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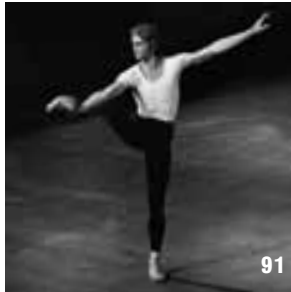
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- 4 Miami – Michael Langlois
- 6 Geneva – Clement Crisp
- 7 Washington, D.C. – Joel Lobenthal
- 8 Toronto – Gary Smith
- 9 Berlin – Darrell Wilkins
- 13 London – David Vaughan
- 15 Toronto – Gary Smith

Michael Langlois
17 A Conversation with
Kevin McKenzie

Darrell Wilkins
23 Early Waltz

Laura Jacobs
27 The Balanchine Tapestries

Nina Alovert
41 Remembering
Natalia Bessmertnova

Larry Kaplan
45 Crown Jewels

Rachel Strauss
51 A Conversation with
Damian Woetzel

Don Daniels
69 Captures

- 74 London Reporter – Clement Crisp
- 91 Gnostic Balanchine – Don Daniels
- 93 Music on Disc – George Dorris
- 100 Check It Out

Cover photo by Paul Kolnik, New York City Ballet:
Sara Mearns and Jonathan Stafford in *Jewels*.



Suzanne Farrell and Peter Martins in "Diamonds." (Photo: Steven Caras, New York City Ballet)

The Balanchine Tapestries

Laura Jacobs

In the spring of 1967, George Balanchine choreographed a work so conceptually unlike anything else in ballet it was premiered without a title. The ballet's three acts were called "Emeralds," "Rubies," and "Diamonds," and in rehearsal the whole was referred to as "Jewels." "There was a kind of pandemonium in the theater," Suki Schorer has said of the first night, for it was only then that the dancers realized they were taking part in a masterpiece. The rehearsal title became official, and *Jewels* entered New York City Ballet repertory as . . . what, exactly? Lincoln Kirstein called it a "full-length ballet without a plot," and that's how it's been described ever since. And yet, the phrase contains not a glimmer of the ballet's vast holdings. In echoes, allusions, and refractions, it is arguably the richest ballet ever made.

One of the beauties of *Jewels* is that it gives pleasure on many levels, answering ever deepening analysis, but also bringing the first-time viewer eye-fuls of spectacle and sensuous color. The mysterious, misted greens of "Emeralds"; the sharp, rapping reds of "Rubies"; the icy sprays of "Diamonds" – all glittering diamanté – the atmospheric differences alone are sensational. Madame Karinska's splendid costumes suggest properties specific to each stone, yet there is continuity in the bodices, where décolletage is deep, so deep in "Emeralds" and "Diamonds" that the necklacelike gem work scallops under the bust and creates a cameo effect, the ravishing poitrine of which poets for centuries have sung.

Jewels is most frequently discussed in terms of its divisions, its three acts representing the three cities in which Balanchine worked as a choreographer – Paris, New York, St. Peters-

A small portion of this essay first appeared as a program note in the New York City Ballet *Playbill*.

burg – and also exploring national styles of classical dancing. In "Emeralds," set to incidental music that Gabriel Fauré wrote for the plays *Pelléas et Mélisande* (by Maurice Maeterlinck) and *Shylock* (a Shakespeare adaptation), we enter a fairy-tale forest that has the hushed, plush decorum of a Paris salon: Cartier, Dior, Ladurée. "Rubies," set to Igor Stravinsky's *Capriccio for Piano and Orchestra*, is *Agon* à la 42nd Street, neoclassicism with a Broadway kick and hustle. And in "Diamonds," to music from Tchaikovsky's *Symphony No. 3*, we find ourselves in a windswept Winter Palace. The place is ghostly, deserted, then suddenly, radiantly royal.

With repeated viewings, divisions dissolve and similarities emerge, shared tonalities between acts, recurring choreographic motifs. Note Balanchine's inventive use of the academic alignments *écarté*, *effacé*, and *croisé*: positions angled, sheared in space. He's showing us the jeweler's cut and bevel inherent in classical dance, how it brings light and shadow to a phrase, and how it shows off the art's most precious gems, its ballerinas. The point is magnified in "Rubies," when a tall girl is cuffed by four men at the wrists and ankles, and her legs manipulated into multifaceted extensions.

