

Dance: Lar Lubovitch at City Center

By ANNA KISSELGOFF

THERE must be something about Lar Lubovitch's choreography that attracts extremely good dancers — for these are the kind of dancers the Lar Lubovitch Dance Company always has. Certainly the troupe's current season, which ends Sunday afternoon, shows off some of modern dance's most polished performers.

The versatility of the Lubovitch dancers is most apparent in the range of their second program, given on Wednesday night at the City Center, 131 West 55th Street. "A Brahms Symphony," the season's premiere and repeated from the previous night, is a glorious ode to onrushing movement. No one interested in passionate dance can afford to miss it.

By contrast, Charles Moulton, a guest choreographer, affords the dancers a chance to sit still. When Mr. Moulton first made his mark as an avant-garde choreographer, it was with pieces such as this 1980 "Nine Person Precision Ball Passing." There were some who said that three tiers of dancers passing balls to each other without moving anything but their upper bodies did not constitute dancing. But then dancing obviously is a matter of definition.

As a middle ground, the company

offered Mr. Lubovitch's fascinating "Big Shoulders" and an older work from 1976, a chamber version of Stravinsky's "Noces."

"Big Shoulders" was inspired by a Carl Sandburg poem about Chicago. A now discarded program note spoke of "architecture and people working." There was a set of a construction site replete with a crane and girder. There was no music last year. This year, Mr. Lubovitch has added a tape of sounds associated with construction sites — the interplay between this buzz and whirl definitely adds a fuller dimension to the building block choreography onstage.

Ten dancers in brightly colored leotards dynamically work in and out of structures formed by their bodies. The motifs of balance and support or lack of support give the shapes they form considerable distinction. But there is always room for human interaction — Peggy Baker's arm-swinging, jumping solo; a bridge-building cluster from Mia Babalis, Kathy Casey, John Dayger, Ronni Favors and Rick Michalek; a brief gymnastic duet for Rob Besserer and Leonard Meak followed by Nancy Colahan's solo, phrased so that each movement has complete value. Mr. Lubovitch's movement phrases here are action packed.

Normally, this amount of movement never interferes with clarity of visual impact. Mr. Lubovitch's approach to "Les Noces," however, makes his choreography look busy.

One longed for the cleaner lines and massed forms of the original 1923 ballet by Bronislava Nijinska. Mr. Lubovitch's approach is less formal, less abstract. Being more realistic, it oddly looks less contemporary. Partly this is because he uses an all-purpose modern-dance idiom in which the classroom moves are easily recognizable as such.

Nonetheless Christine Wright, dancing with blazing fervor, and Douglas Varone, looking properly numb, danced to the energetic hilt as the peasant couple forced into an arranged wedding.

Mr. Moulton's concerns in "Nine Person Precision Ball Passing" belong to another world. Three tiers of dancers with tennis balls pass the balls to one another in their row and gradually increase the complexity of the ball swapping. They pass from row to row or diagonally across — or sometimes to the person two rows above or below. They also splice in gestures — an arm or two swings out, a ball is tossed or bounced, a trio clusters with backs bent over.

The repetitive music by A. Leroy has a jolly tinkle matched by the mix of playfulness and precision onstage. The blend of design and constant activity suggests formalists can have fun. This is minimalism with a difference. Above all, the good humor and finesse of the performers make the piece a highlight of the program.