

APRIL 11, 2007**SUSAN REITER**

LOVE STORIES

"I haven't done this kind of big romantic piece in a long time; I used to do them often. Somehow I seem to have been drawn back to them," notes veteran choreographer Lar Lubovitch, sounding almost surprised that the two works receiving world premieres during his upcoming New York season are set to the powerfully romantic music of Robert Schumann and Antonin Dvorak.



His recent dances have been set to the jazz strains of Dave Brubeck and vocalist Kurt Elling—not to mention the very contemporary commissioned score by Elliot

Goldenthal for his three-act *Othello* that American Ballet Theatre will revive in May. However, for the moment, Lubovitch is reveling in a return to "that area of my output that is lyrical: I daresay an attempt at a beautiful dance. That's a word people treat with a good deal of mistrust. But I admit it, I like beauty."

With his company's 40th anniversary on the horizon next year, Lubovitch has seen enough trends come and go in the dance world—and survived them—to assert his own aesthetic and follow it confidently. Lush, sensuous, grandly flowing movement has certainly played a major part in his work. His ensembles surge like waves rolling into shore, and his dancers often are called upon to move with openhearted expansiveness. But he has also created dances that explore character traits and narrative, perhaps influenced by his work on several Broadway musicals.

Little Rhapsodies, a trio for three men set to Schumann piano works, began as a solo for Rasta Thomas, the young ballet virtuoso who has become a Lubovitch regular; he'll perform the title role in ABT's *Othello* at the Met. Exceptional male dancers have often gravitated to Lubovitch's work, drawn by his ability to showcase their power and bravura while drawing out their more vulnerable qualities with intriguing insight.

The choreographer describes the Dvorak “Serenade for Strings in E Major,” as “really dyed-in-the-wool, old-world poetic romanticism.” For his other premiere, he has set its four movements as a work for his full company of 12 dancers.

The other new work for the season (whose two programs also include a guest appearance by the Limon Dance Company performing his *Recordare*) is *Love Stories*, set to five standards interpreted by Kurt Elling, whom he considers “a profoundly wonderful jazz artist. He has a very unusual gift for re-imagining classics.” A central male figure—seemingly part angel, part faun—arrives in the midst of three couples with what Lubovitch calls “a message about something very essential. He delivers this message, and different exercises in love unfold.”

Sean Stewart, a former ABT standout who has been dancing with Lubovitch in recent years, and will perform in all three new works—including the central role in *Love Stories* – observes that, “His work takes a lot of ballet training to do; at the same time, he’s completely distancing himself from the upright approach of ballet. He intermixes a lot of different styles. The three pieces we’re doing are all very different from one another. Every dancer I tell that I working with Lar has always said, ‘Oh my god, I want to work with him,’” says Stewart. That’s probably because Lubovitch has always been so generous with his insights into, and appreciation for, individual dancers.

“I’m always choreographing for the dancers in the room, and I like to capitulate to their gifts and their special presences,” he explains. “Sometimes, I’m making a dance just because there’s a dancer there that I want to see dancing. I take great pleasure in that—finding out a very special way to create an essay about that dancer.”

April 17-21, Skirball Center for Performing Arts, 566 LaGuardia Place, (at Washington Sq.), 212-279-4200; Tues.-Sat. 8, \$35-\$45.

Volume 20, Issue 15

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