Hear the far-off horns of hunt scenes (think *Swan Lake*, *The Sleeping Beauty*), the midsummer forests in the woodwinds, and Mallarmé's faun in the leaves. The call of the quest sounds through all three acts. And the object of this quest? As in Jacques Offenbach's opera *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*, each act brings us a new, inspiring ideal, a woman enchanted or enchanting, to be captured and possibly feared. Violette Verdy's "pretty song" solo in "Emeralds," the clockwork arabesque in Mimi Paul's walking duet, both contain elements of unreachable Olympia. And mantrap "Rubies" – "Scintille, diamant!" – who but Siren-like Giulietta? And the white flame in dazzling "Diamonds," could it be Antonia in the abstract, the chaste and transported young artist?

Balanchine preferred not to explain his bal-

lets – what they meant, what he was thinking – and with *Jewels* he was no different, insisting to *Ballet Review* editor Francis Mason that it had “no literary content at all.” But structural precedents, pictorial influences, lyric refrains, and palpable metaphor, these his ballets have in abundance. Balanchine made dances for productions of *Les Contes d’Hoffmann* in 1926, 1932, and 1949. The opera was in his system, as were so many operas he had worked on from the 1920s through the 1940s, narrative compositions that act as poetic footprints, invisible blueprints, echoes and impulses coming through the scrim of his subconscious. Offenbach’s Gallic take on Hoffmann’s German Romanticism – his three tales that are one tale, three loves that are one love – and all this a spin on Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*, these musical models feed wordlessly into Balanchine’s three acts with a force not so much literary as limbic. While one cannot point to a plot in *Jewels*, one begins to see the shape and shadings of story, to feel delicate shivers of déjà-vu.

*

When NYCB refurbished Karinska’s costumes for *Jewels* in 1998, I found myself drawn into the symbolist subtexts in Balanchine’s musical choices and gestural motifs, especially in “Emeralds,” the doorway into *Jewels*, where the Fauré-Maeterlinck-*Pelléas et Mélisande*-Debussy nexus leads to a radical reading: *Jewels* as a balletic version of Bluebeard’s Castle, a kingdom of locked rooms and women strangely related. This notion of rooms was a fancy that Violette Verdy brought to the role Balanchine created for her in “Emeralds.” She imagined its opaline green space as an airy Paris apartment, perhaps a love nest for a mistress. It was an image that made sense to Suki Schorer, to whom Verdy taught the role. “Emeralds” also recalls a certain kind of French film, the sort of isolated and erotically charged idyll one sees in Jean Renoir’s *La Règle du Jeu* or Marcel Carné’s *Les Visiteurs du Soir*, wartime films often featuring a castle or chateau in and around which the characters gather to define their relationships

(often amatory) or to suggest metaphysical forces looming over the landscape. It is here, in the green wood of “Emeralds,” that the atmosphere of an Arthurian idyll, with all its chivalric symbolism and mystic-Christian layering, is established. Innocence at risk. Idealism imperiled. Deeds and misdeeds done in the name of love. The English critic Richard Buckle called “Emeralds” “a distant medieval dreamworld.”

Both the operas *Pelléas et Mélisande* and *Bluebeard’s Castle* are set in distant medieval dreamworlds. Their stories intersect in the character of *Mélisande*, a young woman of mysterious origins who is not only beautiful and inscrutable, but may also, some theorize, be Bluebeard’s last wife, escaped from the seventh room in his ominous castle, a kingdom in which seven doors open surreally on seven facets of his wealth: the woods and gardens (“Emeralds”), the armory and torture chamber (“Rubies”), the lake and the room of jewels (“Diamonds”); the seventh room is where the ex-wives live.

Seduction and possession, infatuation and freedom, this is the stuff that ballets are made on, and the terms on which Balanchine – like Offenbach’s Hoffmann, Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*, and old Bluebeard – lived his life. He had five wives and many muses, a life of compartments and women once loved. Locked into *Jewels*, one could say, is the story of Balanchine’s heart.

