

Lar Lubovitch's dance 'about dance itself' comes to Yardley Hall

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Todd Rosenberg

The New York-based Lar Lubovitch Dance Company will perform at 8 p.m. Saturday at Johnson County Community College.

It seems that for dance to be considered artistically worthy or aesthetically fashionable these days it needs to be edgy, challenging and possessed of heady meaning.

Though it is certainly important, and often necessary, that choreography provokes audiences intellectually, isn't it just as vital that it supply beauty or otherwise provide pleasure?

An inspired piece of choreography doesn't need to mean or represent anything other than what it is — compelling human movement set to music.

“My work is about dancing itself — a physical response to music, and a feeling about moving,” said choreographer Lar Lubovitch, whose New York-based dance company will perform Saturday at Johnson County Community College.

Hailed by a New York Times critic as “one of the 10 best choreographers in the world,” Lubovitch creates intoxicating works that are ingeniously crafted out of a gorgeous, distinctively fluid and full-bodied modern dance movement vocabulary.

“Though every piece may have a different over text, the subtext is always the same — the sensation of dancing,” Lubovitch said. “You see, dance itself, without applying any further meaning to it, is a very deep subject.”

Founded in 1968, the Lar Lubovitch Dance Company is one of the oldest, highest-ranked modern dance companies in the world. The troupe will present a program of diverse pieces ranging from the entrancing “North Star,” a signature Lubovitch work, created in 1978, to “The Legend of Ten,” an exhilarating dance that premiered two months ago.



The Legend of Ten. Photo by Steven Schreiber.

Even though Lubovitch's pure movement approach to choreography is easy on the eyes and might be tagged "dance for dance's sake," his works are far from conventional and often quite dissimilar.

While "The Legend of Ten" offers a luscious choreographic reflection of the rich textures and emotional qualities of the Johannes Brahms "Quintet for Piano and Strings in F Minor," "North Star" is set to a minimalist composition by Philip Glass.

"I was one of the very first choreographers to use minimalist music to accompany a dance piece," Lubovitch said. "I used it first in 1975 — a Steve Reich piece — and then again for 'North Star,' which became a very popular work for the company, but which we haven't performed for many years."

Last year Lubovitch received a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts to support the reconstruction and performance of this pioneering work.

The Lubovitch program will close with John Coltrane's "My Favorite Things," a mirthful piece set to the jazz saxophonist's landmark interpretation of Broadway composer Richard Rodgers' song by the same name.

"I choreographed this work because, having grown up in Chicago, I was very close to jazz music," Lubovitch said. "I became interested in Coltrane's music because of what I perceived as its relationship to the visual art of the period during which he was working. Coltrane devised a system that critics called a 'sheet of sound,' a kind of nonstop barrage of sounds with various densities coming and going. Simultaneously, artists like Jackson Pollock were creating...paintings that looked very much to me like Coltrane's sheets of sound. So I tried to create a similar choreographic field of action.

"When we premiered the piece in New York, it had a backdrop that was a blowup of a Pollock painting," he said. "But I felt that it nailed the dance down too firmly. Though the painting is what influenced me to choreograph the music the way I did, I decided to remove the drop, so audiences could just take the dance on its own terms."



The weekend program includes “The Legend of Ten,” a recently premiered work by Lar Lubovitch featuring dancers Jenna Fakhoury and Reid Bartelme

Born and raised in Chicago, Lubovitch attended the University of Iowa as an art major.

“I had been a gymnast in high school, and had never seen dance before,” he said. “But thanks to Marcia Thayer, a woman who was struggling to create a dance department at the university, I saw dance for the first time. She brought in the José Limón company and I knew right away that was what I was meant to do.”

After a year in Iowa, Lubovitch relocated to New York where he earned a dance degree from the Juilliard School and then embarked on his choreographic career.

In addition to the more than 100 concert-dance pieces he has created for his company, Lubovitch also has choreographed for other ballet troupes, Broadway musicals, films, and ice-dance productions. His works include the ballet “Othello” (in the PBS series “Great Performances” and nominated for an Emmy Award), the “My Funny Valentine” sequence featured in the Robert Altman film “The Company,” his Tony Award-nominated choreography for Broadway’s “Into the Woods,” and his television ice ballet “The Sleeping Beauty,” as well as the ice dances he choreographed for several Olympic skaters.

One of Lubovitch’s recent projects is the Chicago Dancing Festival, which he co-founded in 2007 to honor his Midwestern roots. The festival brings an eclectic array of free-dance performances by world-class companies to about 12,000 audience members each summer.

“When I grew up there, Chicago had no dance at all,” Lubovitch said. “But in subsequent years dance has really taken hold there and gotten to the point where it’s a notable art form. I wanted to do something that would take dance in Chicago to the next logical step. The festival has introduced dance to many people who have never seen it before. It’s a way of inviting everyone to the party.”

ON STAGE

The Lar Lubovitch Dance Company performs works of its namesake choreographer at 8 p.m. Saturday at Yardley Hall at Johnson County Community College. Tickets are \$35 and \$45; information at 913-469-4445 or www.jccc.edu.

Read more: <http://www.kansascity.com/2011/01/21/2598385/lar-lubovitchs-dance-about-dance.html#ixzz1BuEJJHZD>