They are poets of gesture — George Balanchine
ON THE SEASON

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INTRODUCTION

George Balanchine, who carefully plotted out the physical poetry that our dancers embody, was just as certainly a poet of language. Endless anecdotes abound of his particular way with words when describing something as elemental as a series of steps – conjuring vivid metaphors to convey the quality of movement he wanted his dancers to achieve.

We approach this season inspired by his ultimate compliment to the endless, perfecting work of a dancer – they are poets of gesture.

These words appear in a pivotal moment from former Principal Dancer Edward Villella’s 1992 autobiography *Prodigal Son: Dancing for Balanchine in a World of Pain and Magic*. The scene is set:

Balanchine tells Villella, “I’d like for you to learn Apollo.” In “pure terror,” he learns the role, which he notes requires “a much more subtle physicality” than his signature role as the explosive Prodigal.

And when he finally dances the role for Balanchine in a fifth-floor rehearsal studio at City Center, the following transpires:

When I was done, Balanchine looked at me matter-of-factly and said, “No, that’s not Apollo.”

“What do you mean?” I said. “Those are the steps and the counts.”

“Those are the steps and the counts, but it’s not Apollo because you don’t understand that dancers are poets of gesture.”

Balanchine goes on to dance the variation in his double-breasted suit, string tie, and loafers, illuminating the intention behind each of Apollo’s signature movements.

Once embodied by a dancer, choreographic gesture is as finely-wrought as the written words of a poet, and connections to verse echo in our history. Frank O’Hara, the central figure of the New York School of poets, was a dedicated balletemane along with many members of that literary circle, and penned odes to Tanaquil Le Clercq and Maria Tallchief. Marianne Moore praised the artistry of Arthur Mitchell in a few dense lines on his ability to transform intellectual thought into dazzling motion. In 1961, while struggling to write an opera libretto for Herman Melville’s novella *Benito Cereno*, celebrated poet and author Robert Lowell penned *Poet to Ballerina*, which you can find on page 21, praising the mysterious language that only Balanchine and his poets of gesture could communicate. And perhaps most intimately, our Co-Founder Lincoln Kirstein, himself a prolific writer and champion of all arts, published several volumes of lyric poetry.

Within these pages, we also turn to a modern voice – author Rumaan Alam – who finds tendrils of poetry not just on our stage, but also reflected in the innocent artistry of a child’s joy in movement. This season, we invite you to find that poetry in our dancers, and explore all the possible stories each gesture has to offer.
SARA MEARNS  Dior bodysuit, Dior bra, Only Hearts skirt
HARRISON BALL
Topman shirt, Giorgio Armani pants
INDIA BRADLEY
Maria Lucia Hohan dress
AARÓN SANZ
Topman shirt, Giorgio Armani pants
MIRIAM MILLER
Oscar de la Renta dress

FALL 2019 SEPTEMBER—OCTOBER
Jewels
All Balanchine
Masters at Work: Balanchine & Cunningham
Balanchine + Wheeldon
Robbins + Peck
Classic NYCB
Ever since it made its debut more than 50 years ago, to both critical acclaim and extraordinary popular success, George Balanchine’s *Jewels* has maintained its place as a gleaming highlight of the international repertory. A full-length work divided into three parts, each named after a gemstone, the ballet incorporates a tribute to French romanticism in *Emeralds*, an explosion of jazzy neoclassical glamour in *Rubies*, and a celebration of the splendor of Imperial Russian classicism in *Diamonds*.

**Raymonda Variations**

*Glazounov/Balanchine*

Two diverse ballets from Balanchine and one from the Company’s first resident choreographer, Christopher Wheeldon, display the breadth of dance styles in NYCB’s repertory. Balanchine’s *Raymonda Variations* is a bravura display of classical technique, with intricate solos strung along the music like a necklace of pearls. *Variations pour une Porte et un Soupir*, by contrast, finds Balanchine in experimental mode, with its unusual sound score and air of macabre mystery. *DGV: Danse à Grand Vitesse* is a large-scale ballet that mirrors the propulsive Michael Nyman score with dynamic rhythms.

