

A woman with dark hair pulled back, wearing a black sleeveless dress, is shown in profile from the chest up. She is looking down and to the right. Her right hand is raised to her neck. She is wearing a diamond watch with a metal link bracelet on her left wrist and a diamond earring in her left ear. The background is dark on the left and light on the right.

ON POINT: BACKES & STRAUSS

Following the launch of Backes & Strauss's latest exquisite diamond watch, REVOLUTION joins the Piccadilly Renaissance Ballerina Pink at a training session with Laurretta Summerscales, Principal Dancer of English National Ballet.

*by Tracey Llewellyn
photography Ioannis Koussertari*

In 1975, *The Journal of Sports Medicine* reported on a study comparing the physical and mental demands of 61 different activities. At the top of the tree in terms of difficulty was classical ballet – interestingly followed by bullfighting. The conclusion was that, while ballet may not quite be a contact sport, dancers are, without doubt, among the most disciplined of any athletes.

And, with an equal dedication to being the best in its field, it is unsurprising that the world's oldest diamond company – Backes & Strauss – has just entered its third year of sponsoring English National Ballet, a partnership that saw three new faces join the brand in 2015: dancers Laurretta Summerscales, Shiori Kase and Jinhao Zhang. The CEO of Backes & Strauss, Vartkess Knadjian, said: “There are so many parallels between the ballet dancer and the watchmaker. Both require decades of experience to master their art and craft, and they share an almost religious devotion to the refinement of artistry and precision of execution.”

To celebrate the partnership with ENB, Backes & Strauss has created a collection of ultra-slim mechanical watches fitted with diamond-set bracelets – the Renaissance Ballerinas, which, according to Knadjian, draw inspiration from the fluid movements of the dancers, combining the signature look of the world's oldest diamond company with the dazzling elegance of a classical ballet dancer.

One particularly remarkable addition to the collection – and the watch featured in these images – is the Piccadilly Renaissance Ballerina Pink set with 268 of the rarest natural vivid pink diamonds, with a further 61 pink diamonds daintily scattered across the sparkling diamond bracelet.

POWER RANGER

Even though Knadjian is inspired by the delicate elegance of the ballet, there is no doubting the determination, grit and power of these strongest of sportspeople. Although they move on stage as if they weigh nothing at all, that is a carefully crafted phantasm. A dancer may appear almost weightless, but this

is merely an illusion created through a combination of power and grace that can only be achieved through hours of intense training and practice.

On the subject of the stamina a dancer's schedule requires, Summerscales shrugs. “You get used to it,” she says. “Typically my working day starts at 10:15am with a 90-minute class to warm up. We then break for 15 minutes, followed by rehearsals from noon to 2:30pm, another break until 3:30pm and then more rehearsal until 6:30pm. So that's every day, five days a week and on Saturday we also work until 2:30pm – and then we have Sunday off. During the Coliseum season [December and January] it can get crazy for everyone in the company and people can have their moments but that's completely normal, you have to just get through it in your own way.

“The hardest thing is when we have to change dance style. At the moment, we're doing contemporary stuff and my body is in agony. I'm so much lower into the ground and my muscles have forgotten what that's like,” she laughs. “When I go back to doing a classical piece, it will be the other extreme and I have to get all the technique back. Dancers can handle it because we're used to it, but we still need time – we can't just flip back.”

“I am naturally a power dancer,” she says. “I have to work hard at the subtleties and I love ballet with a twist. *Elite Syncopations* [Kenneth MacMillan's 1974 ragtime ballet] or Liam Scarlett's *No Man's Land* or the more contemporary *Dust* by Akram Khan's – these all allow me to be powerful. Having said that though, I really enjoy dancing with emotion, *Romeo and Juliet* for me is the best ballet ever to perform – it's not about the pirouettes or being on point, it's just about the raw feeling. It's that moment when Juliet realises that her cousin Tybalt is dead and, although she loves Romeo more than life, she is so angry with him – one minute she hates him and slaps him, then she realises he's her husband. Everything is so messed up, it only lasts two seconds but it is my favourite moment in the whole ballet. Dancing Juliet last year is one of the high moments of my career so far.”



The Piccadilly Renaissance Ballerina Pink with vibrant fancy vivid-pink diamonds adorning the sparkling dial.

