

# Michelle Obama shines in Isabel Toledo

## SPEECH

Continued from page 1

ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — First lady Michelle Obama wore a sparkling yellow sheath dress with matching coat by Cuban-born American designer Isabel Toledo for the inauguration of her husband, a choice many applauded as a cheerful message of hope and a vote for the American fashion industry.

In some light, the embellished ensemble took on a pale greenish cast, coordinating nicely with green gloves from J. Crew and Jimmy Choo green patent pumps.

President Barack Obama wore a red tie and white shirt with his suit, topped with an overcoat adorned with an American flag pin.

Their daughters were style icons in their own right, with 10-year-old Malia in a double-breasted periwinkle-blue coat with a blue-ribbon bow at the waist, and Sasha, 7, in a pink coat with orange scarf and satin belt, a coral-colored dress peeking out at the hem. Their coats were from Crewcuts by J. Crew.

The fashion industry has anxiously looked to the election of Obama for months, embracing his wife as an emblem and ambassador of modern style, who wears clothes from young designers as well as mainstream American retailers.

"What I recognized more than anything from our new first lady and Hillary (Clinton) and everyone else is that everyone was fresh," said fashion designer Kai Milla, wife of Stevie Wonder and an invited guest to the swearing-in ceremony.

The unusual shade of yellow "really popped" on Michelle Obama's complexion, Milla added.

Hamish Bowles, Vogue magazine's European editor at large who curated the Metropolitan Museum Costume Institute exhibit on Jackie Kennedy in 2001, said he sees a



Michelle Obama arrives for the inauguration ceremony at the U.S. Capitol in Washington, Tuesday, Jan. 20, 2009. AP PHOTO/JAE C. HONG

resemblance in the inaugural styles between the two first ladies. "She's off to an auspicious start," Bowles said of Obama.

"Mrs. Obama's choice today was appropriate, dignified and elegant but it also had a considerable element of fashion panache," he added.

She has shown an ability to root

out exciting and innovative styles in her backyard and there's been no need for her to look at European designers, Bowles noted. "She's finding great American talent."

She also connects with American women.

"What's so powerful about Michelle Obama is we all see our-

selves in her. She's a modern woman who is fashionable and even flamboyant in her style and she is still taken seriously," said red-carpet and magazine stylist Mary Alice Stephenson. "She's wearing that dress today for all of us. We're all wearing that dress with her. The dress is elegant, appropriate and has the individual style stamp of Michelle Obama and is timely for a woman in her 40s — and she wears embellishment during the day. Hallelujah!"

"She is single-handedly breathing new life into designers like Narciso Rodriguez and Isabel Toledo, who have had a rocky past," Stephenson said.

Toledo, who just a few years ago unsuccessfully tried to infuse more modern style into the venerable Anne Klein label, is considered among the more avant garde U.S. designers.

The Obamas' look Tuesday contrasted with that of the outgoing Bushes, with Laura Bush in a dove-gray skirt suit and matching coat.

On the podium with the Obamas, Vice President Joe Biden wore a navy Hickey Freeman suit he bought at the Nordstrom's in King of Prussia, Pa., paired with a blue tie, while his wife, Jill Biden, had on a bright red coat and high black leather boots.

Also catching style-watchers' eyes: Aretha Franklin singing to the immense crowd gathered at the Capitol in an over-the-top hat with an oversized bow and beading.

"Aretha is a larger than life personality, why shouldn't she wear a larger than life hat?" said Nicole Phelps, executive editor of Style.com.

Yet, she added, the gray color of Franklin's hat was an attempt to yield the spotlight. "The fact that it was gray to match her outfit can be seen as an acknowledgment that it's the Obamas' day, not Aretha's, i.e., she's a star but she wasn't THE star today."

John Cusack and director Stephen Spielberg.

The district fire department responded to dozens of calls from people falling down or complaining of the being cold, D.C. fire and EMS department spokesman Alan Etter said. About two dozen were hospitalized.

Etter said medical personnel were having trouble getting to people quickly around the mall because of the throngs of people, but he added that everyone who needed help has eventually received treatment.

By 4 a.m., lines of riders had already formed in suburban parking lots for the Metro transit system, which opened early and put on extra trains for the expected rush. Many parking lots filled up and had to be closed.

Streets around the Capitol quickly filled with people, and security checkpoints were mobbed. The cold registered at a frosty 25 degrees at late morning, rising to 28 at the time of the swearing-in.

Warming tents and other facilities on the Mall were late opening because traffic and crowds delayed staffers from reaching them. At one spot, 150 people waited to buy a cup of coffee.

A flea-market atmosphere prevailed on downtown streets, with white tents set up to sell Obama T-shirts and mugs as well as food, bottled water, snacks, scarves and footwarmers. The scent of grilled sausages and steaming Chinese food greeted those who walked toward the parade route, more than six hours before Obama would pass by.

As waves of people moved through security screenings they scrambled for prime viewing spots along Pennsylvania Avenue — sitting on the curb, staking out plots of grass, or clambering on cold metal benches.

