

The Washington Post

DANCE REVIEWS

The Lar Lubovitch Dance Company makes a triumphant return to the region



By Pamela Squires

Monday, November 8, 2010

The New York-based [Lar Lubovitch Dance Company](#) returned triumphantly to the area Friday night after a lengthy absence. Lubovitch's signature top-flight dancers and his intensely musical choreography lifted the performance at the George Mason University Center for the Arts from mere feet on the floorboards to a heady experience.

Lubovitch brought "North Star," a revival of one of six works he choreographed to minimalist music in the late 1970s; the 2005 "Nature Boy: Kurt Elling," set to incredible jazz vocals by Grammy-winning jazz singer Kurt Elling; and the Washington premiere of "Coltrane's Favorite Things" (2010), set to the John Coltrane Quartet's 1963, 17-minute version of this Richard Rodgers classic.

All three are fascinating choices of music. Lubovitch describes the way he works as illustrating the music. He looks for music that "excites my inner eye" and says the architecture of the music forms the architecture of his dance. That may sound simple, almost like the music visualization of choreographers like Ruth St. Denis, who created exact movement equivalents of

All the right notes: The Lubovitch company brought brilliantly skillful dancing to the choreographer's works. (Chris Callis)

music. But Lubovitch vastly underrated himself in this respect.

The music he chooses is complex. Philip Glass's minimalist music may be infamous for repetition, but its phrases build incrementally over the course of a piece, a crucial feature that many who set dances to this kind of music often ignore. Lubovitch, on the other hand, builds his "North Star" dance phrases incrementally over time as well. The 10 dancers create a lyrical, amoeba-like form with something akin to a head and tentacles, which continuously ebbs and flows and withdraws and regurgitates itself in ever more complex ways. There is, as Lubovitch describes, very little dance as such in this work and his intention is to create in space the perpetual motion of sound. Boy, does he succeed.

In the other two works, Lubovitch may use popular (and, in that sense, simple) songs like "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes," but their jazz rendering is complex. Lubovitch is sensitive to every altered chord progression and improvisational passage. He might endlessly repeat a lift (akin to extending a musical phrase), artfully create the impression of a dancer improvising (no easy feat), or visually produce a staccato through a flash of straight, bare leg against a dark background.

Dancer Christopher Vo is so musically attuned that he blurs the line between music and dance. Katarzyna Skarpetowska and Brian McGinnis are so attuned to each other that they dance like one chord. All 10 dancers are true artists in their own right, and the "music" they make is as wondrous as that of any Coltrane quartet.