

JUNE 2009

REVIEW

ballet.*magazine**American Ballet Theatre*

*Balanchine - Tchaikovsky Spectacular:
'Allegro Brillante',
'Tchaikovsky Pas de Deux',
'Mozartiana', 'Theme and Variations'*

May 2009

New York, Metropolitan Opera House

by Eric Taub



© abt

[ABT 'Allegro Brillante' reviews](#)

['Allegro Brillante' reviews](#)

[ABT 'Tchaikovsky Pas de Deux' reviews](#)

['Tchaikovsky Pas de Deux' reviews](#)

[ABT 'Mozartiana' reviews](#)

['Mozartiana' reviews](#)

[ABT 'Theme and Variations' reviews](#)

['Theme and Variations' reviews](#)

[Murphy in reviews](#)

[Gomes in reviews](#)

[recent ABT reviews](#)

[more Eric Taub reviews](#)

[Discuss this review](#)

(Open for at least 6 months)

ABT's been playing mix-and-match games with its stars throughout this weeklong bout of its Balanchine/Tchaikovsky Spectaculars. For better or worse, I'm seeing only two, with last Wednesday night's being the second. So, without further ado:

In *Allegro Brillante*, Paloma Herrera was paired with the up-and-coming Cory Stearns. Her Tuesday-night genius in *Tchaikovsky Pas de Deux* notwithstanding, I've always been wary of Herrera in Balanchine, or rather Herrera's musicality. Or lack thereof. She's always been a bit of a lost sheep in the Mozartean meadows of ABT's own *Symphonie Concertante*, and she's the only dancer I've seen capable of sleep-walking through *Theme and Variations*. However, this night she came to dance, and beautifully played Balanchine's melodies against Tchaikovsky's own. She ate up the ballerina challenges: her delicate, flashing footwork wasn't a surprise, but her confident rubato was, and a welcome one. Much of *Allegro's* about the nuanced relationship between the ballerina

and her partner, as in the odd moments when she must chaine away from him to particularly dramatic piano cadenzas, then fly back to where she's left him, by the stage-left wing. She's not a fledgling leaving, then running back to the security of her nest, as each of the ballerina's little voyages is a demonstration of her puissance, as are her brutal unsupported triple pirouettes, so evokative of the ballerina's famously hard opening solo from *Ballet Imperial*. Herrera ate up every

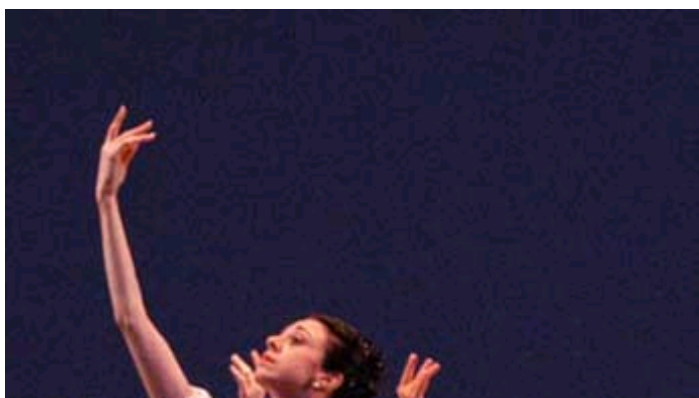


challenge, not with the irresistible force Gillian Murphy'd used the night before, but with an unexpectedly sweet reserve. Her footwork was a marvel, and her presentation seemed to flicker between that of the seasoned, experienced pro she's been for years, and the fresh young student who burst on the world scene straight from the School of American Ballet.

This was my first look at Stearns in a leading role. He might've been excused for taking it easy on himself, as that afternoon he'd filled in for the injured Herman Cornejo in Theme and Variations, but he danced full-out and courageously. With his thick, light-brown hair and slightly dark complexion, he looks a bit like a taller, slighter, younger Jose Manuel Carreno, and while he's doesn't quite have Carreno's polish or bravura, he's quite happily at home with Balanchine's musical flights, and partnered Herrera brilliantly through the trickiest adagio bits, effortlessly pivoting Herrera into one deep penchee after another, holding her delicately by her wrists. Clearly Stearns is a rising star, and I expect to be seeing much more of him this season.

Tchaikovsky Pas de Deux paired last night's Theme couple, Michele Wiles and David Hallberg. They couldn't have been more different than last night's Herrera and Gomes, but still, what a treat. After years in which Wiles would push herself hard into an inevitable stumble (a microscopic one, but there nonetheless), Wiles has mellowed into simply enjoying herself onstage, which she does quite well, playfully showing off for both the audience and Hallberg, who easily gathered her up into the adagio's lovely, tricky final lift, with her legs curved far above horizontal and her smiling face inches from the stage. I suppose I should just make a keyboard macro for writing about the long-legged Hallberg and the almost prehensile arch of feet, and how I'd happily just watch him practice his batterie. In bravura roles, Hallberg can still surprise with treats, like his awe-inspiring sissonnes to the side with developpes that send his foot shooting up like a bottle rocket, or his flying-carpet jetes. Such gorgeous legs and feet, stretched out in perfect opposition so high above the stage Hallberg's a blond, isn't he? Sometimes my eyes have a hard time making it above his knees.

It's saddening to see how much of her once nonpareil technique Nina Ananiashvili has lost. Where she once floated through jumps with Bolshoi-derived nonchalance, she lunges, sketches and, where necessary, fakes us out. One of the smartest dancers I've ever seen, Ananiashvili's a master of direction and misdirection. If a jump's no longer pretty, she'll direct our eyes elsewhere to her grand and tragic carriage, her soulful demeanor, her peerless musicality, her magician's hands. I'm going to miss her art, and her artifice. Angel Corella partnered her ably, as always, although some of quick pivots near the end of their long adagio could've been a bit smoother. Corella's quickness belied his newly chunky form spotlighted by his merciless white tights.





Nina Ananiashvili in *Mozartiana* (from 2004)
© Marty Sohl



In Theme and Variations, Gillian Murphy's like a sports car with a lot under the hood, and curves to match. She subdues her technical hurdles with ease that speaks of great power in reserve (she likes to accelerate where other dancers coast), and her physique speaks of strength and health. She's a ballerina on a pedestal, but the pedestal's in a sports club. She's still properly regal and even haughty, but her athleticism gives her persona a refreshing modernity. She could hardly help but glow in the worshipful arms and gaze of Marcelo Gomes, who treats ballerinas like little miracles. Tall, dark and powerfully built, Gomes overcame the multiple double-tour/pirouette solo with as much grit as grace.

There was a time when it seemed odd to think of ABT performing so much Balanchine in a season, but, judging from the audience at the Met, Balanchine and Tchaikovsky still do well at the boxoffice, and ABT has shown it can deliver the goods more than respectably.

[{top}](#) [Home](#) [Magazine](#) [Listings](#) [Update](#) [Links](#) [Contexts](#)

...jun09/et_rev_american_ballet_theatre_0509.htm

revised: 28 May 2009

Bruce Marriott [email](#), © all rights reserved, all wrongs denied. [credits](#)

written by Eric Taub © [email](#)

design by [RED56](#)
