

To Celebrate Lar Lubovitch Dance Co's 50th Anniversary, Luminous Artist, Peggy Baker Reflects on Dancing with Lubovitch



By Peggy Baker

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A Piece of Heaven

Editors Note: I am a great fan of Peggy Baker. I encountered her in NYC where, performing as a solo artist, she captured my eye and heart with her eloquent physicality and vibrant presence. I am still in awe and am not alone. Not only a brilliant performer, she is a compelling and sensitive writer, and I am delighted that she accepted my invitation to write about her experience of dancing with Lar Lubovitch early in her stellar career. Thank you so much Peggy. And Happy Happy 50th Anniversary, Mr. Lubovitch. --Christine Jowers, Editor of *The Dance Enthusiast*.

For Tickets to the Lar Lubovitch 50th Anniversary Season at The Joyce Theater April 17 - April 22, click [here](#).



Peggy Baker in Rehearsal for Lar Lubovitch's *Exultate Jubilate*; Photo by Carla Smith (Courtesy of Peggy Baker)

In December of 1980 – at the age of 28, but still very raw and incomplete as a dancer – I moved from Toronto to New York City to join the [Lar Lubovitch Dance Company](#). For the previous two summers I had taken intensive workshops with the company and the encounter with Lar's dances smashed my world wide-open. His ebbing and flowing unison passages created the vivid, startling and powerful impression of natural forces at play, while episodes in which every dancer had different steps coalesced as surging choreography teeming with deep musical pleasures, woven together by rich, ribbony movement lines flowing through and among bodies. Awe in the face of the deep mysteries, and the image of a vibrantly diverse collective emerged robustly within each work. His dancers declared themselves as distinct and distinctive individuals who combined forces toward a higher purpose.

Throughout my first year in Lar's company I felt overwhelmed by the difficulty of the work and teetered on the verge of collapse. I was intensely conscious of holding the steps of Lar's dances in my body, of the responsibility I had in

learning them, of how much they were affecting me. The extraordinary people who danced for Lar at that time – [Doug Varone](#), Nora Reynolds Daniel, [Christine Wright](#), Ronni Favors, Rob Besserer, Nancy Colahan, Charles Martin, Harry Laird, Mia Babalis, [Mark Morris](#), Sylvain Lafortune, John Dayger, Kathy Casey, Rick Michalek, Jeanne Solan, Leonard Meek, [Bruce Wood](#) – became my closest friends, and still populate my dreams.



Peggy Baker and Sylvain Lafortune in *Of My Soul*; Photo by Tom Brazil (Courtesy Lar Lubovitch Dance Co Archives)

Lar was intense in the studio, very charged up physically. At the beginning of rehearsal, he would enter the studio side of his West 18th Street loft with a

huge cup of coffee that he kept at the ready and used to fuel himself. Depending on the dance, he gave instructions or was up on his feet moving at a ferocious pace while we scrambled to copy him. Every so often he turned his head and asked, "Who got that?" A couple of dancers excelled at picking up material this way, and as long as they kept up he would keep going.

On occasions when a dancer got frustrated or touchy, and admonishments of "don't go there" failed, Lar would lift them up, turn them around, and put them down somewhere else. Rehearsals were demanding and efficient. There was never any marking. There were pillars near the back wall of studio, and it was great to hug one when you were really beat; this cool, solid pillar against your overheated sagging body. The loft had been a sweatshop before Lar got it and after more than 10 years of rehearsal the floor still occasionally coughed up sewing needles.



Calvacade; Pictured are Nancy Colahan, Christine Wright, and Rob Besserer; Photo by Jack Mitchell
(Courtesy Lar Lubovitch Dance Co Archives)

All through the 1980s we did a huge amount of international touring, a lot of it sponsored by the State Department: Canada, Mexico, England, France, Italy, Germany, Luxemburg, Poland, Romania, Greece, Israel, Hong Kong, Singapore, Korea, Taiwan, Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, Bali, Japan. For six weeks in 1984 the company was in residence at the choreographic centre in Angers, France where Lar choreographed Concerto 622. We lived and worked in the same building, and when we arrived there was a mad scramble to choose bedrooms, frantic bartering among us to swap lamps and chairs, all of us rearranging our rooms to deconstruct the conformity. We shopped and cooked together, we trained and rehearsed for impossibly long hours, and we sat in the kitchen every night talking long after the rest of the town was asleep.

