

BLOG: "Oberon's Grove" 11/07/08 & 11/05/08

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[Oberon's Grove](#)

[Lar Lubovitch @ City Center: MEN'S STORIES](#)

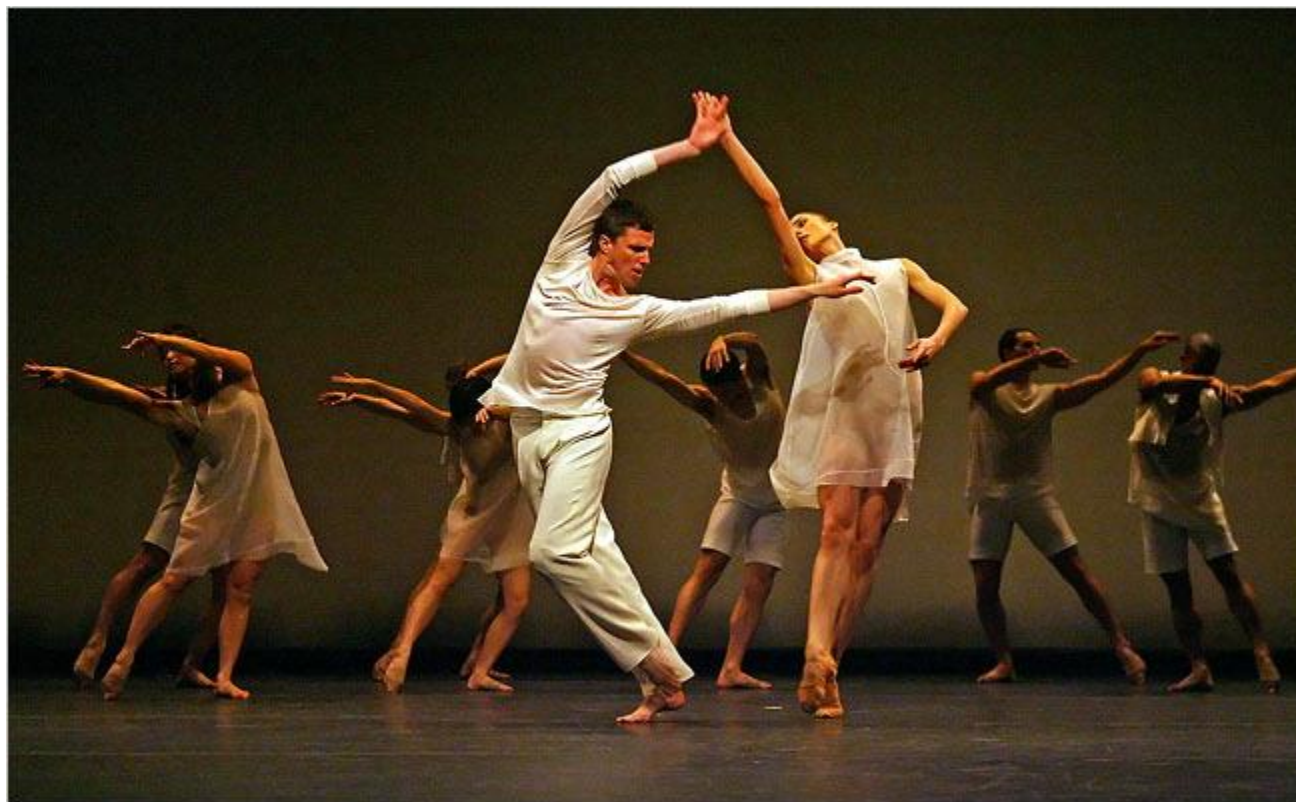


Friday November 7, 2008 - Back to New York City Center for the second programme by the Lar Lubovitch Dance Company. Repeats of two works from Wednesday gave an opportunity to bask in the attractiveness of the Lubovitch dancers as well as the music they were dancing to. In the middle, a fantastical work: *Men's Stories*. Volumes could be written about this piece, but I'll try to edit myself. It's breathtaking.



