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Nancy Colahan and Christine Wright in *A Brahms Symphony*

LOIS GREENFIELD

Patterns Expanding

By Deborah Jowitt

LAR LUBOVITCH DANCE COMPANY. At City Center (May 7 to 12). Premiere of *A Brahms Symphony*, also *Whirligogs*.

Lar Lubovitch opened his City Center season with a revival of his 1969 *Whirligogs* (set to part of Luciano Berio's tremendous *Sinfonia*), illuminating both his progression as a choreographer and his enduring interests.

Malevolent, slightly comic creatures, covered in black, march and scamper and entangle; they menace each other and a man and woman who flee them yet are susceptible to their influence. In 1969, they danced with precise grotesquery, a sharp-edged line. Today, Lubovitch's dancers are looser, schooled to emphasize flow and to let gestures flare or trickle away instead of stopping them to make pictures. As the goblins that lurk in all of us, they're more fumblingly human, less scary in a way. At first I thought this weakened the piece; I ended by liking it better than ever. This was partly due to the touchingly unaffected and clear performing of Ronni Favors and Rick Michalek. Favors is one of those dancers who appears to understand and inhabit every step, as if she were making it all up.

Whirligogs and Lubovitch's newest *A Brahms Symphony* point up something that it took me a long time to notice about Lubovitch—his links with earlier modern dance, with the choral works of Doris Humphrey or with those that José Limón was making when Lubovitch was a Juilliard student. Lubovitch seems relatively uninterested in manipulating the movement he creates through variation and repetition, but in each piece he does project a strong overall structure, and this is usually predicated on how the group as a whole moves together.

For *A Brahms Symphony*, he uses an ensemble of men and women in black (the women in long full dresses) as a kind of curtain that passes across the stage from time to time—dropping one or more of the four soloists from its midst, sweeping one away, crisscrossing in front of one with a big, wheeling pattern that now hides, now reveals what is behind it. Sometimes they pick up a soloist's ges-

tures; sometimes, in pairs or as an ensemble, they dance, in fluent 3/4 time, an expansive waltz. I like their unison dances least, love the complex flocking passages in which, perhaps, one woman is lifted, then another, someone spins, several run.

The dances for the four superb soloists are all ardent—beautifully, sometimes gushingly so. They leave you with a memory of arching backs, scooping arms, spirals, and dips and sailing legs. Relationships are suggested, but not emphasized. Gender is intermittently important. Nancy Colahan dances alone, then with Rob Besserer. Besserer dances alone and is swept by the ensemble toward the wings where he stares as if waiting for someone. Later the ensemble gives him Christine Wright, which seems to please him. Douglas Varone dances a mercurial, almost cross solo that I found the most interesting of all, perhaps because moments of brusqueness, suddenness punctuate its juicy flow; Varone dances it terrifically, almost as if he's wrestling it. The four do dance briefly together, and the work ends with all of them kneeling around a pool of light.