

HOMME ARENA+

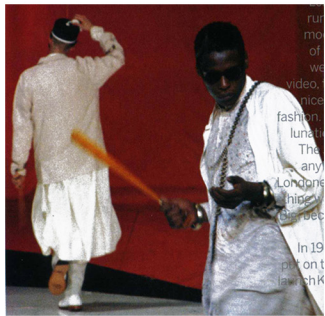
C A S T I N G W O R L D W I D E

IN 1985 JAPANESE BRAND MEN'S BIGI WENT ON A GLOBAL MISSION TO STREET CAST 150 FACES FOR THEIR CATWALK SHOW - FROM TOKYO TO HARLEM VIA LONDON.

Somewhere in the early eighties London clubbers were reporting a strange phenomenon, of being approached by a couple of Japanese guys asking to take their Polaroid. A few days later some of them would get a call with an invitation to model in a fashion show in Japan. This was proto street-casting by the label Men's Bigi, then designed by Takeo Kikuchi. Accompanying Kikuchi on these missions Ralph Shandilya, a Londoner who had moved to Tokyo and was behind Bigi's catwalk spectacles: energetic, upbeat shows with dry ice and massive casts of cool kids. It was a sign of the times that Shandilya found himself at the age of 22 art-directing and producing Men's Bigi shows. All this after an initial meeting in which Kikuchi didn't speak any English, he not a word of Japanese and with no translator.

I showed him the first issues of i-D Shandilya explains. 'We were all in there and he liked the look.' In London Shandilya had knocked around with the crowd that would later become Buffalo, assisting the photographer Roger Charity. 'Everybody was a wide boy, everyone knew everything' he remembers.

After just a month in Tokyo he'd flown out seven faces to appear in the first of his shows for Kikuchi. This was 1980 and his gang of 'nutty English people' - which included James Lebon - stomped down the runway alongside American models to Orson Welles' War of the Worlds theme. 'When we saw the





playback on the video, the other models were all nicely going around in proper fashion. We were just dancing like lunatics, jumping up and down. The Japanese had never seen anything like it before.' The Londoners were a hit – 'the whole thing went sky high' – and Men's Bigi become known for its global flavoured street-casting. In 1985 Shandilya and Kikuchi put on the mother of all shows to launch Kikuchi's own label. Thanks to heavy duty funding by Japanese backers World Co they had \$1 million – 'probably it was more' – to assemble a cast of 150.

In an interview at the time Kikuchi described his criteria; people who were 'inspired and inspiring'. Their global tour took in Tokyo and Los Angeles, where they picked up breakdancers and a ballet troupe. In New York they cast the Apollo Theatre's gospel choir and trawled Harlem clubs. A radical approach then, it has since become accepted practice. Being stopped in the streets by scouts no longer fazes pretty boys and girls, and much of the casting for this issue was done by Joel Bough outside Niketown on Oxford Street.

Shandilya, who went on to work with Michael Roberts at Talter, and The Sunday Times, now works mainly in film. He pulls out a Polaroid of a girl he found in New York for the 85 show, who turned out to be Puerto Rican ballet dancer. 'At that time it was different. You're telling this girl you want her to go to Japan, And she's not believing you.'

On the UK leg he paid a visit to his old friend Ray Petri – 'that's the first time I heard the word Buffalo' – to do the London casting and styling. Not that the term styling had been coined yet: 'It was the first time there was a guy checking the whole look, not just that the clothes were buttoned up.'

As for the show, the 150-strong cast – with a London contingent that included Nick Kamen, Jamie Morgan, Cameron McVey and Neneh Cherry - took up an entire floor of a Tokyo hotel.

'Each segment of the show was an event,' says Shandilya. With a running time of an hour there were motobikes on stage and a gospel finale, repeated twice in Tokyo, before transferring to Kobe, 'There were drugs, people getting on planes,' say Shandilya. So out of 150 how many came back? 'There was one guy in particular... Typical Brits. The Americans were always really well behaved.'

BY LUCY WHITE