

# A STORY OF EMOTIONS

“I have never worked so hard not to hear Bolero!”



*Lar Lubovitch's 1989 work Fandango, above, set to Ravel's Bolero, has been recreated and is being presented at the Joyce Theater next week, as Vez, with a new score by composer Randall Woolf.*

COMPOSER RANDALL WOOLF-- whose extensive credits include, among other things, the score for a 1997 ballet of *Where the Wild Things Are*, in collaboration with Maurice Sendak and Septime Webre— has just created the music for *Vez*, a work by choreographer Lar Lubovitch that comes to New York's Joyce Theater next week. Woolf, who has studied composition privately with David Del Tredici and Joseph Maneri, and at Harvard, where he earned a Ph.D, was given a clear challenge: a score that was “flamenco influenced, sensual and erotic but restrained.” This challenge was particularly subtle, since *Vez* is a reinvestigation by Lubovitch of his 1989 work *Fandango*, which was originally set to Ravel's *Bolero*.

We wanted to know more, so we spoke with Woolf.



*Composer Randall Woolf*

**CLASSICAL TV: You've written in so many forms, for and/or in collaboration with so many different kinds of artists. What are the special challenges and pleasures of writing for the dance theater?**

RANDALL WOOLF: It is quite an ego trip to see one's music through someone else's eyes... always nice to get so much attention! And it's very fun... the choreographer can bring out ideas and aspects of my piece that I never really noticed.

When I am writing for dance, I feel it is my job to serve the choreographer. There are always problems and requests for changes, cuts, inserts. For me, trying to satisfy these requests is an appealing technical challenge.

Another pleasure is the audience... a wider one, a different one. Dance concerts are seen by people who rarely hear modern classical music, and I very much appreciate the chance to be heard by them.

**CTV: How did *Veze* come about? Did you already know Lar Lubovitch's work well? What appeals to you about it?**

RW: Lar wanted to commission a new piece for his *Fandango*, and my friend Ransom Wilson suggested me. I know and love Lar's work. What appeals to me about it most is his musical intelligence. He really thinks like a classical composer, and the form of the music is beautifully elucidated by his dance. Beyond that, I love how he is able to use his geometric imagination to tell a story of emotions and mood.

**CTV: *Veze* has been described as "a reimagining of *Fandango*, which I believe was originally set to Ravel's *Bolero*. How did you and Lar initially discuss what he wanted for the new dance?"**

RW: He told me what he was looking for, which was a constellation of items: flamenco influenced, sensual and erotic but restrained, rhythmic and percussive idea, even though the dance is mostly fluid, and so on.

**CTV: Is there any reference to the Ravel score in your own, or was it to be a totally different thing?**

RW: There is no reference to the Ravel, and I have never worked so hard not to hear *Bolero*! A few times when I was composing and watching the video of the dance, I forgot to turn down the volume, and heard a second or two of the Ravel. Quite a shock... it took some time to recover! I did listen to a lot of flamenco music.

**CTV: And how did the process of composition work—was there periodic input from Lar, or did you simply bring the finished score to him?**

RW: After I had some ideas together, I played them for him, both for his approval and to gauge his reaction. (He was happy). Then I worked for a while, and suddenly the piece came together very quickly. So there was no chance for his input until it was "finished." I put that in quotes because I knew he was going to make further cuts in the dance, and I fully expected him to request changes. He made some good suggestions about the form and "rate of build," and asked for more vocals and clapping.

**CTV: Your work seems to go effortlessly beyond categories like "pop" and "classical." Are categories like that still useful?**

RW: I guess I find them useful, along with my other composer friends, as we invoke them all the time, especially with so much cross-pollination going on. I think those two categories are very different. I feel my music is completely in the classical music tradition, and is meant to be experienced in that context. One of my favorite things about classical music is that form is totally

specific. Even in pieces like *In C*, if you change the order of the sections, you really ruin the piece. Whereas pop music is quite often re-arranged, re-mixed, there are cover versions, and the greatness of the original can still come through.

I compose arrangements for John Cale, for concerts with his rock band and a small orchestra. The rehearsals are a wonderful experience. You can see the differences between the performers of these two musics right in front of you. The rock musicians play everything by ear and from memory, and can instantly adapt to whatever comes up in the live performance. The classical people are uncannily precise and can do just about anything if you can figure out a way to ask for it. For them the composer must specify almost everything, because they are a large group with little rehearsal time.

But interestingly, for the most part both can play like the other 'team' if they are asked to... we have had great improvised solos from classical players, and the rock players, when asked, can be just as precise and reliable as the classical ones. They both seem to really enjoy watching how the other team operates. And in the middle is John, who is both types.

*For more about Lar Lubovitch's *Vez* at the Joyce Theater, go [here](#).*