



Hairdresser Julian Tagliavento (Julian Marc Hair Salon), and fashion designers James Jefferson (top) and Frank Sukhoo give Shannon Mercer all their attention.





# Dressing for the Junos

By Dayanti Karunaratne

Photographs by David Kawai

**W**ith two albums up for Junos this year, soprano knockout Shannon Mercer can leave her floor-length formal wear at home and don something more fun — and sexy.

“I know a lot of singers hate this type of thing,” she says, “but I love it!”

The Ottawa native is nominated in the Best Vocal Classical Album category for both her album *Bach and the liturgical year*, as well as for her vocal work on *Gloria! Vivaldi's Angels*.

“Because I’m not performing, (I) can kind of have more fun,” says Mercer, whose style icons include *Sex and the City*’s Carrie Bradshaw and Russian soprano-cum-fashion maven Anna Netrebko.

So where does a rising star with a ticket to a red-carpet event go for designer threads? For the event, which takes place in Vancouver on March 28, the Ottawa native wanted to show the nation a bit of her home town. First stop: Jefferson Sukhoo.

The Dalhousie Street studio that houses the creative talents of James Jefferson and Frank Sukhoo is a study in minimalism and an ode to classic, quality garments with a modern edge. Woven jackets with rough organza trim hang alongside sheer rhinestone-adorned

The bustier allows Mercer to show more skin. The Junos are a chance to “let loose and celebrate accomplishments,” and this silk strapless number combines flirty with sophistication.

The cummerbund accentuates her waist. And, if fuchsia falls out of favour, a broach clip provides an easy, low-cost change.



The Magpie jewelry carries the sparkle of the bustier’s rhinestones, without overpowering them. The teardrop earrings mimic the bubble skirt’s shape.

The bubble skirt brings youthfulness to the look. The dupioni silk is woven with a lurex thread, giving the piece a funky sheen.

blouses. Tiered sleeves command attention. Every sample item is made in jet black so clients such as Mercer visit for a consultation, get inspired, try pieces on, and work with the couturiers to develop the outfit of their dreams.

On her first visit, the blond soprano immediately loves the cummerbund.

That’s right — cummerbunds are not just for tuxedo clad men any more. As the Jefferson Sukhoo gents explain, a wide, transferable piece of fabric is a versatile wardrobe element that flatters the waist and can be altered to work with other outfits.

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Mercer immediately liked the cummerbund, so the gents personalized it for her with an injection of fuchsia.

Piece by piece, the bubbly blond struts and smirks, hamming it up despite the pins and stares. The sleeves of a sheer blouse are tapered. And she doesn't like the flowers in front, so they, too, are pinned down.

She returns to the fitting room to try another look.

She liked the pleated skirt, but when she re-emerges in a silk bubble skirt, the room seems to echo with a resounding "yes." A modern invention, the piece has a touchable sheen. Plus, it's cocktail-length, a real treat for a soprano.

She likes the idea of two pieces and now that she has bonded with the bubble skirt, she's tossed aside thoughts of a one-piece gown.

In the fitting room, there's barely concealed excitement. She soon appears, glowing, in a beautiful, smooth bustier. Rhinestones catch the twinkle in her eye. Her slim waist is accentuated and she carries a newfound poise. Despite hours of fittings, she's energized. "It's safe — but not in a bad way," she says.

The designers note that the bustier conveys a younger look, which is an important aspect of her style. She wants this outfit to show the youth and vitality she knows exists in classical music.

With three pieces — bustier, cummerbund, and bubble skirt — taken care of, there are details to work out.

Jet black is dramatic, but is it Mercer? "What's your favourite colour right now?" Frank Sukhoo asks.

"Fuchsia!" she exclaims. With a few snips of pink silk for the waist-flower and pink stilettos by Canadian designer David Dixon, the look comes together. For glimmer, she goes to Magpie Jewellery. Her Larus earrings and bracelets, set in sterling silver, twinkle with marcusite stone. Above all, the accessories maintain the modern-classic style.

And just like that, a red carpet dream comes true for this rising star.