Jangle, to Bela Bartok's score, was a perfect example of why dance works must be seen more than once to get a true impression. On Wednesday it was entertaining and vividly danced; tonight I could more fully appreciate the details and the complexity of patterns which Lubovitch etches into the music. The czardas flavour was very appealing, and the pas de deux for Katazyna Skarpetowska and Brian McGinnis (photo above) seemed even more luxuriantly lyrical. Intricacies of steps and gestures kept grabbing my attention, as did touches of humour and subtle references to the gypsy-

rhythms in the score. Jonathan Alsberry's boundless energy and charisma rightly earned him a whooping, screaming salute from the crowd at the end. His solo and the duet for Katazyna and Brian may have been highlights, but the sheer vitality of the entire cast earned the audience's warm affection.



Dvorak Serenade (Steven Schreiber photo above) is just plain beautiful, although apparently we are not supposed to describe things as "beautiful" any more. Oh well, find a thesaurus then and substitute a word of your choice. Here Lubovitch responds glowingly to one of Dvorak's most melodic scores. The dancers in white gauzy apparel seem angelic and an adagio couple, Mucuy Bolles and Scott Rink, carry out the theme with their heavenly dancing. In a superb *pas de quatre* **Valse**, Charlaine Mei Katsuyoshi, Ms. Skarpetowska, Jay Franke and Christopher Vo caught the crowd's fancy with their seamless, elegant combinations.



Men's Stories (Photo above by Rose Eichenbaum) is danced to Scott Marshall's score. When it ended I turned to Tonya and said, "How are we ever going to write about *this*?" Both visually and in terms of the music, this is one of the most complex and enthralling dance works I've ever experienced. But I feel it would take many, many viewings to even begin to discover all the riches contained herein. And believe me, I am ready to see it again...and again and again.



[Photo, Rose Eichenbaum] Let me at least give you an idea of what ***Men's Stories*** is like.

In a smoky, subterranean ballroom - possibly in Transylvania - nine men in rather sinister-looking tuxedos commence an evening of dancing and socializing. In the course of their fete they will fight, flirt, tell their personal stories and celebrate their masculinity as a musical collage - masterfully crafted by Scott Marshall - seems to mirror their thoughts and memories: a jumble of musical fragments and emotional references shaken into a powerful cocktail. At times nightmarish, then playful or dreamy or combative, ***Men's Stories*** is a work that disturbs, entices, amuses and entertains.

Richly layered, the dancing veers from the ebb and flow of structured group patterns to incredible solos which display both the physical and emotional virtuosity of the individual dancers. There are confrontations and instigations; there are fussy formalities and flippant fuck-yous. The men soar and crash to the floor; and sometimes the music causes them to stop and reflect.

Here are some of the elements which Scott Marshall has stitched into his aural tapestry: jazz, Chant, doo-wop, electronic, Baroque, industrial, Bach, Nina Simone, whistling, a piano played underwater, a

sooty violin; a father telling his son about the birds and the bees. Ending the first section, Grace Moore's immortal [Ciribiribin](#) is heard in a distorted, ghostly rendition. And here was my own key to *Men's Stories*: for how well I remember as a boy dancing around the rec room of my parents' house (when no one was home, of course!) to this inane waltz. That must have been where I got my obsession for dance. And that must be why this Lubovitch work struck such a profound chord with me.

I wonder how many men in the dance world got their start secretly pirouetting around the living room when their parents were out?

It's always good to see dancers turning out (!) to support other dancers in performance and so tonight's audience included Arch Higgins, Christopher Boehmer, Gonzalo Garcia, Rory Hohenstein and a contingent from Cedar Lake.

November 08, 2008 | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#)

[Lar Lubovitch @ City Center](#)



Wednesday November 5, 2008 - The first of two programmes being offered by the Lar Lubovitch Company this week at New York City Center. Mr. Lubovitch stood quietly at the rear of the auditorium (right next to us) throughout the evening, watching his troupe. He is a handsome man and it seems impossible that he could be celebrating his 40th anniversary as a creative force in the dance world. His non-narrative, pure dance creations tonight showed his remarkable sense of freedom of movement; upper-body, arms and hands give a flowing impetus and he chose works from his four decades as a creator which made for a strongly contrasted evening in terms of musical settings and the tone of the dances.

Photo by Chris Duggan at top: from *Concerto Six Twenty-Two*. Set to the Mozart clarinet concerto, this 'white' ballet is constructed around a male-male pas de deux which straddles the line between friendship and love, with a couple of laughs thrown in. Jay Franke and George Smallwood kept the audience engaged with their beautiful dancing and partnering. As the work dates from the mid-1980s, the duet has undercurrents of sadness and potential loss which resonate with memories of the worst of the AIDS epidemic. But it also has strength and mutual support, and it ends simply with the men walking off with their arms around one another.

