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Lar Lubovitch's bizarre 'Blood'



Leonard Meek, Kathy Casey, Ronni Favors cavort in Lubovitch's joyous "Concerto Six Twenty-Two."

By CLIVE BARNES

IF Dr. Frankenstein enlisted the help of Steve Martin to start a dance company, it might well have opened shop with a work like Lar Lubovitch's "Blood," which is having its world premiere as part of this week's season by the Lar Lubovitch Dance Company at the City Center Theater.

The music is George Antheil's "Ballet Mechanique," written in 1926 for a movie by the painter Fernand Leger and scored for eight pianos, a player piano and the weirdest assortment of percussion instruments heard outside of Bedlam.

For some reason — and it's been around enough — I had never heard this notorious score before. Ezra Pound heralded it as "the dawn of new age in music," but the composer himself virtually rejected it before his untimely death in 1959.

It's a very interesting score, a little like Varese and still capable of making John Cage sound old hat. Unfortunately, Lubovitch has chosen not to take it seriously and to use it simply for a not-especially-funny expressionist horror show — full of blood, huge hammers and meat cleavers which all find their targets stuck in one

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head after another.

The most musical of choreographers, Lubovitch is true to the music in his way, and he probably thought the generally serious tenor of his programming might benefit from a joke. But it's a very heavy-handed one.

Fortunately, the rest of the program was absolutely joyous, and since his new and brilliant "Concerto Six Twenty-Two" had only once been seen at a Carnegie Hall preview earlier in the year, this, in effect, counted as a premiere.

What a bewitching work this is. Few modern-dance choreographers have captured the explosive delicacy that Lubovitch gives us in this plotless exposition of Mozart's Clarinet Concerto in A major, K. 622.

Funny, grave, playful and, above all, musical, Lubovitch uses the buoyant score as springboard for exercises in the imagination.

The Adagio, where two young men partner each other, is the most adventurous experiment with kinetic plastique — fresh, charming and handsomely danced by Sylvain Lafortune and Rick Michalek.

Yet the peasant-tinged round dances of the opening and the intricate counterpoint of the jokey finale are equally Mozartian in their cut and thrust.

Like many modern-dance choreographers of his generation, the Chicago-born Lubovitch, who has been choreographing for nearly two decades, is now 43. He often seems very close to classic ballet.

This was not only evident in this Mozart, but also in the program's closing work, his by now familiar "A Brahms Symphony."

It is set to the first three movements of the composer's Third Symphony — why it omits the finale is anyone's guess and seems a mistake — and in its way, it recalls Leonide Massine's Ballet Russe symphonic experiments of the '30s.

With the small but athletically poised company led by Lafortune, Peggy Baker, Jeanne Solan and Bruce Wood, the work's swirling images of Romantic loss and heroism emerged with a bold visual vigor.

In the past few years, Lubovitch has been like a gambler on a roll, and he has parlayed himself and his company into the top rank. This is now a choreographic force to be reckoned with.