

The New York Times

DANCE REVIEW

Marking a Company Anniversary With Layers of Style and Sound

By ANNA KISSELGOFF

Published: May 14, 2004

Lar Lubovitch played himself as an internationally known choreographer in "The Company," Robert Altman's recent film inspired by the Joffrey Ballet of Chicago. At home in major ballet companies, on Broadway and with his modern-dance troupe in unconventional performing spaces, he is now pouring whirlpools and waves of passionate movement into his new "Pentimento."

Mr. Lubovitch transformed the altar and pew area of Washington Square United Methodist Church (135 West Fourth Street, Greenwich Village) into a divided stage for the premiere of "Pentimento" on Tuesday night. The main dancing ground was a low platform (later removed) behind a transparent scrim. Dancers also performed on a strip between that scrim and another one in front. The overlapping dance images reflected the idea of pentimento, a process through which a picture's initial images become visible under fading layers of paint. Mr. Lubovitch has said that since the engagement (through May 22) is part of his company's 35th anniversary, "Pentimento" incorporates past and present elements of his style but without quotations from specific works.

Aptly, Richard Woodbury's eclectic score is not the usual collage. Its layers of sound seep in and recede, revealing snatches of classical composers, popular songs, dissonance and, in one passage, "Songs of the Auvergne."

The choreography comes as a relief in the post-postmodern scene, where few share Mr. Lubovitch's belief that dancers should always be on the move. This is texture-rich choreography derived from mainstream modern dance. Movement courses through the Lubovitch dancer's entire body. He or she does not move from position to position or in sharply defined steps.

"Pentimento" has no obvious theme, but its emotional resonance and structure suggest a cycle of birth and death.

There is also a combative duet brilliantly danced by Jason McDole and Ryan Lawrence that has a Cain and Abel tinge. Scott Rink, a veteran, stands out in two mesmerizing solos evoking a speck of a man in the large universe.

On another level, "Pentimento" is a compositional exercise that plays not only with overlapping images but also with a formal use of movement motifs. In one example, Rachel Tess is walked up a man's back with the aid of a partner. When Banning Roberts does the same twice, the repeated phrase recalls the image embedded earlier in the work: the immediate past.

There is also a recurring Lubovitch signature: a dancer twists a torso in ballet's fourth position, arm to brow. It is not an expressive gesture but a signature for energy, which the dancers provide with style and astonishing stamina.

The cast flows in and out of curved sculptural groupings in "Dance One," the first section. Wearing gray leotards by Ann Hould-Ward, the dancers move in circular patterns behind the second scrim, which is filled with Jack Mehler's dappled lighting.

Ms. Roberts and Mr. Lawrence whirl into each other's arms for a love duet. A duet for Adam Houglan and Ms. Tess has a superb moment: she perches on one of his biceps and slides down his arm! Mr. Rink's major solo evokes a braying horse in a continuum of head rotations.

Jennifer Howard is lifted by Roger C. Jeffrey, Mr. McDole and Mr. Rink within a slithering mass that dissolves in "Dance Two." Here Mr. McDole and Mr. Lawrence perform their intense mirror duet on two sides of a scrim before they come into close contact and Ms. Tess appears as a white angel.

The dividing lines are erased in "Dance Three," which has a flat stage with only one scrim. It is inaugurated by Mr. Jeffrey's exuberant dancing and a second solo for Mr. Rink. But here it is the effect of mass movement that is most striking as the group recedes into darkness.