

At Burberry, Fashion and Music Collide

Designer Daniel Lee sampled the stylishness of musicians in his latest outing for the British megabrand, reports Tim Blanks.

By Tim Blanks



LONDON — It was a summer of massive music events: Oasis, Beyoncé, Kendrick... the glorious festival tradition spearheaded by Glasto, of course. Then, there's the upcoming Beatles movies. It all got Daniel Lee thinking about the stylishness of musicians, and the way fashion and music so often hybridise. He claimed that's what he wanted to celebrate with his new collection for Burberry. But maybe the summer event that had the biggest influence on Lee personally, given his passion for contemporary dance, was the mod ballet based on The Who's "Quadrophenia" which he saw at Sadler's Wells in June. There was something ineffably *mod* about the Carnaby Street dandies in their shrunken double-breasted mohair suits and cropped, tightly belted trenches, or the Chelsea girls in their mini-shift dresses that he sent down the runway. In the absence of Vespas, parkas and skinny scarves rounded off the looks.

With Beatles on the brain, Lee and team also toyed with the exotic flourishes that embellished the wardrobes of '60s heads. The fringing on hems and bags, the tiny mirrors that were inset on dresses, the embroidered borders on cropped pants and a print of tarot cards all felt like the kind of groovy details that survivors of the Hippie Trail brought back to London. And macramé! It bisected a trench in one tiny, perfect paradigm of culture clash. Another trench was printed in python, which echoed the glory days of the design genius *manqué* Ossie Clark. "Really celebrating those incredible vintage finds and wearing them in a cool way," Lee enthused.

If that was an admission of sorts, there was plenty of technical skill on display. Waterproofing was always Burberry's USP. Lee pushed the envelope. He waxed everything: denim, cotton, raffia, cotton and raffia. "We're taking the foundations of the brand and using them for inspiration," he said. Denim was also foil-coated; the signature plaid appeared in metal mesh tops and skirts. A leather coat was laser-cut to mimic paisley. According to Lee, it's all of that skill, plus the emotion he and his team infuse into everything they design, that distinguishes luxury fashion, as it is incarnated in Burberry, from a high street product.

The market seems to agree. The green shoots of CEO Joshua Schulman's turnaround have financial analysts smiling for the first time in a while. You could see the youthiness of Coach in some of these clothes, the pared-down clarity of Hedi Slimane's Saint Laurent in others (there is a boyish Eden where a shrunken pink leather bomber jacket will forever sigh "*Hedi*").





But Lee injected a gleefully poisonous shot of his own personal history into things. His Harley-riding dad was a metalhead. Lee grew up with Black Sabbath, AC/DC, Metallica. The first summer music festival he went to was Reading, where System of a Down were headlining. No sunshine there. Still, Ozzy Osbourne is firmly established in the pantheon of British institutions, along with Burberry trench coats (and Elton John, who was sitting in the front row on Sunday night). So the soundtrack Lee went with for his show must have been some kind of tribute. But Black Sabbath grinding out at fashion show volume felt counter-intuitive to a fault, especially when the roof of the massive tent we were sitting in was all blue skies, nothing but blue skies.

In his defence, Lee may have been thinking of the Black Sabbath ballet that is coming to his beloved Sadler's Wells in November. Maybe redemption beckons.

