

Storied dances

Lubovitch's latest choreography on stage Wednesday at SPAC

By Tresca Weinstein

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"The Black Rose"; Reid Bartelme, Anthony Bocconi, Mucuy Bolles, Barton Cowperthwaite, Nicole M. Corea, Chanel DaSilva, Josh D. Green, Robbie Moore, Kamille L. Upshaw, [Eric Williams](#) / Lar Lubovitch Dance Company

Throughout his half-century career, choreographer Lar Lubovitch has always looked to music as his primary inspiration; his dances are a way "to describe music as movement," he said. His work is known for its fluid lyricism and for dancers who "understand intuitively that dance is a form of movement poetry," he said.

But lately, Lubovitch has been taking a different tack: He wants to tell stories.

"I seem to have become much more drawn to less-abstract dances that relate to aspects of humanity and human behavior," he said in a recent interview — like his take on "Othello," which [American Ballet Theatre](#) debuted last month at the Met, and his 2014 work "The Black Rose," an interpretation of the tale we know as "Sleeping Beauty."

"The Black Rose" is one of three works the [Lar Lubovitch Dance Company](#) will perform Wednesday at the [Saratoga Performing Arts Center](#), the culmination of a three-week residency at [Skidmore College](#). The piece tells the story of a young woman who is enchanted at the brink of adulthood.

"These were legends and folk tales that were passed by word of mouth, and weren't written down until the late 15th century," Lubovitch said. "The original stories were very dark, very violent. They were told to children and young adults as cautionary tales, ways to avoid the dangers of the world."

Lubovitch takes a satirical approach, using dramatic gestures and larger-than-life imagery to create what he calls a "parody of the classical story ballet." The commissioned score by [Scott Marshall](#) samples Tchaikovsky's "The [Sleeping Beauty](#)."

"Coltrane's Favorite Things," from 2010 (also on the SPAC program) is Lubovitch's commentary on the groundbreaking music and visual art of the 1950s. Set to [John Coltrane's](#) jazz cover of [Richard Rodgers'](#) standard "My Favorite Things," the piece features a [Jackson Pollock](#) painting as its backdrop.

"Coltrane was creating these sheets of sound, these nonstop, evolving sound patterns, and Pollock was doing something similar visually," Lubovitch said. "The whole canvas was a field of energy, very frenetic and full of movement. I made a dance that describes both these ideas by creating ribbons of movement."



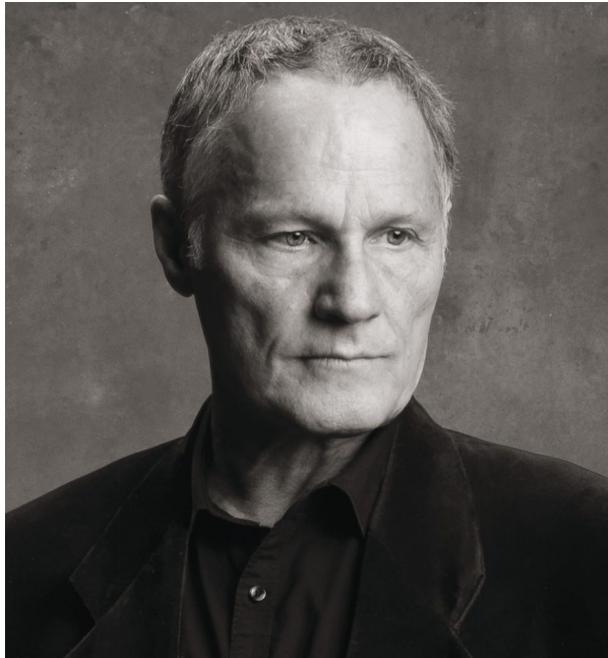
Transparent Things Lar Lubovitch Dance Company

The third work on the program, "Transparent Things," from 2012, is set to [Claude Debussy's](#) String Quartet in G-Minor, which will be played live at SPAC. The dance

references [Pablo Picasso](#)'s 1905 painting "Family of Saltimbanques," a portrait of six traveling street performers, including a harlequin, a clown and a young dancer.

"They're standing in an empty, desolate field, not looking at each other," Lubovitch said. "It's about these characters and their devotion to their art, despite the precarious life they have to live to pursue it. What you get from the painting is that these people might be sleeping in that field that night."

The movement vocabulary for the piece is informed by the music, as well as the performers' story; Lubovitch notes that Debussy was the first composer who wrote music in an effort to imitate the sounds of nature, such as the rhythms of wind and water.



Lar Lubovitch

Born in Chicago, Lubovitch studied at Juilliard with dance legends [Antony Tudor](#), Jose Limon, [Anna Sokolow](#) and [Martha Graham](#), and formed his own company in 1968. Over 47 years of making dances for his troupe — as well as choreographing for Broadway shows such as "The Red Shoes," "[Into the Woods](#)" and "[The King and I](#)" — Lubovitch has experienced his artistic process as "an ongoing endeavor to be as truthful as possible, to find one's own voice and believe in one's own voice."

That hasn't always been easy, he said, particularly as dance has moved from a less popular "fine art" to an entertainment commodity, bringing with it the pressure to make work that's marketable to broader audiences. Lubovitch said that, in some ways, not much has changed for artists — and particularly for dancers — since the days of the itinerant performers in Picasso's painting: More than a century later, they still suffer from long days, aching muscles and low wages.

"But the compensation is that they're able to dance, to have a gift of this kind and to take such deep pleasure in executing that gift," he said. "Almost every day, I take a moment to be grateful that I have been allowed to do this odd, crazy thing — that the world has made a place for it."

More Information

If you go

Lar Lubovitch Dance Company

Where: Saratoga Performing Arts Center, 108 Avenue of the Pines, Saratoga Springs

When: 8 p.m. Wednesday

Tickets: \$30; children 12 and under, \$15

Info: 584-9330 or <http://www.spac.org>

Also: Master class with the Lar Lubovitch Dance Company 5:30 p.m. Wednesday at the Skidmore Dance Center; pre-performance talk 7 p.m. Wednesday; student showing Friday at 2 p.m. in the Skidmore Dance Theater

Tresca Weinstein is a frequent contributor to The Times Union.