

Lar Lubovitch dance troupe to offer dark new work at SPAC

BY WENDY LIBERATORE/For The Daily Gazette June 13, 2015



The Lar Lubovitch Dance Company will perform Wednesday night at SPAC. (Photo provided)

SARATOGA SPRINGS — When confronted with the satirical “The Black Rose,” choreographer Lar Lubovitch says, some in the audience might turn away.

That’s because this newest work from the seasoned dancemaker is a macabre and twisted tale, a Gothic romance gone terribly awry. So dark is the yarn that Lubovitch calls it “risky.” But for those who want to glimpse the depth and drama of Lubovitch’s imagination, “The Black Rose” would be a good starting point.

Set to be staged on Wednesday at the Saratoga Performing Arts Center and then again on Saturday at Kaatsbaan International Arts Center in Tivoli, Dutchess County, it furthers Lubovitch's reputation as a master craftsman who creates in all varieties of dance.

Developing dances with his company since 1968, Lubovitch has gained an international reputation. He has been dubbed by Variety "a national treasure" and by The New York Times "one of the 10 best choreographers."

Lar Lubovitch Dance Company

WHERE: Saratoga Performing Arts Center and Kaatsbaan International Center for the Arts

WHEN: 8 p.m. Wednesday at SPAC and 7:30 p.m. Saturday at Kaatsbaan

HOW MUCH: \$30 for both venues

MORE INFO: 584-9330 or www.spac.org; 845-757- 5106, ext. 10 or www.kaatsbaan.org.

Working in major ballet companies like New York City Ballet and American Ballet Theatre, on Broadway in show such as "Into the Woods" and "The Red Shoes" as well as his own ensemble, Lubovitch creates solid works that are architecturally beautiful, musically vibrant and inherently dramatic.

And leading up to Wednesday's show, he and his dancers have generously shared their luminous artistry with local dancers and audiences. He and his company have been in residence at Skidmore College. During the three-week stay, his company's third, the troupe is offering master classes for pre-professional dance students from around the globe and, with Lubovitch, presenting a series of lecture-demonstrations.

"The residency is a wonderful gift," he said. "When we are rehearsing in New York City, we work between three different studios and it's extremely expensive. We are very adaptable, but it's nice to be able to stay in one place."

Toni Smith, the faculty adviser for Skidmore's Summer Dance workshop, said the college and the community are thrilled to be hosting Lubovitch again.

"His choreographic voice is timeless and carries an emotional tone that strikes the heart of all those in the audience without exception," said Smith.

"We are so fortunate to have his remarkable company in residence at Skidmore College, passing on their pedagogy to young pre-professional dancers while they prepare to grace the SPAC stage."

The preparation for this week's shows plays a large part in the stay. The company will be rehearsing the full bill — the jazzy and rambunctious "Coltrane's Favorite Things," which was seen at SPAC in 2011, and "Transparent Things," which is inspired by Pablo Picasso's painting "Family of Saltimbanques." The latter is set to Debussy's String Quartet in G minor.

Lubovitch "Coltrane" to a Jackson Pollock action painting. "There are sheets of sounds, explosions of movement and ribbons of dance," he said of the work that yields handsome and painterly tableaux.

Making adjustments

But his newest creation, the disturbing “Black Rose,” will probably get the most thorough run-through. The residency will give him time to adjust moments in the dance that were not fully realized when it premiered last October.

“I like to go back and fix things,” said Lubovitch. “I want to get it right and the economy of the arts doesn’t always give me time to do that.” The work is drawn from gothic folk fables, cautionary tales that were common in oral tradition through the late 18th century.

“These are scary stories that were meant to frighten children and clue them into the dangers of the world,” said Lubovitch, who researched the classic stories.

“They were very dark, horror stories that eventually became well-known fairy tales from the Brothers Grimm and [Charles] Perrault. But the fairy tales we know are nothing like the gothic stories. They were much more violent with murder, rape and cannibalism.”

For the grisly dance, he commissioned composer Scott Marshall, with whom he collaborated on “Men’s Stories.” The composer liberally sprinkled the score with references to Tchaikovsky’s “The Sleeping Beauty.”

While the New York Times critic felt that “The Black Rose” is not the best of Lubovitch, [others heaped praise on the work]. The criticism does not rattle the choreographer. In his more than 47 years as artistic director of the Lar Lubovitch Dance Company, he has found that audiences and critics are either crazy for his work or lukewarm to it.

“That seems to be the tenor of my career,” he said. “People always seem to be at polar opposites when it comes to me.” But among local dance fans, Lubovitch is beloved. Smith invited the 72-year-old for his third residency at Skidmore because, as she said, he is “a true master who brings lyricism to a timeless status that will ultimately place his work with the classics in the dance legacy.”

Gregory Cary, co-founder and artistic director of Kaatsbaan, agreed.

“I have seen Lar’s work develop over the last 40 years,” said Cary. “Lar has infiltrated modernism with ballet (or classicism with modern dance) with an adventurous American viewpoint that both celebrates the refined classical technique of his dancers, yet youthfully abandons those stuffy, rigid stereotypes often associated with dated ballet styles. In a way that totally satisfies the viewer’s aesthetic of dance, Lar discloses what modern dance and ballet can be in the present.”

Indirect route

While Lubovitch defines what dance can be, his path to the art form was not assured. Originally a gymnast, the Chicago-born choreographer was an art student at the University of Iowa. While at school, he discovered dance and fell in love as it combined athleticism with visual art.

He transferred to The Juilliard School, where he studied under greats including Martha Graham, Jose Limon, Anna Sokolow and Antony Tudor. At the time, he did not know how lucky he was.

“I didn’t know who they were. If I did, I would have been bowled over by their presence,” he said.

While all of them have since passed, their impact remains with him today.

“I had amazing teachers who influenced me enormously,” he said. “Their craft and depth is what I strive for. I don’t want mere entertainment. I want to present meaningful work.”