

# Cypriot Olympic costumes

*Cypriot designer entrusted by the Hellenic Olympic Committee*

By **Melissa Hekkers**

The pivotal task of redesigning the costumes for next week's Olympic Torch Lighting Ceremony in Athens has inspired designer Eleni Kyriacou to accentuate the importance of the costume design in the narrative of the flame-lighting ritual, so as to enhance the richness of the aesthetic experience.

To achieve this, London-born Cypriot Kyriacou introduced a broad chromatic scheme, thus dispersing long-standing assumptions of achromatic

ancient Greek fabrics and statuary. Her colours, light-turquoise, light-blue, brown and olive green are a reference to the colours of the Greek landscape.

The designer has also sought to animate the schematic form of the ancient Greek dress (chiton) with an inner layer of pleats, being revealed by the movement of the dancers, to create rhythmic patterns.

Kyriacou carries the honour of designing the costumes, bestowed upon her by the Hellenic Olympic

Committee, with great responsibility. Her interpretation of the iconic style of the Ancient Grecian dress aims at offering a glimpse into the beauty of Hellenism's classical past whilst keeping the costume design's context in 2016.

"The task of redesigning the Olympic torch ceremonies' costumes was, for me, primarily about staying true to the core concept, which in my mind was about fully entering the spirit of Classical Greece, thereby making the magical moment when the world is taken on a journey there, as enchanting as possible," Kyriacou says.

"My view on how this should be done was by maintaining historically accurate pivotal points in the design, whilst also placing the work firmly in 2016.

"My idea was that by allowing contemporary techniques and influences to lend themselves to the design process, I was able to explore the spirit of Classical Greece further, taking it to a new dimension," she adds.

"Firstly, I considered it to be more historically accurate to introduce a greater colour palette to the costumes. The colour scheme is based on the Greek landscape: light turquoise and light blue in combination with olive green and brown, referencing the Greek seas and olive tree. The olive wreath, of course, in Classical Greece was the Olympian's prize, and symbolised vic-



**KYRIACOUC'S** design amplifies the dancers' movements

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## Novel elements

When the dancers stand motionless, their dresses appear the same, as only the external pleats are visible. They all appear to be a light turquoise colour. However when the dancers move, the pleats open revealing three different designs.

The first design reveals an internal pleat in olive green, creating an impressive two-colour (light turquoise/olive green) contrast effect. In the second design, the internal pleat is light blue, creating a subtler light turquoise-light blue highlight effect. The internal pleat of the third design has a rhythmic, geometric design on the lower band of the dress, reminiscent of Classical Greek dress. It is a three-colour dress, where the internal pleat has both blue and dark green. All the costume dresses are made of Merino wool.

Leather and fur have been used in the design of the girdles and garlands. The Priestesses' harnesses are made with a signature frontal cross remnant of Classical Greek dress. The design combines perforated and non-perforated leather.

The male dancers' harnesses are created with an asymmetrical belt design of perforated leather and suede straps. The children's garlands are made up of olive leaf-inspired designs. One design is an olive leaf

tory," she adds.

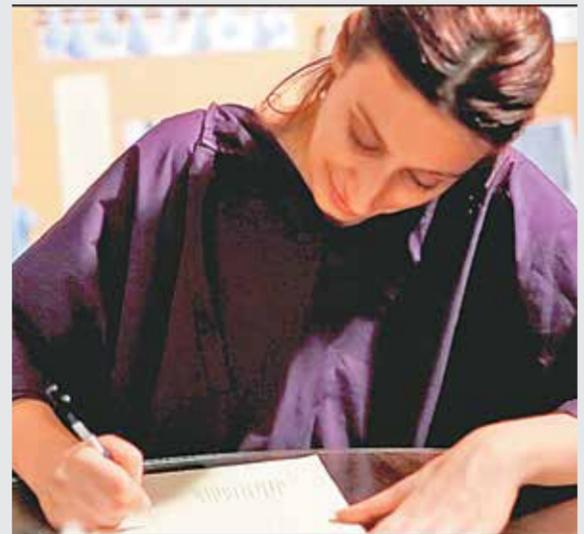
"Also, based on my referencing to Classical Greek dress, I could not ignore the sense of rhythm that was apparent both in the dress design and in the way artists of the time depicted dress.

"I therefore felt very strongly, particularly since these are costumes for dance, that there needed to be far more sensitivity in the design, amplifying a sense of rhythm in the dancers' movements, and as a whole. So, for the first

time, variations are created between the dresses. These variations can only be seen when the dancers are in motion, creating a dazzling as well as rhythmic effect.

"Use of leather and fur was also apparent in Classical dress, both for men and women, including dancers. So for the first time these materials are applied to (the) harness and garland designs.

"In Classical Greek, black figure



motif taken directly from classical Greek pottery designs. The 'leaves' are made of fur, leather, suede and perforated leather.

All the yarn, leather and fur were imported from Italy. All the costume pieces have been made in Athens using a highly skilled team of pattern cutters, machinists and technicians.

vase-painting, women were identified through the use of white depicting their skin and men though black-coloured skin. I was inspired by this chromatic antithesis which the ancient artist used to differentiate men and women.

"Therefore, the male dancers wear the same colours worn by the women, but inverted. So the olive green becomes the dominant, external colour and the light turquoise the internal accent colour."