

Couture Comes To Tampa

By Karen McBride

In movies and reality shows like "The Devil Wears Prada" and "Project Runway", we get a glimpse into the world of fashion and the work that is done before the stiletto clad models reach the catwalk. Behind all the glamour is the heart of fashion--the designers. They create amazing garments beginning with just a vision and a sketch. For those of us who love to see the unique collections by talented designers, we don't have to travel to New York or Paris to see couture, it is coming to Tampa!

Christian Fashion Week brings industry professionals, designers, models and photographers from around the world to Tampa. The festivities will begin with the Model4Jesus VIP Reception and silent auction on Friday, February 8. The fashion show will take place the following evening, with doors opening at 5:00. Fashionable, and modest, swimwear will start down the catwalk, beginning at 6:00 pm and the main event will begin at 7:30. The event will be held at LSA Hall, 4810 N Howard Avenue, Tampa.

Mayra Gomez, Co-Founder of Christian Fashion Week, spent 5 years doing fundraising fashion shows under the ministry of Model4Jesus. The shows were primarily for women's ministries, youth groups and organizations that helped women deal with difficult issues in their lives. Their motto is "Be a model, don't just look like one." It is about learning to be modest and using beauty to glorify God instead of being exploited. Mayra is founder and president of TruModel program, an 8 week character-building program that encourages women to become role models by teaching manners, social etiquette, public speaking, as well as the art of hair and makeup.

With the help of Mayra's husband, Jose, and Tamy and Will Lugo, Christian Fashion

Week came into fruition. Each has responsibilities based on their unique skills. Mayra is in charge of the models, sponsors and exhibitors. Tamy works with the designers. She is a professional Wardrobe and Fashion Stylist and founder of VStylist.com. Will is responsible for the Event Management. His experience as a Graphic Designer and his passion for photography along with willingness to help the community are all valuable assets to this event. Jose Gomez is handling marketing and web services. He is the current president of the Fashion Industry Association and CEO of Netministry Technology Corporation. This talented team has worked long, hard hours to bring this exciting event to the Tampa area.

Designers include Alma Vidovic, who has been working as a fashion designer for the last two years. Fashion has always been a passion, and she has spent many hours drawing sketches using Photoshop or Illustrator and sometimes the good old-fashioned way with a sketchbook. "It is something that I have wanted to do since I was a child. I used to sketch, design, sew, knit and crochet, since I can remember," says Vidovic. She obtained her BA in Fashion Design Marketing from International Academy of Design & Technology in Tampa. One of her favorite items is from the Floriography collection she is launching at Christian Fashion Week. It is a Grecian inspired chiffon gown that she designed a long time ago because of her love of draping.

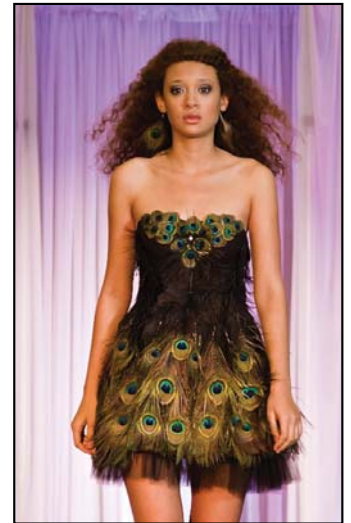
Vidovic's first collection will be available on www.almavidovic.com on February 9, the day of the event. Wholesale buyers may contact her at info@almavidovic.com. Her next show will be "He Asked and She Said Yes" bridal show on February 17 in St. Petersburg.

Designer Julia Chew first learned how to sew by hand from a lady that lived down the street.

grandmother helped her to improve her seamstress skills by teaching her how to use a sewing machine. Being homeschooled allowed her to pursue her interest in art and sewing. She would make clothing for her dolls and, eventually, herself. Chew started making custom garments for local customers at the age of 15 including prom dresses, bridal gowns, and costumes. She expanded her business by designing ready to wear garments and accessories and selling them internationally online at www.Etsy.com (a website to sell and buy handmade items), using her Chinese name, Xiaolin. Christian Fashion Week will be the teenager's first show. Her favorite item is a Peacock Feather dress she designed in the fall of 2012. "I love working with unusual materials and (seeing) the texture and movement of feathers on the runway," says Chew. Chew can be reached via email at xiaolin@tampabay.rr.com or by visiting her Facebook page at <http://www.facebook.com/xiaolindesign>.

