



## Celebrating 40 Years of the Lar Lubovitch Dance Company

by Ilona Wall  
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New York City Center  
130 West 56th Street  
(Audience Entrance is on West 55th Street between 6th and 7th Avenues)  
(Entrance for Studios and Offices is on West 56th Street between 6th and 7th Avenues)  
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### **Featured Dance Company:**

Lar Lubovitch Dance Company  
Lar Lubovitch Dance Company (office)  
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This year Lar Lubovitch Dance Company celebrates its 40th anniversary. After seeing his company perform on Thursday, November 6th at City Center, it was easy to see precisely why this choreographer has such staying power. His dancers are lovely, his choice of music impeccable, and his work is fluid and extraordinarily crafted. Lubovitch manages to strike that delicate balance in modern dance between the onstage interplay of his dancers, and their direct appeal to the audience. He is able to quote the classical technique and show an audience its evolution into a contemporary movement style. His ability to accomplish these feats is helped by his group of dancers which is one of the most harmonious, versatile, and capable that I have seen in recent years. They have an extraordinary expanse of the back which allows them to move with power, grace, speed and dignity, all at once. These ingredients add up to a night of dance that is nothing short of inspirational.

The company's City Center season presented three different programs. I was fortunate enough to see the only performance of the male trio *Little Rhapsodies* (2007) that was included within these programs. The dance fanatics in the audience were concentrated on the appearance of guest artist Rasta Thomas. He was, indeed, beautiful as usual. As Lubovitch placed him in many of the slower sections of Schumann's Symphonic Etudes, Opus 13, his were the most haunting and emotive moments of the piece. More impressive to me, however, was the universal quality and yet diverse dynamic of the three men. Each showed incredible clarity and precision combined with a technical finesse of movement that is so hard to come by, particularly in male modern dancers. Jay Franke provided sweeping, creamy smoothness while Attila Csiki provided moments of crystal clear precision and stately bearing. The duets between these two provided some of the most interesting moments of the trio which included mazurkas, heel-clicking and other subtle aspects of court and folk dances. The adept pianist Pedja Muzijevic shared the stage with these dancers and helped communicate the glorious mixture of military and romantic tones in Schumann's work that was so

brilliantly echoed in the choreography and performance of *Little Rhapsodies*. My only regret was that Rasta's formidable presence was not more focused toward his partners onstage. He exposed himself to the audience but *Little Rhapsodies* is a series of vignettes for three men, and the interplay between them is essential to the work. The connection was there in movement but something about the spiritual chemistry was lacking in Thomas that the rest of the dancers in Lubovitch's company undoubtedly share.

The evening began with *Concerto Six Twenty-Two* (1986) set to Mozart's Concerto for Clarinet and Orchestra, K. 622. Throughout this piece, watching the dancers frolic about the stage in their unceasing and bouncy movement, wearing their expertly made white costumes outlined with the faintest touch pastels, I couldn't help but thinking this is what it must look like to see the Grecian Gods at play amongst the clouds. Indeed, there were Greek themes as the opening movement involved a large circle where the arms and body positions of the dancers recalled etchings on Grecian urns. The movement was focused into the center where an ever changing combination of dancers was highlighted. It was at once community and poetry, ancient and fresh. This circular theme was referenced in the final movement but here there was a central quartet while the ensemble entered and exited always quoting its thematic circular path. Between these movements was one of the most touching male-male duets I have ever seen. As *Concerto Six Twenty-Two* was created in 1986, this Adagio movement is far from new. Yet this duet is the prime example of Lubovitch's ability to make something extremely simple and yet incredibly significant. Danced on Thursday by Jay Franke and George Smallwood, this unsentimental duet centers around two men walking. Are they lovers, friends, or dual aspects of a single character? The answer is insignificant. They are all of these things and none. They support each other, relate to each other, mirror each other and complete each other's lines in pensive and deliberate ways. The relationship between them is unstated and abstract, but one of the most powerful I have seen created onstage in a non-narrative work. Particularly in this Adagio Lubovitch is able to mirror the sparse and spiritual purity of Mozart's music. The enormous contrast of this mood with the ebullient first and finals sections makes his ability to strike this tone all the more powerful.

*North Star* (1978) was next on the program and as the program notes "features member of the Class of '09 of the Juilliard School." Juilliard was instrumental in reconstructing this piece set to the Philip Glass score of the same name. The work begins with the group in an amorphous blob pulling this way and that to Glass's rhythmic, pulsating score. It follows with a quartet, and a supremely powerful solo before the group reunites in the final section. This is the oldest work on the program and although it too is fascinating and well-crafted, it does feel the most dated. Much of this is the synthesized score and costumes consisting of dark bloused shirts and leggings. *North Star* feels more like a conceptual experiment aimed at achieving certain effects. Most interesting to me was seeing the Juilliard students on the same program as the Lar Lubovitch Dance Company. The Juilliard students should be commended for their work. They looked as though they belonged onstage at City Center—no small accomplishment for conservatory students. Their focus and ability never wavered and the piece was incredibly well coached and executed. All of this makes it even more impressive that the Lubovitch dancers were of another caliber altogether. Where the Juilliard dancers had no shortage of technique or fluidity, there was a maturity and assurance in the Lubovitch dancers which one could detect only the beginnings of in most of the students.

The evening ended with *Dvorak Serenade* (2007) to four movements of Antonin Dvorak's Serenade in E Major, Opus 22. Mucuy Bolles and Scott Rink were the central couple whose sections of intense longing correspond to the more poignant moments in the score. With the couple's entrances the ensemble shifts seamlessly into the background so that the elusive interactions between Bolles and Rink commands our attention. There are certainly tributes here to Balanchine's Serenade such as Bolles' ending pose of the opening Moderato movement which echoes that of the Waltz Girl at the end of Balanchine's Serenade as she is carried off in her ascension at the end of the ballet. After the spritely Valse, Lubovitch returns to this ending pose to begin the Larghetto as if to remind us that

the quartet inbetween was a peaceful diversion from the work's original train of thought. The Larghetto is the couple's duet and provides dozens of picturesque moments that flow seamlessly into one another. The thematic upward gaze and chest of the couple appears throughout this section and captures the almost spiritual beauty of Dvorak's music. It returns in the final vision of the piece as the couple appears behind a scrim center stage he behind her, both arching with outstretched arms to the heavens. Again, it is another example of an incredibly simple image that is rendered significant to the point of drawing audible gasps and sighs from the audience because of Lubovitch's superb choreographic design and choice of music.

Throughout this 40th Anniversary season of Lar Lubovitch Dance Company, Lubovitch's work has been widely dismissed. The general sentiment seems to be that he is a capable dance-maker whose body of work is not particularly innovative or significant in the 20-21st century dance canon. I argue that the ability to consistently craft work of this level, with a trademark movement quality and focus over a 40 year period is supremely significant. His work is not experimental in the way much of "downtown" modern dance is experimental these days. Those conceptual explorations are not the boundaries Lubovitch is interested in pushing. I would agree that Lubovitch grows out of a more classical tradition of choreographers: his focus is on music and movement in time and space. His interest is in affecting his audience directly through a dance vocabulary. It is an incredible feat that this program includes the work of one choreographer spanning a 30 year period where the older material does not look dated or un-fresh. Part of this accomplishment is that of the dancers that bring a relentless charged dynamism and clarity to all of this work. But most of this is the work itself. It is timeless. And whether or not it is work that one would walk away from the theatre itching to discuss, the experience of seeing this work makes one long to return to the theatre and see it again. To me, that is the ultimate choreographic accomplishment.

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