*

“He took me to the Musée de Cluny on the Left Bank to see *The Lady and the Unicorn* tapestries,” Suzanne Farrell wrote in her 1990 memoir *Holding On To the Air*. It was the summer of 1965, and NYCB was in Paris, on a European tour. “As we walked by the six huge hangings in the vaulted room he explained to me that five of them represented the senses. The last and most poignant has the beautiful but mysterious title *À Mon Seul Désir* (To My Only Desire) and depicts the young maiden embracing a coffer of jewels, a gift from a lover perhaps. . . . George told me the legend that a unicorn can be captured only by a virgin; it

will come and lay its head in her lap. He loved the title *À Mon Seul Désir* and said he wanted to make a ballet for me about the story of the unicorn." Two years later, *Jewels* premiered.

And so this sensation of rooms, floating spaces full of magical meaning, has a more conscious model, one that is not musical but visual. The art of the tapestry reached its zenith in the Middle Ages, when immense weavings from Northern France, Flanders, and the Netherlands served as wall coverings in castles and chateaux. Tapestries were the province of the aristocracy, custom woven for occasions like betrothals and weddings, and more valuable, a more certain sign of conspicuous wealth, than paintings, because they required so much more time and labor to make.

The greatest tapestries are flamboyantly allegorical and often deeply moral creations. They seek to interweave the nobility with their land, their laborers, and the flora and fauna that support the lives of all. This was a world, as C. S. Lewis wrote in *The Discarded Image*, his 1964 study of medieval literature, "where everyone who could be was a horseman, hunter, and hawk, and everyone else a trapper, fisher, cowman, shepherd, swineherd, goose-girl, hen-wife, or beekeeper." It is a world where the spiritual and the sensual are warp and weft.

Frequently commissioned in sets to cover many walls, tapestries can have an almost cinematic sense of scene, like storyboards. The Cluny tapestries, which Balanchine knew from his early years in Paris, are among the most magnificent tapestries in the world. They are comprised of six scenes, yet they are not cinematic. The first five tapestries, influenced by a handful of medieval manuscripts, among them the famous thirteenth-century poem *Le Bestiaire d'Amour*, represent the external senses: sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch. Each sense is depicted on a floating island of greenery, arbored and bannered, alive with small creatures, and, of course, the lion, the lady, and the unicorn. The enigmatic sixth tapestry, bearing the title Balanchine loved, has

been subject to many interpretations but is understood to represent the internal sixth sense, the heart, which must reign over the other senses and control them. In fact, most scholars believe this maiden is not removing a necklace from the casket of gems, but relinquishing it – an act of renunciation. This interpretation renders a different translation of the title: According to my will only. Either way, I don't think it's a stretch to see in this necklace the gleam of Balanchine's central conceit. His way to the unicorn was through jewels.

The consensus view of these tapestries as an allegory of the senses is supported by another anomaly, a question scholars cannot otherwise answer: Why is a different woman featured in each of the six tapestries? To Balanchine, this series of six women stationed in woven, let us say, "dressing rooms" – emerald-green ovals within ruby-red squares – might have looked like ballerinas in a company, the top of the roster, or perhaps the six fairies in *The Sleeping Beauty*, each with her own different gift, and one of them, Lilac, spiritually higher than the rest. (And look at the bodices of the Cluny women, windowed and jeweled like Karinska's costumes.)

Balanchine may also have connected with these tapestries through Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, thinking specifically of the line from Bottom's dream that is a poetic suggestion of synesthesia: "The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen, man's hand is not able to taste, his tongue to conceive, nor his heart to report, what my dream was." This is a line that Balanchine loved well and often repeated in company class. "The really deep and important message," he told the writer Jonathan Cott in 1978, "was in that dream." It is a line that describes the blurred boundaries, the permeable workings, in the bed of the brain where art finds form.

