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Man Power

By Nancy G. Heller
For The Inquirer

So many men, and so much excellent dancing. Unlike most troupes, whose rosters are female-heavy, the Lar Lubovitch Dance Company is celebrating its 40th anniversary with a nationwide tour that features seven beautifully trained men and four women - who aren't chopped liver, either.

Lubovitch's troupe began its run at the Annenberg Center on Thursday night, presenting three of his works, an old favorite and two new compositions. The program opened with Lubovitch's signature piece, *Concerto Six Twenty-Two*, set to Mozart's *Concerto for Clarinet and Orchestra*. Choreographed nearly a quarter-century ago, this work retains its freshness and emotional power. Although the dancers seemed a bit uncertain at first, they quickly rose to the occasion, easily executing Lubovitch's challenging combinations - switching from lilting glides to quirky galumphs in a matter of seconds.

Concerto demonstrates that Lubovitch can be too literal, with a step for every note of the music, and he includes some overly dramatic gestures and facial expressions. But the piece also showcases his impressive ability to create smooth transitions from one segment of a dance to another; the unusual, powerful poses with which he ends most sections; and his skill at conveying both broad humor and great sorrow within the same work.

The most arresting part of *Concerto* is its central section, the "Adagio" for two men, familiar to Pennsylvania Ballet aficionados as a vehicle for Jeffrey Gribler and David Krensing. For my money no one could surpass Gribler and Krensing's interpretation, but Thursday night Jay Franke and George Smallwood did a fine job with this duet, from its dramatic lifts to its sense of quiet introspection.

Equally effective, in the final movement, was the lightning-fast, precise and very funny trio of Scott Rink, Kevin Scarpin and Katherine Wells, to say nothing of the amazing Jonathan E. Alsberry, a young dancer for whom gravity clearly has no meaning.

Little Rhapsodies, created in 2007 to Schumann's *Symphonic Etudes*, is an exuberant, playful, virtuosic piece for Franke, Alsberry and the marvelous Attila Joey Csiki.

Last on the bill was *Dvorak Serenade*, enhanced by Jack Mehler's dramatic lighting design. In this piece, Lubovitch makes excellent use of the contrast between his ensemble and the two principal dancers, Rink and Mucuy Bolles. Company member Brian McGinnis deserves special mention for his sheer watchability.