

FASHION

Words Elizabeth McMeekin
Photographs Mark Mainz

Four young designers go head to head with a common goal: to create a dress for one of the UK's biggest brands. Can they cut it?

Three judges, one TV crew, an assortment of high heels and some nervous contestants ... Fortunately for the four young designers waiting patiently in the hallway of Glasgow's Hotel du Vin, there isn't a Simon Cowell in sight.

Instead Jett Sweeney, Nadia Scullion, Ingrid Garrioch and Odette Valentine – the nominees for the Scottish Fashion Awards Graduate of the Year – are being grilled by Marks & Spencer director of communications Dominic Fry, Scottish Fashion Awards founder Tessa Hartmann and me.

Sweeney, a recent graduate of Edinburgh College of Art, is up first. She is introduced by STV presenter Jean Johansson. "Introduce yourself to the judges and make your presentation," says Johansson, stepping aside to let the cameraman film proceedings.

Sweeney, who is 22 years old and from Musselburgh, looks nervous. The four nominees for the award, sponsored by M&S, have been invited to show off their wares. Each has been given a budget of £250 to design a dress to fit in to the fashionable M&S Limited Collection range. If Fry and the rest of the M&S fashion team are sufficiently impressed with one of the dresses they will make it and sell it in their shops throughout the country.

"You can't go wrong with a black dress," asserts Sweeney, before describing the 100%

silk frock she has designed. Sweeney is accompanied by Misha Palmer, who is modelling her biker-themed cocktail dress. "This dress is chic and sophisticated," she says. "The shape is quite classic. I was looking at Louis Vuitton and sophisticated eveningwear."

Sweeney's dress is an instant hit with the judges – her dress would suit the youthful Limited Collection perfectly.

"I did my research," says Sweeney, "and found that hardware was on-trend for detail, especially on sleeves. The eyelets were something I'd used previously in my graduate collection. To soften it I've incorporated ribbon because I like surface material manipulation. That's what my designs are all about."

"I was really thinking of the M&S woman, especially VV Brown, as she is the face of the Limited Collection. She's got quite a retro, throw-back style, so I thought I'd incorporate that shape and silhouette into the dress."

Fry is impressed. "That dress is wonderful," he says. "If they are all that good we're going to have a hard decision to make."

Sweeney seems excited by the prospect of seeing her dress on the M&S rails. "It's every designer's dream to see people enjoying their designs and wearing them."

As Sweeney and her model are ushered out by Johansson, the second nominee gets ready to enter. "I feel really sorry for these designers," says Hartmann. "It's like The X Factor."

Grays School of Art graduate Ingrid Garrioch

comes through, followed closely by a willowy model, Arlene Knox. Garrioch's dress has a classic style. "I decided to use the inspiration from Chanel that I'd used for my final degree project," says the 24 year old. "During my third year I was lucky enough to gain a place with Linton Tweeds in Carlisle, which makes Chanel's tweeds, and I was able to get them to make my designs with their material. I wanted to use their fabrics in this dress."

Looking at Garrioch's dress the Chanel influence is clear. Her ivory-coloured, fitted dress is decorated with a mismatch of ivory-coloured buttons. "I was looking on the internet and then I remembered my granny, who had a massive button box," she says. "We used to play with them as kids and make pictures with them. I thought they'd be great to use as that would be recycling them."

Garrioch, from Kirkwall in Orkney, has impressed Fry and Hartmann with her environmentally conscious approach.

"I liked the emphasis on sustainability," says Fry after Garrioch leaves the room. "She's working with a fantastic manufacturer, which is great," adds Hartmann. "That dress has got a lot going for it."

"The standard is definitely up on last year," says Fry, and Hartmann agrees. "We may have to find more than one winner from this group," she says. "They're all strong contenders."

