

KRISTIAN FREDRIKSON

DESIGNER

by MICHELLE POTTER
Foreword: MAINA GIELGUD, AO

... the first in-depth account of the work of one of our most acclaimed designers and one of the few books to look at the collaborative role that design has had in the performing arts in Australia and New Zealand.

— Graeme Murphy, AO

This book examines the life and career of acclaimed designer, Kristian Fredrikson (1940–2005), who worked across genres of theatre, dance, opera, film and television.

His collaborations with leading choreographers and directors saw scenes of unleashed imagination, breathtaking beauty and impeccable craftsmanship, pulsing with human emotion.

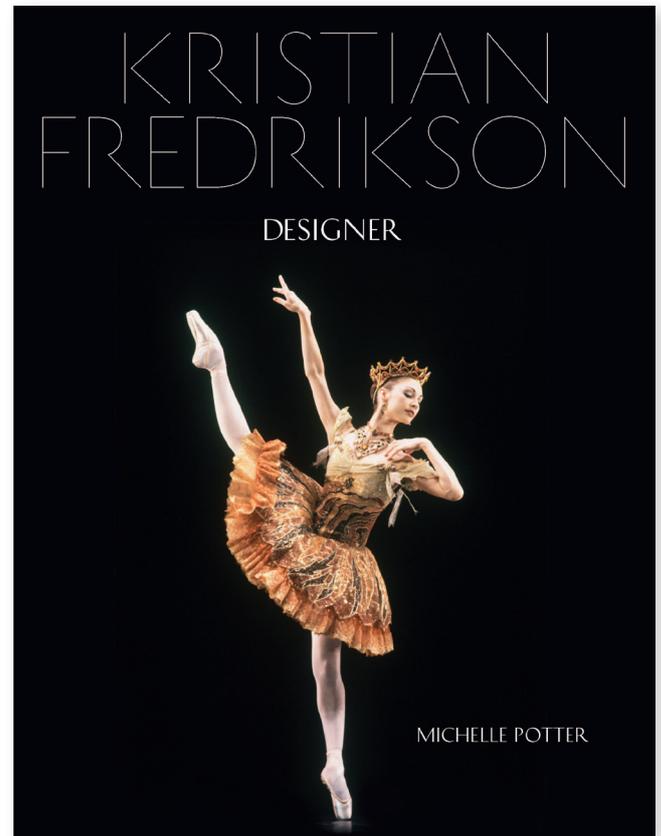
Born in Wellington, New Zealand, Fredrikson began his design career working with a small, amateur operetta company in Wellington. He then went on to establish a major, five decade-long career in Australia, returning to New Zealand on occasions to design for opera and ballet.

During the 1970s Fredrikson worked extensively with Melbourne Theatre Company where he met the then-emerging Australian choreographer Graeme Murphy. This was to be a turning point in his life and in 1979 he made his first work for Murphy's Sydney Dance Company, a mysterious and exotic *Shéhérazade*. Those years were also when he began an association with the Australian Opera, which included a production of *Lucrezia Borgia* in which Dame Joan Sutherland sang the lead. The 1970s were also the years when he began a long association with the Australian Ballet, which lasted until the year of his death.

In the 1980s, Fredrikson was persuaded to return to New Zealand to design works for Royal New Zealand Ballet.

Swan Lake was the ballet he admired above all and the book examines two New Zealand productions, two Australian ones, and one (his final work) in Houston, Texas. 'I was willing to die for my art,' Fredrikson said. And he did, with the Houston *Swan Lake* still in preparation.

Fredrikson was the recipient of many prestigious design awards over the course of his career. They include Erik Design, Penguin, AFI, Green Room, and Helpmann Awards. In addition he received an Australian Dance Award for Services to Dance.