**Unrealistic Expectations**

*Glazounov/Balanchine*

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Two monumental ballets from different eras, both celebrated for their influence on the development of the art form, are paired in this program. A staple of the repertory from Jerome Robbins is paired with a new favorite from the Company’s current resident choreographer, Justin Peck. Dances at a Gathering, a sweeping series of dances blending classical steps with folk-inflected choreography, has rarely been absent from ballet stages since it first premiered in 1969. Peck’s jubilant Everywhere We Go, first seen in 2014 and featuring a cast of 25 and a score from indie-rock composer Sufjan Stevens, has already become a landmark dance of the new century.

The Company honors the centennial of the birth of the great American modern dance choreographer Merce Cunningham with a revival of his fluid, shimmering Summerspace, an expansive work for just six dancers, which made its New York City Ballet debut in 1966 and has not been seen since 2000. Accompanying this rare revival are two Balanchine masterworks, both set to Tschaikovsky: the luminous Serenade, the first ballet he created in America, and the sumptuous Tschaikovsky Piano Concerto No. 2.

Summerspace is presented as part of the Merce Cunningham Centennial.
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*Includes a See the Music orchestral demonstration providing insights on the music of Symphony in C.
JARED ANGLE  COS tank top, Boysdancetoo tights
TERESA REICHLLEN  CÔTÉ COUR leotard, Stylist’s own top
My verses cannot comment on your immortal moment, or tell you what you mean; only Balanchine has the razor edge, and knows that art of language.

—Robert Lowell

American poet Robert Lowell composed this poem in 1961 during a visit to NYCB while on a Ford Foundation fellowship to write an opera libretto. It is reprinted here from Tributes: Celebrating Fifty Years of New York City Ballet (William Morrow & Company, Inc., 1998).
CLAIRE KRETZSCHMAR  Araks bra, Only Hearts top, Capezio shorts
CLAIRE KRETZSCHMAR  Alexander Wang bra top, Only Hearts top, Capezio shorts
ROMAN MEJIA  Giorgio Armani shirt, Capezio tights  JARED ANGLE  COS tank top, Boysdancetoo tights
KENNARD HENSON  Dior sheer tank top, Telfar tank top, Bloch tights
INDIA BRADLEY  Lisa Marie Fernandez top, Only Hearts bodysuit, Capezio tights

WINTER 2020  JANUARY—MARCH
Stravinsky & Balanchine
All Balanchine
Balanchine + Peck
New Combinations
Classic NYCB I
Classic NYCB II
Swan Lake
STRAVINSKY & BALANCHINE
JAN 21, 23, 26, FEB 1 mat, 2
—
DANSES CONCERTANTES
MONUMENTUM PRO GESUALDO
MOVEMENTS FOR PIANO AND ORCHESTRA
STRAVINSKY VIOLIN CONCERTO

The collaboration of Igor Stravinsky and George Balanchine ranks as one of the most fruitful pairings in 20th-century art. Danses Concertantes, the rare Balanchine-Stravinsky ballet not danced in leotards, is a playful work with tart suggestions of humor and bright costumes. Initially presented separately, Monumentum pro Gesualdo and Movements for Piano and Orchestra have been twinned for more than 50 years. Completing the program is the classic Stravinsky Violin Concerto, among the most celebrated of the many dances Balanchine created to the composer’s work.

ALL BALANCHINE
JAN 22, 24, 25 mat & eve, 28, 29
—
ALLEGRO BRILLANTE [Tschaikovsky]
LA SOURCE [Delibes]
FIREBIRD [Stravinsky/Balanchine, Robbins]
Contrasting Balanchine works illustrate the variety of his imagination. Allegro Brilliante dazzles with its intricate choreography, which Balanchine once said “contains everything I know about the classical ballet – in thirteen minutes.” The frolicsome La Source is performed to music from the French composer Delibes. And Balanchine turned once again to Stravinsky for Firebird, a dance drama based on a Russian folk tale, with evocative designs by Marc Chagall.