Other designers include Carmelita Couture, Evelyn Lambert, Franco Montoro, Sandra Hagen, Samita Bhojwani, Renee Scarborough and Pat McGhee.

Carmelita Couture styles have been featured in WWD (Women's Wear Daily), US Magazine, and have been worn by celebrities like Mya, Tiana and Tierra Madry, Paula Abdul, to name a few. Her website is www.carmelitacouture.com.



Peacock dress by Julia Chew

Evelyn Lambert is based in New York and her designs have been featured in Bravo network, J'Adore Magazines, Essence.com, CBS Network TV and more. Her colorful collections can be found at www.evelynlambert.com.

Franco Montoro was nominated for Best Avant-Garde Designer and has dressed many candidates for the Miss Universe beauty pageant. Bridal gowns, Sweet 16 dresses, evening gowns, and cocktail dresses are featured in his collection.

Sandra Hagen, born in Colombia South America, has had the opportunity to live in different cultures and brings this life experience into her designs. Her



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designs have been in magazines like Artstik and Vertical Tampa Bay's, Project Stylish. Some of her designs, like the flowing Chic Minimalist dress, or Mad About Polka Dots dress, can be found online at www.etsy.com/people/sandrachagen.

- Samita Bhojwani's designs have been inspired from her ethnic Indian culture. Being part of the Christian Fashion Week is "a dream come true" for Bhojwani.

- Renee Scarborough, owner of Two Coconuts, designed the swimwear worn in the show. She designs with three things in mind – to look beautiful, to fit perfectly, and to stand out from the status quo.

- Pat McGhee, a native Floridian, has been in the fashion industry for over ten years. Her designs are for women in all stages of life and can be found at <http://www.apmimages.com/>.

Exhibitors will include t-shirt vendors, beauty, jewelry,

clothing, and skincare lines. Aroma Radiance Skincare will be one of the exhibitors with their line of products with natural botanicals.

VIP tickets are available for \$80 in advance or \$85 at the door. General Admission tickets are \$45 in advance and \$50 at the door. For ticket information, visit www.christianfashionweek.com/tickets, call (813) 441-9814, extension 100, or e-mail at tickets@christianfashionweek.com.

A portion of the proceeds will go to Created, a non-profit, non-denominational Christian organization that helps women find hope and healing from sexual exploitation. Created helps the women to understand their value and begin a new life while establishing a relationship with Jesus Christ. It serves as a halfway house for women to get them off the streets and for those recently released from jail. Women are mentored to help them through the transition, with various programs

including education and job search assistance.

Another exciting fashion show will occur later this year, during Tampa Fashion Week. The event will be held September 14-21 and will consist of style seminars, shopping and fashion shows. The annual event began in 2008, when it was launched by a group of professionals, interested in supporting fashion in the Tampa Bay area. The organization, Fashion Week Tampa Bay (FWTB), was formed to bring together talented fashion and accessories designers. The designers are given an opportunity to display their work for local and national buyers, boutique owners, and of course, consumers.

In years past, featured designers in Tampa Bay Fashion Week have included: Ben Chmura (top ten finalist in Project Runway, Season 7), Rhonda Shear of Shear Enterprises and award-winning designer on HSN, and

internationally known designer, Kimberly Hendrix of k.hendrix designs.

Last year's events included "Kid Couture" at the Glazer Children's Museum, "Cocktails & Couture" held at The Ritz Ybor and benefited the Pediatric Cancer Foundation, "History of Fashion" at the St. Petersburg Museum of History and a variety of other seminars.

Designer casting will be held in March. Interested designers and guests can check the website for additional information, including venue details, www.fashionweektampabay.com.

Get ready for the bright lights and heart-pounding music as the models slink down the catwalk. The colorful creations, showing each talented designer's unique point of view, will be a sight to see. Each season on Project Runway, designers work towards showing their designs at "Fashion Week" in New York. Who knows – one day, that may be in Tampa!



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