

The powerful force of dance: Lar Lubovitch Dance Company to perform new and classic works at Syracuse University

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Photo courtesy of Erin Baiano

Choreographer Lar Lubovitch is a longtime devotee of jazz music. He pays tribute to a visual and music artist in "Coltrane's Favorite Things," which premiered in New York City in February 2010. Lubovitch choreographed the piece to Coltrane's live recording of "My Favorite Things." The dance is performed against a backdrop reproduction of Jackson Pollock's "Autumn Rhythm (Number 30)." The Lar Lubovitch Dance Company will perform the piece Nov. 11 at Syracuse University.

To some, dance is the best way to let loose on a boozy Saturday night. To others, it's the stuff of nightmares, a terrifying ritual evoking embarrassing high school memories. Those more practiced in the craft consider dance a pure art form where motion is the paint and the human body is the canvas.

To modern dance choreographer **Lar Lubovitch**, it's much more than that. He considers dance a way to imagine utopia and show it to the world.

"Dance is one of the only surviving forms that's emblematic of people sharing a world in a very democratic and spiritual way," Lubovitch says. "It speaks to everyone's innermost ideal about human behavior and human treatment and interaction."

The soft-spoken choreographer only has a few minutes to talk by phone recently before leaving for a show in Pennsylvania. Lubovitch, a Chicago native, founded his dance company in New York City in 1968, and it has toured extensively nationally and internationally.

Lubovitch is bringing his company to town for the very first time. He will be in Syracuse for the Nov. 11 performance.

The New York Times calls Lubovitch, “one of the 10 best choreographers in the world.” As one of the earliest pioneers of setting modern dance to minimalist music, he has choreographed some of the most influential dances in modern American history.

“I call them dances for a very specific reason because dance itself is a very powerful force,” Lubovitch says.

“The main subject of all of my works is dancing, really.”

The National Endowment for the Arts acknowledged Lubovitch’s influence when it gave him a grant to revive his 1978 dance “North Star” as part of its American Masterpiece Series. “North Star,” the first dance ever set to the music of minimalist composer **Philip Glass**, is one of four original dances the company will perform in Syracuse.

Audiences will also see another of Lubovitch’s widely known early works, “Marimba,” as well as two of his newest dances, the duet from “Meadow” and “Coltrane’s Favorite Things.”

“The dances I compose are a way of seeing the music on the body,” Lubovitch says. “It’s about dancing and dancing in response to music.”

Set to composer **Steve Reich**’s “Music for Mallet Instruments, Voices, and Organ,” Lubovitch’s 1976 dance “Marimba” is one of his most groundbreaking. As the first repertory concert dance set to minimalist music, its early touring performances exposed many Americans to the genre for the first time.

Lubovitch choreographed “Meadow” for the American Ballet Theatre in 1999. Its climax, “Vita Nova,” is a six-minute duet set to composer **Gavin Bryars**’ “Incipit Vita Nova.” The duet is celebrated for its dreamlike imagery and sculptural poses.



Christopher Duggan/Lar Lubovitch Dance CompanyKatarzyna Skarpetowska and Brian McGinnis perform a duet from Lar Lubovitch's "Meadow," which is on the program for the Syracuse University Concert, Nov. 11.

The company's newest piece, "Coltrane's Favorite Things," is an 18-minute composition set to **jazz saxophonist John Coltrane's** live version of the song "My Favorite Things" from the movie and stage musical "The Sound of Music." Nine dancers perform against a backdrop featuring a giant re-creation of artist Jackson Pollock's "Autumn Rhythm (Number 30)," using their movements to draw parallels between the painter and the musician.

Though the Lar Lubovitch Dance Company has been regularly performing since its formation, it hasn't always been on the road. In 1996, Lubovitch and his dancers retreated from the touring world to take stock of their repertoire and work exclusively on new dances.

"I wanted to focus on having the company as a creative center rather than as a performing center," Lubovitch says.

The hiatus, which lasted 10 years, gave Lubovitch the chance to work with his company on a project-to-project basis, creating new dances without losing much time touring them outside New York City. When the company makes its way to Syracuse next week, those in attendance will be treated to new and classic works most audiences haven't had a chance to see in over a decade.

The details

What: Pulse Performing Arts Series Presents: Lar Lubovitch Dance Company

When: 8 p.m. Nov. 11

Where: Goldstein Auditorium, Schine Student Center at Syracuse University.

Tickets: \$20, general public: \$16, SU faculty, staff and alumni; \$5, students with SU or SUNY-ESF identification. To purchase, visit the Schine box office or call 443-4517.