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Lubovitch receives ADF Scripps Award

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Choreographer Lar Lubovitch is the most recent recipient of the Samuel H. Scripps American Dance Festival Award for Lifetime Achievement in Modern Dance.

"Lar Lubovitch is a champion of the dance field," ADF director Jodee Nimerichter said Monday in opening remarks at the American Dance Festival program.

Nimerichter also thanked the Scripps family for continued support and introduced Sebastian Scripps, son of Samuel H. Scripps, who had instigated and funded the award, the first of its kind, in 1981 when Martha Graham became the first recipient.

"This is a serious award. Not just anyone [choreographer] can do it," Sebastian Scripps said. "How can you let everyone know how special it is? Here's a little statue and a big check for \$50,000 to back it up."

Jonathan Emanuel Alsberry, rehearsal director and a dancer with the Lar Lubovitch Dance Company since 2007, added to the accolades as he read:

"Lar Lubovitch's vision for creating big, fluid, grounded, full-bodied dances leaves audiences breathless. His rigorous and authentic approach to his works and their sheer beauty draw the most talented dancers to indulge in performing them. Lar Lubovitch's generous spirit and his embrace of distinctive dance styles allow us to experience the joy of dance across multiple genres."

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Alsberry also said, "His [Lubovitch] mind is always moving forward with new ways to move the bar." Alsberry also spoke of the "golden nuggets of advice" that Lubovitch gives his dancers, including his comment to Alsberry about mistakes. "Often the mistakes that are made create the magic," Lubovitch said.

Lar Lubovitch was the last to speak and had to wait until the audience's thunderous standing ovation ended.

Lubovitch expressed gratitude to the Scripps family and also said how much he appreciated the "affirmation for a job well done."

The choreographer also noted the importance of the American Dance Festival. "The history of [modern] dance was virtually written under the auspices of the American Dance Festival," Lubovitch said.

The ADF had played a large role in his own career as a dance maker. He had been inspired to pursue dance when, as a student at the University of Iowa, he had seen his very first modern dance performance when the Jose Limon Company came to his university. "My life changed after that performance," Lubovitch said.

He started asking where



Lar Lubovitch



ADF Photo | Todd Rosenberg

Members of the Lar Lubovitch Dance Company performing in 2010 in the 1978 work "North Star."

he could study dance and was directed to the American Dance Festival. He still vividly recalls his first day as an ADF student when his first class started at 9 a.m. "A frightful woman walked into the classroom... She said 'And ...' and my first hour and 15 minutes with Martha Graham began," Lubovitch recalled.

Alvin Ailey directed his second class that day. "He tried to teach us to move from our hips," Lubovitch said.

Jose Limon taught the final class. "Jose said, 'Your bodies are orchestras and your arms are violins ...'" Lubovitch added.

After that first day at ADF, Lar Lubovitch was hooked. He auditioned for and was

accepted at Juilliard. Then, as Nimerichter had noted earlier in her remarks, Lubovitch established his own company in 1968. Since then, he has created more than 100 works for his company, as well as for Broadway. He has also made dances for such Olympian skaters as Peggy Flemming and Dorothy Hammill.

On Monday, he acknowledged the challenges of his career. "It was and is a struggle," he said.

But he focused on the rewards. "I get to spend most of my life in the company of dancers. Without inspiring dancers to collaborate with, I would not make a dance at all," he said.

Then, it was "show" time

as the Lar Lubovitch Dance Company demonstrated the type of dancers that inspire Lubovitch as well as the nature of his work that has won him so many accolades. The program featured the 1977 "Scriabin Dances;" excerpts from the 1997 "Othello: A Dance in Three Acts"; the duet from the 1986 "Concerto Six Twenty-Two"; and the First Movement from the 1978 "North Star."

The program ended with his evening-length 2000 "Men's Stories: A Concerto in Ruin."

And the audience responded with a standing ovation that seemed to go on forever and brought Lubovitch and his dancers back again and again for bows.