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Fuse Dance Review: **Wishing on Lar's Star**

Where "Little Rhapsodies" is a ballet that winks with the implication that no one will really get hurt, "Crisis Variations", choreographed last season, lurches into the void.

Lar Lubovitch Dance Company. At Citi Performing Arts Center/Shubert Theatre, Boston, MA, October 19 and 20.

By **Debra Cash.**



Acclaimed choreographer Lar Lubovitch

Almost 35 years after its premiere, I noticed something new about Lar Lubovitch's *North Star* when the Lar Lubovitch Dance Company appeared in Boston under the auspices of the Celebrity Series this past weekend. *North Star* opened the floodgates to every choreographer and his or her mother creating works to the ambient gloss of Philip Glass, Steve Reich, and a smidgen later, Arvo Part; while I respect these composers deeply, hearing those riffs start up again at the thousandth dance performance was enough to make me grit my dance critic teeth.

Lubovitch, I recognized, wasn't responding primarily to Glass's minimalism. He was, instead, responding to the music's persistence and seeing in that persistence a metaphor for life.

When *North Star* begins, the dancers are as close together as notes in a keyboard chord, and each is activated in turn. Costumed in flowing midnight-blue, the choreography is all directional prepositions: under, over, around, through. Their undulations burble along with Glass's musical themes. While what we see on stage is loose, successional movement, former Lubovitch dancer Peggy Baker explains that the choreography was originally worked out on paper to reflect a strict ballet vocabulary.

Apparently, if you were watching *North Star* through the lens of the Hubble telescope, you'd see a huge stick figure laid out on the stage floor, with different dancers and combinations of dancers enacting classical ballet positions of the spine, ribcage and limbs. Naturally, it doesn't matter that this literal and procedural skeleton is invisible to the audience. What we can't help but notice is the cooperation buttressing the dancers' endlessly unrolling skeins of movement.

The recent reconstruction of *North Star* was made possible through special funding. Unfortunately, the performance by the current Lubovitch troupe felt tentative, its crack-the-whip images muted in their urgency. The choreography's unique effects, like the way the men in one of the work's quartets swing their female partners aloft like flourishes on the end of a signature, probably didn't look as calculated when the work was created.

Little Rhapsodies from 2007 is a marvel. To a recording of the celebrated pianist Murray Perahia playing Robert Schumann's Symphonic Etudes, Lubovitch creates a work that could have been Jerome Robbins's *Fancy Free* if two of the three sailors in that classic had looked at each other when they hit their shore leave and decided that, nah, since they had each other, looking for girls was rather besides the point.

Balletic in its positions, horn-piping in its lingo, Reed Luplau and Brian McGinnis (a Worcester native who looks like a younger, buffer Stanley Tucci) flirt while Attila Joey Csiki swoons through a series of heartbroken solos, one elegant wrist more than occasionally flung over his forehead *a la Camille*. *Little Rhapsodies* was funded in part in honor of Broadway Care/Equity Fights AIDS (Lubovitch pioneered AIDS benefits in the dance community as early as the mid-1980s, and the central male duet from his *Concerto Six Twenty-Two* became one of the AIDS campaign's creative signatures), but this is a dance that avoids any shred of authentic melancholy. Solitude may be sad, but especially if you look like Csiki, the suffering is likely to be temporary.

Where *Little Rhapsodies* is a ballet that winks with the implication that no one will really get hurt, *Crisis Variations*, choreographed last season, lurches into the void. The opening moments read like editorial photographs from the site of a disaster: blackout images of twisted bodies on the floor, barely visible beneath Jack Mehler's noir-ish crime scene lighting design, the dancers' stillness buffeted by Yevgeniy Sharlat's smart reworking of Liszt's *Transcendental Etudes* played with brilliant bitterness by the New York instrumental ensemble Le Train Bleu.

Everything in *Crisis Variations* is deliberately awry; the initial tableaux are replaced by distorted, broken lifts, flailing solos, exhausted crawls. But the destruction is studded with tiny moment of sheer gorgeousness, juxtapositions you wouldn't expect.

Crisis Variations reminded me of Iri and Toshi Maruki's Hiroshima murals, where glints of beauty function to honor the humanity of the atom bomb's victims and remind viewers of the innocence we have lost. Fitting, then, that this, and not Lubovitch's prettier and more musically replicative lyricism—a style that critic Jennifer Dunning nailed when she called it “dance to bask in”—was the work that recently earned Lubovitch the twentieth annual prize for best choreography by the Prix Benois de la Danse in Moscow, making him the first American company director to ever receive the award.

The Legend of Ten is made for 10 dancers and was completed in 10 weeks (and, I think coincidentally, in 2010!). Despite the gracious, somewhat mismatched, central duo of Elisa Clark and former Alvin Ailey star Clifton Brown, it reads as another of Lubovitch's big, sweeping ensemble works. While *The Legend of Ten* shares some of the *North Star*'s older stylistic language, in this mature composition

Lubovitch, a former visual artist, gestures across the stage space like a master throwing down an ink painting in a single, sustained meditation. Call him sensei.

Lubovitch has often told the [story](#) of how his Russian grandparents came to the west between the World Wars, emigrating first to Paris, then Montreal, and finally to Chicago, and *Legend* is rich with the heel-and-toeing of Russian folk dance. There are motions where the dancers' arms swing from the elbow as if they were casting seeds and group movements that retain their resonance in social dance. Lubovitch hears the heroic march under big Brahms arpeggios (two movements of the Quintet for Piano and Strings in F Minor, played in a 1957 performance by Glenn Gould with the Montreal String Quartet for the CBC) and has matched it not just rhythmically but with an apt and unapologetic sense of grandeur.

This, in the words of an old print ad, is what becomes a legend most.

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