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Whenever the curtain rises on George Balanchine’s Serenade, a frisson of excitement spreads through the theater, as there appears before us the striking, mysterious image of women bathed in blue light, their right arms held aloft as if hailing a newly risen moon. It is among the most indelible images in the ballet canon.

But this fall, when the New York City Ballet season opens with a performance of this classic Balanchine ballet – famously his first created in America – the emotions for both dancers and audiences will surely be heightened to an extraordinary degree. I hardly need to explain why: the past year has been one of trial, disruption, anxiety, and the terrible loss of human lives. Among the disruptions has been the absence of ballet and other performing arts – not the most grievous consequences of the pandemic, to be sure, but for arts lovers both casual and ardent, a painful loss nonetheless. As we gingerly step back into the routines of our lives, the return of this cherished art form will be, for all dance-lovers, an exciting turning point, a seasonal treasure for both New Yorkers and visitors from all over the world, will be an occasion worthy of a tickertape parade.

Many New York City Ballet fans have watched its digital seasons on the web, including previously taped performances, dancers discussing the repertory, and other engaging offerings. Kyle Abraham created his third work in the spring, a dance that was filmed at the Company’s theater and streamed online. It was followed by another film, by Sofia Coppola, of selections from the repertory and a new ballet by Justin Peck.

And for those who follow dancers on social media platforms, it has been moving and inspiring to witness the renewal and regeneration of New York City Ballet. For fundamentally ballet is a ritual that is best experienced live, with no digital barrier between audiences and artists. Merely browsing through the programs listed in this brochure has whetted my appetite and stimulated my senses. The ballets to be performed on opening night – Christopher Wheeldon’s hypnotic After the Rain Pas de Deux and Balanchine’s exuberant Symphony in C, in addition to Serenade – should have any ballet-lover’s heart racing in excitement.

And if we may look for threads of silver linings from the year’s upheavals, perhaps the ability to take extra time to plan for new works joining the repertory may be among them. Across the fall, winter, and spring seasons, the Company will be presenting ballets from choreographers making their first works for the NYCB stage: Sidra Bell, Andrea Miller, Jamar Roberts, and Silas Farley, as well as new ballets from Justin Peck and Pam Tanowitz. In total the Company will perform 58 ballets over the course of the three seasons – plus, of course, The Nutcracker.

The diverse roster of returning Balanchine favorites will include Agon, Apollo, Chaconne, The Four Temperaments, Prodigal Son, and Stravinsky Violin Concerto, among a total of more than 30 dances, including the traditional spring season-ending A Midsummer Night’s Dream. Jerome Robbins ballets will include the perennial favorite Glass Pieces as well as Opus 19/The Dreamer, The Cage, and the bewitchingly beautiful masterwork Afternoon of a Faun.

After the inexpressible hardships brought on by the pandemic, the return of this unequaled repertory will, I am sure, help give a much-needed lift to the spirits of audiences and artists alike, and indeed to the city itself. For many of us, New York City without New York City Ballet is an unhappy if not unthinkable prospect.

Yes, we endured the Company’s absence onstage for more than a year. New Yorkers are formidably strong people. But its return will be a much-needed reminder that the ballet, like all art forms, is enduring – indeed immortal – and for many of us, not only life-enhancing but sometimes even life-sustaining.

—Charles Isherwood

Winner of the George Jean Nathan Award for Dramatic Criticism, Charles Isherwood has written about theater and the arts for almost three decades and is currently a critic for Broadway News.
OPENING NIGHT
SEPT 21

Serenade [Tschaikovsky/Balanchine]
After the Rain Pas de Deux (Pärt/Wheeldon)
Symphony in C [Bizet/Balanchine]

Following an unprecedented hiatus from live performances, New York City Ballet makes its long-awaited return to the stage with a one-time-only Opening Night program kicking off the 2021-22 Season. There is perhaps no more fitting work to mark this historic homecoming than George Balanchine’s landmark creation Serenade, with its familiar Tschaikovsky score heralding the end of a long journey back as the curtain rises on ballerinas in iconic blue tulle, hands raised to the sky in reverence. The quiet intimacy of Christopher Wheeldon’s After the Rain Pas de Deux achieves new poignancy following more than a year of enforced separation, and the Theater’s reopening finds its ultimate expression in the season’s only performance of Balanchine’s glittering Symphony in C, culminating in a finale with over 50 dancers onstage to commemorate the joyous occasion.