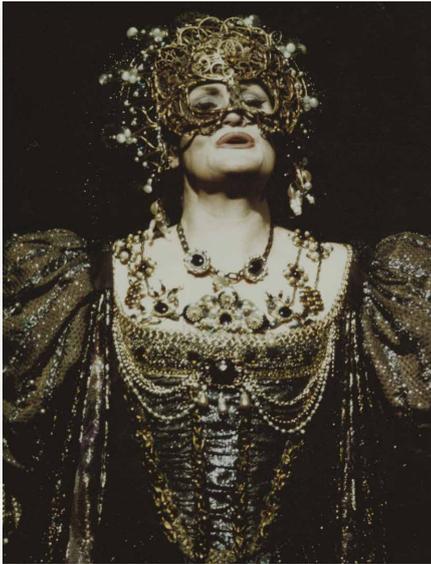


Cover image: Kirsty Martin in the Australian Ballet production of *Nutcracker*. The story of Clara. Photo Branco Gaica

The author

Michelle Potter is a writer, curator and historian with a doctorate in art history and dance history from the Australian National University. Michelle was inaugural Curator of Dance at the National Library of Australia, 2002 – 2006, and Curator, Jerome Robbins Dance Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center, New York City, 2006 – 2008.

Michelle is the recipient of an International Dance Day Award (1996), two Australian Cultural Studies Awards (1998 & 2000), and two Australian Dance Awards (2001 & 2003). She also received a 2012 Scholars and Artists in Residence Fellowship at the National Film and Sound Archive to investigate the film and television commissions of Kristian Fredrikson.



CHAPTER 3
 INTO
 THE
 SEVENTIES

'... he is able to create a world
 that fires the imagination'—
 Nadine Amadio.'

Henry Baker, costume design
 for The Queen of Sheba, Copenhagen
 National Opera, 1968. Photo
 taken from a book produced
 by the National Danish
 Archives of New Zealand

Ultimately, of course, Fredrikson developed his own style, although any writer here almost has suggested that it may not have been an 'instantly recognisable one'. But Fredrikson's style did have a number of traits, that are discernible throughout his career. Notable among them is a strong interest in historical accuracy. Although the nature of his designs often reflected scheduling, budgetary matters and the company for which he was working, the research notes that accompany so many of his designs indicate the extensive work he undertook prior to and while designing a particular work, or while collaborating on the development of a new narrative for a well-known play, opera or ballet. He explained to a journalist his detailed research and design process for the opera *Lucrezia Borgia*:

After you've read the opera itself, you look and see how the first opera company treated it. Then you look back to the period itself—in the case of *Lucrezia Borgia* it was 15th or the last year of her life—and you study the paintings of whatever artist was around at the time. Unfortunately, there are very few authentic portraits of *Lucrezia* and those were done when she was very young. The main artist who helped me with my ideas was Raphael, and he of course did very few portraits at all. In the end you put all the things together in your mind, think of the main themes of the story and I've bounced the whole period off and tried to create a fantasy.'

But he also spoke about transforming, or inventing a period:

The problem is most of us don't know true period. We look at a Watteau painting and we say 'Oh, that's how they dressed in *Venice's time*.' Well they didn't. Watteau made up his own people. We look at Rembrandt and say, 'That's how they dressed in Rembrandt's day.' They did not. Rembrandt created costumes for them... Our understanding of the past is so unreal that even if I do the real history, it's surreal. And I suppose that's what I do. I go towards the real history and that seems extraordinary.'

He also had an ongoing interest in ensuring that his costumes worked to give those who wore them an understanding of their character. One of his most treasured commissions came from Sydney Theatre Company to design costumes for its 2014 production of Henrik Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*. In particular it gave Fredrikson the opportunity to work with Cate Blanchett, iconic Australian star of the international stage, who played the leading role of *Hedda*. For *Blanchett* he designed three gowns—a light purple gown patterned down, pleated at the back and split up the front, which moved with swinging elegance as *Hedda*



Henry Baker, costume design
 for The Queen of Sheba, Copenhagen
 National Opera, 1968. Photo
 taken from a book produced
 by the National Danish
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Henry Baker, costume design
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CHAPTER 8
 THE
 ULTIMATE
 BALLET:
 SWAN LAKE

One of the most sought-after gifts
 by a designer would be to have several
 opportunities in one lifetime to explore
 'The Lake of Swans' —
 Kristian Fredrikson.'

Kristian Fredrikson: Designer sample spreads

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