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## Lar Lubovitch keeps his choreography focused on beauty

By Lisa Traiger

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In an era when politics, personal narrative and post-modern irony overwhelm so much contemporary dance, the Lar Lubovitch Dance Company is the real thing.

"The one aspect of my work that is hardest in today's context for people to deal with is its lack of irony," says Lubovitch, 67, who has crafted more than 100 pieces since 1968.

"That's Lar," agrees one of his former dancers, Susan Shields, now a professor of dance at George Mason University, where Lubovitch's company will perform Friday. "That is a perfect sentiment. One of the things I learned from him - and I learned so much - is that he is never afraid of beauty. In the dance climate today . . . everything has been intellectualized, analyzed, post-modernized."

The Chicago-born, Juilliard-trained Lubovitch makes dances that celebrate beauty, grace, elegance and lyricism. "Lar's just never been afraid of being beautiful," Shields says. "I think people look down at that because they think being beautiful is not intelligent. But when you make something sublimely beautiful, that takes people's breath away, there's no way that it's not intelligent."

Lubovitch's pedigree includes study with Antony Tudor, Martha Graham, Anna Sokolow and Jose Limon.

"There's no question that I was aesthetically birthed by those masters," Lubovitch says. "I've been making dance for a long time. I've seen a lot of dance come and go. I've done what I do, and I haven't altered myself in relationship to what was expected or what was current. I'm not interested in the newfangled, nor am I interested in old fashioned. I'm interested in getting to the heart of what I do very honestly and with integrity."

The 10-member company's rare Washington appearance includes a revival of "North Star," a work from 1978 and, Lubovitch says, one of the first dances with a score by Philip Glass. "It's one of the first pieces I got to learn with the company," recalls Shields, who danced with Lubovitch's company from 1988 through 1996. " 'North Star' is the quintessential ensemble piece. The score is impossible to count, so you're really working as a team and completely in touch with one another. Being part of an ensemble was always a real pleasure in that piece."

American music takes center stage in Lubovitch's piece "Nature Boy: Kurt Elling" and in his newest work, "Coltrane's Favorite Things," in which the choreographer finds inspiration in jazz saxophonist John Coltrane's 1963 interpretation of Richard Rodgers's "My Favorite Things."

As for Lubovitch's favorite things? No surprises there: "The thing I'm drawn to most is dancers dancing. Dancing is the essence of my work. It's what my work is about. That does not mean to say it's not about choreography; it's about choreography with a particular departure point. And that departure point is dancing."

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