

# Chicago Dancing Festival: A free ticket to top names next week



**Laura Molzahn**

CHICAGO TRIBUNE

WED AUG 19, 2015

[LauraMolzahn](#)RT @HubbardStreet: The Chicago Dancing Festival returns next week.  
More from @wperrondancemag:<http://t.co/tzB0Q5CEsC>



Chicago Dancing Festival

Lar Lubovitch Dance photo

"The Black Rose" with Reid Bartelme, Anthony Bocconi, Mucuy Bolles, Barton Cowperthwaite, Nicole M. Corea, Chanel DaSilva, Josh D. Green, Robbie Moore, Kamille L. Upshaw and Eric Williams of Lar Lubovitch Dance Company



Chicago Dancing Festival  
Lar Lubovitch Dance photo  
"The Black Rose" by Lar Lubovitch Dance Company

Chicago Dancing Festival: Our guide to the 9th annual free dance series Aug. 25-29 in Millennium Park and MCA.

"I've always been bothered by the ballet 'Sleeping Beauty' — irritated by it, really, because no story ever gets told," says choreographer Lar Lubovitch. That thought fathered his most recent work, "The Black Rose," which the Lar Lubovitch Dance Company will perform here Tuesday at the Harris as part of the Chicago Dancing Festival.

The eminent Lubovitch, whose New York-based company is now entering its 48th year, also co-founded and co-produces the festival — its ninth annual incarnation runs Aug. 25-29 — with Chicago dancer Jay Franke. Friday night, Lubovitch will be honored for his work at this summer's benefit dinner and performance.



Dancing Queequeg, the secret weapon in 'Moby Dick'

With "Black Rose," Lubovitch says, he was doing something he's enjoyed over the years but hasn't done often: Tell a story. His starting point was Giambattista Basile's "Il Pentamerone," a 17th-

century collection of 50 stories that became what he calls "the kernels of later fairy tales," the "prettified" versions by Jules Perrot and the Brothers Grimm.

Those narratives can have dark aspects, Lubovitch notes, but are nothing like the "truly dark and twisted and cruel originals. They were told as cautionary tales, as a way of teaching young people how to avoid the dangers of the world — particularly that world, filled with mythology and superstition." All of Basile's collection, he adds, "featured perversions: cannibalism, pedophilia, rape, you name it. They were horror stories, really."

So, although a romantic hero and heroine are among the 12 dancers of "Black Rose," it's not your great-grandma's "Sleeping Beauty." His dark take upset some people, Lubovitch says: "A number of presenters were repelled and found they could not show that to their audience. That was illuminating, but also startling to someone who's never been a provocateur or set out to offend — I was just telling a story."

About the Chicago Dancing Festival, whose performances are free but require reservations (except Saturday), Lubovitch says, "We do try to make every year different, though there's a consistency of intent: We represent all access to the arts. We try to speak in many voices."



You're only 40 once: Joel Hall Dancers celebrate with 'Anja'

This year the festival offers its first-ever "Modern Women" program, which Lubovitch calls "a nod to the fact that modern dance was created by women." Offered twice at the MCA on Wednesday, the program includes photographs and films of such figures as Martha Graham and Doris Humphrey plus performances of works by Graham, Isadora Duncan and contemporary choreographers Pam Tanowitz, Kate Weare and Crystal Pite.

Tanowitz made her festival debut last year with the marvelously intricate, musical duet "Passagen." She returns this season with a work for nine, "Heaven on One's Head," which will be performed opening night, Tuesday, as well as Wednesday. Though she's been making witty, distinctive dances for two decades, last year was the first time the New York-based choreographer toured her work.

Music is key to it. An onstage violinist accompanied "Passagen" last year, and members of the Chicago Philharmonic will play the score for "Heaven," two string quartets by Conlon Nancarrow, on Tuesday (the music Wednesday will be recorded).

Nancarrow is "very famous for his player-piano pieces," Tanowitz notes, which he devised because no live piano player could reproduce the blazing-fast notes he heard in his head. Intrigued by the complex rhythms of these string quartets, Tanowitz found the score appealing on both intellectual and visceral levels.

"I wanted a piece intimately connected to the music," she says. She keyed the opening choreography for four couples to the canon of the opening movement, for example, but without mimicking it exactly, "honoring it in a different way. The way I find freedom is by bumping up against structure."

Tanowitz also uses the curtain in "Heaven" unconventionally. "But I try not to do it in a way that's kitschy or hokey — I try to make it part of the structure," she says. Showing "the behind the scenes" is an attempt to make her work "not just about being pretty. It takes the 'magic' out of the theater."

Other highlights this year include the festival debut of Ballet Hispanico, directed by former Luna Negra head Eduardo Vilaro (Tuesday); a commissioned work by Chicago Human Rhythm Project director Lane Alexander, performed by members of CHRP, Ensemble Espanol and Trinity Irish Dance (Thursday and Saturday); the festival debut of Miami City Ballet (Thursday and Saturday); and the festival debut of Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre, in Mark Morris' "Sandpaper Ballet" (Saturday).

Laura Molzahn is a freelance critic.

[ctc-arts@tribpub.com](mailto:ctc-arts@tribpub.com)

### **Chicago Dancing Festival**

- 7:30 p.m. Aug. 25 and Aug. 27 at the Harris Theater, 205 E. Randolph
- 6 and 8 p.m. Aug. 26 at the Museum of Contemporary Art, 220 E. Chicago
- 7:30 p.m. Aug. 29 at the Pritzker Pavilion, 201 E. Randolph

**Tickets:** Free, reservations required for indoor events; [chicagodancingfestival.com](http://chicagodancingfestival.com)

Copyright © 2015, **Chicago Tribune**