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Gem of Neoclassical Brilliance: Jewels

Vienna State Opera, 02.02.2026 [ENA]

In the grand tradition of balletic excellence at the Vienna State Opera, George Balanchine's Jewels stands as one of the most dazzling and intellectually compelling works in the modern repertoire. The 2026 run of this masterpiece — presented on the revered stage of the Vienna State Opera — confirms both the timeless brilliance of Balanchine's vision and the extraordinary artistic maturity of the Vienna State Ballet.

In every facet of its execution — from the musicality and stylistic precision to the emotional resonance of individual performances — this production offers an unforgettable evening of dance that transcends the usual boundaries of classical ballet. Created in 1967 for the New York City Ballet, Jewels is widely recognised as the first full-length abstract ballet in history: a work without narrative plot but rich in thematic coherence and stylistic exploration. Conceived as a celebration of three precious gemstones — Emeralds, Rubies and Diamonds — the ballet unfolds in three distinct parts, each with its own musical language, choreographic character, and emotional landscape.

Balanchine's genius lies in his ability to treat pure dance as narrative expression, where movement itself conveys nuance, poetry, and the sublimity of human artistry. The Wiener Staatsoper's staging of Jewels was nothing short of breathtaking — a true testament to the company's artistic breadth and technical refinement. From the opening strains of Emeralds to the final resounding chords of Diamonds, the evening was a luminous journey through the evolution of ballet language itself. Each section reveals not only Balanchine's mastery of neo-classical vocabulary but also the Vienna State Ballet's exceptional interpretive capabilities.

Emeralds, set to the ethereal music of Gabriel Fauré, opens the evening with a mood of refined mystery and lyrical charm. The Viennese corps de ballet moved with an effortless, almost shimmering quality, as though each dancer's very breath had been transformed into brushstrokes of light. The elegance of the lines, the softness of the port de bras, and the delicate interplay between ensemble and soloists illuminated Balanchine's intent: to evoke the mystique and understated radiance of the French ballet tradition. The overall effect was nothing less than poetic — a whisper of emerald light brought to life through the most refined classical technique.

The transition into Rubies marks a striking shift in temperament. With its score by Igor Stravinsky and a choreography that is decidedly more angular and rhythmic, this section pulses with energy and wit. Here,

Redaktioneller Programmdienst:
European News Agency

Annette-Kolb-Str. 16
D-85055 Ingolstadt
Telefon: +49 (0) 841-951. 99.660
Telefax: +49 (0) 841-951. 99.661
Email: contact@european-news-agency.com
Internet: european-news-agency.com

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the Vienna State Ballet demonstrated not merely technical precision but an acute sense of musicality — dancers and orchestra combined in a symbiotic relationship that elevated every motif and every pulse of the score. The troupe's articulation of Stravinsky's rhythmic complexities was impeccable, transforming Balanchine's clever choreography into an electrifying ballet of movement and sound. The dancers emanated joy and spark, their dynamism capturing the fiery spirit of American modernism that Rubies so vividly embodies.

Yet it is in Diamonds — set to the lush, majestic music of Tchaikovsky — that the evening's emotional and technical zenith is attained. A tribute to the grand Russian tradition, this final section combines immaculate technique with an almost spiritual sense of wonder. The Vienna State Ballet's interpretation was both powerful and poetic, tracing a line of continuity from classical tradition to neoclassical innovation. Every jump, turn and épaulement was executed with crystalline clarity, and the corps de ballet's unity created visual tableaux of profound beauty. In this section, one could feel the heartbeat of ballet history itself, as if witnessing the lineage of the art form distilled through the dancers' mastery.

What makes the Vienna State Ballet's Jewels especially remarkable is not just technical superiority, but the company's capacity for deep stylistic insight. In Emeralds, the dancers conveyed romance and lyricism with gestures that seemed improvised yet perfectly poised. In Rubies, their musical precision and rhythmic bravado made even the most complex steps appear spontaneous. And in Diamonds, the ensemble's regal coherence suggested a collective soul — a synthesis of individual brilliance and communal purpose.

This Jewels also stood out for its exquisite visual design. The famed costumes by Karinska, preserved in their original elegance, brought an additional layer of poetry to the performance. Their rich colors — verdant greens, ruby reds, and luminous whites — not only distinguished each section but seemed to animate the ballet's emotional register. Combined with the understated but effective stage design and lighting, the aesthetic created a sensorial experience that was at once sumptuous and evocative.

Equally noteworthy was the musical accompaniment, conducted with finesse and sensitivity. The orchestra responded to each choreographic nuance with agility and depth, underlining how Jewels is as much a musical odyssey as it is a choreographic one. Whether interpreting the dreamy phrases of Fauré or the bold rhythms of Stravinsky and Tchaikovsky, the Vienna State Opera orchestra played an indispensable role in shaping the evening's artistic impact.

Solos and smaller ensembles within the work were met with brilliance by the company's leading artists. Each principal dancer brought distinctive voice and personality to their respective roles, embodying Balanchine's nuanced blend of precision and freedom. Moments of solo brilliance — supported by the vibrant energy of the corps — highlighted the dancers' expressive range and illuminated the psychological

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dimensions of balletic style that Balanchine's choreography implicitly invites.

Perhaps the greatest achievement of this performance was its ability to communicate profound artistic clarity without the use of narrative. Jewels remains, by its own design, an abstract ballet — a sequence of choreographic jewels that sparkle not through plot development but through sheer expressive force. The Vienna State Ballet's performance embraced this abstraction with intellectual curiosity and emotional generosity, transforming pure dance into a language of wonder.

In a cultural landscape often dominated by narrative productions, Jewels stands out precisely because it refuses to tell a story in words. Instead, it tells stories through form, rhythm, texture, and gesture — and the Vienna State Ballet gave these stories life with extraordinary depth and beauty. For audiences in 2026, this performance was more than a celebration of Balanchine's genius: it was a reminder of the transformative power of dance itself.
In conclusion, Jewels at the Wiener Staatsoper was not merely a ballet — it was a luminous experience, one that affirmed the enduring relevance of neoclassical form and the profound artistic integrity of the Vienna State Ballet.

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Redaktioneller Programmdienst:
European News Agency

Annette-Kolb-Str. 16
D-85055 Ingolstadt
Telefon: +49 (0) 841-951. 99.660
Telefax: +49 (0) 841-951. 99.661
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