ROBBINS + RATMANSKY
SEPT 22, 25 eve, 26, 29, OCT 2 eve

Opus 19/The Dreamer [Prokofiev/Robbins]
Namouna, A Grand Divertissement [Lalo/Ratmansky]

Dance meets drama. Set to Prokofiev’s by turns plaintive, manic, and mysterious Violin Concerto No. 1, Jerome Robbins’ Opus 19/The Dreamer opens as though awakening from a troubled sleep, then takes its dancers—and the audience—on a journey whose paths seem to lead constantly inward. Alexei Ratmansky’s Namouna, A Grand Divertissement combines a lightly sketched story, loosely drawing on a little-known ballet by Marius Petipa, with dazzling classical choreography, to both celebrate and play upon conventions of story ballets.

CLASSIC NYCB
SEPT 23, 24, 25 mat, 28, OCT 10

Serenade [Tschaikovsky/Balanchine]
Pulcinella Variations [Stravinsky/Peck]
Glass Pieces [Glass/Robbins]

Ballets from Founding Choreographers George Balanchine and Jerome Robbins bookend a work from Resident Choreographer Justin Peck. Created on students at the School of American Ballet just months after its formation, Balanchine’s Serenade has since become an international mainstay, with expansive, unexpected formations in keeping with its lush Tschaikovsky score. Robbins’ Glass Pieces, also an enduringly popular work, blends traditional steps with modern movement, reflecting the shimmering score by Philip Glass. Peck’s Pulcinella Variations, with its colorful costumes inspired by commedia dell’arte characters, mixes blithe humor into a series of varied divertissements.

FALL GALA
SEPT 30 at 7 PM

New Miller—World Premiere
New Bell—World Premiere
Glass Pieces [Glass/Robbins]

The annual Fall Fashion Gala highlights the opening of the season with world premieres by two acclaimed local dancemakers. Sidra Bell and Andrea Miller, both of whom are making their first-ever works for the NYCB stage, will each pair with a leading fashion designer to collaborate on stunning looks for their new dances. Continuing the momentum of the preceding premieres, a favorite from one of the Company’s founding choreographers brings this thrilling evening to its conclusion; drawing upon the repetitive structures of its Philip Glass score, Robbins’ electrifying Glass Pieces creates a distinctly urban energy to cap off this riveting program.

Details regarding the 2021 Fall Gala celebration will be released at a later date. To reserve gala tickets or to support the event, please email specialevents@nycballet.com.
INNOVATORS & ICONS
OCT 1, 2 mat, 3, 6, 12

New Miller
New Bell
Western Symphony
[traditional American melodies, orch. by Kay/Balanchine]

Two contemporary choreographers create their first main stage works for New York City Ballet on this forward-looking program. Andrea Miller, founder of the Brooklyn-based company GALLIM and the first choreographer to be named artist-in-residence at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, has emerged as one of the most sought-after dancemakers working today. Choreographer and educator Sidra Bell's work has been acclaimed as "brainless, exuberant and audacious,” establishing a high international profile for the founder of Sidra Bell Dance New York and the award-winning MODULE Laboratory. Their adventurous choreography reflects the inquisitive ethos of Balanchine, whose zesty paean to the Wild West of popular myth, Western Symphony, concludes the evening on an effervescent note.