In the opening sequence the dancers turn, whirl and leap around in a carousel-like circle. The all-white costuming gives *Concerto* a fresh, free appeal and presents opportunities to begin to focus on individual dancers, though putting names to faces/forms will take a bit of time. In a trio passage, Scott Rink, Kevin Scarpin and Katherine Wells were outstanding. The only slight drawback with *Concerto* is that, like many dance works I have seen set to Mozart, it goes on a bit too long. The wondrously spiritual melody of the adagio, however, works perfectly and the two men turned it into a reverie on human relationships.

North Star (Philip Glass score) was danced by students from the Juilliard Dance Division's Class of 2009 who looked confident in this dark-toned work in which clusters and waves of dancers move across the stage with a feeling of organic inter-connectedness. Two outstanding solos: Kendra Samson was at first vividly spastic and then settled into a more fluid movement sequence. Dramatically lit, Kendra made a really striking impression. Kyle Robinson's solo was equally fine, more spacious and airy in feeling. I'm not crazy about the vocal music of Philip Glass but it works here. This was an excellent contrast to the opening Mozart, both musically and in the sense of moving from light into darkness.



Jangle is a very recent Lubovitch work to music of Bela Bartok. The seven dancers, dressed in working-class garb, were impressive in the folk-oriented style. Footwork is key, as is a sense of joy in the outer segments. In quiet contrast, the central pas de deux for Katarzyna Skarpetowska and Brian McGinnis reminded me (and Rob) of Bigonzetti's *OLTREMARE* in its darkish lyricism. Jonathan Alsberry (photo) triumphed in an athletic solo and ended the work with a joyous leap over his kneeling colleagues.

Whirligogs (to Luciano Berio's speech-heavy but subtly humorous score) with the Juilliard dancers in black body tights and ski masks is amusing yet centers around a serious and expressively danced the pas de deux (Anika Yamada and Spenser Theberge) which is made all the more impressive thru its effective lighting. Mr. Theberge shows already at an early age the type of charismatic appeal that makes some dancers stars. The quirky moves of the masked corps of creatures reminded me of Paul Taylor's *THREE EPITAPHS* and sure enough, in the programme note Lubovitch refers to the Taylor work as his source of inspiration.



Dvorak Serenade (Steven Schreiber photo, above) swirls around a central two-part pas de deux for Mucuy Bolles and Scott Rink; the first portion ends in a back-bend pose for Ms. Bolles supported by Mr. Rink. At this point other dancers intrude and then several minutes later the couple resume where they had left off, reappearing in the same pose. This brought a continuity to the work which flows and soars ideally on Dvorak's melodic score. At the end the dancers waft into the wings as the silhouetted Mucuy and Scott raise their arms in a benediction, crowning the evening.



A dancer whose polished style, expressive arms and steadily glowing presence - not to mention a great smile - impressed us in the first and last ballets was Christopher Vo (photo).



The evening's mixture of musical styles was especially welcome and the works were programmed to best show their contrasts. The New York audience were in a festive mood as the end of a dark era seems to be on the horizon now. Lar Lubovitch's works and his dancers celebrate the human spirit

with their strong sense of community, reminding us of the possibilities that music and dance afford for enhancing a movement away from divisions and towards a mutual celebration of life. Happy anniversary, Mr. Lubovitch!

November 06, 2008 | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(2\)](#)

[This Week: Lubovitch @ City Center](#)



The [Lar Lubovitch Dance Company](#) will be at New York City Center this week, opening on Wednesday November 5. Two programmes are on [the schedule](#). It's been a while since I last saw this Company so I am really looking forward to it. Photo above from *Concerto Six Twenty-Two* by Chris Duggan.



Note: On Thursday (only), Rasta Thomas is scheduled to appear in *LITTLE RHAPSODIES* with the Lubovitch Company. Above: Jay Franke, Sean Stewart and Rasta in a Nan Melville photo.

November 03, 2008 | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#)

Biography of Philip Gardner:

Post-mid-life crisis GWM. After 22 years in the corporate world in Connecticut, I took the long-desired plunge and moved to NYC in 1998 where I found - very quickly - the love of my life.

Interests

NYC Ballet, opera, tennis (watching, not playing!), the great outdoors, reading, a few good friends, and my perfect partner.