The unicorn, of course, is the charming star of the Cluny show. But a small, static star. One can't help thinking that when Balanchine showed these tapestries to the virginal Farrell, with whom he was in love, he saw himself as

the unicorn laying his head in her lap. (Which makes Lincoln Kirstein the lion?) Balanchine had previously worked closely with Farrell on the pas de deux between Bottom and Titania in 1962's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and had even cast himself as the Don to her Dulcinea in 1965's *Don Quixote*. Clearly, Farrell was the lady in the sixth tapestry, Balanchine's "Mon Seul Désir." And the ballet he wanted to make for her? A necklace of emeralds, rubies, and diamonds held midway between two worlds, acceptance and rejection. It is well to remember that in the mythological language of its time the legend of the unicorn was thus understood: the unicorn was the lover, the lady was the beloved, and the hunter was love. In the Cluny tapestries, however, there is no hunt.

I believe it wasn't just the Cluny tapestries that Balanchine was thinking of when he made *Jewels*, but another set of tapestries much closer to home, just as magnificent, and far more choreographic and kinetic. In 1938

a branch of the Metropolitan Museum of Art called the Cloisters opened in upper Manhattan, in a castle on a hill. It was built to house the Met's collection of medieval European art, and the jewel in its crown was a set of six tapestries and two fragments. Purchased by John D. Rockefeller, Jr., in 1922, and donated to the Met in 1937, this masterwork is known as *The Unicorn Tapestries*. Scholars accept that these tapestries celebrate a marriage (whose marriage, though, remains a mystery), and while there is some question as to whether these pieces were all created in the same workshop at the same time, or as separate commissions of four, two, and one, the story they tell is a coherent whole. It is known they were woven between the years 1495 and 1505, about ten years after the Cluny series, which dates to the 1480s. Colorfully, eloquently, dynamically, they depict the hunt and capture of a unicorn.

Did Balanchine know these tapestries? He had to. The Cloisters opened with a bang on



"Emeralds," *Dance in America*. (Photo: Costas)



“The Start of the Hunt” (detail), *The Unicorn Tapestries*, Wool warp, and wool, silk, silver, gilt wefts. South Netherlandish. ca. 1495–1505. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of John D. Rockefeller, Jr., 1937. (Photo: courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

May 10, 1938, and the fanfare included seven articles in eight days in the *New York Times*, with five full pages looming in the Sunday editions of May 8 and May 15. Moreover, the *Times* of May 15 ran three separate stories on the Cloisters, the largest carrying a huge photograph of one hanging: the unicorn encircled by four hunters with spears. We know Balanchine was in New York this same week. The musical comedy he had just choreographed, Rodgers and Hart’s *I Married an Angel*, opened on Wednesday, May 11, and was a hit. It starred

Vera Zorina, the beauty with whom Balanchine was madly in love and would marry seven months later on Christmas Eve. So the *New York* papers of May 1938 were full of both unicorns and angels.

And yet it is quite likely that Balanchine already knew *The Unicorn Tapestries* through Kirstein. During the 1930s, Kirstein was deeply involved, very hands-on, with the New York art world. Furthermore, his close friendship with Nelson Rockefeller, the son of John D. Rockefeller, Jr. (who, besides donating the

tapestries, made the building of the Cloisters possible), gave him behind-the-scenes access to the entire Rockefeller family and their rooms. In *Thirty Years/The New York City Ballet*, Kirstein expands on an entry of May 1941 with a memory of John D. Rockefeller, Jr.'s wife, Abby, whom he calls the "one person to whom I could go for sanity and assurance." He writes that in the early 1930s, "In a room next to a chamber in which, at that time, were hung the *Unicorn Tapestries*, now a glory of the Cloisters, Mrs. Rockefeller gave me tea and toast as she listened to my account of the day's skirmishes."