NEW COMBINATIONS
JAN 30, 31, FEB 4, 7, 8 mat, 12
—
BRIGHT [Dancigers/Peck]
POLYPHONIA [Ligeti/Wheeldon]
NEW RATMANSKY—World Premiere
Even as the Company draws deeply on its repertory, it has continually commissioned new works to create a living canon of contemporary ballets. “There are no new steps, only new combinations,” Balanchine once said. This annual program invokes that precept: Christopher Wheeldon’s Polyphonia has, since its 2001 premiere, become a classic of contemporary ballet. It is presented here alongside Justin Peck’s Spring 2019 premiere Bright, set to a score by the American composer Mark Dancigers, and a premiere from Alexei Ratmansky, bringing together on one program three of today’s most acclaimed dance-makers.

BALANCHINE + PECK
FEB 1 eve*, 5, 8 eve, 11, 13
—
BELLES-LETTRES [Franck/Peck]
IN CREASES [Glass/Peck]
BRAHMS-SCHOENBERG QUARTET [Brahms, orch. by Schoenberg/Balanchine]

Dances from Resident Choreographer Justin Peck are united with an ebullient Balanchine classic. In Creases, Peck’s first ballet for the Company, draws on the propulsive music of Philip Glass for an ensemble work rich in geometric patterning. Peck’s Belles-Lettres has the distinction of being the only dance in the repertory performed to the music of the Belgian-born composer César Franck. Balanchine’s Brahms-Schoenberg Quartet, a ballet in four movements, evokes the majesty of the Austro-Hungarian Empire at its height through its cast of more than 50 dancers and its elegant designs including costumes by the great Karinska.

*For FEB 1 only, George Balanchine’s Firebird will be performed in place of Brahms-Schoenberg Quartet.
CLASSIC NYCB I
FEB 6, 9, 25, 29 mat
—
HAIEFF DIVERTIMENTO (Haieff/Balanchine)
CONCERTINO (Stravinsky/Robbins)
EPISODES (Webern/Balanchine)
RODEO: FOUR DANCE EPISODES (Copland/Peck)

To honor Paul Taylor, the American choreographer who passed away in the fall of 2018, the Company will present Balanchine’s neoclassical favorite Epis-odes incorporating the solo originally danced by Taylor, not included in perfor- mances since 1989. Also returning after an absence of more than two decades is Balanchine’s Haieff Divertimento, a charming dance for five couples originally created in 1947. Completing this eclectic program are Concertino, a pas de trois from Jerome Robbins danced to jazzy Stravinsky chamber pieces, and Justin Peck’s Rodeo: Four Dance Episodes, set to Aaron Copland’s celebrated score.

SWAN LAKE
FEB 14, 15 mat & eve, 16* mat & eve,
18, 19, 20, 21, 22 mat & eve, 23
—
(Tschaikovsky/Martins after Petipa, Ivanov, Balanchine)

Perhaps the most famous of all classical ballets, Swan Lake combines a mythical tale of love and loss with the music of Tschaikovsky at his most rapturously beautiful. Peter Martins’ staging draws on the beloved original choreography of Marius Petipa and Lev Ivanov, as well as the one-act distillation of the ballet created by Balanchine. The striking décor and costumes, infusing the ballet’s sweeping romantic atmosphere with glints of modernism, are by the contemporary Danish artist Per Kirkeby.  

*FEB 16 matinee begins at 2 PM; specially added Sunday evening performance begins at 7 PM

CLASSIC NYCB II
FEB 26, 27, 28, 29 eve, MAR 1
—
IN G MAJOR (Ravel/Robbins)
NEW PECK (Muhly)—World Premiere
DGV: DANSE À GRANDE VITESSE (Nyman/Wheeldon)

For his newest work, Resident Choreographer Justin Peck will create a dance to a commissioned score by acclaimed American composer Nico Muhly. Preceding Peck’s world premiere is Jerome Robbins’ buoyantly charming In G Major, featuring scenery and costumes by the Art Deco artist Erté. Completing the program is Christopher Wheeldon’s 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, composed in honor of a new addition to the high-speed French train service known as the TGV.
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<td><strong>WED</strong> 22 ALL BALANCHINE Allegro Brilliante La Source Firebird</td>
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<td><strong>MAR</strong></td>
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| | 7:30 PM | **WED** 26 CLASSIC NYCB II In G Major New Peck  —World Premiere  
| | 7:30 PM | **THU** 27 CLASSIC NYCB II In G Major New Peck  
| | 7:30 PM | **FRI** 28 CLASSIC NYCB II In G Major New Peck  
| | 7:30 PM | **SAT** 29 CLASSIC NYCB II In G Major New Peck  
| | 7:30 PM | **SUN** 30 CLASSIC NYCB II In G Major New Peck  

