

LIVE FROM LINCOLN CENTER

May 30, 2002, 8:00 p.m. on PBS

**The New York City Ballet's Diamond Project:
Ten Years of New Choreography**

The New York City Ballet Company's record for commitment to new choreography is perhaps unmatched by any other ballet troupe in the world. This dedication, begun by the legendary George Balanchine, has been continued by the current Ballet Master in Chief of the Company, Peter Martins. Ten years ago, through the support of the philanthropist, Irene Diamond, Martins began an ongoing project of commissioning new work from prominent choreographers in collaboration with dancers. The result has been the creation of 39 new works by 21 different choreographers. This spring the New York City Ballet is celebrating the 10th anniversary of The Diamond Project by presenting 6 world premiere ballets, along with a retrospective of 15 works from earlier Diamond Project Festivals. The performance on the evening of Thursday, May 30 will constitute the next adventure in our Live From Lincoln Center telecasts on PBS.

The program will consist of 8 different ballets, some excerpted and some complete. It will begin with new choreography to Stravinsky's music "Jeu de Cartes" ("Card Game") by none other than Peter Martins. Interestingly, it was Balanchine himself who choreographed "Jeu de Cartes" at its premiere in 1937. Martins has written: "Years ago, George Balanchine suggested that I choreograph Stravinsky's 'Jeu de Cartes', not as a ballet about a card game but as an abstraction. I wasn't interested. But when I heard the score recently, I was struck by its jazzy vitality, and I've decided to take Mr. B's advice." The Company unveiled the fruit of Peter Martins' decision on May 28, 1992--almost exactly 10 years ago to the day.

Next on the program will be "Chiaroscuro," choreographed by Lynne Taylor-Corbett to music by the Italian Baroque composer, Francesco Geminiani. This is Ms. Taylor-Corbett's second work for the New York City Ballet; she characterizes it as highly charged and theatrical. Her other choreographic activity has been in theater, opera and film. The term "chiaroscuro" is borrowed from the art world, where it signifies the play of light and shadow, giving a three-dimensional illusion. Light and shadow are also integral to the ballet, in alternating between the fast and slow movements and the interactions between Jock Soto, who danced the lead in the premiere performances (in 1994) and three women and two men.

"Viola Alone", the dance that follows, has choreography by Kevin O'Day set to excerpts of Paul Hindemith's scores for viola. Mr. O'Day has been a member of the American Ballet Theater and the Joffrey Ballet, and he has danced with Twyla Tharp and the Frankfurt Ballet as well as on Broadway in "Singin' In The Rain." He is currently with Mikhail Baryshnikov's White Oak Dance Project as

both dancer and choreographer. “Viola Alone” was introduced by the New York City Ballet in May 1994.

“Ancient Airs and Dances,” choreographed by Richard Tanner to selections from Respighi’s three Suites of the same title, was a 1992 premiere in the Diamond Project series. Tanner has said: “I’ve chosen excerpts from orchestral Suites by Respighi. I love that music. It’s so beautifully arranged. Although Respighi based his themes on Renaissance melodies, I’m using no steps from that period. I tried putting a few into the ballet, but they just stuck out.” Tanner is not the first choreographer to find inspiration in these delightful pieces; Respighi’s widow, Elsa, created a dance version of the score, which received its premiere at La Scala in 1937. Four years later, Agnes de Mille created a version titled “Three Virgins and a Devil” for Ballet Theatre. And in 1950 yet the English dancer and ballet director, Michael Somes, created another ballet using this music. Richard Tanner was a member of the New York City Ballet for a decade in the 1970s and began his career as a choreographer with two works for the Company in 1971.

Next on our Live From Lincoln Center program comes “Them Twos”, the second collaboration between Peter Martins and composer, Wynton Marsalis, the Artistic Director of Jazz at Lincoln Center. It is a sophisticated neo-classical ballet about the uneven course of love. It begins with an Overture (“Forever”), which is not danced, followed by a series of duets for 5 couples. Each section is named after the titles of the music: “First Love”, “Almost”, “Horror”, “Sex”, and “Loss”. The action ranges from tender and lyrical to passionate and sensual and culminates in a pas de deux of challenging mystery. “Them Twos” was first performed by the New York City Ballet in June 1999.

The music for “La Stravaganza,” the next work on our program, consists of electronic music by Evelyn Ficarra, Robert Normandeau and Serge Morand, choreographed by Angelin Preljocaj and first performed by the Company in 1997. Mr. Preljocaj was born in France, five days after his parents left Albania. He studied at the Merce Cunningham School in 1980 and in 1984 founded his own avant-garde troupe with which he toured Europe for several years. He has also worked in Japan with a Noh theater group. “La Stravaganza” is an ensemble piece for twelve dancers. It opens with an innocent curiosity but then meets up with ambiguity, sensuality and violence in the human condition. Fantasy and reality are merged throughout, to which the lighting and scenic design are important contributing elements.

Ulysses Dove is the next choreographer to be represented, by his 1994 ballet titled “Red Angels” to the music of Richard Einhorn’s “Maxwell’s Demon.” Mr. Dove is a former member of the Merce Cunningham Company; he has danced with Anna Sokolow and was a Principal Dancer with Alvin Ailey. Though he made his choreographic debut in 1979, “Red Angels” is his first work for the New York City Ballet. Four dancers are involved, and highlighted are their power and athleticism. Against a jet-black curtain the dancers, in scarlet leotards,

are bathed in spots of blinding white or red-hot light, with music played by an electronic violin. According to Mr. Dove: "I wanted to deal with aspects of the Balanchine esthetic I find appealing: the speed, legginess, the formality. As for the title, I think the dancers are angelic. And for me, the angels of the senses are red."

The final work is titled "Mercurial Manoeuvres", choreographed by Christopher Wheeldon (a former soloist with the New York City Ballet), set to the First Piano Concerto by Shostakovich and introduced at the April 2000 Diamond Festival of the New York City Ballet. Twenty-one dancers form the cast of characters of this imaginative, witty and cheerful piece, which opens with an explosive male set of bravura leaps, followed immediately by rapidly shifting ensemble work by a corps of women. After a solemn duet of unfolding turns, arrested leaps and intricate lifts, the ballet ends with squadrons of dancers flying on and off the stage in constantly changing patterns.

An exciting evening of dance awaits us on Thursday May 30, courtesy of the New York City Ballet's Diamond Project. As usual, I leave you with the suggestion that you watch your local listings for the exact day and time of the Live From Lincoln Center telecast in your area. See you then!