I wish I could produce the date(s) when Bal-

anchine viewed this masterwork. I picture – during the heady, introductory weeks after Balanchine's 1933 arrival in Manhattan – Kirstein taking him to the Rockefeller apartment on 54th Street, where the tapestries hung from 1923 to 1937. Certainly, these tapestries would have drummed up a powerful association for Kirstein: at Harvard he'd started a literary magazine, now fabled, called *Hound & Horn*, its title taken from a line of Ezra Pound's – "'Tis the white stag Fame we're hunting / Bid the world's hounds come to horn." Then again, Balanchine may not have crossed paths with the tapestries until they moved to the Cloisters, where for years they continued to re-



Colleen Neary in "Rubies." (Photo: Costas)



“The Unicorn Leaps Out of the Stream” (detail), *The Unicorn Tapestries*.
(Photo: The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

ceive coverage in the *Times*. In 1942, for example, a new reading of their recurring cipher AE, fashioned as a love-knot, led scholars to guess (wrongly) the identity of the couple for whom they were made – just the kind of puzzle or pun that Balanchine loved. Later still, he may have been spurred north by the knowledge that Farrell, some months after their trip to the Musée de Cluny, visited the Cloisters on a first date with a young admirer. Look at the Cloisters tapestries and then look at *Jewels*. It isn't just the iconography that's compelling. There is, as well, the thrust of a through-line.

With forested backgrounds predominantly blue-green, as opposed to the royal reds of Cluny, the Cloisters tapestries are both animated and intricate. They brim with life, as do Balanchine's ballets. And the animals are a special delight, with human eyes that suggest souls, an emotional connection to the action at hand. The series begins with a panel showing the huntsmen's entrance into the forest. This is followed by four incomparable panels: (1) the unicorn kneeling at a white stone fountain, dipping its horn in a stream to purify the water; (2) the unicorn leaping

from the stream, four spears poised around it like rays of sun; (3) the unicorn held at bay, the same four spears radiating (this was the *Times* image of May 15, 1938); (4) the unicorn caught and killed. Finally, we see the unicorn (whose wounds are metaphoric) sitting in a tiny corral, attached by a gold “chain of love” to a pomegranate tree, the symbol of marriage. If you stand back from *Jewels* you can see in “Emeralds” the entrance into the forest, a lush realm of fantastic creatures.

And in “Rubies,” a blood lust: the thrill of action, aggression, the capture, killing, and owning of another creature. And in “Diamonds,” the creature itself.

*

The imagery in *Jewels* is not static. It does not have quotation marks around it. It is seen in glimpses that come and go, like the glimmers and flashes in a diamond ring, where mood and color depend on the angle and the light. When we enter into “Emeralds,” we know



Suzanne Farrell and Peter Martins in “Diamonds.” (Photo: Paul Kolnik. NYCB)



“The Unicorn is Found” (detail), *The Unicorn Tapestries*. (Photo: The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

we are in a twilight world of transformations because the women are dressed in Romantic tutus, the knee-length tulle of sylphs and Wilis. The men are dressed as knights, their tunics having the decorative brio of chess pieces and their white tights giving big steps the charge of white horses. The atmosphere is delicate, distilled – hushed boughs parting on a most sophisticated tale. This is the start of the hunt, and French horns, muted, velvety, sound through the forest understory. Water, too, is heard – harp glissandos, a sense of springs – which Balanchine answers with whorls and twirls, jetés carried through the

air in floating slow motion. Who are these creatures in blue-green tulle that pull knights from the path? I see them as naiads, sprites, undines. In fact, the *Mélisande* of this music (so another theory holds) may not be human at all, but a version of the undine Melusine, who loves a man yet leaves him. This theory brings a new meaning to Karinska’s costumes: that naked bosom underlined in gems is like the nudity of mermaids.

The woman in the lead, the role made on Verdy, one moment seems a *châtelaine* dressing for the night, and the next moment Titania in her woodland court. Now she’s runaway

