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Lar Lubovitch's classical modern dance experience

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Chris Roesing/White Bird Lar Lubovitch's "Jangle" as performed at Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall in Portland.

Portland Arts Watch has a few passing observations before the memory of Lar Lubovitch Dance Company disappears completely. Lubovitch himself was in the large Schnitzer Hall audience for White Bird show, and the company performed three long pieces from the recent Lubovitch repertoire -- "Jangle" (2008), "Men's Stories" (2000) and "Dvorak Serenade" (2007).

1. Lubovitch is still a "classical modern" choreographer. He studied with Jose Limon and Martha Graham at Julliard, after all (along with Anna Sokolow and Antony Tudor), and he loves the dramatic dancery pose. He also loves swift, well-drilled ensemble work and virtuosic solos, and he's not above a little wink to crowd for a laugh now and then, some of which may come from his Broadway experiences.

Although he's the right age (born in 1943), there's nothing of the Judson School dance experiments in his dances, no traces of Merce Cunningham, nothing from the "post modern" wing of the dance world.

2. His company is loaded with great male dancers. And "great" isn't too strong a word. Wednesday night the spotlight was on the diminutive Jonathan A. Alsberry, the much taller Scott Rink and Brian McGinnis, each gifted with a slightly different sort of kinetic intelligence. Alsberry is fast but is able to communicate each step and shiver because he's so precise; Rink is remarkably flexible for such a tall dancer -- he can bunch himself up into a little ball with the smallest of them -- but he also takes full advantage (or rather Lubovitch does) of the long lines his body can describe; McGinnis approach is more idiosyncratic, a little odder, his body able to fling itself into angles that upset our expectations, his personality coming through as a result. I've focused on these three, but the rest of the male contingent is strong, too, as they proved in the all-male "Men's Stories."



Chris Roesing/White Bird Macuy Bolles and Scott Rink in Lar Lubovitch's "Dvorak Serenade."

3. I liked the duets best. In "Jangle" that meant McGinnis and Katarzyna Skarpetowska, and in "Dvorak Serenade" it was Rink and Macuy Bolles. Lubovitch can be a little too "dramatic" for my personal taste, and the duets are subtle little things, without gigantic lifts or poses. McGinnis and Skarpetowska are nearly the same size, but his lifts seemed so natural and her movements through them so secure, not a bit of strain. And they are a great physical match -- he's a quick as she is, she's as powerful as he is. Great stuff.

4. We love live music. The Bartok duet for violin and piano of "Jangle" was ideal for live accompaniment, but we got the recorded stuff. There's just no substitute for the heat that real musicians would have generated onstage. Scott Marshall's audio collage for "Men's Stories" was made sense as a recorded piece, of course, a blend of classical music and electronic shrieks.

5. The audience loved it. You never know how something is going to be received. I thought the length of the program -- something around two-and-a-half hours including two intermissions -- might sap some of the crowd's enthusiasm. I was dead wrong, if the applause at the end is any indication.

Any other thoughts on the concert out there? We'll discuss.