SHORT AND SWEET

Now 25, Summerscales is aware that her dancing career will not last forever. Although she cites examples like 51-year-old French ballerina Sylvie Guillem, she also acknowledges that this is the exception and accepts that in reality her ENB days will be over around the age of 40. And that's a lot of punishment on a body that has danced since the age of three. "My mother had a dance school," she says. "And like all little girls I took lessons in modern, tap, singing and drama – I loved it. The Golden Era of cinema is my passion – *Singing in the Rain*, *Hello Dolly*, *Carousel*. I always want to watch them, but I get sad afterwards that they're not being made any more. It's something that was so special and I wish I had been there. It's what I would love to do, but I can't sing so it's not going to happen.

Summerscales puts a lot of her drive to succeed down to a need to please others. "Growing up I always wanted to be the favourite at dance school," she says. "But I never was. I always wanted people to accept me, to like me, so I danced for other people. But as I got older I started to rebel a bit and question my motivation and I realised that I have to do it for myself. I saw that the more I listened to my insecurities,

the more it affected me negatively, but if I shut this out and worked hard for myself, it benefitted me.

"I don't remember having a point when I realised I wanted to dance professionally; it's just something that was always there. I used to go to another school separately from my mum's, just to do extra ballet, because I find you have to do a little every day, you can't just do an hour a week or five hours in one day and then drop it for five days – you need to do an hour five times a week.

At 16, Summerscales auditioned for the Royal Ballet, Elmhurst and Central, but the school that captured her heart and imagination was English National Ballet School. She studied there for two years, after which she was offered a contract without having to audition. This was in 2009 and earlier this year she achieved her dream when ENB Artistic Director Tamara Rojo made her a Principal Dancer of the company.

"I kept on pushing Tamara and she told me it would happen when I was ready. She is an amazing dancer, teacher and director and I think she always had a big plan in her head. She announced my promotion on stage, after a performance of *Le Corsaire*. I had no idea. And to make it even more special, it was my birthday."

SET IN STONES

The Backes & Strauss relationship with ENB began several years ago when Rojo – who was both Artistic Director and a Principal – became a brand ambassador. Passing on the mantle, she later recommended Summerscales, along with Kase and Zhang, to become new friends of the brand.

“It happened around September 2015,” smiles Summerscales. “I already knew Backes & Strauss through Tamara’s watch and the amazing photo shoots they had done with her. I’d known the ostrich symbol since I was young, but I’d never put the logo and the brand together. It was only seeing the ads in the back of the programmes and looking at the photographs of Tamara that I made the connection.”

Exquisite design, the finest diamonds and a certain air of exclusivity make Backes & Strauss the perfect partner for ENB. “Yes, but it’s not only the diamonds,” says Summerscales. “It’s the detail and how particular it is. To do that is an art, you have to strive for it, putting in hours on end to make it perfect. So ENB and Backes & Strauss are quite similar, albeit in different ways – we both want 100-per-cent perfection, and that’s what we aim for every single day.”

These days, Summerscales’ daily wear watch is a white-gold Regent from the classic collection set with two rows of diamonds, with a mother-of-pearl and diamond-set dial and heather-coloured, alligator-leather strap. “It’s so beautiful. My fiancé is a bit jealous,” she laughs. “I think he would quite like an introduction. But on a serious note, I’m very particular in what I wear and although I like watches, I love jewellery, so this is definitely the brand for me.”

When we start to talk about Backes & Strauss’s support of the company, the usually mischievous Summerscales becomes deadly serious: “There are no words for it, because we wouldn’t survive without it. Tamara couldn’t do what she’s doing without corporate sponsorship. We simply wouldn’t be here and you don’t need to say any more than that. And it also helps us to reach different audiences. It opens up ballet to a wider genre and vice versa, it can bring a new clientele to the sponsor, ballet fans who may not have known their products previously.

“I love working with Vartkess and Backes. So far I’ve done a video and some photo shoots and I’m looking forward to collaborating more and more. It’s a very intimate partnership and we talk directly to people at the heart of the brand, we tell them about the ballet and they teach us about diamonds. It’s an exchange of knowledge. I think everybody working in the arts likes to share to enable them to learn about and create something new. Everything’s always developing. What’s that saying? ‘It’s not a destination, it’s a journey.’” ★

Upcoming performances by ENB: Swan Lake in the round, Royal Albert Hall, London, 1–12 June 2016; Le Corsaire, Palais Garnier, Paris, 21–25 June 2016; Akram Khan’s Giselle; UK Tour, 27 September–19 November 2016. www.ballet.org.uk



The Meeting of the Masters.



The Berkeley Emperor
Brilliant Tourbillon

UNIQUE PIECE



BACKES & STRAUSS
London

Masters of Diamonds since 1789

21-22 Grosvenor Street, Mayfair, London W1K 4QJ | +44 20 7629 5714 | www.backesandstrauss.com