

Figs. 1-3 (clockwise from left): side view of Raymonda headpiece; inner view of makeup residue on headpiece; front detail view. *Julia Brucculieri, 24 Sept. 2019.*
FRC2014.08.023.



CASE STUDY OF A BALLET COSTUME HEADPIECE FROM RAYMONDA, ACT III

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November 18, 2019

PART ONE

When I was about four or five years old, my parents enrolled me in ballet classes for the first time. I continued dancing quite seriously for the next decade, and while I cannot recall every move I learned or dance I performed, I can talk in detail about all of my costumes.

Costumes are one of the most important aspects of dance performance. They allow dancers to transform into different characters across time periods and communicate with the audience (Smith 191). Much like fashion, which is a tool for expression, costumes can also “lead us into visual realms that tabulate a scenario’s meanings” (Chazin-Bennahum 2).

My love for ballet and costumes drew my attention to a particularly flashy headpiece (figs. 1-3) in the Toronto Metropolitan University Fashion Research Collection. According to Toronto Metropolitan University’s records, the accessory was worn in 1985 for the National Ballet of Canada production of *Raymonda, Act III*. The FRC records note that the accessory was designed by Göran Ljungburg.

At surface level, the headpiece is quite striking, with its golden wire frame and emerald-coloured rhinestones. But it is also a useful tool for analysis. With this headpiece as a jumping-off point for my research, I wanted to explore ballet costumes in history and the ways in which they portray characters and time periods on stage, asking specifically: How does this headpiece represent the time period and era depicted in *Raymonda*?



Fig. 4: An image of ballerina Pierina Legnani, the dancer who originally played Raymonda when the ballet premiered. *Photographer unknown.* 1898. Accessed 18 Nov. 2019. The Marius Petipa Society.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF RAYMONDA

Marius Petipa choreographed Raymonda, which was first performed in Russia in 1898 (The Marius Petipa Society; Kisselgoff). Petipa was born in 1818 in Marseille, France and died in Ukraine in 1910 ("Marius Petipa"). He worked for the Mariinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg for almost 60 years. Along with Raymonda, Petipa is known for ballets such as The Sleeping Beauty and The Nutcracker, among others ("Marius Petipa").

The title character is a young countess awaiting the return of her fiancé, a knight named Jean de Brienne who leaves to fight in the crusades led by King Andrew II of Hungary (De Santis). While Jean de Brienne is away, Raymonda experiences a terrible dream in which she is visited by a mysterious knight who tries to seduce her. The dream comes to life when a knight from the east named Abderakhman tries to abduct her. Jean de Brienne returns just in time to fight off Abderakhman and marry Raymonda.

The headpiece at the centre of this post was worn by a soloist on stage during the third act, when the wedding between the two lead characters takes place.



Fig. 5: A frontal view of the headpiece. *Julia Brucculieri*, 24 Sept. 2019. FRC2014.08.023.



Fig. 6: A detail shot of the interior rim, showing the name tag with "MACEDO" written on it. *Julia Brucculieri*, 24 Sept. 2019. FRC2014.08.023.

OBSERVING, REFLECTING ON AND INTERPRETING THE HEADPIECE

The headpiece is constructed out of flexible wire that has been wrapped with two types of synthetic cord: one is metallic gold with a woven texture, the other is off-white and smooth. It evokes a sense of opulence, beauty and decadence, which seems fitting given the fact that it was worn during a noble wedding. The headpiece is in good condition, though there are some spots with frayed or fuzzy threads.

The main component is a double band headband (21 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches circumference), which is meant to be worn across the forehead; there is more cord-wrapped wire between the bands, arranged in a diamond pattern with bright, emerald-coloured rhinestones at the cross points (fig. 5). There are two U-shaped components on either side of the headband, constructed with the same criss-cross wire pattern and crystal embellishments. These components are meant to be worn downward, covering the ears. Five gold-covered wire strips with green crystals and gold floret embellishments are affixed to the top of the headband, along the front side. The strips would stick up above the forehead.

The headpiece does not contain any store or designer labels, which is a sign that it was handmade. There is, however, a small fabric name tag that reads "MACEDO" stitched to the inside (fig. 6). After some light detective work, Cynthia Macedo was identified as the dancer who wore this headpiece onstage. (Read the interview with Macedo in part two of this post.) There is also an orange-brown residue visible inside the crown, likely the result of sweat and heavy stage makeup.



Fig. 7: A replica of a crespine-style headpiece, made with a golden cap. Unknown photographer and maker. Accessed 18. Nov. 2019 from Object Lessons.