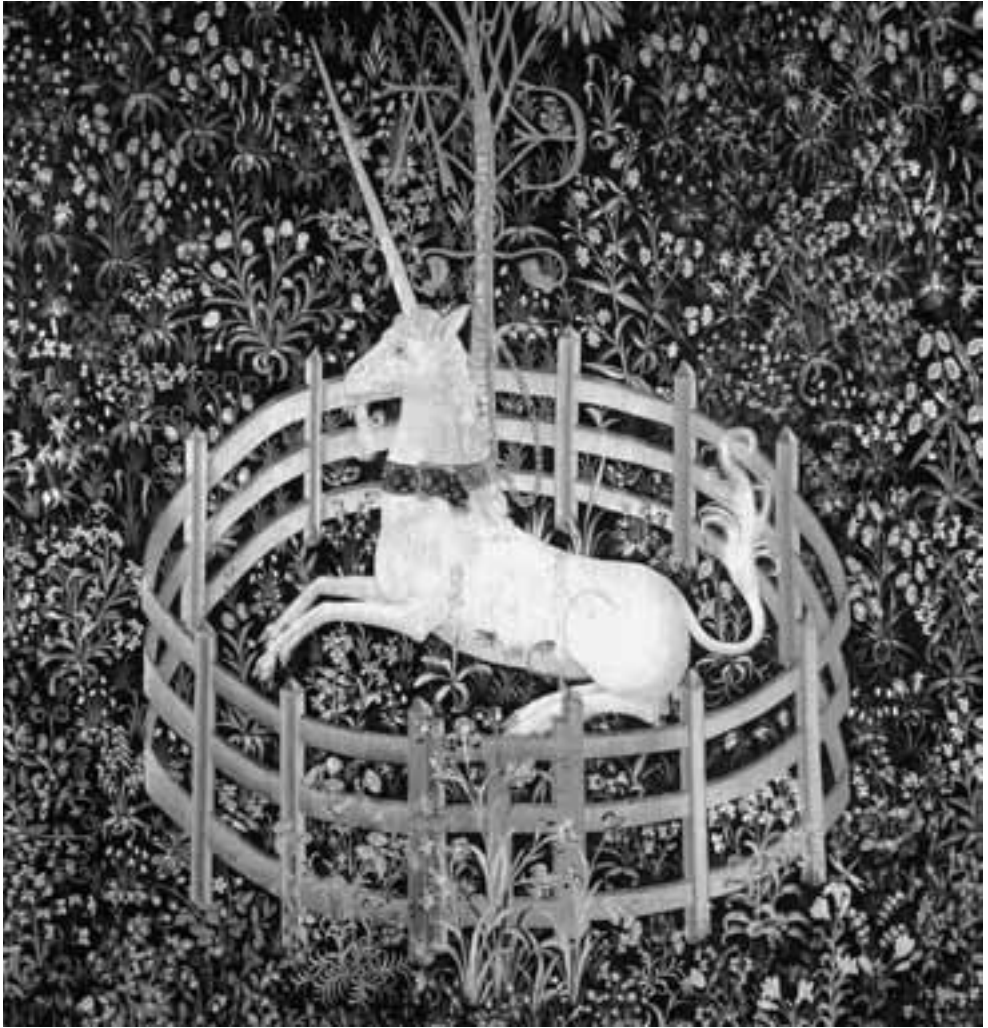
Mélisande lost in thought, and now an undine dreaming of water. In the gorgeous duet created for Verdy and Anthony Blum, a section, along with the final septet, that Balanchine added to the ballet in 1976 (which tells us that he knew “Emeralds” wasn’t yet fully, poetically woven into *Jewels*), we witness a sudden quickening, a stormy tug-of-war with visual intonations of long-rein dressage. We seem to see an enmeshed couple, an ill-fated romance. Or perhaps it is something stranger. I can’t help reading this sequence as the undine’s own bit of storytelling. She knows

what is happening in another part of the forest and is acting it out for the knight: the hunt and capture of the unicorn.

The couple quiets and both go down on one knee, leaning forward as if over a pool. She shifts her weight back onto her right knee and angles her left leg, now stretched and pointed, to the ground in *éffacé*. This position points the way to “Diamonds,” where the exact same position already exists: that moment in the *pas de deux*, downstage left, when the consort, from the floor, supports his ballerina’s deep *penchée*. How very odd, this posi-



Suzanne Farrell and Peter Martins in “Diamonds.” (Photo: Costas)



“The Unicorn in Captivity” (detail), *The Unicorn Tapestries*. (Photo: The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

tion, and how structurally akin to the unicorn kneeling at the stream, its horn reaching into the water, as pictured in the Cloisters tapestry “The Unicorn is Found.”

