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DANCE

The Joyce Theater Confronts Its Own Staleness

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Lar Lubovitch, seated, with, from left, Loni Landon, Pam Tanowitz, RoseAnne Spradlin and Tere O'Connor, the choreographers of "NY Quadrille," which will temporarily reconfigure the Joyce Theater. Credit Sasha Arutyunova for The New York Times

As you make your way through the cramped lobby into the theater of the Joyce, one of New York's venerable dance spaces, it's best not to look down. But there it is again — that carpet, with its hotel-chain print of zigzags and intersecting stripes in shades of beige, maroon and pink.

How does a space and what surrounds it, a crucial frame for choreography, affect a performance? Can a theater become something new, reclaiming its aesthetic territory, without hiring a demolition crew to knock it down and start over from scratch?

With its fixed proscenium stage and outdated décor, the Joyce Theater is finally facing a demon head-on: its own staleness. The choreographer Lar Lubovitch has come up with a way to breathe new life into the space. Inspired by an 18th-century dance performed in a rectangular formation, he has conceived and organized the performance series “[NY Quadrille](#).”

For the two-week series, the Joyce will temporarily transform its theater, adding a new stage — a runway-like platform that will cover several rows of seating — that allows for viewing on four sides, with risers on what is normally the stage.

“We are trying to construct a new experience at the Joyce,” Mr. Lubovitch said. “The theater looks a certain way, the curtain goes up on a company, and whatever happens on a stage can be vastly different from week to week. However, the experience itself of attending the Joyce has grown to be somewhat regular, and this is a way to challenge that.”

Mr. Lubovitch originally came up with the idea to reconfigure the theater for one of his own works but decided to go in a different direction. An avid dancegoer, he also enjoys programming and is a founder and artistic director of the Chicago Dancing Festival. In “Quadrille,” which starts on Tuesday, Sept. 27, he has selected four choreographers, whom he described as “very different and each in their own way quite iconoclastic,” to present programs: Loni Landon, Tere O’Connor, RoseAnne Spradlin and Pam Tanowitz.

All but Ms. Spradlin have previously shown their work at the Joyce. Ms. Landon, 33, who has attended performances at the Joyce since she was a child, said that, to her, the Joyce has the feeling of a retro ’70s theater. (Before its conversion, it actually was the Elgin Theater, a movie house.)

“This is giving it a makeover,” she said. “It’s a big risk for the Joyce, but I think it’s an exciting risk. I think it’s going to be so refreshing because everyone in the dance community has almost stopped going to the Joyce. To be honest, I don’t go because I can’t even afford to go.”

Linda Shelton, the Joyce’s executive director, said she wants to see how the new stage works before offering it to other companies that want an alternative to the proscenium. She added that the Joyce was also considering the possibility of a more permanent makeover that would involve rebuilding the space. “We’re just starting a study to look at what we can do,” she said.

(Outside its walls, the Joyce Theater Foundation presents companies regularly at the David H. Koch Theater at Lincoln Center. It is also branching out to institutions like New York Live Arts and the Abrons Arts Center with its Joyce Unleashed series, which focuses on more experimental work.)

The Quadrille artists, each of whom received a \$15,000 commission plus a performance fee, will present a mix of new and recent works. [Ms. Tanowitz](#) leads with “Sequenzas,” a premiere set to music by Luciano Berio — his sequenzas for viola, trombone and harp — and David Lang’s “Stuttered Chant.” She has some surprises in store regarding her

costumes (remember the carpet?) and sets, for which she is collaborating with the artist [Suzanne Bocanegra](#) to create unconventional backdrops in tribute to the Joyce's willingness to open up its space.

In keeping with the four-sided stage, Ms. Tanowitz has had to consider the challenging prospect of "choreography in all directions," as she put it. "Even though I don't use front in my proscenium, I can control where people are looking."

She added: "A lot of times what I love is having something very detailed happening at the same time as a full-picture composition, so the viewer can choose to follow one dancer's track or to look at the whole picture. It's like a painting: You can look up close or get the full picture."

Mr. O'Connor will present two works, including his new "Transcendental Daughter," a trio for Natalie Green, Eleanor Hulihan and Silas Riener. He said he had been thinking about "the multidimensionality of the space, whether it's proscenium or not" since his dance "[Rammed Earth](#)" in 2007.

In that piece, first presented at the Chocolate Factory, audience members sat on folding chairs scattered across the stage. "In all of my work, I look at it from many viewpoints," he added. "I really want to enhance that in people's viewership."

Part of that, he said, relates to how you can imagine the back of the dance even while watching the front. "Because there are often multiple points of activity in my dances, one of them may be frontal and the other might be a secondary thought that isn't taking up that kind of attention," he said. "The viewer becomes a director of the work in that instance."

For Ms. Spradlin, whose new trio, "X," explores the idea of an abandoned space, working with a platform stage isn't an alien experience. She used one for "[beginning of something](#)" (2011), and is versed in how to make swift changes once in the performance setting. "Even if it's the side that you've paid no attention to, there are interesting things to be seen," she said. "They get revealed to you in a lucky way, and I'm hoping that will happen again."

Ms. Landon will show two works, "Fast Love," a premiere featuring four electric guitarists that explores human connection in the modern age, and a reprise of "[Rebuilding Sandcastles](#)," which she knows will look vastly different in the new setting.

She welcomes the change. "We're so conditioned to watch dance in a certain way," she said. "I think this is going to spin the Joyce on its head."

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