Fig. 8: Various illustrations of medieval crespines, fillets and barbettes. The women on the top right and bottom right are wearing versions most similar to the Raymonda headpiece. Illustrator unknown. From *Women's Hats, Headdresses and Hairstyles: With 453 Illustrations, Medieval to Modern*. Accessed 18 Nov. 2019, Google Books.

HOW DOES THIS HEADPIECE REPRESENT THE ERA IN WHICH THE FICTIONAL RAYMONDA LIVED?

The wedding between Raymonda and Jean de Brienne was blessed by King Andrew II of Hungary ("Repertoire"). As a result, one can surmise that the individuals in attendance would also be noble members of society – hence the fancy headpiece.

The accessory bears a striking resemblance to a crespine or crespinette, a headpiece that was popular during the thirteenth century (de Courtais 2006), when the story of Raymonda takes place. The crespine (or crespinette) was essentially comprised of some sort of netting attached to a band – known as a fillet – that was worn across the head (fig. 7); they were sometimes also worn with barbets (fig. 8). Hair was often braided or twisted into a knot at the nape of the neck, with the crespine placed over top (de Courtais 2006).

According to de Courtais, crespines and crespinette were worn by women in all levels of society; women of the upper classes wore versions made of silk cord with jewels attached to the mesh, while the less wealthy wore versions made of less expensive materials (2006).

We can also look at the colours of this particular accessory for additional context. As stated by Pulliam, nobility in the middle ages tended to gravitate toward fabrics and garments in bright, saturated colours, which required expensive dyeing processes (5). These types of bright colours were a status symbol and, under sumptuary laws at the time, they could act as a tool to help reinforce social hierarchy (Pulliam 5).

Since this specific headpiece was created in the 1980s, it is possible the costume designer may have found inspiration in other time periods or objects. For instance, the gold, white and green colour scheme and criss-cross pattern are reminiscent of the details on the roof of Hungary's Museum of Applied Arts (fig. 9), built in the late 1800s – around the same time that Raymonda was originally created. (It also brings to mind images of Fabergé eggs.)

Raymonda may have premiered in Russia, but the production was likely influenced by the classical styles of western Europe (Mitchell 6). For instance, the U-shaped pieces on either side of the headband are reminiscent of Queen Victoria's ear braids (fig. 10) as well as the braided styles worn by women in the medieval period under their crespines (de Courtais 2006).

As evidenced, this headpiece from the FRC is representative of various aspects of medieval history, but upon reflection and interpretation, it also appears to take influence from other aspects and periods in history.



Fig. 9: A photograph of the green roof of the Museum of Applied arts in Hungary. *Philipp, François*, 10 March 2014, licensed under CC BY 2.0.;



Fig. 10: George Hayter's coronation portrait of Queen Victoria, 1838. Found on Wikimedia Commons.

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Fig. 1: A photo of Cynthia Macedo dancing onstage in *Raymonda*, Act III, 1985. *Andrew Oxenham.*

PART TWO: A CLOSER LOOK AT THE RAYMONDA HEADPIECE AND THE DANCER WHO WORE IT

In my first blog post, I examined a gold and green costume headpiece from a National Ballet of Canada production of *Raymonda*, Act III. Through research, I found that the accessory was quite successful in representing the era in which *Raymonda* is set, as well as shedding some light on different periods in history.

But, there was one piece of information about the headpiece that could not be found through the typical scholarly research channels – that is: Who wore this headpiece?

One of the first things I noticed while studying the object was a small name tag in the inner rim that read “MACEDO.” Thanks to my background as a journalist, my curiosity was spiked. A few internet searches and a couple emails later, I found the woman who wore this golden headpiece onstage.

Her name is Cynthia Macedo and she is a former soloist who danced with the National Ballet of Canada for about 13 years, starting in 1982. At present, she is a ballet instructor at George Brown College and a company teacher with Canada’s Ballet Jörgen. I was lucky enough to meet with Macedo to talk about the headpiece, her experience wearing it onstage and how it made her feel as a dancer.

Continue reading to see what she had to say.



Fig. 2: An illustration of dancer Clara Webster with her hair worn in a classical ballet style. Artist unknown, circa 1844, lithographic print, Victoria & Albert Museum.

