



Metropolitan Opera

Lincoln Center/stagebill

Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts/May 1988

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Azalea bushes in Damrosch Park

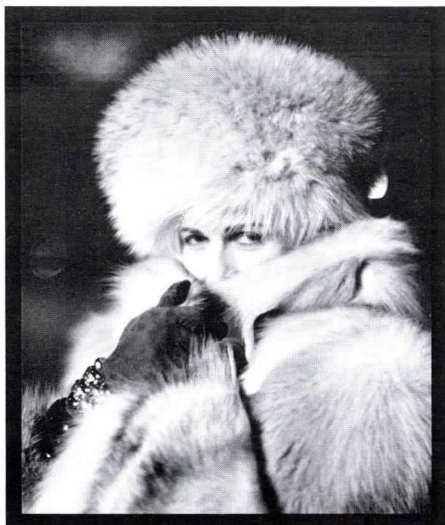
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Season of Surprises

ABT's repertory moves in fascinating directions this season

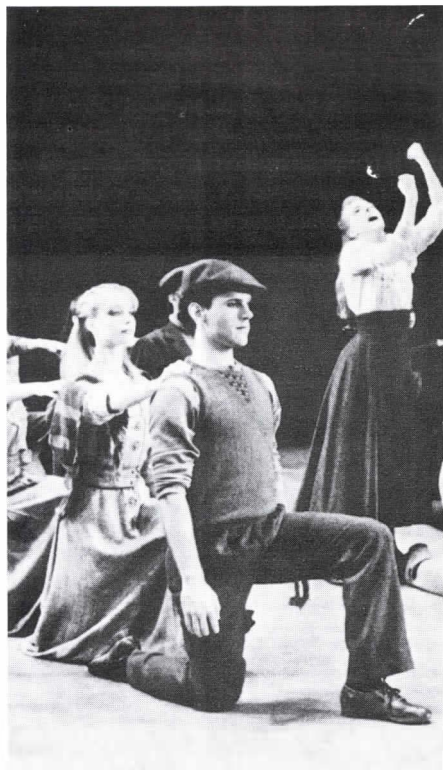
Anyone who still thinks of American Ballet Theatre primarily as a "museum" company, faithfully conserving a few hallowed relics from dance history, is notably out of touch with the ABT of today. While maintaining, even expanding, its repertory of perennially popular nineteenth-century works (such as last year's production of the full-length *The Sleeping Beauty*), the company has been steadily enriching its repertory, its dancers, and its audiences with a wide range of new choreography. A look at the eight ballets entering or returning to repertory at the Metropolitan Opera House for the first time this season reveals a world premiere, three new productions, two New York premieres, and two New York company premieres—

all signs of ABT's vital, ongoing artistic life.

The pair of New York company premieres—*Ballet Imperial* and *Stravinsky Violin Concerto*—represents especially daring and fascinating choices. ABT has recently developed an increasingly rewarding relationship with the works of George Balanchine; the growing number of his ballets acquired by the company both clarifies and challenges the dancers' technical abilities and classical style. Yet ABT has previously offered mostly lighter, small-scaled Balanchine, such as *Donizetti Variations*, or intriguingly out-of-the-way Balanchine—for example, the reconstructed *Symphonie Concertante*, long ago dropped from the repertory of Balanchine's

Above: American Ballet Theatre's new production of Gaité Parisienne features costumes by Christian Lacroix

Edward Willinger



Above: A moment from Agnes de Mille's new *The Informer* and (below) Leslie Browne, Susan Jaffe, and Alessandra Ferri in Antony Tudor's *Gala Performance*

own company, the New York City Ballet. With *Ballet Imperial* and *Stravinsky Violin Concerto*, major Balanchine masterpieces that rank among our century's greatest ballets, ABT moves boldly into the custodial domain of NYCB. However, it does so with a difference.

