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## Five Questions for Lar Lubovitch

Posted on 16 November 2010 by Maura Donohue

The **Lar Lubovitch Dance Company** will present a one-week season at the Baryshnikov Arts Center (BAC), November 18–21, 2010. The program features *The Legend of Ten*; a revival of his acclaimed *North Star*; and a new production of the company's most recent premiere, *Coltrane's Favorite Things*.

***I'm used to your work being in much larger spaces, though I know you were at DTW a couple years ago. What prompted a season in as intimate a space as BAC?***

Actually, if you look at the history of the company, I've always worked in a variety of spaces. I enjoy how works look different in different spaces. It gives it all a different gestalt. For this, I wanted intimacy. I often venture all over the city looking for different spaces to perform. I have a history of creating theaters where none existed. DTW is one I originally turned into a theater. It was originally a rehearsal studio for the American Theater Lab. I asked the owner, who happened to be Jerome Robbins, if he'd let me use it as a theater for a series of performances, and I brought in lighting and bleacher seating (that I rented), and that space eventually turned into Dance Theater Workshop. Jeff Duncan, one of DTW's founders, saw it as I converted it into a theater, and he turned it into DTW. Then, a year later, I converted a scenery storage space in the East Village, and that became the La Mama space. When our touring grew and performing in more proscenium spaces became financially necessary, that led to 13-14 years at City Center during the 70s and 80s. But, different venues have always been in my thinking.

***You are known for keeping a close choreographic relationship to the music you work with. For this season, you have Coltrane, Glass and Brahms. Were you thinking about the various musical selections as part of a single program?***

I've always used a wide range of music in my programs. I've done an "all jazz" and an "all Mozart" program. Both times I've thought it was a terrible mistake. I know that today it is considered old fashioned to make dances to music, but it is what I've always done. I've always shown a range of music. This program includes a wide range of years, from *North Star* in 1978 through *Meadow* in 1999, through *Coltrane* from last year, to *The Legend of Ten* (set to Brahms Piano Quintet, which is quite romantic – lush and poignant). I do what I do because I've found my truth as an artist, and it runs to the bone of my integrity, and in my 43 year history it's as truthful as I can be. My relationship to music is a personal expression. I listen to a lot of music. I'm always looking for music. I attend a lot of live music events. Sometimes I come to it by recommendation, but, more often, I am interested in a specific composer and go through their music. It's much easier online now. I'm focusing on Brahms because I wanted to do a chamber piece and went through many other composers and then ended up back at Brahms. I had developed a work several years ago to Brahms. Balanchine had once claimed that it's impossible to choreograph to him. Those kinds of statements give me an itch that I have to respond to. So, I choreographed *A Brahms Symphony* in the 80s. This particular Brahms piece

provides an emotional range and a constancy of sound that creates a very fluid aural environment, and, choreographically, I've been creating works with a constancy of motion, and this is in that vein. It doesn't mean constant music; it's more like a ribbon caught in a wind. The legend in *The Legend of Ten* refers to the codes and symbols by which one reads a map and the company of 10 dancers. For this work, the dancers are cartographers who are mapping the music.

***You mentioned your 43 years of working and being truthful to yourself as an artist. When did your truth begin presenting itself?***

When I came into the dance world, there were a few very extremely distinct voices: Graham, Limon, Balanchine, and then Cunningham. The idea that an artist had to find their own voice was implanted early on. It's difficult to say how one arrives at one's own voice or how one distinguishes one's truth. I think it comes from being honest about what stimulates your inner eye and shying away from the commentary by others who may not see clearly what it is you are doing and spend more time discussing what you could or should be doing. I don't think one arrives at a singular place and stays. It shifts; your truth shifts. After choreographing for some years, I found it illuminating to see the first work I'd ever made. I started at U. Iowa and, even coming to dance so late, I made a dance right away. Someone made a film of it. I did it to audition for Juilliard. Once I started studying dance, I realized I had to go to New York, and when I found that I had to submit a dance, I made one up. The filmmaker brought that back, and I'd not seen it before. I saw that I already had a voice and could appreciate that, years later, it was still there – even after all the influences of the dance world.

***You see a lot of work. You're always out seeing dance. Where do you think dance is now after several decades?***

That is a many-layered question. Lifers like me – people who have been doing it for a long time – we have to put on blinders to make it through this path sometimes. I do see a lot of dance, many others don't. I think it has grown exponentially in creative directions. There are many more things called dance than there used to be. That is thrilling. But, it's also lost its civic direction, because the amount of ideas have sent it in so many directions that many people don't know what dance is. I think dance is in a holding pattern; I don't think we are at a high point, and it's not quite a plateau. There's a higher plane coming where it will have a larger resonance. Right now, it feels as though so many people are reaching for difference for its own sake. Rather than a forward motion, we're forgetting our history and re-inventing things. I do see a lot of work and see younger dancers and younger critics getting excited and think "I've been there and done that." There was a time when new was new, and that's very exciting. When someone does something new and original, I want to be in a seat and seeing it. The focus on new takes away from accurate, specific, craft. We lose our grip if all we focus on is "new-ness" rather than honing in to focus on our work and creative faculties. New will give birth to itself.

***This burden of innovation often makes us forget quickly, which makes the NEA's American Masterpieces: Dance program so interesting. It brings us older works that many of us haven't ever seen, have no memory of. That's how North Star came back into circulation, right?***

Yes, most of us don't want to spend time, energy, and money to bring old stuff back. But, there is a value in bringing things back. But, I probably wouldn't have chosen to bring *North Star* back. Some one else asks. Some one else identifies the demand. But, it's interesting to see these works in their new context. We try to keep every step the same, so that it is the time in which we're doing it and the dancers who are doing it that are different. These are very different times than late 70s. Counterculture was burgeoning and, it seemed, that thought was changing. We thought societally, that everything was changing. And now, that is lost. It's in a very different light. It's removed from

how unusual the work was, when it was first done. “North Star” was one of the first concert dances to Minimalist music. Since then, who hasn’t choreographed to Glass or Reich? At the time, that was new. Now, it has to be taken at face value. I can’t tell if that’s good or not. But, we’re keeping it in the company repertory. The AM grant pays part of the fee to presenters if this dance stays on the program. So, it stays. It helps with touring because it supports presenters and helps them get us there. That’s the business of dance.

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