

SIMPLE STYLE

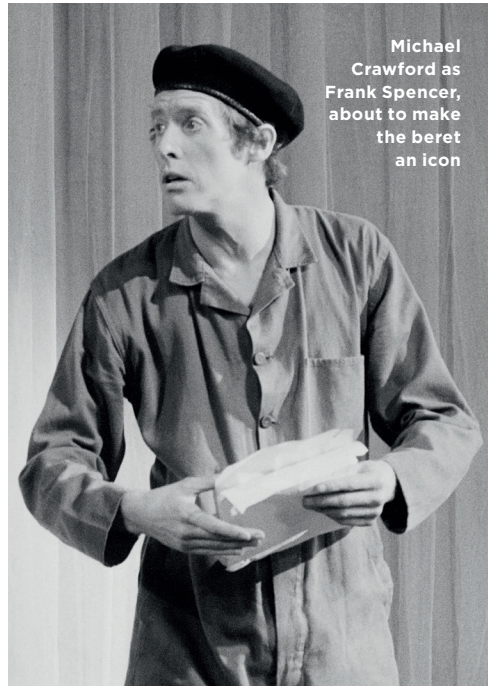
THE BERET

Words: **CLARE GOGERTY**

Few items of headgear strike an attitude like the beret. Put one on and you instantly have a choice of identities and postures to adopt. You could accessorise with a slash of scarlet lipstick and channel a chic Parisienne. You could smoke a fat cigar, emblazon your beret with a star, look defiantly into mid-distance and summon up the revolutionary spirit of Che Guevara. Or you could clutch a shooter and pout crossly thus becoming Faye Dunaway in *Bonnie and Clyde*. You could even wear one with a belted raincoat and come over all Frank Spencer in *Some Mothers Do 'Ave 'Em* (right), although that would probably be foolish.

Of course you could also choose to wear a beret simply because it is a comfortable thing, sitting softly on your head, keeping it warm and snug. And what other hat is so flexible? It can be jauntily pushed to one side or the other, depending on which suits you, or it can be placed squarely and neatly in the middle of the head. And when you decide to take it off, it can be folded and slipped unobtrusively into a pocket.

Much of this practicality is down to the beret's origins. It was first worn by Basque shepherds in the Pyrenees to protect them from hot sun and cold winters. The circular



Michael Crawford as Frank Spencer, about to make the beret an icon

“Beatniks, intellectuals and jazz musicians adopted it as their headwear of choice”

hat was knitted, then felted, by hand before being commercially produced in the 19th century by Laulhere, now the sole manufacturer of berets in France (there were once 20 factories that made only berets). By the 1920s it had become thoroughly adopted by the Spanish and French working classes, becoming a cliché of Frenchness, especially when worn with a striped jersey and string of onions.

The French military adopted the beret in 1889, followed by the British army during the First World War, particularly the Royal Tank Regiment who could nip in and out of tanks without fear of knocking it off.

It became fashionable during the 1920s with peak beret-wearing occurring during the 1940s and 1950s – bohemian, beatniks, intellectuals and jazz musicians all adopted it as their headwear of choice and it still retains an alternative, left-bank quality.

Most recently, Gucci rediscovered the beret producing a wide, foppish version. Fortunately, there are also many high-street variants to choose from, one to suit whatever attitude you decide to adopt when wearing it. **S**

PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY IMAGES

THE UPDATE

THE CLASSIC



Anglobasque beret by Kangol | £33.95

One hundred per cent wool with satin lining and thin nylon sweatband. Classique!hatsandcaps.co.uk



Mohair beret | £22

Soft and squashy enough to pull down snugly over your ears. oliverbonas.com

TWO GREAT TWISTS



Turquoise mohair beret | £24.95

Made by French company Laulhère and soft as a *bébé's* bottom (other colours available). cashmerechoice.co.uk