

Feature



Liberacicus: God of Lounge Singers Kevin Roche*

Move over, Bacchus! A musical “god” of imbibement is on the scene, with togs that would make the fashion arbiters of the Roman pantheon take notice.

Origins

This costume started with a party theme, which seems to be a prime motivation for most of my oddball creations. I’m part of a group known as the “Torchwood 4 Cabal” who put on a themed cocktail party on the Friday night at Gallifrey One, a *Doctor Who*-based convention in Los Angeles every February. We decorate in theme, dress in theme, put together themed background music, and usually slide an assortment of visual puns and *Doctor Who* and other SFF references into things. It’s a lot of work, utterly silly and a great deal of fun!

One year our theme was “It’s Volcano Day!” in honor of the “Fires of Pompeii” episode of *Doctor Who* and a reference to a conversation in another episode between the “Doctor” and “Captain Jack Harkness” about the dangers of casual time-hopping. The maguffin of our party was “It’s the last night in Pompeii in the hottest nightspot in

Pompeii” and, of course, it was a toga party. Since, the “Porta Aurea” (“Golden Gate”) was supposed to be a nightclub, I decided to dress as the floor show.



There is a garment referred to as a “Trojan Kilt” which is essentially a waistband with an arrangement of leather straps hanging from it. As near as I can tell, the garment as drawn today is the result of serial misinterpretation of descriptions and drawings of some part of a legionnaire’s uniform. The garment as popularly drawn didn’t exist. Marvin the Martian even wears a version. While it may not have existed, it is immediately evocative to the contemporary eye of “Roman Times”.

One can purchase leather “Trojan kilts” from fetish shops these days; as sold they are intended to be worn in intimate situations (usually without undergarments). Such an item would be inappropriate for a cocktail party, but the catalog image gave me a starting point for a costume. I had what I thought was a roll of snake-textured silver vinyl, and some drapey fabric with glued on sequins. Add a metallic silver square-cut swimsuit



underneath and *Voila!* I’d bashed together my Pompeian lounge act wardrobe.

Before our party started, the convention was having a (non-cocktail) social that was also a toga party, so we stopped by to pay our respects. While there, one of the kids in attendance told me I reminded him of “that guy in Las Vegas with all the diamonds.” I asked, “Do you mean Liberace?” and he replied, “Yes, I think that was his name.” And thus was born “Liberacicus”.

The costume was fun, but the “vinyl” turned out to be embossed polyurethane and had a tendency to look like silver duck tape, the swash of sequins was scratchy as all get out, and when I added a small bag to carry room keys, etc., let us just say that photographs of this costume from the rear were not flattering.



Top left: Marvin Martian wearing “Trojan kilt.” Image copyright Warner Brothers Studios. *Left:* Commercial “Trojan kilt.” *Above:* Author in “Mark I” version of “Liberacicus” costume. Photo: [Andy Trembley](#).

Liberacicus, Mark II (and elevation to the pantheon)

The first costume was fun, but was impractical except for a party costume when I was staying in one place all evening, because of the lack of stowage. Most convention party nights involve wandering from party to party, so a party costume needs a place for your room key and ID, maybe a little cash, and, these days, your phone.

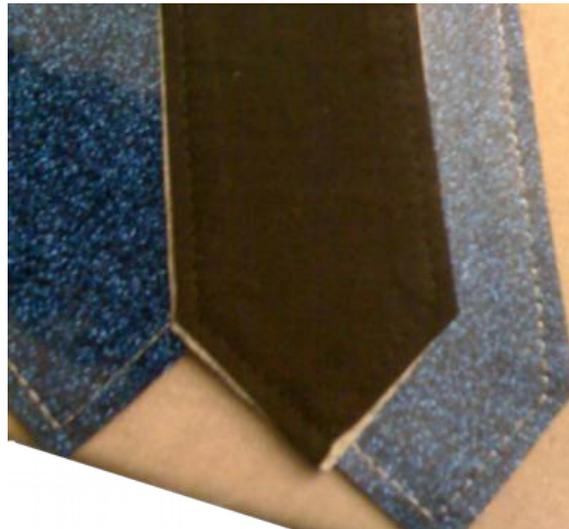
As it happened, I happened to have $\frac{3}{4}$ of a yard of royal blue sparkle banquette vinyl, the kind with the glitter in it that is used on bar stools and diner seat cushions. It looked like it might be just enough.