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*Includes a See the Music orchestral demonstration providing insights on the music of Danses Concertantes on January 26 and Rodeo: Four Dance Episodes on February 25.
HARRISON BALL  Boss shirt, 3.1 Phillip Lim pants
Years ago, my family was vacationing in a little town on the shore. There was an overcast day, so we went strolling downtown, and passed a busker strumming his guitar. My older son, then three, began to dance as maybe only a three-year-old can, with such conviction, such enthusiasm, such emotion.

It was so joyous it was almost unnerving, the baby I knew as mine revealing an interior human life I could never guess at. Who taught him how to dance like this, or who taught him how to be so happy? It was only a moment, fleeting and mysterious, but it ranks at the top of the list of things I’ve seen in my life: my chubby toddler, eyes screwed up with real passion, bobbing around like he was trying to tell us something, not us, his parents, but us: the world.

——

Words barely do what we ask of them. The word love doesn’t come close to the tickle of a sleeping baby’s breath on your neck. The word marriage isn’t anything like the weight of another’s hand in yours as an airplane lifts off the ground. But words are what we have.

The idea of a dancer as a poet shows just how inefficient and insufficient words are. It’s a straightforward metaphor but doesn’t get at what a dancer does because words never will. Sure, let’s agree: dancers are poets, and their language is gesture, the body, gravity, motion. It almost makes you pity the actual poet, stuck with words.

My favorite part about this metaphor is that it follows that dance is a poem. To some, poem is a scary word. Poetry is misunderstood precisely because some think it demands understanding. Maybe we’re all poorly served by an educational system that prizes answers over questions. Poetry, and dance, and art—good luck defining that word—have nothing to do with clarity, or objective truth, or answers.

——

Neither a dance nor a poem come with instructions. But even a three-year-old knows that dance is at its essence the release of something trapped in the body. So pretend you’re three. Enjoy how this vast theater makes you feel so small: look up at the ceiling like the stars overhead, or peer over the railing at the stage far below. Listen past the music to the percussion of feet upon the surface of the stage. Notice the way the bodies move and let yourself feel a little out of breath as a dancer reaches up, up, higher than a human being should be able to. If you are watching like a three-year-old, you’ll probably want to move your body, too, affected or infected by all that emotion.

Who cares what it all means, what it’s all for, what it’s supposed to tell us or make us feel. A poem is not a riddle or a pop quiz; it’s something else, for which there may not be even a word. It’s an attempt at something. So let’s try.

——Rumaan Alam

Rumaan Alam is the author of the novels Rich and Pretty and That Kind of Mother.
INDIA BRADLEY  Prabal Gurung dress, Only Hearts bra
CLAUDE KRETZSCHMAR  Rochas dress  HARRISON BALL  Boss shirt, 3.1 Phillip Lim pants
GONZALO GARCIA  Uniqlo shirt, Salvatore Ferragamo pants  TILER PECK  Maria Lucia Hohan dress
KENNARD HENSON  Ann Demeulemeester tank top, Bloch tights  ROMAN MEJIA  Giorgio Armani shirt, Capezio tights  MIRA NADON  Prabal Gurung dress

21st Century Choreographers I
21st Century Choreographers II
21st Century Choreographers III
21st Century Choreographers IV
Masters at Work: Balanchine & Robbins
All Balanchine I
All Balanchine II
All Balanchine III
A Midsummer Night’s Dream
Three dances from contemporary choreographers illustrate the Company's continually renewed repertory of original works. The third ballet from Lauren Lovette returns for the spring, joined by Justin Peck's *Year of the Rabbit*, an exuberant breakthrough work inspired by the Sufjan Stevens score, and Christopher Wheeldon's *Estancia*, depicting a romance on the Argentine pampas and featuring a set designed by the Spanish architect Santiago Calatrava.

For MAY 1 only, Gianna Reisen’s *Composer’s Holiday* and Christopher Wheeldon’s *This Bitter Earth* will be performed in place of Lauren Lovette’s Fall 2019 premiere.

