

## BEHIND THE SCENES WITH NY FASHION WEEK PRODUCER AND CREATIVE ENTREPRENEUR MARITTA VIOLA

*MSU Alumnae makes mark on Big Apple fashion*

By Naakai Addy

**W**HEN WE THINK OF NEW YORK Fashion Week (NYFW), most of us think of the designers and how we're going to incorporate next season's trends without having to replace our entire wardrobes.

What we rarely see is the well-oiled, incredibly complex machine that makes major fashion shows possible. We rarely see the job behind the scenes that manages the details, encourages the designers, coordinates the guest list, and puts all of the pieces together just in time for the lights to go up on the runway.

That job? Show producer.

If you didn't think about the work of a fashion show producer in the past, a conversation with producer, creative mind, and organizational powerhouse Maritta Viola should do the trick.

Maritta has always been an out-of-the-box thinker, but that's not all it takes to make it in fashion. For her, singular determination, astute vision, and unwavering focus have been critical ingredients in her journey from a small town in Germany to producing shows for NYFW.

Maritta was born and raised in Germany, where she earned top marks in school, competed in track and field at the highest levels, and won prominent art contests. Those achievements would have been enough for most adolescents, but Maritta knew that there had to be a greater outlet for her talent and passion. An illness made her question the longevity of an athletic career, and she never felt quite at home in her hometown.

At 16, she accepted an opportunity to study abroad as an exchange student in Mississippi, and that's where the next

chapter of her life began. Maritta spent a year there, and was transformed by the warmth, openness, and hospitality she experienced. Though her German upbringing had reinforced her natural work ethic, it wasn't until she moved to the States that she felt the freedom to fuse business acumen and creativity in momentous new ways.

"When I first arrived in Mississippi I was in awe," Maritta shares, "having never seen such broad and open spaces of countryside in my life, I was astonished by the beauty of nature and also by the warm-hearted hospitality of Mississippi residents as well as my wonderful host family. While maintaining some German structure and habits, I also learned how to enjoy the little things in life and relax when work was done which created a valuable balance of managerial skills and a love for life."

The rest is history: Maritta finished school in Germany, and then applied to Mississippi State University so that she could resume her promising path to being the creative professional she'd dreamed of.

After graduating with a degree in Human Sciences Fashion Design and Merchandising in 2013, she became a retail fashion director and rose through the ranks, eventually transitioning into her current role as a show producer and brand developer.

That professional rise involved a lot of hard work, but it's not surprising that those around her took note of her commitment to collaboration, generosity, and honesty, and quickly recognized her potential.

Maritta's interest in fashion didn't

come out of nowhere. Though she doesn't remember it herself, her mother reminds her that while waiting for her older siblings to finish their sports practices, Maritta would style her mother at the local shopping center.

That innate understanding of how to pull disparate elements together to form a cohesive, compelling finished product exemplifies Maritta's unique blend of creative vision and shrewd analytical savvy. It is these qualities that make her the ideal show producer. She understands the creativity and inspiration that many designers rely on, but she can also seamlessly navigate the many organizational nuances of producing a show (without distracting the designers from their creative process).

Maritta has found the primary task of show production to be syncing her level of idea visualization with the designer's.

"You must learn," she explains, "to understand the designer's thoughts, wishes, and ideas before you can interpret [them] into business actions. Another challenge is to be adaptive to changes in a fast-paced environment and to be solution-driven at all times."

That alignment of vision and constant adaptability begins quite literally the day after the previous Fashion Week ends. As soon as it's time to look ahead towards the next season, it's time to get right back to work planning another spectacular show.

Though it's a long and involved process, Maritta relishes in every aspect of it: working with her talented team, reaching out to celebrities and press, helping designers make their vision a reality,

and connecting with some of the most incredible creative minds in the industry.

On the day of the show, getting into the right mindset is essential.

"The morning of the show; all preparation must be complete, but your brain is still working very hard making sure you have everything covered on your checklist and are ready to go. I usually wake up and go over my last-minute checklist of notes, pack model information, show time notes, and other routine notes I prepared prior to this day and quickly go over it again in my mind. Generally I know everything by heart at that time, but I like to triple-check myself—because once I arrive at the venue, time passes quickly and I only have a few hours to get everything rolling until show time."

It isn't just her internal mindset that Maritta has to manage on the day of the show—it's the energy and confidence she projects to her team.

Maritta prioritizes backstage management, using the drive and inspiration of adrenaline to help temper the chaos and time constraints, which could otherwise be overwhelming.

The models arrive about three hours before show time, and Maritta arrives even earlier than them (as well as the backstage crew). Upon arrival, she touches base with her production team and ensures that the designers are settled in.

It is then time to allocate tasks among the backstage crew, all the while staying attentive to the designers' needs. It is critical that everyone is prepared, knows what they have to do, and feels capable of completing their tasks.

The purpose behind her rigorous



MSU alumnae Maritta Viola.  
(Photo by Paul Walker)

preparation is to ensure that the models and backstage crew can put their full trust in her, and follow her lead. Confidence and calm, in her experience, has a trickle-down effect backstage.

When the show comes to an end and celebrations are underway, Maritta's joy and relief sink in. "The ultimate enjoyment happens when you see how it all came together as a flawless show with successful results. You forget about the months of hard work, because it all was worth it. Working with designers in general is a wonderful art, as you must learn how to combine the creativity of a designer with the business mind of a producer and strive for an overall successful show outcome in which all parties involved—including the audience and models—feel content and happy."

While her career as a fashion show

producer flourishes, Maritta is hardly resting on her laurels. Instead, she pushes herself to create, innovate, and inspire. She is a true entrepreneur, and her many professional pursuits include brand development, public relations, creative directing, fashion styling, and motivational speaking.

She even launched her own label, MVDesigns, in August 2016, with a line of modern, edgy printed bodysuits.

Maritta has already accomplished incredible feats at a young age, so her career is certain to have many fascinating chapters to come. For now, though, her ambition, sincerity, and creativity have paid off, for herself, her collaborators, and for the designers whom she helps shine.