



In “Elemental Brubeck” (2005), the Lar Lubovitch Dance Company draws on nearly classical-sounding jazz selections from the jazz great’s quartet. (ERIN BAIANO)

Gourmet Vanilla

Lar Lubovitch simply satisfies

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With the current taste for pyrotechnic, bells-and-whistles dancing, when everything is trick-driven tutti-frutti, it’s nice to be reminded why vanilla is still the most popular flavor.

Lar Lubovitch brought his company to the Joyce on February 23 for a two-week run. His is a gracious, musically coherent, spatially fluent, and emotionally accessible style, and his pleasingly diverse and accomplished company treats us to good, gimmick-free dancing in well-crafted works

As Lubovitch said in a recent interview, “I design music visually. And at my age, I’m not embarrassed to lay claim to it.”

On opening night, the all-jazz program opened with “Nature Boy: Kurt Elling,” set to sophisticated stylings of five pop classics by the Chicago-based jazz vocalist. The 2005 dance, formerly titled “Love’s Stories,” still needs a better title, but when Elling’s edgy rhythms and melodic deviations meet Lubovitch’s fluid, modern-ballet steps inflected with jazz, the result is entertainment, pure and simple.

Christopher Vo, in white as the protagonist, begins and ends the ballet with solos that interact with three featured couples to the title song, “Nature Boy,” and to “Smoke Gets In Your Eyes.” His dynamic lyricism illuminating Jack Mehler’s moody lighting.

The three duets in between reveal different shades of romance. Fleet Charlene Mei Katsuyoshi and Jonathan E. Alsberry end their bouncy flirtation to “The More I Have You” with a startling airborne embrace. Luscious Katarzyna Skarpetowska hangs like a necklace around Brian McGinnis’s neck in the striking start of their affair, “Prelude to a Kiss.” And petite, fiery Nicole Corea leaves lanky, soulful Reid Bartelme heartbroken when she abandons him at the end of “Every Time We Say Goodbye.”

One of two world premieres this season takes inspiration from the John Coltrane Quartet’s arrangement of Richard Rodgers’ “My Favorite Things,” recorded live in Copenhagen in 1963. Coltrane’s soaring saxophone improvisations have been described as “sheets of sound,” and this 18-minute jazz epic is a prime example. A reproduction of Jackson Pollock’s action field painting “Autumn Rhythm (Number 30)” forms the visual backdrop.

Unison passages where everyone faces the audience, which recall old-fashioned chorus-line routines, recur throughout. Dancers, holding hands in human wreaths – Lubovitch’s “ribbons of movement” – surge across the space, sweeping the palate clean between a Skarpetowska-Alsberry duet, a quartet for Katuyoshi, McGinnis, Bartelme, and Laura Rutledge, and a trio for Jonathan Campbell, Attila Joey Csiki, and Vo.

Lubovitch keeps the dancing incessant, and that, matched with the music’s relentless “wall of sound” and Pollock’s busy “action field,” leaves us over-sated with art theory by the time Skarpetowska and Alsberry finally collapse in mock exhaustion at the end of duet — the inevitable conclusion to such a visual, aural, and kinetic barrage.

“Elemental Brubeck” (2005) closes the program. Contrary to my expectation — this was my first viewing of it — the ballet doesn’t use Brubeck’s greatest hits, like “Take Five,” but instead nearly classical-sounding jazz selections from “Time Changes,” played by his quartet. The structure again involves a solo figure (Csiki) who knits together cascading passages by four couples.

Deftly unobtrusive sports clothes and full-skirted dresses by costume designer Ann Hould-Ward are done in light, muted tones, except for Csiki’s bright red jumpsuit. Since the ballet was created in collaboration between the San Francisco Ballet and Lubovitch’s Company, unsurprisingly, the steps lean more toward ballet than modern. Csiki dances with a big grin and Broadway flair — far more flamboyant than we tend to expect from Lubovitch — and high-kicking line-ups, back solo couples, faintly suggesting “Dance at the Gym” from “West Side Story,” but without the high stakes implications.