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Dance review:

Lubovitch troupe dazzles at Miller Center

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Photo by Chris Callis

At long last, the Lar Lubovitch Dance Company came to Berks County to perform as part of Reading Area Community College's Downtown Performing Arts Series at the Miller Center for the Arts.

Lubovitch has earned a reputation as one of the top choreographers in the world, and the performance of his renowned company Saturday night proved why.

The 10 dancers entrusted with this choreography were not only capable of doing anything in terms of style and technique, but were sensitive musicians as well, helping Lubovitch to reach his goal of making music visual.

They began with a 1978 work, "North Star," using Philip Glass's electronic five-part work of the same title. The initial visual image of the company in dappled light, moving as one across the stage, was breathtaking. With sweeping gestures and mostly circular movement, the dancers stayed linked in various configurations,

giving a sense of freedom and natural rhythms.

In the second movement, a quartet did a smaller, more intense variation on the first ensemble, to music that sounded like an amusement park ride. The third movement, also a quartet, was intricate and buoyant, with a sense of humor.

Jenna Fakhoury's solo for the fourth movement was striking and extremely difficult; with her jerky, anguished gestures it looked like a strobe-lit version of Martha Graham's "Lamentation" - except there was no strobe light. This melted into a smooth, undulating version, and then a frenetic one.

Reid Bartelme began the last movement with a spiritual, classical solo; he was joined by the rest of the ensemble; reunited they ended as they began.

Jason McDole was featured in a solo dance called "Do You Be," a 2004 work set to Meredith Monk's piano/vocal "Double Fiesta." With Monk's anarchic scating in the background, McDole performed an inventive, sassy, energetic and loopy tour de force, with a nod to the eccentric dancing of Ray Bolger and Donald O'Connor.

The 2010 work, "The Legend of 10," featured the ensemble dancing with powerful emotions, exploring the topography of Brahms' Piano Quintet in F minor, first and fourth movements.

Like the late George Balanchine, Lubovitch is known for his musicality, and this work is a perfect example of how dance can make a piece of music completely understandable in terms of structure and drama.

The fourth movement was particularly evocative, with the use of an adagio pas de deux juxtaposed with furious, aggressive, abandoned dancing containing folk elements by the rest of the ensemble.

They ended with "Coltrane's Favorite Things," another 2010 work, celebrating the legendary live recording by the John Coltrane Quartet. Spirited and loose-limbed, the dance, like the music, established a tension between creativity and structure. The dancers exuded joy.



Photo by Nan Melville. Lar Lubovitch Dance Company performs "Coltrane's Favorite Things," a dance set to John Coltrane's "My Favorite Things," from "The Sound of Music."

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