

Bodies Never Lie

Ebb & Flow: Lar Lubovitch Dance Company in *Men's Stories* and *Crisis Variations* at the Baryshnikov Arts Center

BY RYAN WENZEL

Posted on November 18, 2011



Lar Lubovitch Dance Company in "Men's Stories." Photograph by Chris Roesing.

To date, I've seen only five works by Lar Lubovitch, founder of the New York-based modern dance company that bears his name, but I've already spotted a pattern: a pattern of patterns, to be more precise. Often, when a number of dancers are on stage, Lubovitch molds them into living landscapes of shifting energy. Weight flows from one dancer to the next. Poses are rarely held for long, and the geometries change dramatically by the second. The effect sometimes brings to mind ripples traveling through water, or dominoes falling. At other times, the dancers seem like limbs extending from a singular body.

Lubovitch employs this skill brilliantly in *Men's Stories: A Concerto in Ruin*, the first of two memorable works presented by his company on Saturday at the Baryshnikov Arts Center. Created in 2000 and featuring an all-male cast of nine dancers, *Men's Stories* deconstructs the pressures of masculinity, pitting individuality against group mentality. The men, remarkably varied in appearance, at first are dressed in tailcoats — they could be either members of an elite gentleman's club or hotel doormen — and they demonstrate their physical prowess as they perform what appears to be a routine: push-ups, spins, arms spread like airplane wings, legs kicking high. The group often disintegrates and disappears, allowing dancers to show unique personalities through solos and (sometimes romantically tinged) duets. Some performers (Nathan Madden) offer exhilarating displays of sheer athleticism, and others (Jonathan A. Alsberry) are more introspective. None, however, can escape the group, which invariably returns to interrupt these fleeting moments of solitude; as the others flood the stage, any differences between the men fade and they again become interchangeable parts of one machine. The efficient score, an audio collage by Scott Marshall, creates further tension by waging battle on itself, combining fragments of classical music, sound effects, and straight-up noise. Even a recording of an awkwardly humorous father-son chat about puberty finds its way in. ("Gee, our bodies are complicated, aren't they, Dad?" the boy asks. They sure are.)



Katarzyna Skarpetowska and Brian McGinnis in "*Crisis Variations*." Photograph by Paula Lobo.

Men's Stories, though often bleak and fraught with conflict, shows flashes of hope. There are no such moments in *Crisis Variations*, a chillingly psychological work that had its world premiere this season. The mood is ominous before the dancers appear: The five-musician ensemble Le Train Bleu plays a nervous score by Yevgeniy Sharlat (based on Franz Liszt's *Transcendental Etudes*) in the corner of an otherwise dark stage. A group of five dancers moves with desperation, forming huddles and heavy heaps of human debris. When they rotate in cluster formation, one woman seems to have been jammed in as an afterthought, her legs unceremoniously sticking out to the side. They compete for the stage with Katarzyna Skarpetowska and Brian McGinnis, whose partnering shows no tenderness, only frustration. The effort is all his, as if he's trying to wake her from a deep sleep. She becomes paralyzed when he lifts her, behaving like an article of clothing. Her rare attempts at action fail: Resting on one knee while McGinnis drags her in a circle around the stage, she tries to lift herself but repeatedly crashes back to the floor.

As the work draws to a close, the couple and the group meet, and we understand the dancers to be her demons: confused chaos, always hovering nearby. McGinnis lets go of Skarpetowska and raises his torso, forming an arch over her inert body. Without warning, she slides backward, disappearing beneath the heap of five bodies. Her partner has given up, and without pause she surrenders herself to darkness.

<http://bodiesneverlie.com/2011/11/18/lar-lubovitch-dance-company-in-mens-stories-and-crisis-variations/>