In “Rubies” we see reenactments of chase and capture, almost a court entertainment. Edward Villella, like Violette Verdy, was very much alive to Balanchine’s imaginative process. In his 1991 autobiography *Prodigal Son*, he wrote, “I marveled at Balanchine’s ability to use what he had observed. He was fond of horses, adored the Lippizaner’s of Vienna. And the company had recently been spending time in Saratoga, during the racing season.

The track atmosphere was one of the many elements he was integrating into ‘Rubies.’ . . . This kind of layering is a part of every Balanchine ballet and gives them an extra dimension, a subtext that he rarely took time to point out or discuss.”

Villella comes closest to the subtext of “Rubies” when he suggests that Balanchine was also pulling from Villella’s street life as a boy in Queens: “There was always a leader of the pack in those days.” The “pack” is very much a part of “Rubies,” no more so than in that strangely iconic passage when the lone tall girl (Why always tall? Because she’s a phenome-

non!) is cuffed and captured by four men – or more pointedly, four hunters. In not one but two of the Cloisters tapestries – “The Unicorn Leaps Out of the Stream” and “The Unicorn at Bay” – we see the unicorn surrounded by four men with spears. And so, amid those reaching arms arrayed like spears, the tall girl’s legs are pulled into various extensions that show us, in the slowest of motion, the stylized fight of a captured thing, its fearsome horn, its heart-stopping fate unfolding. Notice what the corps is doing. They are packed in a corner upstage, waiting, watching, grave.

Both “Emeralds” and “Rubies” give us glimpses of the unicorn; in “Diamonds,” the incarnation. The act itself is white, saturated with the spirit of the unicorn, its bursting purity, its fabled speed, now you see it, now you don’t. It first emerges in part, its horn suggested in the many *développés devant* that are deployed by the women of the corps. It achieves a more dimensional physicality in specific passages for the ballerina. For example, her spontaneous and repeated attitude *devant*, usually viewed as a reference to Odette, is also a poignant approximation of the unicorn’s raised forelegs as seen in tapestries from both Cluny and the Cloisters. And it is in the ballerina role that Balanchine shows us the spiral on the unicorn’s horn – a spiral that legend borrowed from the narwhal. We have an early sensation of that spiral in the series of three *soutenu* turns the ballerina performs downstage.

A more perfect spiral is hidden later in the *pas de deux*. I owe this sleuthing to the writer Don Daniels. The move is so quick the eye can hardly catch it, yet Balanchine places it in profile so that it can be seen (and seen well in the clip of Farrell’s performance on the superb *American Masters* documentary “Balanchine”). It comes just before that first attitude *devant*, in the short phrase of turns *en dedans* (a single) and then *en dehors* (double) that leads there. Watch for the first turn, a *pirouette en dedans* in which the ballerina’s *pointe en passé* plunges down from the knee to create a narrowing corkscrew effect. “I think Balanchine

wanted the spiraling ‘horn’ to float before our eyes for a moment,” says Daniels. “It is the hidden figure in the tapestry.”

★

Images of spindle and thread, shuttle and loom, are deep in the metaworld of ballet. Two of the art’s seminal works, *The Sleeping Beauty* and *Raymonda* (both containing dream-visions, both choreographed by Petipa and known to Balanchine from childhood) use spinning and weaving as metaphors for the dance. And do not forget that in 1960, seven years before *Jewels*, Balanchine choreographed *The Figure in the Carpet*, a ballet in five scenes, which took the hand-woven carpets of Persia as its ostensible subject. “Layer by layer,” read the NYCB program note, “the underlying systems of foliation, as in the great Ardabil carpets, are revealed. . . . Patterns of existence displayed in calculated arrangements of meaningful symbols; cloud, mountain, wave, running dog, lion, phoenix, dove, peacock, palm, pool, dragon.”

For all its beauties *The Figure in the Carpet* didn’t work and is now lost. But did it give Balanchine an idea of what he might do with the other woven figures that enchanted him? We know that Balanchine was attracted to symbols. At the end of his evening-long *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* he had wanted, he told Jonathan Cott, to put “a big vision of Mary standing on the sun, wrapped in the moon, with a crown of twelve stars on her head and a red dragon with seven heads and ten horns . . . the revelation of St. John!” He didn’t, he said, because he thought “that nobody would understand it, that people would think I was an idiot.” This was in 1962.