BALANCHINE + PECK
OCT 5, 7, 13, 14, 16 eve

Monumentum pro Gesualdo
[Stravinsky/Balanchine]
Movements for Piano and Orchestra
[Stravinsky/Balanchine]
Rotunda
[Muhyi/Peck]
Chaconne
[Gluck/Balanchine]

Preceded by two beloved Balanchine Black & White ballets, Justin Peck’s Rotunda similarly conveys a pared-down celebration of pure dance, with intimations of improvisation and playful experimentation that mirror the commissioned score from American composer Nico Muhyi. Monumentum pro Gesualdo and Movements for Piano and Orchestra, both set to scores from Balanchine favorite Igor Stravinsky, are leotard ballets that represent the choreographer in top neoclassical form. The sumptuous Chaconne, in itself a display of Balanchine’s virtuosity, begins with a lyrical adagio pas de deux before culminating in a spirited finale showcasing both principals and ensemble.

BALLET & BROADWAY
OCT 8, 15, 16 mat

Agon
[Stravinsky/Balanchine]
Other Dances
[Chopin/Robbins]
After the Rain Pas de Deux
[Pärt/Wheeldon]
Slaughter on Tenth Avenue
[Rodgers, orch. by Kay/Balanchine]

Two strikingly contrasted Balanchine dances bookend equally unique pas deux. Agon, among Balanchine’s most acclaimed and popular Black & White ballets, represents the apex of his creative collaboration with Stravinsky. Robbins’ Other Dances combines the purity of classical technique with the peerless romanticism of Chopin’s mazurkas for a virtuosic display for two, while Wheeldon’s moving After the Rain Pas de Deux, among the choreographer’s most acclaimed dances, holds its performers in poignant suspense in time with Pärt’s Spiegel im Spiegel. Balanchine’s Slaughter on Tenth Avenue, a vibrantly funny romantic comedy in miniature, brings showbiz glitz and glamour to a murder plot gone awry in a seedy New York City dive.

LAUREN LOVETTE FAREWELL
OCT 9 mat

Opus 19/The Dreamer
[Prokofiev/Robbins]
Namouna, A Grand Divertissement
[Lalo/Ratmansky]

A Company member since 2010, Lauren Lovette spellbinds with her bright and generous performances across a variety of NYCB’s repertoire and has more recently inspired audience members and colleagues alike with her own choreography, crafting three memorable works for the Company. While she intends to continue dancing, Lauren will depart New York City Ballet to focus on her creative pursuits following this special performance.

Lauren is scheduled to appear in both Opus 19/The Dreamer and Namouna, A Grand Divertissement.
ASK LA COUR FAREWELL
OCT 9 eve

Monumentum pro Gesualdo  
[Stravinsky/Balanchine]
Movements for Piano and Orchestra  
[Stravinsky/Balanchine]
Rotunda  [Muhly/Peck]
Chaconne  [Gluck/Balanchine]
After the Rain Pas de Deux  [Pärt/Wheeldon]

Since making the leap from Denmark into the ranks of NYCB in 2002, Principal Dancer Ask la Cour has spent almost two decades impressing audiences with his heartfelt drama and unassuming presence, ever a generous partner to his ballerinas. Join us in applauding Ask as he takes his final bow with New York City Ballet.

Ask is scheduled to appear in Monumentum pro Gesualdo, Movements for Piano and Orchestra, and After the Rain Pas de Deux.

MARIA KOWROSKI FAREWELL
OCT 17

Program to be announced

In a career spanning over 25 years, Principal Dancer Maria Kowroski has contributed innumerable performances of beauty and grace to a remarkable swathe of the Company’s classical and contemporary repertory. Maria bids adieu to NYCB’s audience with a special one-time-only program that is sure to be an unforgettable occasion.
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WINTER 2022
JAN 18—FEB 27

All Balanchine
Masters at Work: Balanchine & Robbins
New Combinations
All Tschaikovsky
Visionary Voices
Swan Lake
Short Stories
Gonzalo Garcia Farewell

MEGAN FAIRCHILD Natalie crop top, Capezio briefs
ANTHONY HUXLEY Bodywrappers tights from BoysDanceToo
Three celebrated works from Balanchine evoke intriguingly contrasting atmospheres. In Rubies, from the full-length ballet Jewels, the jazz-inflected score sets the stage for a romp glinting with wit, surprise, and thrilling choreography. The Four Temperaments, a repertoire favorite throughout the Company’s history, is a plotless neoclassical work loosely inspired by the ancient belief that human behavior is defined by four elements, or “humors”: the melancholic, the sanguinic, the phlegmatic, and the choleric. The mysterious La Valse depicts a young woman dancing with increasing abandon under the influence of an enigmatic figure enticing her to the edge of darkness.