Highlighting work from a quartet of contemporary choreographers, this program features a new ballet from Pam Tanowitz, whose first dance for the Company premiered in the spring of 2019, along with Gianna Reisen’s *Composer’s Holiday*, first seen in 2017 (when Reisen was just 18, making her the youngest choreographer to create a work for the Company). Also on the bill are Christopher Wheeldon’s quietly mesmerizing pas de deux *Liturgy* and Justin Peck’s *Belles-Lettres*, set to a celebrated work of chamber music from César Franck.

The sprightly *Rubies*, a witty and electrifying ballet set to a jazz-inflected capriccio from Stravinsky, steps out from its *Jewels* counterparts to join two Balanchine ballets infused with their own haunting atmospheres. *Divertimento from ‘Le Baiser de la Fée*,’ set to a score originally inspired by a dark fairy tale from Hans Christian Andersen, evokes a brooding sense of romance and tragedy, while in *La Valse*, performed to Ravel, a sense of impending doom gathers as a young woman dances to the edge of the abyss.
MASTERS AT WORK:
BALANCHINE & ROBBINS
MAY 7 (Spring Gala at 7 PM)*, 9 eve, 13, 16 eve, 22

PIANO PIECES (Tschaikovsky/Robbins)
SYLVIA: PAS DE DEUX (Delibes/Balanchine)
THE FOUR TEMPERAMENTS
(Hindemith/Balanchine)

Comparative rarities from the Company’s founding choreographers lead off a program of vividly diverse ballets. Piano Pieces finds Jerome Robbins turning to a favorite Balanchine composer, Tschaikovsky, for one of the dance-maker’s last ballets. Balanchine’s Sylvia: Pas de Deux, returning to the repertory after a quarter century, features bravura steps originally created for great American ballerina Maria Tallchief, set to an excerpt from the titular Delibes ballet. Completing the program is The Four Temperaments, Balanchine’s astoundingly compelling exploration of complex human emotion.

*Jamar Roberts’ world premiere will be performed in place of Piano Pieces at the spring gala.

ALL BALANCHINE II
MAY 14, 15, 17, 19

DONIZETTI VARIATIONS (Donizetti)
TSCHAIKOVSKY PIANO CONCERTO NO. 2
(Tschaikovsky)
The effervescent Donizetti Variations is a smile-inducing dance brimming with delicate choreography and a seasoning of high-spirited humor, evoking both Italianate charm and the style of the great Danish choreographer August Bournonville. The ballet’s playful mood makes for a piquant contrast with Tschaikovsky Piano Concerto No. 2, created in 1941 as a tribute to the grandeur of Imperial Russia, subsequently reenvisioned by Balanchine in a more contemporary style, while retaining both the ballet’s beautiful essence and its scintillating choreography.

ALL BALANCHINE III
MAY 20, 21, 23 mat, 24

CONCERTO BAROCCO (Bach)
KAMMERMUSIK NO. 2 (Hindemith)
VIENNA WALTZES (J. Strauss II, Lehár, R. Strauss)

Music from three centuries illustrates the breadth of Balanchine’s tastes. The classic Concerto Barocco brings together the pristine beauty of Bach’s music with Balanchine’s own lush but spare neoclassical choreography. The 20th-century modernist Paul Hindemith provided the music for Kammermusik No. 2, a frisky dance featuring a rare all-male corps supporting two principal couples. And while waltzes were composed as early as the 16th Century, the dance in three-quarter time reached its apogee in 19th-century Vienna, inspiring Balanchine’s intoxicating celebration of its heyday.
A MIDSUMMER NIGHT’S DREAM
MAY 26, 27, 28, 29, 30 mat & eve, 31 —
[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 mischief-making Puck – in a ballet of myriad pleasures.
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*Includes a See the Music orchestral demonstration providing insights on the music of La Valse on May 8 and Vienna Waltzes on May 23 at 2 PM.
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Spartak Hoxha
Rachel Hutsell
Sasonah Huttenbach

As of April 2019

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Anonymous
Maria-Cristina Anzola
Harriet Ford Dickenson Foundation/Miss Gillian Attfield
Zoe Baird and Bill Budinger
Cynthia and Ronald Beck
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As of April 2019

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