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Lar Lubovitch

New Guy on Campus

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Celebrated Choreographer Lar Lubovitch Becomes a Professor at UCI

Photo by Rose Eichenbaum



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In one of the expansive, sunlit dance studios at the University of California, Irvine, Lar Lubovitch throws out some nuggets of wisdom about the movement quality he seeks. "If you're not breathing, the dynamics are flat," he says. "You can't capture my interest if it's a flat line." He particularly insists on the play of tension and release his choreography demands, how the energy emanates from the coiling of the spine: "You're just getting into poses, instead of a spiral so extreme it has to unspiral."

In July 2016, the university bestowed the title of Distinguished Professor on Lubovitch. At 74, the celebrated choreographer still possesses the deftness to demonstrate some of his steps, although he relies on former Lubovitch company dancer Katarzyna Skarpetowska, now a *répétiteur*, to fully flesh out the dance phrases for the 25 students in class. They're learning a solo called "Pardon my Affection," from *Thus is All*, a ballet he created for the Royal Danish Ballet in 1998.

Previously, Lubovitch's experience at the higher education level had been setting works on The Julliard School Dance Division and other university dance departments. But what compels him to teach at this stage of his career? Check out this slideshow of images of Lubovitch in the classroom to learn why he's going back to school.

Approaching Act III



In July 2016, the University of California, Irvine, bestowed the title of Distinguished Professor on Lubovitch. "My body is kind of quitting," he says. "This [position] walked toward me just when I was looking for my third or maybe fourth act. I'm trying to figure out my relationship to dance from this point forward. When they asked me to teach, I even said that means coaching, not teaching in an academic sense. I speak of movement, coach people and inform young dancers about what is required to do it."

The Study of Lubovitch



Lisa Naugle, chair of UCI's dance department, had wanted to recruit Lubovitch for years. "At this point in his life he has so much experience to offer," she says. "His work is enormous in detail, precision and musicality, and he can coach—one of his best skills is helping dancers become outstanding dancers. He can bring so much in terms of research—his repertory that the students can be exposed to and what he can give to the students technically and artistically. He's an enormously generous person."

Distance Learning



Lubovitch will use the research grant availed to him by the professorship to stretch the methods of teaching and analyzing dance in unconventional ways outside of the classroom. This fall, in conjunction with Seán Curran, dance department chair at NYU's Tisch School for the Arts, he plans to produce a series of cyber lecture/concerts called the *Heart of Dance*, showcasing major New York City-based dance companies. "I felt like, more than anything, the dancers need to see more real dance," Lubovitch explains. "It's one thing to be in a classroom talking about dance, but seeing is everything and is really the way to learn what dance is."

Information vs. Critique



For the UCI graduate students, Lubovitch concentrates on choreography and composition. "I try to inform them about what choreography is and the chains of dance that have evolved to get us here to this moment," he says. "I try to give them as much information as I can so their work will be informed. I give some assignments, but I don't feel it's my objective, nor is it even interesting to me, to criticize their work. I don't let anyone tell me how to choreograph, either." Photo of UCI students performing Lubovitch's *The Legend of Ten* in February.

What Can and Can't Be Achieved



"I think that there's a tendency in dance classes for people to be allowed to remain delusional," he says. "I find in many institutional situations that dancers are being handled carefully and lovingly, but the only way to really get better is to know what you're doing wrong. If you believe in the students, one would think that kindly telling the truth would help them to enlarge their understanding of what to do."