NYCB Resident Choreographer Justin Peck’s first main stage world premiere since February 2020’s Rotunda is followed by the pointillistic Summerspace, returning from its 2019 revival for the Merce Cunningham centennial, complete with Morton Feldman’s experimental score and the Robert Rauschenberg-designed décor and painted leotards. Christopher Wheeldon’s charging DGV: Danse à Grande Vitesse, a fleet and intricate dance for a cast of more than 25 performed to a minimalist score by Michael Nyman, closes the program.

Two Balanchine ballets join one by Robbins, in a progression from the elegiac, to the romantic, to the resplendent. Balanchine’s late work Mozartiana is among his most serenely beautiful dances, with its meditative mood and elegant black costuming. For his Andantino, Robbins choreographed a charming pas de deux infused with effortless drama to the shimmering second movement of Tschaikovsky’s Piano Concerto No. 1. And Diamonds, the concluding section of Jewels, is an opulent display of classicism paying tribute to the golden age of the Russian ballet.
VISIONARY VOICES
FEB 3, 22, 23, 24

New Roberts—World Premiere
Bartók Ballet (Bartók/Tanowitz)
The Runaway (Muhly, West, Jay-Z, Blake, add. artists/Abraham)

A world premiere from Jamar Roberts opens this program of works from dancemakers at the forefront of contemporary choreography. Roberts, whose work as a dancer and as the Resident Choreographer at Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater have garnered recent commissions from New York City Center’s Fall for Dance and Works & Process at the Guggenheim, among others, returns to NYCB for his first main stage work following the Fall 2020 dance-on-film premiere of Water Rite. It is joined by Pam Tanowitz’s first dance for the Company, Bartók Ballet, an ensemble piece fusing neoclassical choreography with modern and folk steps. The program concludes with Kyle Abraham’s genre-bending work for the 2018 Fall Gala, The Runaway, with a score that combines a classical piece by contemporary composer Nico Muhly with music by James Blake, Jay-Z, and Kanye West, among others.

SWAN LAKE
FEB 11, 12 mat & eve, 13* mat & eve, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19 mat & eve, 20

(Tschaikovsky/Martins after Petipa, Ivanov, Balanchine)

Audiences enthusiastically flock, as it were, to this most cherished of full-length ballets, with its unforgettable, sweeping lyrical Tschaikovsky score and darkly romantic story drawn from folk tales. Peter Martins’ version, first presented by the Company more than 20 years ago, has captivated viewers ever since. While bringing his own perspective to this classic, Martins drew on the previous versions of the ballet, notably the revered Marius Petipa-Lev Ivanov production from 1895, which remains the template for most contemporary presentations of the ballet.

*FEB 13 matinee begins at 2 PM; specially added Sunday evening performance begins at 7 PM.

SHORT STORIES
FEB 25, 26 mat & eve

Prodigal Son (Prokofiev/Balanchine)
The Steadfast Tin Soldier (Bizet/Balanchine)
Pavane (Ravel/Balanchine)
Carnival of the Animals (Saint-Saëns/Wheeldon)

Narrative dances are the focus of this program, which features three works from Balanchine: the early Prodigal Son, based on the Biblical tale of forgiveness and redemption; the whimsical storybook pas de deux The Steadfast Tin Soldier; and the solo Pavane, imbued with a subtle sense of loss. Returning to the repertory is Christopher Wheeldon’s joyful 2003 ballet Carnival of the Animals, a family-friendly dance featuring fanciful costumes and settings by Jon Morrell, inspired by the tale of a boy whose imagination turns all his companions into animals, with a text written by the actor John Lithgow.