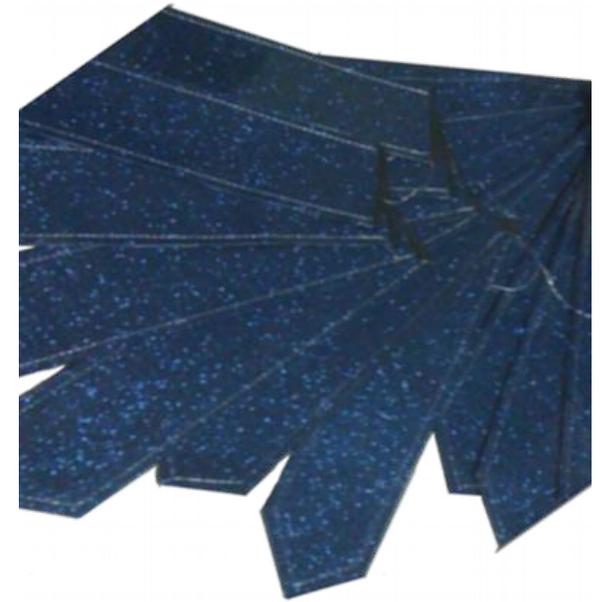
The pattern for the kilt itself is very simple. Straight rectangular strips of two different lengths, ending in a square point (45° off the sides), overlapped in two layers (short and long) on a straight waistband. Here you can see the strips and waistband all cut out, and the little bit of vinyl left from cutting out the strips. (The waistband was

cut from the raw stock above the short strips, so all the points were at the same level in the material. I had plans for the leftovers)

Assembling it is less simple. The back of the vinyl was white (and quickly becomes sticky/scratchy if placed against skin), so I set out to line it with black cotton broadcloth. I had to take care, however, to keep the clear shiny surface of the vinyl away from the feed dogs on my sewing machine. The answer was to use one of my secret costuming weapons: Bo-Nash Bonding Powder, a sprinkle-on steam-activated fusing adhesive. I cut my cotton lining pieces, pressed all the edges under, and bonded them to the back of the vinyl pieces with the bonding powder. A silicone pressing mat (recommended by the manufacturers) under the vinyl kept the shiny surface from being marred during the process.



Once all the lining pieces were bonded, I flipped everything shiny-side up and topstitched with metallic thread. The feed dogs were happy and the vinyl didn't get chewed up.

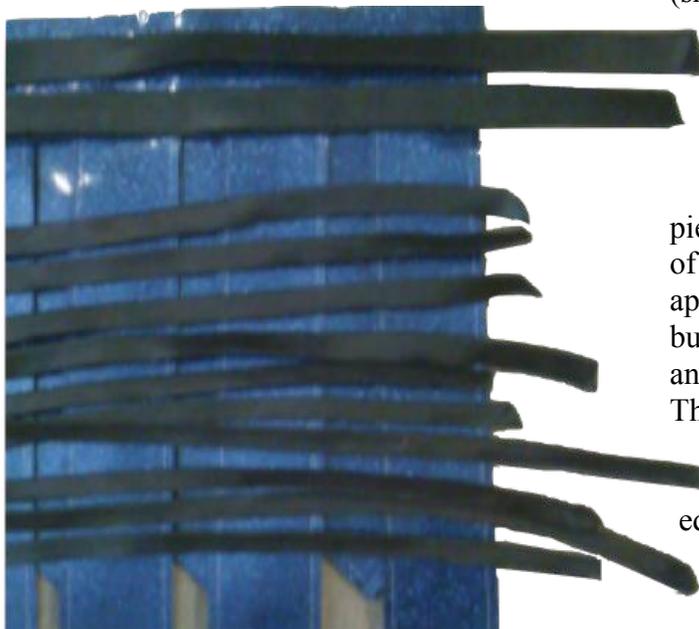


Now I could get to work on assembling the kilt pieces. I used a leather punch to punch matching holes in the waistband and strips, then pounded rivets to layer everything together and lock it in place (see photo on next page). Once that was done, I applied more cotton broadcloth as a lining to the waistband. (I may have slipped a layer of interfacing in there as well to discourage stretching of the vinyl).

Now I need straps and buckles to put the kilt on. My favorite technique for small buckled straps is to cut long strips of lightweight leather, glue and fold it over so



Above: Assembling kilt pieces on waistband with rivets. Below: A lot of 1/2" and 1" wide leather straps.



both the front and back are smooth, hammer/roll it flat, and then edge stitch it to stabilize it from stretching over much.

