



Debutantes at le Bal 2015 in Paris

BELLE OF LE BAL

Meet Payal Mehta, the first woman—and the first Indian—to be named the official jeweller of the prestigious annual le Bal event in Paris

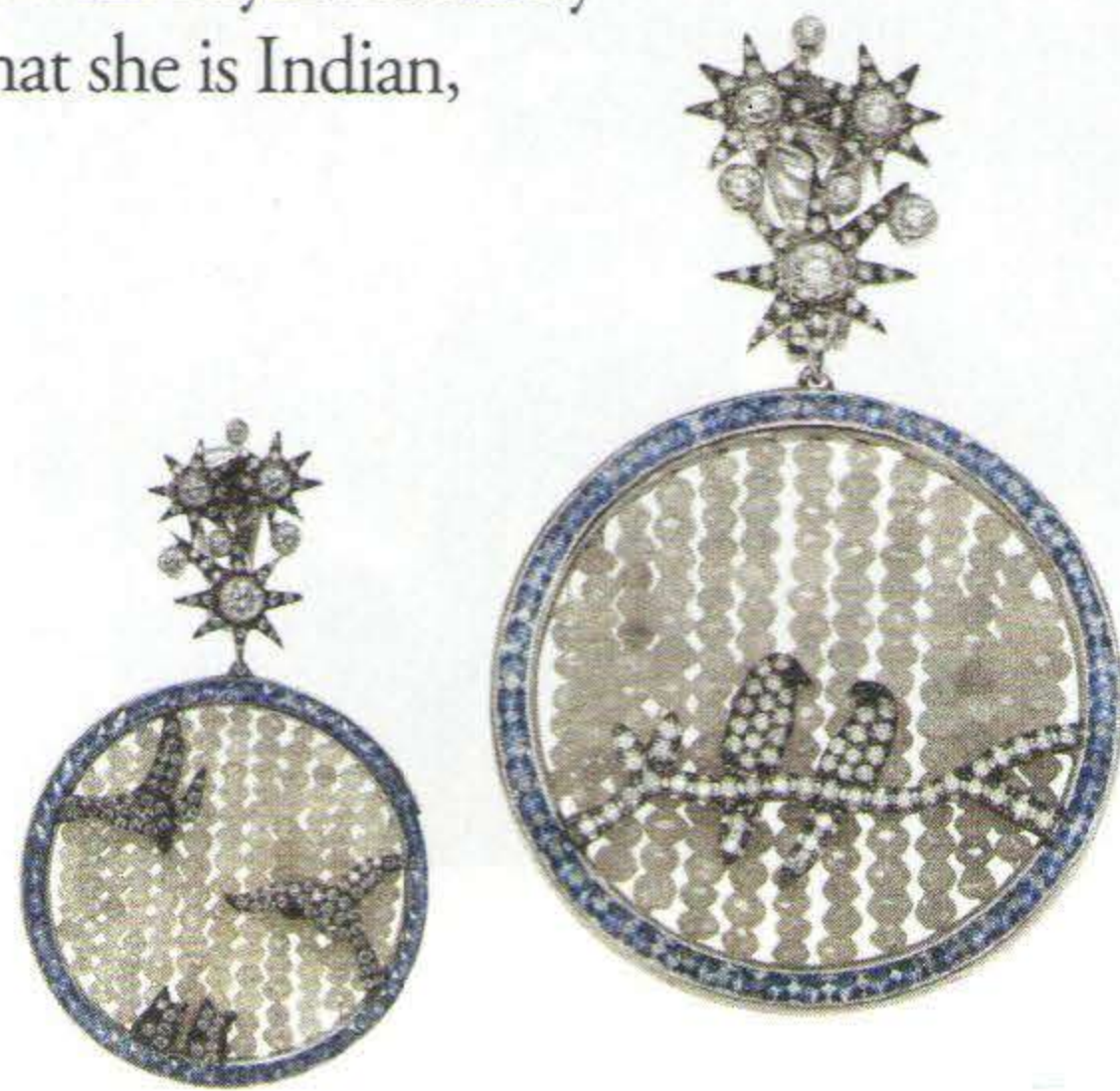
EVERY YEAR, Paris plays host to le Bal des Débutantes, where girls of ages 16-22 from different countries don the best in couture and jewellery for charity. Started by former hospitality PR maven Ophélie Renouard in 1992, it is primarily a fashion event that *Forbes* magazine in the past has ranked as one of the top 10 hottest parties in the world. And while the girls and couturiers come from all over the world, a single jeweller—Bucherer, Adler, and Mikimoto have participated before—dresses all the deb (short for debutantes). For the 2015 le Bal, held in November, Mehta became the first independent jeweller, the first woman, and the first Indian to have the honour. “I met Ophélie about four years ago,” says Mehta, on the phone from New York. “When she suggested I come on board, I was happy to. I carried 60 pieces for the 25 girls.”

Mehta was born in the Mumbai-based Rosy Blue family of diamond merchants, and grew up surrounded by fabulous gems. She holds a diploma from the New York School of Interior Design, is a certified chef from the Natural Gourmet Institute in New York, and even studied model drawing at the Fashion Institute of Technology in NYC. She launched her label—Payal New York—in 2009, and has, since then, flown under the radar, catering to high-end customers in New York through trunk shows, and in her hometown, Dubai, at her flagship studio. In six short years, Mehta has carved a niche for herself with her unusual combinations—mixing coloured gems with diamonds and using important jewels with lesser stones. Her pieces have been worn by Sarah Faber-Castell (of the artists’ supplies family), and she has shown at prestigious exhibits in Dubai, Paris, and India.

For le Bal, Mehta researched every deb, even those she couldn’t meet, to design pieces that matched their personalities. “I loved Payal’s idea of creating a special piece for each deb based on her bio, her picture, and her gown. This is unique in the history of the ball,” says Renouard. “For Vanessa Lauren-Wang, who comes from a prominent business family of Hong Kong, I made earrings in black jade, and for two girls from the Middle East, I used feathers with coloured gemstones. For an Italian princess, I used turquoise with diamonds,” she says. Renouard can’t wait to have Mehta back for next year’s ball. “Different jewellers ask to work with us, but I would be very happy to do it with Payal for many years. For more than one reason: The fact that she is Indian, and that her pieces are one of a kind.” ■



Payal Mehta with designer Hemant Sagar at le Bal



Payal New York jewellery, prices upon request.

COURTESY LE BAL; JEWELLERY: PAYAL NEW YORK; LOCATION: HÔTEL DE CRILLON, A ROSEWOOD HOTEL; MAKE UP: MAC COSMETICS