GONZALO GARCIA FAREWELL
FEB 27

Program to be announced

NYCB Principal Dancer Gonzalo Garcia joined the Company in 2007 after dancing with San Francisco Ballet, swiftly endearing himself to New York City audiences with his virtuosic technique and soulful drama in a slew of Balanchine roles and contemporary premieres. The Company honors Gonzalo with a one-time-only program as he takes his leave from New York City Ballet’s roster.
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DAVIDE RICCARDO
Bodywrappers tights from BoysDanceToo

Masters at Work: Balanchine & Robbins
Masters at Work: Balanchine & Robbins II
Visionary Voices
2022 Spring Gala
Stravinsky Festival I
Stravinsky Festival II
Stravinsky Festival III
Stravinsky Festival IV
All Robbins

A Midsummer Night’s Dream
SPRING 2022

MASTERS AT WORK: BALANCHINE & ROBBINS I
APR 19, 20, 21, 23 mat, 26 —

Serenade (Tschaikovsky/Balanchine)
The Goldberg Variations (Bach/Robbins)

Ballets from the Company’s founding choreographers make for a unique pairing. Balanchine’s enchanting *Serenade*, famously the first ballet he created in America, danced to an all-strings composition from Tschaikovsky, has long been a staple of the international repertory. The Goldberg Variations, created by Robbins in 1971, uses the full Bach piano score of the title to illustrate the potentially infinite variety of classical choreography, in a two-part ballet that bridges the baroque and the contemporary, the high-spirited and the formal, the romantic and the mysterious.

VISIONARY VOICES
APR 22, 23 eve, 24, 29, MAY 1 —

New Roberts
Gustave le Gray No. 1 (Shaw/Tanowitz)—NYCB Premiere
New Peck
New Tanowitz [Hearne]—World Premiere

Fresh approaches to contemporary dance share the stage here. Two winter premieres return: Justin Peck’s newest work for the Company and Jamar Roberts’ first main stage NYCB commission, which premiered in February. Pam Tanowitz’s *Gustave le Gray No. 1*, set to a piano score from Caroline Shaw and hailed for its “wit and whimsy,” joins the repertory for the first time, featuring guest artists from the Dance Theatre of Harlem reprising their original roles. Alongside this NYCB debut, Tanowitz introduces her second commissioned main stage work for the Company: a world premiere set to Ted Hearne’s string score *Law of Mosaics*.

MASTERS AT WORK: BALANCHINE & ROBBINS II
APR 27, 28, 30 mat & eve —

Divertimento No. 15 (Mozart/Balanchine)
Afternoon of a Faun (Debussy/Robbins)
Le Tombeau de Couperin (Ravel/Balanchine)
The Four Temperaments (Hindemith/Balanchine)

An enticingly varied program comprises essential works from the Company’s founding choreographers. The program opens with Balanchine’s *Divertimento No. 15*, the rare ballet he composed to a work by Mozart and a glittering display of pure classicism that has remained a favorite of both audiences and dancers. From Robbins comes his bewitching pas de deux *Afternoon of a Faun*, considered one of his greatest achievements despite its simplicity, followed by two more by Balanchine: *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, a neoclassical ballet steeped in elegance and courtly refinement, and *The Four Temperaments*, an exemplar of the neoclassical style Balanchine defined with his Black & White ballets.

ALL ROBBINS
MAY 17, 18, 19, 20 —
Piano Pieces (Tschaikovsky)
The Four Seasons (Verdi)

Jerome Robbins turned to Tschaikovsky for *Piano Pieces*, which infuses classical steps and patterns with suggestions of folk dances, drawing on hints in the music encompassing compositions ranging across the composer’s career. Robbins’ ebullient ballet *The Four Seasons*, with its vibrantly colored costumes and inflections of humor, presents an allegory of the changing seasons set to selections from Verdi.
A MIDSUMMER NIGHT’S DREAM
MAY 21 mat & eve, 22, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28 mat & eve, 29
—
(Mendelssohn/Balanchine)
Balanchine’s full-length adaptation of one of Shakespeare’s most cherished comedies has never been long absent from the repertory since its debut in 1962. Inspired by the music of Mendelssohn, Balanchine captures the play’s infinite colors — the bumbling comedy of the Rude Mechanicals, the feisty feuding between Titania and Oberon, the romantic confusion of the young lovers chasing each other through the Athenian forest, and of course the mischievous Puck — in a ballet of myriad pleasures.