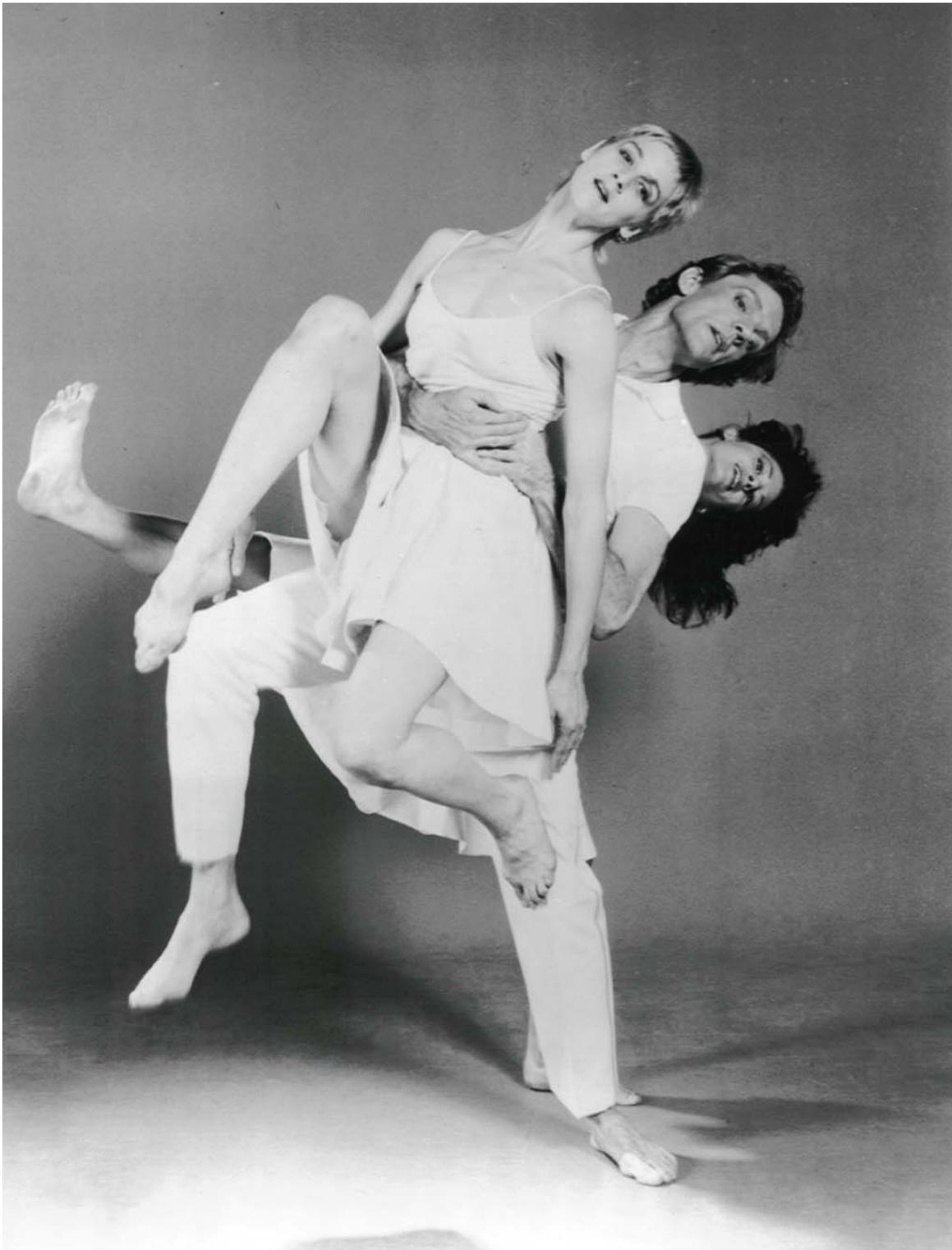


Peggy Baker in Dressing Room on Tour (1981) Lar Lubovitch on Tour in Bali (1983); Photos by Peggy Baker

Dancing at Carnegie Hall we had to run down a staircase through a hallway and back up stairs simply to cross over from one side of the stage to the other. In a small theatre in Greece where our music was run from a tape recorder in the wings, the machine was accidentally unplugged in the middle of a dance and all of us on stage were caught in a holding pattern – literally running around in circles – until the sound eventually resumed and we found our way to a cue in [Steve Reich](#)'s circular music.

At the Berliner Ensemble's theatre we danced against the gritty pull of a painted floor cloth, and in Lisbon on a stage so steeply raked we felt as though we were careening toward the front and crawling toward the back.

In Mexico City we danced in one of the most opulent theatres I have seen anywhere in the world. Diego Rivera murals on the lobby walls, tiers of gilt boxes, embroidered velvet upholstery, exquisite carpets and magnificent chandeliers. The luxurious dressing rooms, one for each of us, were like first class cabins on an ocean liner. We took oxygen in the wings whenever we left the stage – so strange, liking drinking air.



Concerto Six Twenty-Two; Pictured are Peggy Baker, John Dayger, and Mia Babalis; Photo by Martha Swope
(Courtesy Lar Lubovitch Dance Co. Archives)

In theatres around the world, grand and shabby, everywhere you turn – looking into a mirror, climbing a staircase, opening a door, putting your hand on a barre – you feel the resonance of the past. History offers itself as a groove worked in wood, as paint and fabric faded by light, as beams and floorboards settled in by the vibration of music, voices, footfall. Lar's work left its own imprint everywhere we danced.

The experience of performing a great work of choreography that you understand and appreciate and have mastered is a piece of heaven. It sets up a kind of resonance that reorganizes your structure and alters your destiny. Dancing for Lar was of the utmost consequence in my life. *North Star, Marimba, Exultate Jubilate, Cavalcade, Les Nocces, A Brahms Symphony, Big Shoulders, Of My Soul* – are part of my body, part of my past certainly, but also part of who I am yet to become.



Peggy Baker Practicing *A Brahms Symphony* in a Montreal Studio (circa 1986); Photo Carla Smith (Courtesy of Peggy Baker)

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For More on Peggy Baker watch Peggy Baker /Four Phrases artful animation and documentary hybrid that travels through a variety of techniques to celebrate Baker's work and legacy. Check it out Here. or Check out our 2012 interview with her on The Dance Enthusiast.

<http://www.dance-enthusiast.com/features/view/Lar-Lubovitch-Dance-Company-50th-Anniversary-Peggy-Baker-The-Joyce-#.WtQwAw4R0al.gmail>