



**Flash Review 2, 4-10: Gems**  
**Diana, Maffre, Solomakha Glisten in SF Ballet "Jewels"**

By Aimée Ts'ao  
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SAN FRANCISCO -- George Balanchine's "Jewels," his only evening-length abstract ballet, premiered in 1967 to great acclaim. Until recently only a small handful of companies were allowed to perform it, although the middle section, "Rubies" had found its way into many a company's repertoire (San Francisco Ballet has performed it since 1987). San Francisco Ballet first performed the entire ballet last season, and Tuesday night I returned to the War Memorial Opera House to see how it is doing since I saw it last year.

The opening "Emeralds" is easily the most difficult section to do well. The dreamy Faure score, from "Pelleas and Melisande" and "Shylock," casts a mesmerizing spell that is quickly shattered by any movement less than ethereal. The SFB corps de ballet here is ragged, marring the ornate frame it is supposed to be creating around the soloists. And both lead ballerinas, Yuan Yuan Tan and Katita Waldo, dance inconsistently, at times using their arms fluidly, then suddenly with an odd angularity, or abandoning themselves to the movement with sweeping musicality, only to retreat into merely doing the steps. Damian Smith, who has been one of my favorite dancers since he started with the company, as Tan's partner, is not his usual elegant self and seems almost distant. But then again, last year he was dancing with the incomparable Joanna Berman in the same piece. When Miami City Ballet performed "Jewels" in 1999 at Berkeley's Zellerbach Hall, it fared much better in terms of maintaining the style throughout, even though the precision lacked the necessary inner musicality. MCB's Deanna Seay was the only dancer who understood how to use the music on a higher level and created the illusion of gliding and floating during the "walking" pas de deux, where the ballerina walks on pointe without coming down. Waldo could use some advice on how to defy gravity. The pas de trois dancers are a real pleasure. Amanda Schull, and particularly Elizabeth Miner, dance with warmth and grace, while Hansuke Yamamoto performs with a disarming naturalness.

Stravinsky's "Capriccio for Piano and Orchestra" sets the tone for the next section, "Rubies," with its jazzy syncopation. Vanessa Zahorian and Gonzalo Garcia, excellent in technique and nuance, have a strong rapport with each other but could turn up the thermostat and smolder with a more heated sexual tension. Muriel Maffre is exquisite, as in everything else I have seen her in this year. (See [my Flash Review](#) of "Damned," and her Mercedes in "Don Quixote" was brilliant.) Maffre owns this role, not through cute sexiness, as is often the case, but by exuding such power and authority that you submit to her mastery of the sensual.

# the DANCE i n s i d e r

The corps de ballet also delivers a tighter and more focused performance than in "Emeralds." I am beginning to enjoy this.

In the closing "Diamonds," the purest of gems, the corps de ballet is good, though a bit stiff as I think they confuse classical with academic, but Julie Diana and Vadim Solomakha are the absolute peak of the evening. The music from Tchaikovsky's 3rd Symphony contains resonances of "Swan Lake," which he was writing at the same time, and Balanchine pays homage to that classic ballet with hints of the Petipa choreography, not only the steps for Odette and Siegfried, but also the national folk dances in the third act. Diana is practically beyond description. You never see her perfect technique because it is part of her seamless interpretation. With her long graceful swan neck, her ravishing port de bras and crystalline footwork I am transported to dance Nirvana. Her every movement is imbued with meaning and nuance. I long to see her perform Odette now. Solomakha is an attentive partner and their rapport is magical, tender and loving. He dances his solos with elegance and ease, a Prince in the best sense of the word. How rare to see such a performance of artistic perfection, and I hope I will be lucky enough to have the experience again soon.

SFB performs "Jewels" with Maffre, Diana and Solomakha this Saturday at 2 p.m. in the War Memorial Opera House.