

## Lar Lubovitch Celebrates Decades of Dancemaking

By **Deborah Jowitt**

Thursday, November 6th 2008 at 5:14pm

**Details:**

**Lar Lubovitch Dance Company**

City Center

131 West 55th Street

212-581-1212

November 4 through 8



Lar Lubovitch Dance Company's "Jangle"

Photo: Sharen Bradford

This year, Lar Lubovitch celebrates the 40th anniversary of his company...Performances at the American Dance Festival this past summer and at Dance Theater Workshop earlier this fall preceded the group's City Center season. Lubovitch studied with Martha Graham, Jose Limon, Anna Sokolow, and Antony Tudor during his Juilliard days, but, to me, the influence most noticeable is that of Limon (although his sense of theater could have been sparked by Graham and Tudor). I'm not speaking of borrowed steps – Lubovitch has developed his own style – but in lyrical works like the 1986 *Concerto Six Twenty-Two*, to Mozart's famous clarinet concerto. Rapture lifts the dancers' bodies; they breathe into their curving, arching patterns – a quality that reminds me of Limon and his mentor, Doris Humphrey. In the fascinating opening section of his 1978 *North Star*, when the dancers (at these performances, final-year Juilliard students) swirl around with 1970s abandon, to Philip Glass's work of the same name, you feel as if each cosmic wind that blows this churning galaxy into semi-unruly patterns peaks in a suspended breath. Lubovitch's earthiness, however, has a lusty, digging-in peasant quality. The white-clad dancers who frolic buoyantly in a circle in *Concerto Six Twenty-Two's* opening Allegro also form shoulder-to-shoulder lines that hint at Slavic folk dances. Lubovitch often surprises you, though, with small changes of texture. Amid their big, luscious, sweeping moves, the dancers are also likely to simmer down into prissy tiptoe steps and follow these with a deliberately clunky jump. Or drop from airy exaltation into galumphing or sneaking around.

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Lubovitch has assembled some superb performers. Charlene Mei Katsuyoshi, Katarzyna Skarpetowska, Jonathan E. Alsberry, and Christopher Vo dance warmly and brightly together in that Allegro, as does another foursome composed of Mucuy Bolles, Katherine Wells, Attila Joey Csiki, and Brian McGinnis. Scott Rink and Kevin Scarpin roister with Wells to begin the final Rondo. Jay Franke and George Smallwood give a touching account of the duet that became famous during the AIDS crisis for its poetic portrait of a tender, supportive relationship between two men.

The newest work, *Jangle*, is subtitled *Four Hungarian Dances* and set to two wonderful Bela Bartok pieces for violin and piano, *Rhapsody # 1* and *Rhapsody #2*. As dressed by Ann Hould-Ward, the seven dancers look as if they might be inhabitants of a European country between the wars who have come together for festivities in a town square. In the beginning, they're skipping in patterns that form the spokes of a large wheel. Instead of the little unison duets that succeed one another in the opening section of *Concerto Six Twenty-Two*, these dancers pair up in scrappy, I'll-do-my-thing-you-do-yours counterpoint; yet Katsuyoshi and Franke, Bolles and Csiki are never cantankerous, and they stay close together during their dialogues. The duet for Skarpetowska and McGinnis has shadowed moments. At one point, he lies on his back, and she steps onto his leg and belly, causing him to rock upward around her. In the end, she's upside down in his arms, frozen in the flex-footed running position we've already seen others form upright while racing across the stage. Alsberry is the loner everyone loves. When he jumps backward into the wings after one solo, hands reach out to catch him. At the very end, they kneel in a line facing us, and he jumps over them. Tada!

In this program, Lubovitch reunites not only with his younger self, but with his Juilliard background. His 1969 *Whirligogs* (*Knots, Tangles, Confusion*) was inspired, the program tells us, by Paul Taylor's witty *Three Epitaphs*, a dance that made a huge impression on young Lar. In anniversary fervor, he has reconstructed the dance for a larger cast – again Juilliard students, class of 2009. Eighteen people, wearing black unitards and black ski masks that show only their eyes, slump over and slog along in whirlpools of grim patterns, sometimes pressed together in lines of four or more, sometimes forming tunnels for others to scramble through. Jack Mehler's lighting (after Craig Miller) throws their giant shadows on the backdrop. They scare even themselves, and whipping off their masks doesn't reassure them for long. The third movement of Luciano Berio's *Sinfonia*, with its welter of buried voices and clanging noises, is in itself alarming. But there's hope. Two young people (Arika Yamada and Spenser Theberge) bump by accident and find their way into a duet. Love blooms in the unlikeliest places. And a choreographer can grow in just about any kind of soil, even though, as Balanchine once said, there is earth in which choreographers, like potatoes, really flourish. Given a good start, Lubovitch grew into a master.