

Jewels, which premiered in New York on 13th April 1967, is something of an exception both in George Balanchine's repertory and in the history of ballet. It is a long choreography in three acts lasting for an entire evening, but there is no storyline, simply precious stones as a guiding theme. Balanchine himself said that the idea of creating a new ballet with costumes encrusted with gemstones (later designed by his favourite costumer, Karinska) came to him when a friend introduced him to the jeweller, Claude Arpels. Some time later, the choreographer was able to admire a splendid collection of jewels at Van Cleef & Arpels, an experience which must have left its mark. Indeed, the oriental Balanchine, a Georgian from the Caucasus, admitted that he always had a passion for the colours and beauty of gemstones. During the preparations for the ballet, he expressed great satisfaction over how closely the jewels applied by Karinska to the costumes resembled to the real thing (the original jewels would obviously have been too heavy for the dancers to wear!).

Although blinded by the dazzling light of jewels, Balanchine certainly did not forget his habitual sources of inspiration even while preparing this ballet: the music that seduced him at the time, and the dancers who fascinated him. He was determined to create a large-scale, opulent ballet that would please the public and would suit his large company, the New York City Ballet, which, for the occasion, was to move to its new, prestigious venue, the New York State Theater, in the Lincoln Center. The result was a ballet which corresponded completely to its creator's aspirations.

Women love jewels and George Balanchine, the choreographer who most supported women's dance, produced a ballet which is a tribute to them. *Jewels* is a triptych where each single part shines the light of a precious stone. Physical perfection and colours melt with the music by Gabriel Fauré, Igor Stravinsky and Tchaikowsky in *Emeralds*, *Rubies* and *Diamonds* respectively.

EMERALDS

Emeralds is conceived for two principal couples, three soloists and a corps de ballet of ten dancers. It is set to music composed by Gabriel Fauré for Maurice Maeterlinck's drama *Pelléas et Mélisande* (1898), and Edmond Haraucourt's *Shylock* (1889). It opens with a delicate pas de deux, framed by eight dancers, on light music for strings. This is followed by a variation for one of the soloists on a delightful melody, which is then followed by another variation for the second soloist. A pas de trois, with a varied melody for strings, anticipates another calm, solitary pas de deux. All the dancers return to the stage for the finale.

The order of the music is as follows: *Prélude*, *Fileuse*, *Sicilienne* (from

Pelléas et Mélisande); *Entr'acte*, *Nocturne*, *Épithalame* and *Finale* (from *Shylock*) and *La mort de Mélisande* (again from *Pelléas et Mélisande*). It was only in 1976 that Balanchine added *Nocturne pas de deux* and the final *Pas de sept*. The choreographer said, and wrote, that since narrating this type of dance in words might prove boring, perhaps the spectator could think of France: “the France of elegance, comfort, dress, and perfumes”. And we might add, of France as the birthplace of romantic ballet...

RUBIES

Regarding *Rubies*, Balanchine, eager to contradict the opinions of some commentators, stressed that the second part of *Jewels* was not at all meant to represent America, her energy, her chorus line girls. On the contrary, it was again inspired by the music of his compatriot Stravinsky and conceived in accordance with the composer himself.

On stage, *Rubies* has one principal couple, a soloist and a male and female corps de ballet. The couple and the soloist alternate in leading the ensemble. Stravinsky's *Capriccio for piano and orchestra* (1929) in three movements (Presto, Andante rapsodico and Allegro capriccioso ma tempo giusto), used here, was composed with the brilliance of Carl Maria von Weber in mind, or to use Michael Praetorius' definition, as a synonym of “fantasy, or free form of fugato”. Sometimes, this part of the ballet, especially when performed without the other two accompanying parts of *Jewels*, takes the title of *Capriccio per piano*, as a tribute to the music.

DIAMONDS

The final part of *Jewels* is danced by one ballerina and her partner, a group of soloists and a large corps de ballet to four of the five movements which constitute Tschaikowsky's *Symphony no. 3 in D major*. Balanchine considered the first movement unsuitable for dancing. The second (Alla tedesca: Allegro moderato e semplice) is performed by twelve dancers and a couple of soloists. The third (Andante elegiaco) is danced by the principal couple, the fourth (Scherzo: Allegro vivo) by four male and four female dancers with variations by the two protagonists. Finally, the fifth movement (Allegro con fuoco – Tempo di Polacca) brings to the stage the entire group of thirty-four members.

(Traduzione di Chris Owen)