

Dance

Lar Lubovitch excites and inspires

By [Laura Vernaci](#) Tue, Feb 01, 2011



The saying that life after 40 is downhill would definitely not apply to the Lar Lubovitch Dance Company, now in its 42nd season. The internationally recognized modern company exemplified its wisdom, but not its age, on Saturday night in front of a gracious crowd at Yardley Hall. The ten-member ensemble exquisitely executed its four-piece program but the real highlight of the night was Lar Lubovitch's post-performance interview.

Lubovitch humbled himself as he recounted four decades of directing and choreographing for his namesake company and relived his beginnings as a dancer. He choreographed his very first work at the University of Iowa as he prepared to audition for Juilliard with no prior dance experience. Relying on his strong art and gymnastic background, he went on to study under dance legends Martha Graham, José Limon, and Antony Tudor. Lubovitch said his motivation at nineteen years old is still present today and he depends on this and his intuition when creating new works.

The night, however, opened with *North Star*, an early, signature work for the company that premiered in 1978 and only recently returned to the repertoire. Set to Philip Glass' minimalist composition by the same name, the piece was utterly mesmerizing as the dancers continuously moved, intertwining with each other. It was like watching the ebb and flow of tides on the beach as the dancers lapped back and forth across the stage, rotating on an axis around the elegantly tall Reid Bartelme who moved like a gazelle. Lubovitch later noted that from an aerial perspective, the beginning sequence appears as one giant body, with the dancers unifying as its head, body, and appendages. The intimate connection between the dancers allowed for unrivaled musicality and fluidity.

Contrastingly, Jenna Fakhoury's solo was sharp, frenetic, and on the cusp of hysterical. She moved almost uncontrollably, but with precision and calculation. The energy that the dancers exerted radiated out into the audience and as the curtain closed, hearts were still pounding from the wonder and excitement.

The duet from *Meadow* began with a breathtaking visual of Katarzyna Skarpetowska perched above Brian McGinnis. The couple deliberately maneuvered around the stage, almost in slow motion, creating living sculptures. Both dancers tested themselves with each lift and balance, displaying a perfect combination of strength and grace. The peaceful moving art was set in opposition to Gavin Bryars' *Incipit Vita Nova*. The score's instrumentals were full of tension and aggressively competed against one another. But the powerful, operatic Latin text matched the harmony of the dance with phrases such as "Omnis vita est immortalis" (All life is immortal) and "Incipit Vita Nova" (A new life is beginning.)



The last two selections of the evening were new works for the season. Similar to the first piece, *The Legend of Ten* began with nine dancers and Fakhoury joined partway through to execute a duet with Bartelme. However, this piece had a dramatic air—set to the first and fourth movements of Johannes Brahms’ Quintet for Piano and Strings in F Minor, Opus 34. Throughout the complex and very involved choreography, there were several themes that the dancers returned to, keeping the work grounded. *Legend* was one of the longer pieces, but, if anything, the dancers rallied and gained more momentum as it continued. While each dancer had a moment to stand in the spotlight, Bartelme and Skarpetowska again stood out. Lubovitch quoted Martha Graham later on stating that the center of the stage is wherever the strongest dancer is.

Changing pace, *Coltrane’s Favorite Things* lightened the mood as the dancers let loose to John Coltrane’s jazzy interpretation of Richard Roger’s iconic tune. The stage was stripped bare, allowing audiences to see what happens “off stage.” Dancers hydrated themselves, adjusted their costumes, stretched and even softly chatted. While slightly distracting, very seldom do people get to participate as fully in a performance and gain insight into the behind-the-scenes. Also detracting were the stiff, leather jazz shoes which cut off the dancers’ balletic lines.

Lubovitch’s goal for the final selection was to play on the music’s improvisational quality even though all of the dancing was choreographed. Jonathan E. Alsberry and Skarpetowska accomplished this best, dancing loose or sharp when necessary, emitting that care-free attitude which jazz music embodies and shimmying until their hearts were content. Attila Joey Csiki also was eye-catching for his infectious energy.

The company’s one-night performance was one of the most talented, exciting, and inspiring dance demonstrations I have seen in a long time. The members danced together like a family, successfully captivating and entertaining the audience. Often times, older companies lose their luster or become stuffy and outdated. However, the Lar Lubovitch Dance Company was fresh and energetic and is sure to be a leading-edge, reputable organization for many more years.

REVIEW:

Johnson County Community College Performing Arts Series

Lar Lubovitch Dance Company

Saturday, January 29, 2011 at 8 p.m.

Yardley Hall, Johnson County Community College

12345 College Blvd., Overland Park, KS

For tickets call 913-469-4445 or visit <http://www.jccc.edu/performing-arts-series/>

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