

# COSTUMES

Kym Barrett's initial approach to the TOTEM costume designs was rooted in documentary-based reality. This process entailed research into real animals, plants and birds as well as traditional cultural and tribal designs to source her fanciful, inventive concoctions.

Kym's other major preoccupation was the show's theme of evolution, which led her to emphasize the importance of the human body at every opportunity. She points to the example of a forest populated by butterflies and frogs, saying it was important to her to show the human body as part of the overall visual mosaic of the scene.

The third show theme reflected in the costumes is the cycle of the seasons, which underscores the importance of nature to the show. Neon-bright colours, vivid, shiny fabrics and playful details lend a summer atmosphere to the Bollywood-inspired beach scene. To suggest a time of harvest and the abundance of fall, the unicyclists' costumes feature seed pods, flowers, trees and leaves. And the two roller-skaters are dressed in white and silver to help create a winter tableau.

To recreate such a broad range of textures, colours and markings found in nature, Kym concentrated on the treatment of fabrics rather than on the fabrics themselves: Advanced printing techniques, fluorescent pigments, mirror fragments and crystals allowed her to "paint" on canvases as varied as Lycra and leather, with results that constantly interact with and adapt to the show's ever-changing lighting.

## Costume Closeups

- The Crystal Man—a recurring character in the show—represents the life force. His (literally) dazzling costume is entirely covered of small mirrors and crystals creating a ball of energy when he comes down from the sky in a beam of pure white light. The glittering mobile mosaic is made up of about 4,500 reflective components on a stretch velvet leotard.
- The Hoop Dancer's costume is inspired by the traditional ceremonial clothing of a number of North American Indian tribes, rather than an accurate portrayal of any one culture. It includes a Hopi cross and a headdress, and features extensive use of leather.
- In the opening scene of the show the marsh is populated by fish and frogs. Their patterns and colours came from real fish and frogs – including the most poisonous frog in the Amazon jungle – and are replicated by the pixelation of the image in the screen printing process. The textures of the fabrics are also a close match to the skin of fish and frogs found in nature. The end result resembles a community of human amphibians.
- Each unicyclist has her own look, but together they form an integrated unit. The base costumes are printed in earth tones, with small details sewn onto them – including bolts and screws as well as feathers and insects. The line of the costumes and the stylized tutus create flirty ballerina silhouettes.

- The costumes worn by the foot-juggling duo are based on Lycra body stockings. Each is adorned with 3,500 crystals and the two headdresses are each encrusted with a further 1,000.
- The Businessman character looks like he's wearing an off-the-rack black suit, but when he's pursued and tackled by a gang of monkeys it has to break away at various points on his body when they tear it off him. The monkeys are each wearing a custom-woven fur to reflect their individual personalities.
- The Cosmonauts are wearing two costumes in one: When they first appear (under black light), their body-hugging Lycra suits glow dramatically in the dark, but as soon as the stage lights kick in, their look is completely transformed. Some of the printed motifs recall Mayan drawings, and each artist is wearing an individual variation on the theme.

## Costumes Facts

- There are 779 pieces of costumes in the TOTEM wardrobe (including shoes, headpieces, accessories, etc.)
- The heaviest costume is Crystal Man and it weighs 8 pounds! There are 4,001 pieces of mirrors just for his unitard.
- A team of 6 people clean, iron, repaint the shoes and maintain the costumes in the wardrobe department.
- The artists apply their own make-up, which can take between 30 minutes to an hour and a half. Except for the frogs, as part of their make-up is air brush!
- The use of electronics is present in the design of TOTEM's accessories (i.e. the tracker's hat, the cosmonaut helmets, etc.).

