

Shakespearean Swagger and Sweet Dreams Materialize in Lar Lubovitch Anniversary Show

by [ELIZABETH ZIMMER](#)

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The Joyce program includes Lar Lubovitch's long, sprawling work from 2000, "Men's Stories." JUSTIN CHAO

Educated at Juilliard by the masters of American modern dance and ballet geniuses like Antony Tudor, Lar Lubovitch combines meticulous technical training with a prodigious work ethic. Celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of his company at the Joyce this week, the culturally ravenous choreographer has stuffed three bills with more than thirty years of interesting work, one piece performed with great élan by the incomparable Martha Graham Dance Company, and another by members of the Joffrey, now based in Lubovitch's native Chicago.

Programs A and B include Lubovitch's newest dance, *Something About Night*, a wisp of a quintet costumed in floaty pajamas by company alum Reid Bartelme and Harriet Jung. Performed to subtle recordings of Schubert songs for male chorus, it manifests the perpetual challenge faced by lighting designers (here Clifton Taylor): How do you illuminate events supposedly happening in the dark? Surrounded by pure blackness, Nicole Marie Corea, Tobin Del Cuore, Brett Perry, Belinda McGuire, and Barton Cowperthwaite rise and fall, a tangle of restless sleepers showing us, delicately, how we might dance our dreams, men and women separately and together.

Appearing on all three programs is Lubovitch's ambitious, flawed *Men's Stories*, subtitled *A Concerto in Ruin*. This long, rambling work from 2000 is graced with startlingly dapper period costumes by Ann Hould-Ward, layers of which the cast of nine men gradually shed as their solo turns and group encounters reveal the agonies of growing up male (and, most specifically, gay) in this country at the end of the twentieth century. Pacing the others in his specificity and clarity is Jonathan Emanuell Alsberry, veteran dancer and now the troupe's rehearsal director. The only African American in the ensemble, he is given passages of delicate, minstrelsy-inflected movement, as well as set up for one confrontation with white gang members.

Scott Marshall's collage score combines fragments of popular song from decades of film and live performance, against a background of deteriorating music and sound and Taylor's smoky light. There's more personal angst and loneliness, and probably grief, in the hour-long piece than is strictly necessary — or perhaps it's just that, in the nearly twenty intervening years, our patience for this kind of mooning, handsome sadness has grown thin.

The opening salvo on Program A is Lubovitch's eight-year-old *Legend of Ten*, obscure in concept but dazzling in its execution by members of the Martha Graham Dance Company. In deeply sexy, formfitting outfits by L. Isaac with Naomi Luppescu (sheer bat-wing tops, velvet midriffs, tight trousers and boots), to parts of a Brahms piano quintet, ten dancers seize the space as if staging folk material, but it's clear that the staggers are the nobility, appropriating these steps and designs as if theirs by right. Their behavior is extremely courtly; Graham training instills in dancers a certain verticality that's hard to defeat. Both here and in *Men's Stories*, we see Lubovitch's tropism toward using the body for an almost Shakespearean clarity of expression.

Over the weekend, on Program B, a trio of Lubovitch dancers will show the 2007 *Little Rhapsodies*, to Schumann, as well as scenes from his 1997 choreography, for American Ballet Theatre, of *Othello*. And on Program C, a dozen students from the George Mason University School of Dance will perform Lubovitch's 1985 *A Brahms Symphony*; the company closes out the season with *Men's Stories*. Altogether, and especially remembered along with the choreographer's work on Sondheim's *Into the Woods*, it adds up to a major legacy in American dance.

Lar Lubovitch Dance Company
Joyce Theater
175 Eighth Avenue
212-242-0800
joyce.org
Through April 22

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