

Color Hearing: Bridal Chorus

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Contextual Review and Concept

This design used the neurological phenomenon of synesthesia as an inspiration for creating the textile print. Synesthesia occurs when one sensory attribute (e.g. taste, sound, sight) leads to the conscious experience of another sensory attribute (Ward, 2013). Chromesthesia, known as “color hearing,” is a common form of synesthesia in which a tone will elicit the experience of color visualization (Haack & Radoocy, 1981). What color is associated with what particular sound is based on the individual; rarely will two people with synesthesia experience the same sound as the same color. The design challenge sought to emulate this phenomenon through the creation of a textile print, which embodies color hearing through the depiction of sound as color. This type of emulation is known as psychomimicry (Jonsson, 2014).

The influence and inspiration for the conception of this garment needs to be discussed in order for readers to fully understand the creative process employed (Strickfaden, Stafiniak, Terzin, 2015). The designer used sociocultural capital (e.g. personal experiences/events) to serve as the influence for this design project. A major life event, marriage, influenced the musical piece selection that serves as the sound component for this design. The song selected was *Bridal Chorus*. *Bridal Chorus* is the piece of music that is commonly played as a bride walks down the aisle and is known to most as, “Here comes the bride” (Pleck, 2000). *Bridal Chorus* was originally written for the 1850 opera, *Lohengrin*, and was composed by Richard Wagner (Pleck, 2000).

The historic events surrounding this piece of music served as the inspiration for both the textile print design and silhouette of the created dress. In 1858 Princess Victoria (daughter of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert) was the first to walk down the aisle to *Bridal Chorus* (Pleck, 2000). Scottish artist, John Phillip, captured Princess Victoria’s wedding in an oil painting titled, “The Marriage of Victoria, Princess Royal, 25 January 1858.” The painting depicts Queen Victoria in an ombre purple gown with a full skirt, and a deep v neckline slightly off the shoulder. It is surmised that Queen Victoria also wore a crinoline underneath her skirt, as this historical period was known as the crinoline period (Tortora & Eubank, 1989). This depiction served as inspiration for both the color used in the current design and the overall silhouette. However, the silhouette has been updated in the current design to reflect more of a modern day bride with the inclusion of an open back and more of an A line skirt. Additional research of the 1850s revealed that in 1856, William Henry Perkin, founder of synthetic dyes, patented his first synthetic dye in 1856 known as dye aniline purple. The dye was known as mauve or mauveine for the French flower “mallow flower” (Nagendrappa, 2010). The dye was originally intended for use with silk, but was developed to be applied to cotton which gave rise to its’ popularity. Moreover, Queen Victoria’s decision to wear a garment in this color to her daughter’s wedding is suggested by some historians to be the catalyst for the color’s increased popularity (Nagendrappa, 2010). This historic importance is the reasoning behind the use of purple in the current design.

Process and Technique

Print Development: The song bridal chorus was used as a road map for creating the digital textile print. The designer used the Adobe Illustrator blending tool to create a monochromatic color scheme with even steps from violet to pale lavender. A monochromatic color scheme was selected as to emulate the ombre of Queen Victoria’s dress. There were a total of eight notes used in the simple violin version of bridal chorus; thus the total color scale contained

eight shades of purple. The designer allocated the darker shades of purple to the lower notes and the lighter tints of purple to the higher notes (see Figure below, left panel for note=color reference). The designer created one colored stripe for each note in the Bridal Chorus piece. The end result is a striped digital print that visually depicts the sound of *Bridal Chorus* in color (see Figure below, right panel for striped print used in design). Additionally, a white stripe in the print indicates a break in the music.

Process: The dress was created using a combination of flat patterning and draping. Cotton sateen was selected as the fabric. This decision was based on the historical reference of the color, mauve, growing in popularity once it could be applied to cotton fabrics. The fabric was digitally printed using a Mutoh textile printer. Regarding the printing process, the textile print was engineered for the bodice front and back while yardage of the textile print was used to create the skirt. After several rounds of different iterations, the designer selected to use a one-inch stripe for the skirt and bodice front/back so that the stripes/notes of the piece of music were easy to see and obvious to the viewer. The belt at the waistline is a smaller scale of the stripe to give visual contrast and create emphasis at the waist. Additionally, the four bars of music used to create the print are digitally printed on the belt. This provides a direct link between the piece of music and the textile print. The bodice of the dress has been created through a slashing technique that allows the weaving of the left and right sides of the bodice together. This symbolizes the unity of two individuals coming together as one through the union of marriage.

Design Contribution and Innovation

This design contributes to the body of design scholarship through the use of historical references, textile print development, and inclusion of technology and music into the design process. One of the main contributions of the design is the implementation of psychomimicry. As demonstrated here, psychomimicry can lead to new areas of research within the field of clothing and textile. Psychomimicry is closely connected to biomimicry, which has been used recently within textile and apparel design scholarship (Lee, 2015). Psychomimicry allows for the emulation of a psychological phenomenon such as synesthesia. Hence psychomimicry in textile and clothing scholarship should be further explored. To this end, the designer intends to continue this line of research by exploring additional and more complex pieces of music with a wider range of colors. In summary, "*Color Hearing: Bridal Chorus*" used psychomimicry to create a striped textile print that was influenced by the personal experience of the designer and inspired by historical events surrounding the time period in which the original musical piece was written.



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