Balanchine originally created *Ballet Imperial* for his short-lived American Ballet Caravan in 1941. Set to Tchaikovsky's Second Piano Concerto, a brilliant but much less familiar composition than the Concerto No. 1, and with regal costumes and scenery by Mstislav Doboujinsky, the ballet glorified the Maryinsky Theatre of Petipa and Tchaikovsky at its height. In subsequent restagings, including those for the Sadler's Wells (later Royal) Ballet in 1950 and New York City Ballet in 1964, Balanchine slightly revised his choreography, but the new settings and costumes continued to situate the dancing clearly in old St. Petersburg. In 1973, Balanchine not only revived but rethought the ballet, preferring to evoke imperial grandeur through dancing alone rather than to specify an imperial Russian locale. He renamed the work *Tchaikovsky Piano Concerto No. 2* and replaced the formal tutus with simple chiffon dresses and the elaborate





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CORIANDER SEEDS FROM MOROCCO



ANGELICA ROOT FROM SAXONY



JUNIPER BERRIES FROM ITALY



CASSIA BARK FROM INDOCHINA

decor with a plain backdrop; this version of the ballet has remained a recurring highlight of NYCB repertory. ABT is now giving us a chance to experience the ballet as Balanchine first imagined it; the dazzling choreography will be performed with Petipa-style costumes and opulent scenery (including a vista of Leningrad's Neva River) by Rouben Ter-Arutunian, who also designed the 1964 City Ballet production. *Ballet Imperial* has been staged for ABT by John Taras, the company's Associate Director and a long-time associate of Balanchine.

If, in *Ballet Imperial*, ABT may be tackling Balanchine choreography of greater complexity and sweep than it has attempted before, *Stravinsky Violin Concerto* will challenge the company with its sparseness and astringency. This work, first presented during NYCB's renowned Stravinsky Festival of 1972, could serve to epitomize Balanchine's "modernist" vein—those ballets in which he took a knotty twentieth-century score (in this case, Stravinsky's

1931 *Concerto in D for Violin and Orchestra*) and a relatively small cast (here, four principals and a corps de ballet of sixteen) and produced an invigorating flow of novel, striking images. While adhering to the music's insistent pulse, Balanchine managed—especially in the two central *pas de deux*—to elicit wit and tenderness, too. Both rigorous and playful, *Stravinsky Violin Concerto* tests its dancers' lyricism and rhythmic precision, in addition to requiring clear execution of often startlingly unconventional movements and positions. ABT was fortunate to have its production staged by Karin von Aroldingen, a former NYCB principal dancer and one of the ballerinas in the work's original cast.

Of the season's three new productions, two are ballets that have been out of repertory so long they might almost be called company premieres. ABT has not performed Antony Tudor's *Gala Performance*, for example, since 1970. Those who have come to know Tudor through such emotionally charged ballets as his *Pillar of*



ORTED TASTE OF BOMBAY GIN.

ALMONDS FROM INDOCHINA LEMON PEEL FROM SPAIN ORRIS (IRIS ROOT) FROM ITALY LICORICE FROM INDOCHINA



Fire and Dark Elegies, or through the beautiful, nostalgic *The Leaves are Fading*, may be surprised to learn that the choreographer was capable of biting satire, too. In *Gala Performance*, Tudor targets the backstage and onstage behavior of three rival ballerinas (one from France, one from Italy, one from Russia), their attendants, and the surrounding company. The ballet makes ingenious use of two Prokofiev scores: the Piano Concerto No. 3 in the backstage scene, and the ironic Classical Symphony for the gala performance itself. Choreographed for the London Ballet in 1938, the ballet was first danced by Ballet Theatre in 1941 (with Tudor himself as Cavalier to the arrogant Italian ballerina). This revival has been staged by Sallie Wilson, a noted interpreter of Tudor roles, including the Russian danseuse, during her years with ABT.

