

The Oregonian

Rare visit by Lar Lubovitch Dance Company is wholly enjoyable

by Marty Hughley, *The Oregonian*
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Chris Roesing Lar Lubovitch's "Jangle"
mixed Old World folk flavor with a dash of brash attitude.

Over the years, the **White Bird Dance Series** has brought many spectacular companies to the Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall. Some have stood out for the thrilling athleticism of the performers, others for the striking conceptual conceit of a work, still others for movement vocabulary that speaks with a distinctively creative voice. But rarely has a company presented dances with a sense of wholeness to match that shown Wednesday night by the **Lar Lubovitch Dance Company**.

Lubovitch's 14-member troupe has no shortage of compelling dancers, and the veteran choreographer's three program pieces, all from the past decade, showed no lack of engaging ideas. But what made the evening such a treat was a sense of completeness -- the seamless integration of each movement phrase into a broader visual sweep; the sympathetic match of music, mood and gesture; the evidence of a cohesive aesthetic, at once craftsmanlike and magical, at work in everything.

Surely experience plays a part. Lubovitch has directed his company for just over 40 years, all the while also creating a large repertoire for other major dance companies, and projects for film, television, Broadway, even ice shows. In recent years he's concentrated on creating in his home base of New York, so this tour -- the company's first in more than a decade and its first visit to Portland in almost twice that long -- is a valuable opportunity to catch up.

Among the evening's virtues were Lubovitch's sensibilities in the choice and use of music, and his skill at filling the proscenium view with gorgeous ensemble movement. Both those aspects were at the fore in the opening "Jangle." Subtitled "Four Hungarian Dances," it was set to Bartok rhapsodies for violin and piano, the dancers echoing the folksy derivations of the music, linking arms in a celebratory circle, shimmying shoulders, and so on. And like the music, the choreography balanced an earthy grit with graceful complexities and symmetries, the troupe at times forming patterns of snowflake-like beauty. Even the backdrop played up the theme of contrast, with a black field marked by an arch of large, chalky X shapes, suggesting either barbed wire or a constellation of stars.

There were moments of individual virtuosity, too, though, such as a marvelously fluid solo by Jonathan E. Alsberry (a standout repeatedly on the evening), which was followed by a charming, capering duet by Charlaine Mei Katsuyoshi and Jay Franke.

The centerpiece "Men's Stories" occupied a more abstract realm by virtue of Scott Marshall's ever-shifting audio collage. Shards and swaths of orchestral strings, chattering static, a distant siren wail, electronic squiggles, Jimmy Scott's keening supper-club croon -- all these and more swirled together in a dream of woozy romanticism, like warped 78s playing on an out-of-range radio station.

The men wore costumes of an almost satirical elegance, with sheer tops, black tails, and high-waisted trousers accentuating the length of already sleek legs. And they moved from courtly poses to balletic turns to a simulated brawl full of roundhouse blows and kicks. This time the standout solo belonged to Scott Rink, looking implausibly lanky and mining the subtlest of gestures for comic effect.

The closing "Dvorak Serenade" was less distinctive than the rest of the program, but impossible to fault in its sheer loveliness, musicality and grace.