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Photo: Sarah Kinslow

Weaving music on stage

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Review: The Lar Lubovitch Dance Company, one of the world's foremost modern dance troupes, took center stage at the Goldstein Auditorium.

The audience waited with bated breath as the auditorium turned dark. With a flood of patterned blue and purple lights, the Lar Lubovitch Dance Company began to weave magic on the stage with “North Star,” the first performance of the night. The New York City based modern dance company performed on Nov. 11, at the Goldstein Auditorium.

Dancers moved in fluid, balletic motions, their arms entwined with each other, in the first dance ever set to the music of minimalist composer, Philip Glass. Lubovitch had received a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts to revive this 1978 dance as part of its American Masterpiece series. Performers dressed in the color of the night, a deep purple, moved across the stage in perfect harmony and left the audience spellbound.

In the fourth part of “North Star,” Nicole Corea performed solo and embodied agony and pain. She stayed at one spot on the stage and expressed herself with strong, harsh movements of the body, twisting and turning to the music. It was one of the shortest, yet most powerful performances of the night.

The next piece, “Vita Nova,” the six-minute duet from “Meadow,” was much slower and easy on the eye. Lubovitch choreographed “Meadow” for the American Ballet Theatre in 1999. The movements in this piece, set to composer Gavin Bryars’ “Incipit Vita Nova,” were very controlled, with dancer duo, Brian McGinnis and Katarzyna Skarpetowska, striking statuesque poses to the music and moving slowly in perfect coordination with each other.

“Coltrane’s Favorite Things” is the company’s newest composition. It is an 18-minute composition set to jazz saxophonist John Coltrane’s version of the song “My Favorite Things” from the musical “The Sound of Music.” It was the most energetic performance of the night with nine dancers bringing to life a carnival-like scene on the stage; often looking like children playing tag. It was clear that the dancers were having as much fun as the audience. They possessed an immense amount of energy and stamina and moved around the stage, each doing his or her bit to perfection. The performance was missing the usual backdrop that the company uses for this particular piece – an enlarged rendering of Jackson Pollock’s brown-on-gold “Autumn Rhythm (No. 30).”

The last dance routine, “Marimba,” reminded one of a forest, with the dancers dressed in various shades of green and brown. It started with 10 performers moving on one spot slowly and gradually gained speed. Their movements through the piece resembled ones of trees moving about in strong wind. The piece is set to composer Steve Reich’s “Music for Mallet Instruments, Voices, and Organ,” and is said to be one of Lubovitch’s most groundbreaking pieces. It was one of the first repertory dance set to minimalist music and introduced many Americans to the genre.

Lubovitch’s dance is beautiful and his dancers are flawless. His pieces do not tell a story and are not representational. They are there for the moment and then they are gone. Dancers move to music in waves and lifts, and instead of just moving their arms and legs, they twist and turn their whole body. They often seem to be in a trance-like state and on stage, each one of them working towards one goal – to please the audience. At one moment they look so agile it seems as if they are floating through the stage, and at another they seem immensely strong and powerful.

The four pieces presented during Thursday’s performance were very different from each other and showed the audience the wide range of the vision and creativity of the master choreographer.