

IT'S NOT BALLET

Jazz dance takes the stage tonight

By JAN SJOSTROM
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Don't call Elemental Brubeck a ballet — at least not in front of its creator, Lar Lubovitch.

"It's a dance," he said. "A ballet is a specifically classically oriented piece of choreography."

Lubovitch — who has danced with modern, ballet, jazz and ethnic companies and choreographed for ballet companies, Broadway shows and Olympic medalist ice dancers — is an authority on the many ways dancers move.

Elemental Brubeck "is a jazz dance" descending from the work of film and theater choreographers such as Gene Kelly, Michael Kidd, Jack Cole and Matt Mattox, he said.

Ballet Florida will perform the dance at 8 tonight and 2 p.m. and 8 p.m. Saturday at the Kravis Center. The program also will include Vicente Nebrada's Percussion for Six Men and the premiere of Trey McIntyre's Pluck.

Elemental Brubeck is set to three tracks from jazz legend Dave Brubeck's 1963 album Time Changes — Iberia, Theme from Elementals and Elementals.

Music always comes first for Lubovitch. Choreography "is just a way of seeing the music," he said.

He chose jazz because he created the dance for the 2005 kickoff of a new dance festival in France. "It's appropriate for the French, because they embraced American jazz," he said.

It wasn't easy to find a long jazz piece suitable for his purpose. Elementals, one of the few works Brubeck composed for jazz ensemble and orchestra, "was a discovery," he said. "It hadn't been heard in many years."



Lee Hershfield

Choreographer Lar Lubovitch, at left, leads Shannon Smith, Jay Franke and Lorena Jiminez during a rehearsal of 'Elemental Brubeck' at Ballet Florida.



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Stephanie Rapp, in the background, Shannon Smith and Jay Franke rehearse 'Elemental Brubeck.'

Brubeck, who sat in on one of Ballet Florida's rehearsals and even chimed in on piano, said he's "thrilled" that a company so close to his winter home on Sanibel Island is performing Elemental Brubeck.

The 86-year-old composer's music has been set to dance only once before, in 1960, when American Ballet Theatre commissioned a score for the quickly mothballed Points on Jazz.

But it's not the first time dancers have grooved to his tunes.

"I remember during the jitterbug days I used to love to perform with my jazz group at dance halls," he said.

Elemental Brubeck's 25 minutes of dance include Lubovitch's signature intricate partnering and an explosive solo for a man who has received rave reviews.

It is the third Lubovitch dance to enter Ballet Florida's repertory. The others are Musette and ...smile with my heart.

"I think it shows how well this company moves," said Marie Hale, Ballet Florida's artistic director. "There are so many bun heads who can stand in arabesque and look divine. But if you ask them to move, it's a horror."

At 63, Lubovitch moves pretty well, too. During rehearsals, he demonstrated complex steps with unself-conscious grace and precision. He keeps fit with regular bar and treadmill workouts and swims four times a week.

He's just as vigorous in his creative life. This season, he will unveil two new dances for his own company, one for Hubbard Street Dance Chicago and another for the Limon Dance Company.

He's as exacting in his expectations for himself as he is in others' definitions of his work. "I've made more than 100 dances, but one always wishes to do it better and be reborn each time," he said.