Cynthia Macedo: *[laughs and smiles as I present her with a carefully wrapped box containing the headpiece, along with gloves for safe handling]* This is hysterical. I have to laugh, because I have a story to tell you about these costumes. We finished doing a performance in Toronto and we were going on tour to Europe. We finished the show, they put all these costumes in a box, took them to the container ... and shipped them to Europe via airplane. When we got there, they unloaded all the costumes, [which] are all white. Well we were sweating when we took them off, and they packed them all wet and they all molded and started to turn green. That's why I laugh that you're so [careful]. These costumes and headpieces have been through so much.

Julia Brucculieri: **How does it feel to be seeing it now, knowing it's an artifact?**

CM: It seems so funny because, first of all, I look at these costumes and headpieces that we had with the National Ballet of Canada and we took them all for granted. We'd have quick changes and we'd rip them off and not look after them. [But it reminds me] of a very special time in my life, and how amazing it makes you feel when you put something with jewels on your head and whatnot. However, I always felt like this Hungarian princess with a really tiny head, because it was always too big for me. We had to wear a classical [hairstyle, where] the hairline comes just over our ears, because of course we wore diamonds. The hair had to come over [the ears] and it had to be pouffy enough to support the pieces that were coming over.

JB: What type of character would this be for?

CM: This is from the third act of *Raymonda*, so it's the wedding scene. There's this famous pas de dix, five couples [dancing]. A lead couple and four others. In our version, they turned it into a lead couple and eight couples to get more people onstage. Four of the girls were kind of highlighted, you had a pas de trois and one solo variation. Then of course you had the lead couple. I did the pas de trois. I was one of the three girls, which was nothing but pirouettes, hence my feeling of, *it's going to fall off*.

JB: Did it ever fall off?

CM: No, it never did, because I was so paranoid. I pinned it to my head every place possible.

JB: Before I saw the picture of you wearing it (fig. 1), I thought the headpiece was meant to be worn the other way.

CM: [People] think it's a crown that goes upward. No, it's a perfect replica of the Victorian age. The 1800s. The ballet premiered in the late 1800s, so they would have had those Victorian hairstyles. If you ever go back and look at those costumes, they had the most amazing headpieces and they usually had something flowing down the back too.

Even though [the ballet was] set way back in the 1200s, people wouldn't want to look at what they were wearing in the 1200s. There's no way. It wouldn't be conducive to dance either, it would be very heavy and whatnot.

JB: When I was looking at this headpiece, I noticed there's clearly makeup inside, which is a sign that it has obviously been worn. How does it feel that the makeup is now part of this artifact?

CM: My DNA [*laughs*]. The thing is, I look at it and sure, it was mine and I wore it and, probably because we did it for such a short period of time, nobody else wore it. But I look at it as just another costume piece that I wore, because I wore so many. I remember dancing it, I remember enjoying it, but it doesn't tug at my heartstrings.

JB: You said putting this on made you feel like a princess. In that scene, the characters are noblemen and women, correct?

CM: Absolutely, there's not a poor person on the stage. It's all about jewels. Everyone was in a creamy white, kind of pearly [colour]. They had the green rhinestones too. They were beautifully made. You put the costume on and the headpiece, and you just felt really elegant and beautiful.



Fig. 3: Macedo examines the headpiece she once wore onstage. *Julia Brucculieri*, 7 Nov. 2019.

JB: As a dancer and someone who has worn a ton of costumes, how would you say that helps shape how you perform and portray characters?

CM: It helps you create a character right away. What's funny is that there will be times when you rehearse and you're doing a new piece and all of a sudden you see the costume and you go, 'Oh, this isn't what I imagined at all.' Then you kind of reevaluate [and ask yourself], What am I representing here? Generally speaking though, when you're learning a piece, the costume designers are really good at picking up what the characters are.

It does help you create, it also [influences] the way you move. If you have a costume with a [heavy skirt], you're going to move heavier and reflect that within your movement. If it's light and airy, your movement will be more light and airy. Also, the way it fits. If you're wearing an empire waistline, you're going to move differently than in if you have something very tight around the middle.

JB: Was this headpiece restrictive at all?

CM: Restrictive for sure, because I always felt like it was going to fall off. I'm claustrophobic, so as soon as I wear that classical style and that headpiece – and you can't hear as well – it can affect the way you move your head. But once you start performing, you forget about these things.

JB: As a teacher, when you're choreographing for students and thinking about what they might wear on stage, how has past experience helped you?

CM: I want my students to go onstage and feel good. I've had times where I've been onstage in a bikini and I was like, this is not me, I'm not comfortable. And I would never want to send any of my students, or even a professional dancer, onstage without them feeling confident and comfortable in a costume, because it's not a good feeling at all ... I really want my students to go out and feel as elegant and beautiful as I would feel when I would wear something like this.