

## Hollywood's got nothing on Ottawa this gala season



From left, Dominique Laframboise, her husband Charlie Sezlik, Hattie and Chris Klotz, and Suzanne and David Lang are ready to party at tonight's Viennese Winter Ball.

JANA CHYTILOVA FOR STYLE WEEKLY

### BY WENDY WARBURTON

It used to be every gala ball in Ottawa looked like the Black & White Opera Soirée: The women wore skinny, black, V-neck halter gowns. The men wore tuxedos with black bow ties.

Not anymore. When the 2005 gala season kicks off tonight with the ninth annual Viennese Winter Ball, the National Gallery of Canada will be bright with a rainbow's worth of extravagant gowns, many matched by the bow tie of the woman's escort.

"We're getting back to Hollywood — to the very, very beautiful, more ballgown image," enthuses Earlene Hobin, owner of Earlene's House of Fashion on James Street, where many of the city's most faithful gala-goers shop by appointment for their dresses.

Think back to the Golden Globes Awards last month and Cate Blanchett's fabulous periwinkle gown with its voluminous skirt and long train for an idea of what starry-eyed Ottawans will waltz in tonight.

"Colour and texture are the big influences," says Hobin, citing taffeta and velvet as popular new fabrics and pink, fuchsia and lavender as the hot new shades — although black is still selling well too.



WAYNE CUDDINGTON FOR STYLE WEEKLY

Entertainer Holly Larocque plans to wear this pink/orange silk taffeta gown by Sunny Choi and marabou jacket by Ursula, both from Earlene's House of Fashion, to the Royal Ottawa Hospital gala on March 9.

Details are important this year, says Hobin. Many of the gowns she has sold are ruffled along the bottom or have a train (with a finger loop to keep it out from under a dance partner's two left feet), and many are beaded or trimmed in chinchilla fur.

"Everything for the Viennese Ball is opulent. That's the key word right now," says Nicola Lang, an Ottawa custom designer who calls tonight's event "the grand gala of Ottawa." "I'm finding that the young girls are really loving to pour it all on now."

Lang is helping some of her clients revamp simple dresses into gowns that go "wow" by making formal cropped jackets in a striking colour to wear over a simple black dress, fitting simple tops with voluminous skirts, and ramping up plain styles with ruffles or a new silk and lace bodice.

Shimmery fabrics in ice-cream pastels are a hit with clients in their 30s. "But I'm trying to keep the shimmering thing discreet," says Lang. "When it's for a ball like the Viennese, it's got to be elegant, very sophisticated."

For other galas, like the Snowflake Ball at the Congress Centre on Feb. 12, Lang is making more sensual gowns in delicate transparent silk organza with halter or bustier tops and slim skirts. Black gowns are still *de rigueur* for the Black & White Opera Soirée on Feb. 19.

"Glamour is the big thing," says Hobin, citing Ottawa women's growing confidence and comfort with fancy balls for the shift away from conservative dressing. She notes she has sold two cropped jackets made of marabou stork feathers to clients making the gala scene. "Marabou is getting back to the '30s, the '40s and the '50s in Hollywood."

Evening purses are "little opera bags in extravagant beading," says Hobin. Since the elaborate dresses seldom need adornment, jewelry is confined mostly to drop earrings and pretty bracelets. Strappy cocktail sandals make no concessions to dancing: They are high-heeled to accommodate the long gowns with trains.

At Justine's on Sussex Drive, gala-goers are snapping up a simple two-piece set by Saatchi. The floor-sweeping, raw-silk circle skirt in red or pink is paired with a matching shirt to look like a dress, says store owner Christine Shaikin. A crinoline under the skirt gives it a more formal look. "If they're going to another gala, they can put on a beaded top, or change the colour (of the top), or leave the crinoline off," Shaikin says.

Paired with pants that match the set, the look can just as easily go to a play. It's the kind of transition women today want from their dressy clothes, Shaikin says. "People are looking at evening wear and other ways to wear it."

As for the men, Claude Charette of Harry Rosen suggests going classically formal for the Viennese Ball. But don't feel you have to fade into black.

"I would want something under my tuxedo jacket that might stand out a little bit, not extremely flashy," Charette says. He recommends a bow tie in silver, or a colourful bow with a matching vest under a buttoned jacket. "Sometimes men like to co-ordinate with what the lady's wearing. If she has a pink dress, he wears something that's pink."

For other gala events this month, which include the Valentine's Charity Ball on Feb. 12 at the Centurion Centre, many men will likely wear long ties instead of bow ties with their tuxedos, Charette says. Black is the most popular colour, but gold, red, silver and off-white are also being worn by gents who do a lot of gala duty.

Just remember: If you're wearing a long tie, leave your cummerbund at home.

Wendy Warburton is Style Weekly fashion editor.

### WHAT OTTAWA'S GLITTERATI ARE WEARING

#### Maria Teresa Garcia de Madero, Mexican Ambassador

The energetic Madero and her husband Manuel will attend the Viennese Winter Ball and the Snowflake Ball. For tonight's Viennese Ball, she'll sport a dusty rose-coloured silk dress with embroidered top. The dress has silver details and ruffles surrounding the neckline. The ruffles pick up again at the end of the sleeves and at the end of the skirt. For the Snowflake Ball, she'll wear a black lace dress with embroidery and silk ribbon appliques and small flower details. The spaghetti-strap dress has a shawl.

#### Hattie Klotz,

National Arts Centre marketing co-ordinator

Klotz, who recently gave birth to her first child, will head to the Viennese Ball in a dramatic top and classic skirt by Ottawa designer Nicola Lang. Made of silk and satin, the bodice has striking black and white vertical stripes, and the slim skirt is pure black with a fishtail fan effect.

#### Suzanne Lang,

stay-at-home mom and student Lang will dance at the Viennese Ball wearing her wedding gown — a cream-coloured duchesse dress made of silk and satin and layered with shimmery silk organza by Irish designer Bridgette Moore. Its colour, along with floral appliques in tea rose, butter yellow and apple green, and a butterfly motif on one shoulder, give it the light, airy look of spring.

#### Dominique Laframboise,

Charles Sezlik Group sales representative

Laframboise, another a Viennese ball-goer, will be decked out in a sophisticated champagne and black dress by BCBG Max Azria. The silk and chiffon dress creates a look of delicate transposition with a low-neck effect. The sleeveless dress has a floral applique.

#### Margaret Dickenson,

cookbook author and TV host For the Snowflake Ball, Dickenson will wear a one-of-a-kind designer gown with matching floor-length coat by Korean designer André Kim. While living in Seoul on a posting with her diplomat husband Larry, Dickenson gave Kim (known as the Dior of South Korea) several bolts of modern abstract brocade fabric she'd bought in Brussels. There was enough to make a long evening dress with shoulder straps and a matching coat. Embroidery and a gold-thread quilted coat lining and sash belt accent the outfit.

#### Lawrence Greenspon,

lawyer Greenspon, who will be the celebrity auctioneer for the Snowflake Ball, will wear a one-of-a-kind silk bow tie adorned with snowflakes and sparkles. His girlfriend, Louise Carota, is an artist and has fashioned custom bow ties for numerous prominent Ottawa men. "They really are beautiful creations," Greenspon says. —Jennifer Campbell



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Laura Carleine, a volunteer with the May Court Club, will wear this pale lavender Sunny Choi gown from Earlene's House of Fashion to the Variety Club International Ball on April 2.