

Sitting down to a feast of dancers

by Deborah Jowitt

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Like Lubovitch, who sets works for other companies, as well as choreographing Broadway musicals, some of the 14 dancers he assembled for a spring season at the Skirball have additional allegiances, and some are performing with the Lar Lubovitch Dance Company for the first time. All – both old and new – are **spectacular**: Rasta Thomas, Charlie Neshyba-Hodges, Sean Stewart, Kate Skarpetowska, Scott Rink, Drew Jacoby, to name just a few. **There's nothing these people can't do...**

The three pieces—two of them world premieres—shown at the Skirball demonstrate **Lubovitch's musicality, plus his gift for creating clever steps** and filling the stage with patterns that swirl and reconfigure like an errant constellation viewed in speeded-up time. The dancers attack them **expertly and vigorously...**

The five **great** old pop songs that accompany *Love's Stories* (premiered in 2005 by Hubbard Street Dance Chicago) are sung in recordings by Kurt Elling... Sean Stewart leads the cast's three couples in the final old **beauty**, "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes" and opens the work, soloing to "Nature Boy," while the others stare at him as if alarmed by his creaturely maneuvers. To "The More I Have You," Jay Franke and Charlaine Mei Katsuyoshi gambol as archetypal cute ingenues, while the **marvelous** Skarpetowska and Marty Lawson dance more passionately. Their song, "Prelude to a Kiss," ends with what it anticipated: Lawson pulls his partner's blouse off her shoulders and buries his face in her neck. Neshyba-Hodges and Harumi Terayama stand out in "Every Time We Say Goodbye"—fast of foot and, happily, attentive to each other and the **bittersweet** message of the tune.

Little Rhapsodies is a **gem**. In this trio for three men (attractively costumed by Ann Hould-Ward), Lubovitch shows what **clever** footwork he can devise and what a **variety of expressiveness** he can draw from Robert Schumann's Symphonic Etudes, opus 13, **exquisitely** played by Pedja Muzijevic on an onstage Steinway. The style of the choreography brings to mind Jerome Robbins's *Suite of Dances* (made for Mikhail Baryshnikov) and portions of his *Dances at a Gathering*. The men—Thomas, Franke, and Stewart—acknowledge one another by clicking their heels together with a military flourish, and when they aren't leaping and rushing about, their steps and manner occasionally allude to the earthy springiness of the czardas and the mazurka. Jack Mehler's lighting, oddly drab in *Love's Stories*, creates a sunny space for them to frolic in.

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(left to right) Jay Franke, Sean Stewart & Rasta Thomas in Lubovitch's "Little Rhapsodies"

photo: by Nan Melville

Lar Lubovitch Dance Company
Skirball Center for Performing Arts
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Lubovitch has given the lyrical solos to Thomas, who's a **marvel**. He projects **romantic yearning**—not through a generalized attitude but through awareness of the space around him and a sensitivity to the dynamics of the music. In the livelier passages, he wears his **silky virtuosity** easily, making the most difficult steps look as natural as walking down the street. Franke and Stewart are **terrifically accomplished** dancers, but Stewart, who consistently impressed me when he was a member of American Ballet Theatre, looks restrained and chilly in Lubovitch's choreography, for all his admirable clarity. Not until the end do the men really acknowledge one another...

Dvorák Serenade, set to four movements of the Czech composer's magisterial *Serenade in E Major*, opus 22, is a **lush, romantic piece**. Jonathan E. Alsberry, Karen Moore, and Kevin Scarpin join all those mentioned above (minus Thomas) to create sweeping patterns—wreathing around one another, rushing past, slipping through lines. In their floaty white clothes by Wendy Winters, they **look like an assemblage of minor Olympians when they part to create an avenue for the entrance of a pair of tall deities**: Drew Jacoby and Rink... Their **exalted** maneuvers offer a fine contrast to the pulsing ensemble passages and the lively foursome (Katsuyoshi, Franke, Skarpetowska, and Neshyba-Hodges) that takes over the stage during Dvorák's **lovely waltz**.

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