2022 STRAVINSKY FESTIVAL MAY 3–15

Commemorating New York City Ballet’s unique relationship with Igor Stravinsky, the Company mounted a 1972 celebration to mark what would have been the composer’s 90th birthday. Conceived by Balanchine as a “musical biography,” the weeklong festival featured 30 ballets, including 20 premieres and four musical works performed by the NYCB Orchestra.

50 years later the Company honors Stravinsky with a two-week homage, an extraordinary look at a genius whose music has become an intrinsic element of New York City Ballet’s identity.

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SPRING GALA MAY 5 at 7 PM
—
Circus Polka (Robbins)
Scherzo à la Russe (Balanchine)
New Farley (Israel)—World Premiere
Stravinsky Violin Concerto (Balanchine)

The centerpiece of the 2022 Stravinsky Festival is a gala performance, highlighted by a world premiere from former Corps de Ballet Member Silas Farley in tribute to George Balanchine and Igor Stravinsky’s landmark works. The score for the premiere will be created by composer and writer David K. Israel and based on a 1946 musical exchange between Balanchine and Stravinsky, in which the choreographer wrote an acrostic poem in Russian as a gift for Stravinsky’s 65th birthday and set it to a simple melody that the composer then harmonized as a gesture of gratitude. This celebratory program will open with Jerome Robbins’ Circus Polka, a whimsical escapade for a carousel of 48 students from the School of American Ballet, joined by Balanchine’s Scherzo à la Russe, a sprightly dance for female ensemble, and his streamlined masterpiece Stravinsky Violin Concerto.

Details regarding the 2022 Spring Gala celebration will be released at a later date. To reserve gala tickets or to support the event, please email specialevents@nycballet.com.
STRAVINSKY FESTIVAL I
MAY 3, 4, 6, 7 mat

—

Fireworks—NYCB Orchestra
Scherzo Fantastique (Peck)
Symphony in Three Movements (Balanchine)
Firebird (Balanchine, Robbins)

Stravinsky wrote the delightful, spirited Fireworks as a wedding gift for his mentor Rimsky-Korsakov’s daughter; upon hearing Fireworks, famed impresario Serge Diaghilev commissioned the original Firebird score. Firebird is presented here as restaged by Balanchine and Robbins, with evocative designs by Marc Chagall that capture the magic and mystery of the ballet’s fantastical tale, following two additional works set to eponymous Stravinsky scores: NYCB Resident Choreographer Justin Peck’s vibrant Scherzo Fantastique, with strikingly colorful costumes by frequent-Peck collaborators Reid Bartelme and Harriet Jung; and Balanchine’s bold and breathtakingly kinetic Symphony in Three Movements, choreographed for the original 1972 Stravinsky Festival.

STRAVINSKY FESTIVAL II
MAY 7 eve, 8

—

Pulcinella Variations (Peck)
Scherzo à la Russe (Balanchine)
New Farley (Israel)
Stravinsky Violin Concerto (Balanchine)

The breadth of styles from the various stages of Stravinsky’s career is on full display, beginning with Justin Peck’s Pulcinella Variations, which combines Stravinsky’s foundational neoclassical composition with classical technique and striking costumes by Tsumori Chisato. Balanchine is represented by two notably different works: the charming and evocative Scherzo à la Russe and Stravinsky Violin Concerto, a dynamic, demanding leotard ballet and one of the definitive neoclassical works in the repertory. For his first commissioned work for the Company, former NYCB Dancer Silas Farley returns with a world premiere homage to Stravinsky and Balanchine’s unprecedented collaborative relationship, set to a new score from composer David K. Israel based on a musical gift exchange between the two titans.