Fun though it is, the judging process is only one part of the graduates' journey. While a ▶



Back row, from left:
Jean Johansson,
Dominic Fry, Tessa
Hartmann, Elizabeth
McMeekin. Middle
row: Ariene Knox,
Ingrid Garrioch, Jett
Sweeney, Misha
Palmer. Front row:
Odette Valentine,
Claire-Louise Fergus,
Lauren McKelvie and
Nadia Scullion



From left: Valentine's leather-look dress; Garrioch's Chanel-inspired creation; Sweeney's little black dress; Scullion opts for a vision in pink

▶ winning dress will be picked out from the four on show today, these young designers will also go through an online judging process whereby they will be marked against each other by fashion authorities such as Dolly Jones of Vogue.com and fashion journalist Hilary Alexander. The two sets of votes will then be pooled to crown an overall winner.

Glasgow-born Nadia Scullion, a graduate of Edinburgh College of Art and the third nominee to enter the room, has just made our decision even harder. Scullion's dress is a short, shocking-pink creation with an exposed industrial zip at the back and two gravity-defying 3-D panels. If ever there was a dress to lift your mood, this would be it. Fry is instantly impressed. "Very striking," he says. "Fabulous - you've hit the target market perfectly."

At just 22 years old, Scullion seems to be taking the process in her stride. Dressed in an aqua-coloured jacket and sporting vibrant red lipstick, it's obvious Scullion is not adverse to colour. "My design is inspired by a few of the simple shift dresses I saw in M&S," she says. "I saw a lot of simple shapes but with one focal point such as an embellishment, or a nice jersey dress with a little gather."

"I wanted to create a garment with one focal point so, for me, that is these 3-D sections on the front. The exposed zip is current so I wanted to integrate that. It's a flattering shape

SCOTTISH FASHION AWARDS HALL OF FAME RECIPIENT MALCOLM EDWARDS

Malcolm Edwards, his skin tattooed and ears decorated with thick metal hoops, looks more Helts Angel than high fashion. The short haircut, muscular build and gruff Scottish accent all simultaneously belie the fact that Edwards is one of the world's most respected and sought-after hair stylists.

He's worked with pop star of the moment, Lady Gaga, and on advertising campaigns for Burberry, Christian Dior and Yves Saint Laurent. Now Edwards will be the fifth Scot to be inducted into the Scottish Fashion Awards Hall of Fame, sponsored by Hotel du Vin, tomorrow night at the IMAX theatre in Glasgow.

Previous recipients include designers Pam Hogg and Brian Rennie, besides fellow hair stylist Sam McKnight.

It's not hard to see why Edwards, from Irvine in Ayrshire, has been chosen. His rise to prominence



includes high-profile collaborations with photographers such as Mario Testino and Tim Walker for Vogue. He is also been responsible for the catwalk looks of Amanda Wakeley and has worked with other

designer brands, such as Prada and Marc Jacobs, to perfect their catwalk and advertising images.

Although he admits to falling in love with fashion at just 12 years old, with images from The Face, i-D and Blitz on his bedroom wall, Edwards' hairdressing career didn't start until a few years later at the Alan Edwards salon in Glasgow. He moved on to work at Toni & Guy with famed hairdresser Guido Palau and quickly graduated from salon work to styling hair backstage at catwalk shows. The rest, as they say, is history.

For more information on the Scottish Fashion Awards visit www.scottishfashionawards.com.

as well. Usually I come up with boxy garments but I thought, for the M&S customer, it has to be flattering as well."

Finally, London College of Fashion graduate Odette Valentine appears before the judges. Her tribal, dance-themed, leather-look dress is the last garment into the judging room, and, again, is impressive.

Valentine, who grew up in Edinburgh, seems to have thought of everything, even making a kilt pin brooch for the collar of the dress as a nod to the Scottish Fashion Awards. "I think the overall design could fit with the Limited Collection range," says Valentine, 34, confidently. "It delivers a look that isn't currently within the collection, but also fits with the existing collection." Her dress gives us all something to think about. With its slouchy, relaxed glamour and quirky details, the dress is a definite contender.

After all four presentations have been made we each have a favourite, and spend the next 30 minutes arguing about who should claim the top prize. And the winner is ... well, that would be telling, wouldn't it? ■

The Scottish Fashion Awards take place in Glasgow tomorrow. To find out who was awarded Graduate of the Year and the names of all the other winners see *The Herald* and www.heraldscotland.com on Monday.