Real estate appraiser Denise Grandberry of St. Louis stood on the mall with her niece Murphy and daughter Nikki and talked about all the foreclosed homes she's seen in her work. "I've seen the remnants of peoples' lives," she said. "I have hope now and I think the nation has hope."

Some 410,000 people had entered Washington's Metro transit system by 9 a.m., an extraordinary number, transit officials said. "God Bless them, they came out in this weather," said Robyn Ahlstrom, a volunteer with the Presidential Inaugural Committee.

The joyous mood of many was tempered for some by delays and dashed expectations.

Alice Williams, a 51-year-old teacher of gifted children from Kansas City, Mo., had the coveted purple ticket that would place her in front of the Capitol, but got caught in the crowd bottleneck and was stuck a half mile away.

"We got blocked off; there was too much traffic and no guidance," she said forlornly. "I've been walking for an hour and a half. All I want to do is see my president sworn in."

The cold was also taking its toll.

Shelton Iddeen, 57, of Greensboro, N.C., arrived at the Mall at 4 a.m. and huddled in front of an ambulance to warm up.

"My hands feel really bad; you can't feel your toes," he said. "I'm more concerned about other people, the elderly and the young. I've seen a lot of people here really suffering."

Others were unfazed.

Faosat Idowu of Lagos, Nigeria, had tickets for the inauguration but couldn't get through the crowds at five different entrances between the White House and Capitol Hill. She ended up walking in a highway tunnel that normally carries Interstate 395 under the Capitol grounds, closed for this one day to all but pedestrians. She wore a bright red scarf and hat adorned with dozens of green patches bearing Obama's face and the words, "Africans for Obama."

"It's part of the excitement," Idowu said. "I don't mind it at all."

# Obamas dance to 'At Last' during inaugural ball

ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — "At Last" may have been just what President Barack Obama and his wife Michelle were thinking Tuesday night as they glided through their first inaugural dance to the Etta James classic.

The Obamas were the star attraction at the Neighborhood Ball, the first of 10 inaugural celebrations they planned to attend, going into the early hours of Wednesday. The celebrations marked the end of a long day of formal inaugural events and the two-year campaign that put them in the White House.

The president pulled his wife close and they danced a slow, dignified two-step while, offstage, Beyonce sang. The president spun first lady Michelle Obama once in a half-turn.

Obama cut loose in a faster groove a few minutes later, as Shakira, Mary J. Blige, Faith Hill and Mariah Carey sang along with Stevie Wonder to his "Sign, Sealed, Delivered." The song was played at nearly every one of Obama's rallies throughout the campaign.

The president wore white tie, while Michelle shimmered in a white, one-shouldered, floor-length gown. It was embellished from top to bottom with white floral details and made by 26-year-old New York designer Jason Wu.

"First of all, how good looking is my wife?" Obama asked the crowd of celebrities and supporters alike.

At their second ball, the president pulled the first lady much closer than he did on their first dance. At one point, he wrapped both arms around her waist and locked his fingers together at the small of her back.

"I hope all of you will remember what this campaign and hopefully this presidency is all about," Obama said. "It's about you, pitching in, working together, trying to get past our differences in order to create the kind of world we want to pass on to our children and America."

At the Commander in Chief Ball, Vice President Joe Biden saluted the nation's military men and women and then said he wasn't looking forward to his moment in the spotlight — the dancing, that is.

"The thing that frightens me the most (is) I'm going to have to stand in that circle and dance in a minute." At that, he laughed and did a quick sign of the cross.

Despite the formal attire and celebrity entertainment, balls aren't overly fancy affairs. Lines often are long to get in, go to the bathroom or check your coat, and the food is heavy on vegetables with dip and cheese cubes.

In a sign of the financial times, guests who already paid anywhere from \$75 for a ticket to thousands more for a package deal had to buy their own drinks served in small plastic cups. Beer went for \$6, cocktails for \$9 and champagne for \$12.

People waited in line over an hour at Union Station to get into the Eastern States Ball. Because of very limited seating at the Western ball, a number of attendees in long gowns and fancy dress plopped cross-legged on the floor.

"This is what happens in a down economy. No chairs, no highboys — it's the floor and plastic cups," commented ballgoer Brig Lawson, 38, of Las Vegas.

Most of the ladies wore black like their dates, but Patrick Landers was an exception in his kilt at the Biden Home States Ball. The 33-year-old Washington attorney moved to the United States from Ireland in 1998.

"I'm here to celebrate this great day and the beginning of a transformation in the United States and the rest of the world in creating a more inclusive society," Landers said.

Not everyone was so thrilled to be attending a ball. Singer Sheryl Crow, doing a sound check for a performance later at the Midwestern Ball, said she was homesick.

"I have not seen my child in four days. I'm miserable," she told her band between songs.



Above and at left, President Barack Obama, right, and first lady Michelle Obama, left, have their first dance of the evening during the Neighborhood Inaugural Ball in Washington, Tuesday, Jan. 20, 2009. Below, Vice President Joe Biden dances with his wife Jill at the Commander in chief ball.

AP PHOTOS