STRAVINSKY FESTIVAL III
MAY 10, 11, 14 eve, 15

—

Suite No. 2 for Small Orchestra—NYCB Orchestra
Apollo (Balanchine)
Orpheus (Balanchine)
Agon (Balanchine)

The wit and humor of Stravinsky’s Suite No. 2 for Small Orchestra, arrangements the composer made of his piano exercises for young musicians, belie the complexity and innovation that would come to characterize his work. These find their ultimate expression in his collaborations with Balanchine—most particularly in this now-classic trilogy of ballets inspired by Greek mythology and concepts. The oldest of their collaborations, Apollo presents the young god’s ascension with streamlined simplicity; Orpheus recounts the doomed hero’s tale of descent into the Underworld to retrieve his beloved Eurydice, and Agon personifies the Greek word for ‘struggle’ with its ever-contemporary athletic competitiveness.

STRAVINSKY FESTIVAL IV
MAY 12, 13, 14 mat

—

Divertimento from ‘Le Baiser de la Fée’ (Balanchine)
The Cage (Robbins)
Duo Concertant (Balanchine)
Rubies (Balanchine)

A smorgasbord of works from the Company’s founding choreographers highlights the creative possibility of Stravinsky’s multifaceted output. Set to Stravinsky’s symphonic suite of the same name, Balanchine’s plotless Divertimento from ‘Le Baiser de la Fée’ conveys a sense of both playfulness and foreboding with its fleet choreography. Inspired by the Concerto in D for String Orchestra’s dramatic intensity, Robbins crafted The Cage, a boundary-breaking tale of the violent actions of a “Novice” in a female-centric, cult-like hive of insects. Balanchine’s admiration for Stravinsky’s music finds its ultimate expression in Duo Concertant, in which the leotard-clad couple shares the stage with the violin and piano, and in Rubies, a dazzling work set to Stravinsky’s jazzy Capriccio for Piano and Orchestra.
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Thanks to classics like Swan Lake and Romeo and Juliet, ballet lives in the popular imagination as an art of tiaras and tutus, swooning melodrama and sweeping romance, tragedy, and heartbreak. But at New York City Ballet, with its rich repertory of demanding modern and contemporary pieces, it is just as much about strength and stamina, melding emotion with athleticism in performances that can only be the result of years and years of exhausting training. The Company highlights ballet’s vigorous physicality in its latest campaign by English fashion photographer and director Jacob Sutton, emphasizing arresting moments of grace and agility, often caught mid-flight. The striking images in lush black and white are a study of motion and form, the dancers seen unadorned and determinedly focused on their lifts, spins, and jumps against a sparse set. “It was very much about functionality,” Sutton says, “and the body being the center of everything.”

Over the course of nearly two decades, Sutton has photographed for a range of luxury clients from CHANEL and Louis Vuitton to Burberry and Giorgio Armani, but it is his work for more performance-minded brands like Lacoste, Nike, and GapFit that is perhaps a better reflection of his artistic interests. His powerful images are often imbued with a sense of movement, so it’s no surprise that he calls athletes and dancers some of his favorite subjects. “My good day in the office is having people that move well,” he offers, which made the opportunity to work with New York City Ballet “an easy one to say yes to.”

Given the chance to photograph sixteen members of the company, Sutton says that “one of the most important starting points for me was I wanted to explore the dynamic between groups and the individual.” Dressed in pared-down neutrals, the dancers—a selection of principals, soloists, and corps de ballet members—form a coherent collective, whether seen alone, in pas de deux, or as a group, all dramatically lit by a glowing white backdrop and framed by a sharply cornered proscenium. The overall effect is elegant and timeless, yet vibrant with force and energy. “A good movement picture always feels like it’s got a bit of tension to it,” Sutton adds. “It feels active rather than passive or static and I’m really drawn to that.”

