



Lar Lubovitch

by Steve Weinstein
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Lar Lubovitch, now in his 60s, is reaping the rewards of longevity. Long a fixture on the Downtown dance scene, he is being recognized, in the *New York Times*' words, as one of the best choreographers on the planet.

The all-too brief season at the wonderful Baryshnikov Arts Center, on the southwest edge of Hell's Kitchen, is a great place to experience Lubovitch's intimate choreography (with, it should be added, the most comfortable bench seating in New York). There are two distinct programs. I only saw one, but it included what, for this audience, is probably the most salient work, "Men's Stories."



'Crisis Variations' (Source:Paula Lobo/
Lar Lubovitch Dance Co.)

The subtitle, "A Concerto in Ruin," describes the musical momentum of the piece. Lubovitch and Scott Marshall have taken two of Beethoven's best-known piano concertos and deconstructed them. Along the way, there is occasional voiceover narration, a deeply bluesy number (Etta James??), a couple of treacly pop ballads and assorted distortions, noises and musical mash-ups.

Since dance is effectively physical movement

set to music, it all begins with the score. In a few spots, I didn't find the choreography follows (and yes, dance follows) the musical

pastiche. But it did often enough; and even where it didn't, the dancing was so magnificent that it didn't really matter.

Lubovitch has assembled some of the most talented young dancers working in New York today, many of them for other distinguished companies, including Alvin Ailey, Shen Wei, Baryshnikov's Hell's Kitchen Dance, and Stephen Petronio.

What makes "Men's Stories" so fascinating is its easy mix of traditional gestures and steps, many from classical ballet, with the standard tropes of modern dance. All of the men do well in complex movements that require immediate passage from a back arabesque into a back flip.

If there is a theme here, it's implied in that enigmatic subtitle. The men first appear in riding coats contemporaneous with the great composer. After some ensemble work, one dancer (Clifton Brown, a Bessie winner for his work with Ailey) brushes aside the others, and, after some macho posturing that will be repeated throughout the piece, he proceeds to execute a beautiful classical solo.

He's followed in quick succession by more ensemble work and solos from nearly all the dancers. The one standout for me had to be Jason McDole. Improbably short and sporting a Mohawk, the

Tharp veteran did two distinct solos. In the first, he executes a series of floor rolls and other athletic moves. The second incorporates a kazatsky-type knee killer. In all of them, he exhibits killer form, control and expert pacing to the music.

Some of the dancing borders on spastic, such as a passage where a man writhes on the floor while a '50s-type singer exhorts her son to act like a man. In an earlier voiceover, in which a '50s-type "Leave It to Beaver" dad has a first-time "birds and the bees" talk, two men partner each other in a slightly erotic pas de deux. (Maybe I've got Penn State on the brain, but I found the juxtaposition of the spoken narrative and the coupling a little disconcerting.)

The longish (40 minutes-plus) piece is roughly divided into three parts. I say "roughly," because the first part is by far the longest. The third begins with several tableaux vivants, in which the dancers are placed in geometrical positions that hark back to paintings of Christ's passion or the paintings of Pierro della Francesca.

The end of the piece comes when all of the men, in a barroom-like brawl, knock each other out. You know when Anita in "West Side Story" tells Maria that men make love like they fight? I think it's something like that: the line between lovemaking and fighting is bridged by the hard-driving passion that defines "real men" -- quite often, to their ruin.

The Second Act piece was a new piece, "Crisis Variations." A jumpy, percussion-accented score is very well performed by an on-stage five-piece mini-orchestra, Le Train Bleu, that was dominated by a bass saxophone.

The dancing is equally jumpy. Three men and four women throw each other around, crawl and writhe on the ground and assume various difficult poses. Dressed in standard East Village casual t-shirts and stretch pants, they present striking images. But, unlike "Men's Stories," I'm not sure if the whole is equal to the sum of its parts.

The other program being presented at Baryshnikov features pieces set to the music of Dvorak and Brahms as well as "Crisis Variations."

Lar Lubovitch Dance Company

Through Nov. 20 only

The Baryshnikov Arts Center

450 W. 37th St. 4th Floor

Between 9th & 10th Avenues, Hell's Kitchen

EDGE Editor-in-Chief Steve Weinstein has been a regular correspondent for the International Herald Tribune, the Advocate, the Village Voice and Out. He has been covering the AIDS crisis since the early '80s, when he began his career. He is the author of "The Q Guide to Fire Island" (Alyson, 2007).