Skating in Style

BY ERIN K. SCHONAUER & JAMIE C. SCHONAUER

Grab some spandex and rhinestones. It's time to hit the frozen runway and twirl through ice couture!

In the early 1900s, women glided outdoors in ankle-length skirts and feathered hats. They complemented their ensemble with "high-top black skating boots almost up to their knees," adds Karen Cover, Museum Archivist at the World Figure Skating Museum and Hall of Fame in Colorado Springs.

The boots might have been tall, but the skating skirt was getting shorter. Shorter hemlines weren't always welcomed. At the 1920 Olympics, the dress of U.S. bronze medalist Theresa Weld Blanchard was six inches below her knee. She felt that was too revealing. Norwegian skater ***Sonja Henie*** wasn't hesitant about hemlines, however. In 1924, she clipped the excess fabric and competed in knee-length dresses. Henie's new look set the trend for short dresses forever. Her dress also complemented her athleticism.

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Sonja Henie

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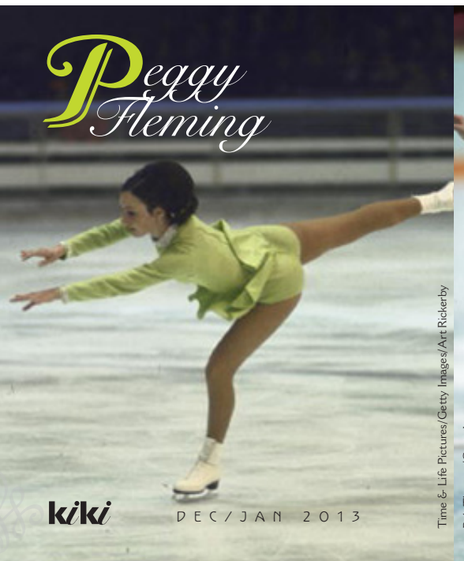
Barbara Ann Scott

Thanks to Henie, dresses of all styles and materials soon emerged. By the 1940s and 1950s, there were chiffon, velvet, and fur. Canadian, ***Barbara Ann Scott*** braved the chilly outdoors at the 1948 Olympics in a vanilla-colored fur dress. Entirely hand sewn and flowing well above her knee, it was one of a kind inside and out. Beneath the warm fur was a good luck message written by the women who assisted designer Jack Creed.


Time & Life Pictures/Getty Images/Art Rickerby

Peggy Fleming

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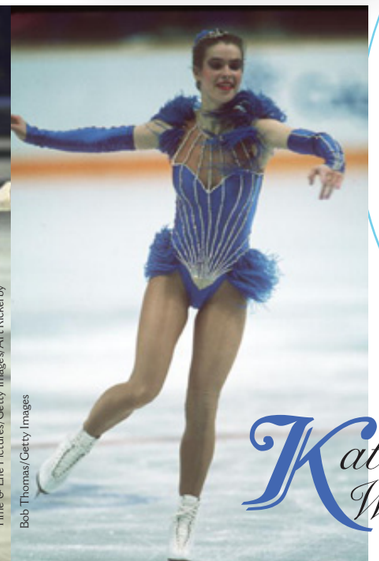
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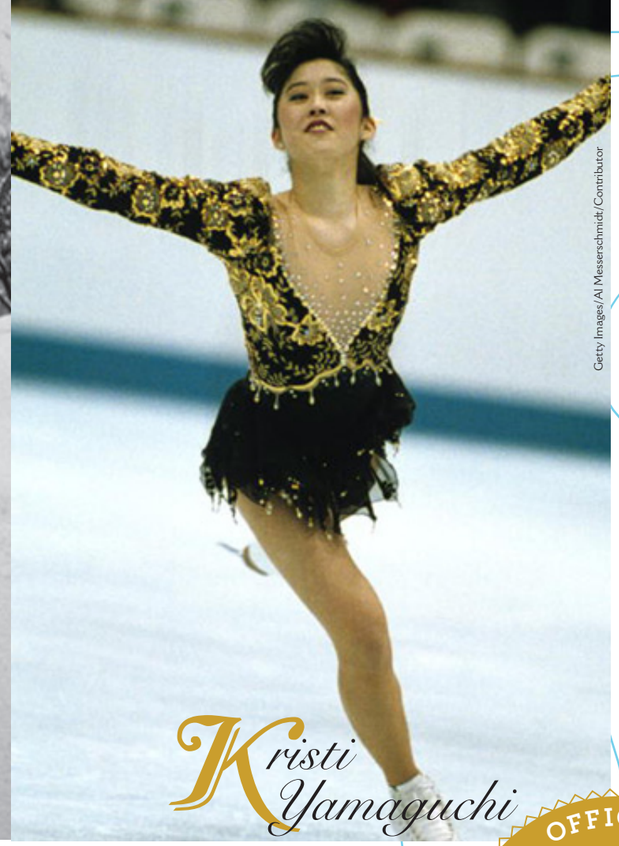
Katarina Witt

