment to animal rights, featured Hyde Park sweet chestnut, Sicilian blood oranges, saffron risotto, Périgord black truffle and Wigmore cheese on toast.

The jazz musicians made way for the Dutch magician Hans Klok, aided by a glamorous assistant in the form of Alexa Chung, who was this week appointed an ambassador for young fashion by the British Fashion Council. After being hypnotised, Chung appeared to levitate on the point of three swords, two of which were then whipped away. McCartney then joined Klok on stage to perform a card trick. An audience as jaded as they come whooped and hollered.

If this had been the evening's party trick, it would have still been the talk of fashion week, but in the classic tradition of magic acts it was in fact a distraction designed to divert attention from preparations for the real show. As diners were turning their attention from the stage to the Campari and Sanguinello sorbet, the models who had been seeded among the guests leaped from their chairs on to the centre of the round tables, and performed a ballet to a Led Zeppelin soundtrack. Spanish choreographer Bianca Li, the dance mastermind responsible for Daft Punk's 'Around The World' music video, had rehearsed models including Yasmin Le Bon, Shalom Harlow and Amber Valetta, as well as professional dancers masquerading as mannequins for the evening.

This piece of theatre was also a showcase for evening wear, and it made a strong case for these being clothes you can have a good night out in. The collection reprised looks which have become McCartney classics, including the exaggerated hourglass swirls which have become a red carpet favourite of, among others, Kate Winslet. These really are clothes for dancing on tables, it seems.

Dressed in swirling marbled silks, cobalt blue lace gowns and cutaway tuxedo evening suits, the dancers performed a modern ballet routine standing on tables dotted with champagne glasses, and traversed the room stepping from chair to chair. The waiters joined in, partnering the female dancers in their jumps and twirls.

It was one of the elite number of catwalk shows which will go down in fashion history. Like Alexander McQueen's asylum-themed show in London in September 2000, or Tom Ford's New York comeback show featuring Beyoncé in September 2010, it was a night to remember. "I wanted to do something special to celebrate being back in London," said McCartney. "I love magic, and that was pretty magic."

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