Gâté Parisienne has not been danced by ABT in 16 years. Created by Leonide Massine for the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo in 1938 (and staged for ABT in 1970),

the ballet has attained near-legendary status; it was once described as “probably the most popular and the most-performed ballet ever presented in America.” Its aura is due partly to its extraordinary past performers, including Massine and Alexandra Danilova, and also to its beguiling subject matter: the bygone, idealized Paris of Offenbach and the Second Empire, a setting for countless, heedless flirtations. A special attraction of ABT’s new production are the costumes by Christian Lacroix, the celebrated French designer who regularly makes fashion headlines; the extravagant frivolity of his style may perfectly suit the racy, pleasure-seeking ambience of *Gâté Parisienne*.

One of the first ballets that Mikhail Baryshnikov mounted after assuming the artistic directorship of ABT in 1980 was a *Raymonda Divertissement*. For the season’s third new production, he has turned again to excerpts from this three-act ballet of 1898, with its rich Petipa choreography and splendid Glazounov score. Whereas

the earlier version contained samples of both classical and character dancing, Baryshnikov has called his new suite a Grand Pas Classique; it consists of the wedding dances from Act III as well as several ballerina variations from previous acts. Not just the dances but Barbara Matera's new costumes, too, are based on

Informer. Using specially arranged and orchestrated Celtic folk tunes, and incorporating some of her dances from the 1958 show *Juno*, de Mille gives us a picture of strife-torn Ireland in the years during and just after World War I. Finally, *Drink to Me Only With Thine Eyes*, with music by Virgil Thomson, becomes the first ballet



Susan Jaffe and Ross Stretton in George Balanchine's Ballet Imperial

those seen at the Kirov Ballet and derive from the original Maryinsky production.

And what about the season's custom-made new choreography? Following his well-received choreographic debut last year (ABT's *Enough Said*), principal dancer Clark Tippet has created a second ballet, *Bruch Violin Concerto No. 1*. Danced by four leading couples and a small ensemble, the work shows Tippet exploring a more purely classical idiom. As her first ballet for ABT since *The Four Marys* in 1965, Agnes de Mille has choreographed *The*

made for the company by acclaimed young choreographer Mark Morris. An artist of powerful individuality and musicality, Morris can only add further luster to what promises to be a season of exceptional additions to American Ballet Theatre repertory.



Edward Willinger has written about dance for Ballet Review, The New Dance Review, and other publications.

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II**Drink to Me Only With Thine Eyes****World Premiere**

Music by Virgil Thomson
Choreography by Mark Morris
Costumes by Santo Loquasto
Lighting by Phil Sandstrom

MIKHAIL BARYSHNIKOV SHAWN BLACK JULIO BOCCA LESLIE BROWNE
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ROBERT WALLACE ROSS YEARSLEY

Pianist: MICHAEL BORISKIN
Assistant to Mr. Morris: Tina Fehlandt

"Drink to Me Only With Thine Eyes" was created for American Ballet Theatre. Portions of the ballet were presented as a work in progress on the *Dancing for Life Aids* Gala on October 5, 1987. The music for "Drink to Me Only With Thine Eyes" is Virgil Thomson's *Etudes for Piano* and include "Chromatic Double Harmonies", "Repeating Tremolo", "Fingered Fifths", "Double Glissando", "Oscillating Arm", "Pivoting on the Thumb", "Alternating Octaves", "Double Sevenths", "Broken Arpeggios", "Parallel Chords", "Ragtime Bass", "For the Weaker Fingers" and "Tenor Lead".

**"Drink to Me Only With Thine Eyes" is underwritten by grants from
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In this evening's performance of RAYMONDA, the First Solo Variation
will be danced by MARIANNA TCHERKASSKY
and the Second Solo Variation by ALESSANDRA FERRI

In DRINK TO ME ONLY WITH THINE EYES, ISABELLA PADOVANI
replaces LESLIE BROWNE

In GAITE PARISIENNE, "The Peruvian" will be danced by JOHAN RENVALL
and "La Lionne" by JENNET ZERBY