What is a corps de ballet, after all, but a weaving of lines that forms the setting of a story even as it tells that story? One sees in “Emeralds,” all the way through, a loop-the-loop motif of dancers going under each other’s arms and then around, under and around, weaving a place of glades and pools, long allées and swift streams. In the opening of “Diamonds,” the corps girls continually find themselves in four lines that make the

shape of a diamond, the sides of which sweep forward and back across open space like the shuttle motion of a loom. And in the finale the men zig-zag around each other in a tight weave (houndstooth?). These patterns may have been tossed off on union time, spur of the moment, but study and immersion came before. Farrell writes that during her visit to the Musée de Cluny with Balanchine, he bought her a book on the tapestries. And I am told that Balanchine's library shelves in his State Theater office contained numerous volumes having to do with crafts and craftsmanship. "God creates," Balanchine once wrote, "woman inspires, and man assembles."

In *Jewels*, Balanchine assembled a work of medieval transparency and dynamic, multivalent meaning. C. S. Lewis wrote, "It has been shown that many Renaissance pictures which were once thought purely fanciful are loaded, and almost overloaded, with philosophy." When and where Balanchine's imagery locks into "philosophy" is the question, or in this context, the quest. Yes, *Jewels* is entertainment. Yes, there is a metaphor of gems. But the ballet, finally, is a supreme fantasia on Balanchine's preeminent theme of love.

One can view *Jewels* as a trio of tapestries, woven through with the allegorical creatures of classical dance: sylphs, undines, sirens, firebirds, and swans. It is Balanchine's own *bestiaire d'amour*. The pervasive presence of the unicorn, however, strikes a deeper note, a chord of the cathedral. In medieval times, the unicorn was not merely a mythical embodiment of power and passion. The story of its hunt and capture was accepted, on another level, as an allegory of The Passion. This story touches on the Virgin; invokes God's one and only begotten son, Christ; and embodies in stages (or stations) annunciation, incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection. It is inconceivable that Balanchine, who was deeply religious, did not know this. You cannot see the Cloisters tapestries and not know it. Two

of the set are called *The Hunt of the Unicorn as Lover*. The magnificent central four are called *The Hunt of the Unicorn as an Allegory of The Passion*. Indeed, at the very center of the great pas de deux in "Diamonds," Balanchine builds in a spiral of almost choral amplitude: this is the momentous, supported arabesque penchée which, while turning slowly, imperceptibly shifts and floods open into an ecstatic extension en avant, the ballerina's lancing leg a shaft of white light from on high.

"It felt like an oracle," Farrell has written of her diagonal entrance in "Diamonds," "prophesying what was to come and whence it came." The final tableau of *Jewels* expands on this sensation of prophecy. The stage is dominated by a huge reverse V, a floor pattern created by the corps and opening toward the footlights. This is an unusual structure for Balanchine because it is stiff and emphatic. Rarely, despite his love of diagonals, did he use such a V. Flowing forward, its vanishing point upstage, it conveys the visual perspective of an arrival, the moment of light borne toward us on a widening path of white. The ballerina and her consort are contained within the walls of this V, which reaches out ad infinitum, to contain the audience as well. And what is an upended V really – Λ – but a horn?

"He has raised up a horn of salvation" (Luke 1:69) "for us in the house of his servant David."

Just as all the unicorn tapestries hold up visions of a world where the sensual and the spiritual are integrated, body and soul interwoven, so *Jewels* pulls all into its system: Balanchine's faith in his art, in his craft, in the one woman he must love, and in multifaceted love itself, which chases, captures, kills, and in wisdom, chastened, transcends.

"I will get Peter Quince to write a ballet of this dream," says Bottom, the weaver. "It shall be called 'Bottom's Dream,' because it hath no bottom."

In 1967 George Balanchine wrote a ballet of a dream. He called it *Jewels*.