



SAVE THE LAST DANCE



As VAN CLEEF & ARPELS celebrates their recent partnership with Dubai Opera, *SLT* chats with the jewellery dynasty's CEO and Creative Director NICOLAS BOS on their latest spin on the dance floor, including their final curtain call with L.A. Dance Project.

Words: Julia Seidl



On a summer evening in late June, London's well-heeled turned up at Sadler Well's for a performance that celebrated the marriage of two worlds, that of contemporary dance with the classical stylings of high jewellery house, Van Cleef & Arpels. The union was led by Benjamin Millepied, renowned dancer, choreographer (and husband to actress Natalie Portman) and his company, L.A. Dance Project and marked the third-installment of *Gems*, a trilogy of works by Mr. Millepied commissioned by Van Cleef & Arpels.

That evening's performance, entitled "On the Other Side," was a milestone in the maison's love affair with dance, one that began decades earlier with a chance encounter between Claude Arpels and George Balanchine, the choreographer and co-founder of the New York City Ballet. The window displays at the jeweller's 5th Avenue boutique had captivated Mr. Balanchine, who found himself invited inside to meet Claude Arpels, a passionate lover of ballet and the nephew of Louis Arpels. "That meeting was about to seal the link between the maison and the world of dance," says CEO and Creative Director of Van Cleef & Arpels, Nicolas Bos. Their mutual love of ballet and baubles blossomed into Balanchine's ballet, *Jewels*. First performed in New York in 1967, Mr. Balanchine divided his ballet into three sections, each inspired by and named after precious gems: "Emeralds" recalled the elegance, comfort and dress

Clockwise from top: George Balanchine and dancer Suzanne Farrell wearing Van Cleef & Arpels for Balanchine's ballet *Jewels* in Paris, 1976; Benjamin Millepied rehearsing; Van Cleef & Arpels Danseuse clip from 1943



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Photo by Patrick Swirc



of 19th century France; "Rubies" is crisp and witty; and "Diamonds" celebrates the grandeur of Imperial Russia, where Mr. Balanchine was trained. "Of course, I have always liked jewels; after all, I am an Oriental, from Georgia in the Caucasus," the legendary choreographer once said of his masterpiece. "I like the colour of gems, the beauty of stones."

Nearly half a century later, Mr. Balanchine's chef-d'oeuvre still resonates amongst dance fans the world over. "On a fortuitous meeting one evening, Benjamin and I were chatting about dance and realised we had in common a passion for Balanchine," says Mr. Bos. "We wanted to give another interpretation of his ballet, *Jewels*." And so, *Gems* was born. Debuting in 2013, the first chapter entitled "Reflections" debuted at Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris followed by part two, "Hearts & Arrows," a year later at the Olympia Theater in Miami. This summer's chapter marked the finale to the collaboration but one that poignantly celebrated the union. "I really enjoyed this last chapter," says Mr. Bos. "It was colourful, dynamic, emotional and even kind of romantic. It was almost like Van Cleef & Arpels' creation process: we reinterpret our patrimony with a contemporary eye and design to give birth to new lines and collections. Millepied reinterpreted Balanchine's ballet with his own style and sensitivity."

Even before *Jewels*, the fine, graceful figures of dancers inspired the jewellery maison. The 1940s saw the introduction of their celebrated Ballerina clips which reproduced the posture of dancers in gold and precious stones, a tradition that continues in the present, when each season they create a new interpretation that have become highly sought after collector's items. "Today, the Pas de Trois clip, made of spinels and white mother-of-pearl and the Pas de Deux Naere clip, made of yellow sapphires, white and golden mother-of-pearl, show the continuity of this inspiration," says Mr. Bos.

The high jewellery house is expanding its relationship with dance right here in the Gulf thanks to a recent partnership with Dubai Opera. The venture will exclusively support ballet and dance arts, starting with the venue's first two classical ballets, *Coppélia* on the 15th and 17th of September and *Giselle* on the 16th September, both performed by The Russian State Ballet and Orchestra of Siberia. It's sure to be an evening worthy of an encore. ☺



Ali Bin Ali is the exclusive agent for Van Cleef & Arpels in Qatar



Clockwise from top left: Van Cleef & Arpels CEO Nicolas Bos; Scene from the third installment of *Gems*; Van Cleef & Arpels Pas de Trois clip, 2016; Scene from the third installment of *Gems*; Sketches of the Danseuse clips from Van Cleef & Arpels archives