Fur was swapped for simplicity in the 1960s. This style came about because "women were becoming more athletic," says Cover. At the 1968 Olympics, ***Peggy Fleming*** performed twelve jumps and five spins in a long-sleeved chartreuse dress accented with basic rhinestone cuffs and collar. Her classic dress was handmade by her mother who bought the material at Macy's for a mere $8.

Two decades later, at the 1988 European Championships, German skater, ***Katarina Witt*** bared her thighs in a flashy cobalt-blue dress with high-cut bikini briefs—minus a skirt. Her provocative costume stirred controversy among the judges, so Witt added ostrich feathers to the dress to cover her thighs before the upcoming Olympics. Shortly after, the International Skating Union implemented a new costume rule, known as the Katarina Rule, which stated all dresses require a skirt.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Kristi Yamaguchi

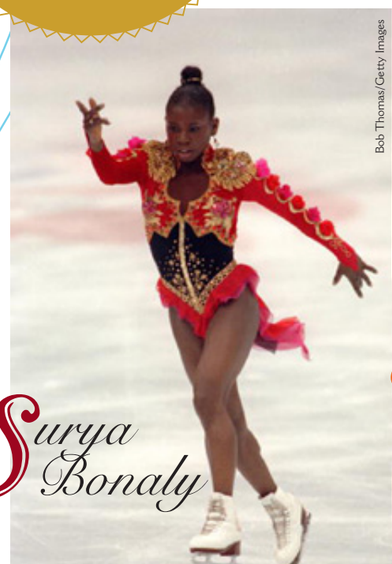
OFFICIAL COSTUME RULES:
Men must not expose their chests. Women must have hips and backside fully covered. Beads, sequins and feathers can't be excessive. If a costume is too elaborate, skaters can lose up to two-tenths of a point off the score for presentation.

Despite the rules, new creations spun their way onto the ice. Before sketching ideas for ***Kristi Yamaguchi***'s 1992 Olympic dress, designer Lauren Sheehan first listened to Kristi's music "Malagueña." Cover explains, the costume and music "had to blend together as one cohesive unit." Yamaguchi skated to gold in her ornate black and gold dress.

Red-carpet designs were another muse and were transformed to fit the frozen stage. At the 1992 Olympics, French skater ***Surya Bonaly*** wore a costume designed by fellow countryman Christian Lacroix. Lacroix looked to Spanish bullfighting costumes for inspiration. Bonaly's look was completed by fabric carnations running down her sleeve and a full skirt made of layers of fuchsia, red, and black mousseline.

In 1994 ***Nancy Kerrigan*** brought glamour to the ice when she wore a stunning Vera Wang creation. Kerrigan's champagne-colored dress sported 11,500 rhinestones that were heat-pressed onto the spandex and illusion fabrics. The dress was inspired by a Vera Wang evening gown and had a price tag of $13,000.

On and off the ice, the figure-skating dress boasts its own personality, inspiration, and style.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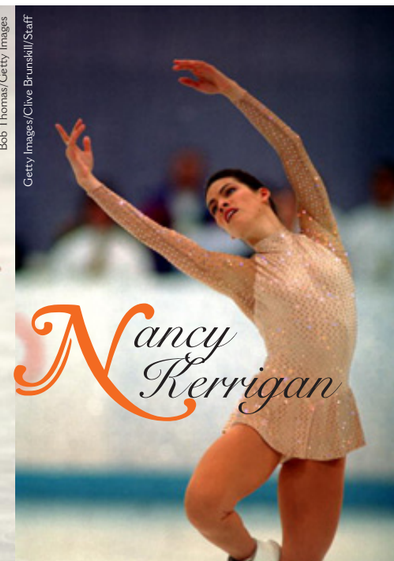
Surya Bonaly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Nancy Kerrigan