After edge stitching, I cut patching pairs from the straps and riveted buckles onto one end, then cut points on the matching insertion end. I have (finally) learned not to punch the belt holes until after trying things on.



Now I went back to all those scraps I'd saved. I had some heavier hide to use for leather bracers (arm guards) and greaves (shin guards). I experimented with paper to get the shapes correct (the bracers are essentially cones, but the greaves were a bit more complicated), then cut them out of the hide.



Greaves made from left-over leather.

Each greave piece then got three of the narrow straps applied, with the buckles on one side and a tail on the other. The strap was flexible enough that I could curve it to match the edge of the leather as it was topstitched down.



1" wide straps and buckles riveted and top-stitched to waistband completed the kilt.



Bracers with pocket for cards, cash, and keys (above and below left)..



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Greaves (above and below right).



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The bracer buckles were done similarly to the waistband, with three buckle pieces stitched on one side and three straps with holes on the other. The stitching ended well short of the edges of the bracer so it could be wrapped and overlapped underneath the straps. This minimizes pinching when buckling them on.

The bracers also contain the first PARTY modification: a rectangular leather

pocket large enough to hold a credit card, drivers license, room key, or a bit of cash was appliquéd to the center of the top edge. No more tacky bags to carry my keys!

After the leather was stitched together, I took the leftover zigzag scraps of the vinyl and used it to embellish the bracers and greaves to match the kilt.

Next on the list was the sash. The Peninsula Wearable Arts Guild had a roll of lined, pre-pleated blue tissue lamé donated for an auction. Friends who knew I was building something with the blue glitter vinyl chipped in and bought me a great big piece of it. It was perfect to build the sash. Tissue lamé can be both fragile and

scratchy, so I lined it with more of the black cotton broadcloth. I shaped the sash carefully to drape over one shoulder, and the point to hang just over and behind one hip (right).

Built into the point of the sash was another pocket, perfectly sized for my iPhone (or a box of Altoids!, left).



The outfit now had all the accessories I needed for a night of party-hopping. It also, when I tried it on, reminded me a lot of Michael

Forest's Apollo costume from the *Who Mourns for Adonais* episode of Star Trek – the original series. (right)

And that was when I decided that *Liberacicus* ought to be promoted to the pantheon as the God of Lounge Singers.

Friends suggested that my Olympian needed a laurel wreath -- so I made a frame for one by braiding 1/16" aluminum wire into a circlet. I bought some plastic foliage with the right shaped leaves, pulled



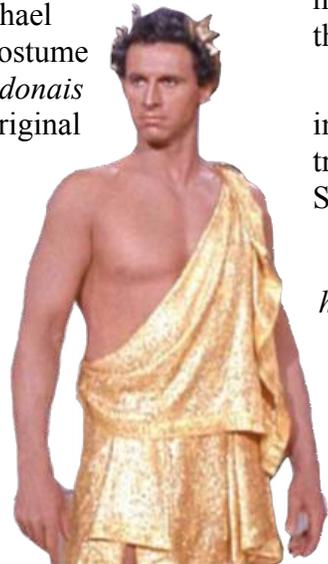
the leaves off the branches and gave them a coat of silver spray paint. The stems wound very nicely into the braided wire, and the happy purchase and addition of a pair of fiber-optic hair ornaments gave the whole thing an appropriately heavenly aura.



The costume was finished in time to run amok through the parties at Anticipation (the 2009 Worldcon in Montreal), and remains one of my favorite slightly-salacious evening hall costumes, although these days, I'm more likely to put up my mohawk and add some lights or glitter to it than to wear the "laurel" wreath.

Be warned, however, should you run into the God of Lounge Singers in your travels -- he will break into song (usually Sinatra) at the slightest provocation!

Kevin Roche is a sci-fi/fantasy and historical costumer with extensive experience entering, judging, and running masquerades. He was Chair of Costume-Con 26 in 2008. Kevin received the ICG's Lifetime Achievement Award in 2007. He is a past ICG vice-president, and is currently president of SiW. Visit his [website](#) to read his blog and view his album of costume photos.



Michael Forest as Apollo in Star Trek episode, *Who Mourns for Adonais*. Photo: Copyright Paramount Pictures, Inc..



Author in "Mark II" version of "Liberacicus" costume. Photo: [Andy Trembley](#).