Sutton gathered a wide-ranging collection of references as he prepared for his shoot, starting with stark images of Martha Graham dancers and, more esoterically, German physical culture from the 1920s. “There was a big movement of lots of people running around outdoors with no clothes on doing synchronized athletic poses,” he laughs. Based in Europe, Sutton admits he was more familiar with The Royal Ballet and the Paris Opera Ballet before this project, and worked closely with the Company to connect his vision with specific moments from its vast and storied repertory. “We definitely wanted to speak in the language of New York City Ballet and what they perform,” Sutton elaborates, “so we worked together with Repertory Director Craig Hall to translate the sentiments I was drawn to into pieces of choreography that they’ve worked on and the dancers would be familiar with.” It was this intense research process that allowed Sutton to capture thirty compelling images in just one day of shooting.

A team drawn from Sutton’s collaborators in the fashion world was assembled, including Edward Bowleg as stylist with Didier Malige on hair and Kuma on makeup, and given the instruction to create a look that was elevated but natural, one that was cohesive but wouldn’t distract from the dancers themselves. “I didn’t want it to be decorative or ornamental,” Sutton explains. “My original idea was to have a kind of uniform that people would wear or wouldn’t wear. That’s why we went for the trench coats and the boxy, dark, almost utility-style clothing. I wanted to contrast that against the cleaner lines of the body so we also went for nude leotards and shorts. I wanted it to be a strong counterpoint between the clothed or the uniformed and the non-uniformed.”

Inspired by this commission, Sutton says he is hoping to finally see New York City Ballet perform live on a future trip to the city and looking forward to learning more about the Company’s works. “Generally, I’m more into contemporary ballet rather than the old faves—although they do have their place,” he says. Newly acquainted with the Company and its stable of dancers, the photographer says NYCB was the perfect partner with which to further investigate one of his lifelong interests. “It’s just about finding the right movement. When you look at a painting or something, it’s a bit more nuanced, but for me it’s really easy to feel when it’s right and when it’s wrong,” Sutton elaborates about the particular thrill of capturing that single perfect moment of action. “My dad’s an artist and he drew dancers for years, so I’ve always been looking at the way he selected images. There’s a rightness or wrongness to it. It’s hard to put your finger on it really, but for me when you find a piece of movement that works, it’s the easiest. You just know it’s right.”

Jonathan Shia

Jonathan Shia is editor-in-chief of Cero Magazine.
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Maria Kowroski
Ask la Cour
Lauren Lovette
Sara Mearns
Tiler Peck
Amar Ramasar
Teresa Reichlen
Abi Stafford
Taylor Stanley
Daniel Ulbricht
Andrew Veyette

Soloists
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Daniel Applebaum
Harrison Ball
Chun Wai Chan
Harrison Coll
Jovani Furlan
Emilie Gerrity
Lauren King
Claire Kretzschmar
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Jonathan Fahoury
Christopher Grant
Laine Habony
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Ashley Laracey

As of April 2021

JONATHAN FAHOURY Sunspel sweater, Bodywrappers tights from BoysDanceToo
Leadership support for new work is provided by the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, LuEsther T. Mertz Charitable Trust, Ted and Mary Jo Shen Charitable Gift Fund, and donors to the New Combinations Fund.

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New York City Ballet gratefully acknowledges The Jerome Robbins Foundation for leadership support of its Repertory Directors who ensure the excellence and vitality of the Company’s repertory performances.

The Corps de Ballet is endowed in part by the Carl Jacobs Foundation.

The Stepping Forward Fund to support the salaries of NYCB dancers during their first year in the Company has been made possible through the generosity of the Joseph and Sylvia Slifka Foundation and Martha and Bob Lipp.

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As of April 2021
† In Memoriam

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Additional dancers in the 2021-22 Season photo campaign include:

SARA ADAMS  Natalie crop top, Capezio briefs  LAJEROMENY BROWN  Bodywrappers tights from BoysDanceToo  LAINÉ HABONY  Sunspel roll neck, Capezio briefs  MARY THOMAS MACKINNON  Mariia leotard, Prada coat  LARS NELSON  Sunspel sweater, Bodywrappers tights from BoysDanceToo, Prada coat  PETER WALKER  Alternative Apparel tank top, Bodywrappers tights from BoysDanceToo

Coats worn on page 24 are (left to right): Max Mara, vintage, and Prada

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