

# That Lubovitch Touch

by SUSAN REITER on Feb 8, 2012 • 1:39 pm



Lubovitch dancers Nicole Corea and Reid Bartelme in *Histoire du Soldat*. Photo: Steven Schreiber.

*This winter will play host to a varied program of choreographer Lar Lubovitch's work*

Back in the 1980s, when live music was not the rarity it has become for dance performances, Lar Lubovitch often collaborated with Ransom Wilson, a prominent flutist and conductor. Among Wilson's projects was the Solisti New York Orchestra, which was in the pit for several Lubovitch company seasons—including the premiere of perhaps his best-known work, *Concerto Six Twenty-two*.

More recently, Wilson has formed Le Train Bleu, a musical collective of some of the city's most exciting young musicians. Among its projects is a residency at Brooklyn's Galapagos Art Space; last year, Wilson reunited with Lubovitch, inviting him to create the choreography for Le Train Bleu's performance of *Histoire du Soldat*, Stravinsky's bracing and unusual musical drama for chamber ensemble, actors and dancers.

The work's single Galapagos performance took place on a snowy evening last March, so it was over by the time anyone saw Roslyn Sulcas' enthusiastic *New York Times* review. She wrote that Lubovitch "finds ingenious ways to deploy the limited space, deepening our sense of the music's spare yet rhythmically complex instrumentation."

Happily, *Histoire du Soldat* returns this week for three performances, sharing a program at Manhattan Movement and Arts Center (MMAC) with *Crisis Variations*, Lubovitch's most recent work, which had its premiere last November. During a recent pre-rehearsal interview at a café near Union Square,

Lubovitch said he had no hesitation about accepting Wilson's offer for a one-night-only event in an especially tiny venue.

"It was an invitation to stretch, which is always desirable," he said. "I like to be in different spaces as often as possible, in the spirit of seeing the work differently—or choreographing for the scale of the specific space."

A 1918 collaboration between Stravinsky and Swiss writer C. F. Ramuz, *Histoire du Soldat* is based on a Russian folk tale and was intended "to be read, played and danced." In the course of its hour-long duration, a naive soldier encounters the devil, in various guises, and is persuaded to trade his violin for the promise of great wealth—with further adventures ensuing.

Originally, only the tango/waltz/ragtime sequence in the work's second half was choreographed, but Lubovitch has created dance action for other sections of the work, establishing the soldier's loping, loose-limbed character right from the start. Reid Bartelme dances the Soldier, with Attila Joey Csiki as the nimble, manipulative Devil and Nicole Corea as the princess.

At MMAC, where Marni Nixon will appear as the narrator, he plans to maintain the intimacy of the piece. That space "has a little bit more room, but we're trying to make it very compact, because it called for a small amount of space. So rather than try to stretch the dance out, we'll make the space accommodate the origins of the dance."

The movement Lubovitch devised, particularly for the men, is pungently character-flavored and captures the music's shifting, complex rhythms. "I wanted to set the characters in that time period, so he's a World War I doughboy. So much of what Stravinsky wrote was based on folk melody, and was folk dance-based. But I think the texture of the music, and the subject, have an early 1920s, Weimar Republic tone. It's early music theater—early performance art, really."

On the double bill at MMAC, Le Train Bleu will also perform Yevgeniy Sharlat's score for *Crisis Variations*. Lubovitch was introduced to the Russian-born composer, now an assistant professor at the University of Texas in Austin, by Wilson. Lubovitch commissioned the score but initially choreographed the work for seven dancers to Liszt's *Transcendental Etudes* and asked Sharlat to compose a contemporary score that followed some of that work's structure.

"We worked separately. I didn't want him to write *to* the choreography—I wanted the music to have a disparate relationship, to some degree," the choreographer explained, admitting that the process was quite different from his usual approach. "It was very nervous-making. That again was the point: to stretch and try to open my own rulebook to new possibilities. I went out of my comfort zone."

The busy Lubovitch will offer a different program the following weekend to open the 92nd Street Y's annual Harkness Dance Festival, which has a theme of "Stripped/Dressed" this year. In the first half, an interview/lecture/demonstration, a rotating eminent dance writer will speak with Lubovitch while dancers in practice clothes perform excerpts from dances. The second half will offer a full performance of *The Legend of Ten*, a 2010 work set to two movements of a Brahms quintet.

The Harkness performances mark a return to the building where Lubovitch presented his first-ever dance concert in the city in 1968.

And Lubovitch will reconnect with his past in another way when he choreographs for the Martha Graham Dance Company's March season at The Joyce Theater, where he was invited to create one of the company's ongoing series of *Lamentation Variations*.

“That’s where I began—I wanted to be a Graham dancer,” he said, “I also wanted to be a choreographer, but I needed to dance for a while and I wanted to do my dancing with Martha. But that didn’t happen.” He danced with the Harkness Ballet, Pearl Lang and others, and the rest is history. The day after the final performance at the Y, he will go into the studio with the current generation of Graham dancers.

*Lar Lubovitch Dance Company*

*Feb. 10–12, Manhattan Movement & Arts Center, 248 W. 60th St. (betw. Amsterdam & West End Aves.), [www.manhattanmovement.com/event/LAR](http://www.manhattanmovement.com/event/LAR); \$15+.*

*Feb 17–19, 92nd Street Y Harkness Dance Festival, 92nd Street Y, 1395 Lexington Ave., [www.92Y.org/harknessfestival](http://www.92Y.org/harknessfestival); \$15.*

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