

Lar Lubovitch Lets Loose at Jacob's Pillow

Dance review by [Bess J.M. Hochstein](#)



Photo: Todd Rosenberg

Lar Lubovitch is a master of shape in space. In his work, form and flow take precedence over narrative or message, and his dances are a joy to watch. In the [Lar Lubovitch Dance Company's](#) appearance at Jacob's Pillow, now through July 24, audiences can see the consistency of his craft and the integrity of his vision in four works that range a three-decade span.

North Star (1978) has the distinction of being regarded as the first modern dance set to music by [Philip Glass](#). (Yes, [Lucinda Childs](#) did the choreography for [Einstein on the Beach](#), which debuted in 1976, but that was an opera.) Lubovitch's choreography ebbs and flows with the spellbinding music, the dancers clustering together and spinning apart, moving like a single organism expanding and contracting with breath. Movement ripples through the dancers, like a wave – not repeated but transformed into different shapes – flowing smoothly, never still. While the dancers' appearances are distinct, their individuality is subjugated to the gestalt of the dance.

The exception is a solo by Jenna Fakhoury, trapped in the cone of a spotlight on an otherwise dark stage. Feet rooted, she throws herself into a sequence of jagged, rhythmic movements that take over her entire body, which switch to smooth, sweeping full-body moves, guided by a similar change in the music. The brief, expansive solo by Reid Bartelme that follows, in which he quickly traverses the stage, serves as a contrast to her immobility, and it's a relief when the ensemble reassembles and resumes its graceful ebb and flow.

Duet from Meadow, an excerpt of a work premiered at the American Ballet Theatre in 1999, showcases the prowess and presence of Lubovitch's dancers. Set to *Incipit Vita Nova* by [Gavin Bryars](#) (another favorite composer of modern choreographers), it opens with Brian McGinnis holding Katarzyna Skarpetowska aloft, rigid, in a sort of asymmetric, upside-down tabletop position; he slowly lowers her as her shape gradually morphs and she touches down, only to be lifted again into another striking pose.

Here Lubovitch sculpts arresting shapes of the dancers' bodies; the pace is gradual, but not plodding, so the audience has ample time to enjoy the gorgeous forms in transition. Despite the strength and flexibility required to execute the duet, neither dancer shows exertion, only calm self-possession. This brief piece ends as it began, with McGinnis holding Skarpetowska aloft. As he moves slowly in a circle, they are like a statue rotating on its pedestal.



The Legend of Ten (2010), set to Brahms' *Quintet for Piano and Strings in F Minor, Opus 34*, features fast-flowing, clever formations of nine dancers spiraling and spinning off into three groups of three, and back together again. The tenth member of the company, Fakhoury, strides onto the stage, which seems to precipitate a sort of geometric crisis. The pace slows, and all the other dancers except for Bartelme leave the stage, marking the end of the music's first movement. *Dance 2*, to Movement IV, begins with Fakhoury and Bartelme (in photo by Cherylynn Tsushima) moving slowly, crablike, across the front of the stage on their backs. They perform a series of sweeping, lover-like duets, interspersed with ensemble sequences that incorporate folk-dance-style conventions, with rhythmic stomping, fist-shaking, and high-kicking phrases, until, by the end, the couple is absorbed into the group and the spinning, spiraling, unfolding formations resume, under a new geometric balance and harmony that allows for one group of four.



The program ends with *Coltrane's Favorite Things* (2010; photo, left, by Todd Rosenberg), a joyous romp with elements of swing dance as a series of high-spirited, fast-paced duos, trios, and quartets sweep onto the stage in sync with the music's various solos. The scenic design—barn walls and doors exposed, littered with ladders, a mannequin, and other items, set back behind a semicircle of multicolored floor lights in front of which the dancers perform in crisp rehearsal-type costumes—lends the piece a feeling of a backstage party, which is reinforced by the dancers' genuine-seeming smiles. They are loose-limbed on top, with non-stop, rapid-fire legwork moving them briskly across the floor, all to the rolling rhythms of the music. It was a crowd-pleasing end to an evening of beautifully crafted dances that undoubtedly pleased both longtime Lar Lubovitch lovers and new fans alike.

Lar Lubovitch Dance Company in the Ted Shawn Theatre

Now through July 24

Jacob's Pillow, Becket, MA

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