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Lar Lubovitch @ The Joyce



Photo above: Chris Callis.

Tuesday March 2, 2010 –

The programme for tonight's performance by the [Lar Lubovitch Dance Company](#) changed between the time I decided to attend and the actual event: Lubovitch is in a jazz mode this season and I had specifically picked the least-jazzy programme. But then the listing changed and jazz was heavily on the menu tonight. For me a little jazz goes a long way. Thanks to the excellent dancers of the Lubovitch Company, I ended up enjoying the entire evening.



Erin Baiano photo, above.

Coltrane's Favorite Things is set to an arrangement of "My Favorite Things" from **THE SOUND OF MUSIC**. Danced against a Jackson Pollock backdrop, the work is Lar's musing on Coltrane's 'sheets of sound' and on Pollack's giant canvas in which the medium is its own message.



The dancers in **Coltrane**, a Julieta Cervantes photo above.

The movement is non-stop as the dancers shake and shimmy, sometimes swaying in unison to the beat. A male *pas de trois* in white sneakers are especially lively. It's a celebratory piece in which the dancers cut loose and it swept by leaving the audience collectively breathless.

The central portion of the programme was the most absorbing for me: two contrasted duets: **Vita Nova** and **Dogs of War**, the latter a world premiere.

In **Vita Nova**, Katarzyna Skarpetowska and Brian McGinnis are clad in sleek body tights and they barely move from their spotlight circle of light. Katarzyna slowly unwraps her body from Brian's in a series of sculptural 'snapshots' which allude both to coupling and to new birth. The trance-like Gavin Bryars score, [Incipit Vita Nova](#) sounds at once ancient and *avant-garde* with its unearthly counter-tenor spinning a spiritual motif. The duet ends as Katarzyna's feet finally touch the floor and Brian slowly pivots her in place. In its transcendent calm, **Vita Nova** is one of Lar's most poetic expressions and was performed with other-worldly grace.

Sample the music of Gavin Bryars [here](#) as Julian Lloyd Weber plays part of the composer's cello concerto.

I suppose some people would look at **Dogs of War** as just another anti-war dance work. It's exactly that immunity to the ongoing pain and suffering of the universal soldier that makes today's wars so horrific: it's fine as long as it isn't happening on *our* soil.

Two men - Attila Joey Csiki and Christopher Vo - in identical camouflage uniforms are seen musing in separate pools of light during a lull in the battle. They might be comrades but the battle line has been drawn to separate them. And so two men who could just as easily be buddies or even lovers are reduced to nameless pawns in the ongoing chaos of warfare and must fight one another. Each has a stylized, militaristic solo in which their human individuality is re-programmed as an instrument of combat. In one touching lull they show one another photographs of their loved-ones.

But then the battle is joined. In slow motion the two men fight hand-to-hand as the Prokofiev score becomes wildly agitated. Behind them, images of the dead and wounded from the great wars of the 20th century flash on a screen. Attila kills Christopher with savage brutality and is left to lament his act of murder with a silent scream.

I felt that the audience - while admiring the dancers - did not really want to be reminded of the one-on-one realities of war. It's so much safer and more reassuring to just read about it in the newspaper at home and then flip on *Dancing With The Stars* and forget about war altogether. But as long as religious and political ideologies continue to rend humanity asunder the **Dogs of War** will continue to bark and rage and kill.

A word of praise for the superb performances by Attila and Christopher: for the raw physicality as well as the momentary poetry of their interpretations. If only it had ended with a kiss instead of a killing.



Elemental Brubeck has a very clean and freshly-scrubbed look; the dancers - led by Attila Joey Csiki in red - revel in their own energy. Above photo: Erin Baiano.

With references to the jitterbug and other social dancers from days gone by (when people on a dance floor actually made contact with one another!) the piece flows with comings and goings by the dancers as individuals or in pairs. Though it seemed just a bit too long, in the end the vitality of the Lubovitch dancers carried us along and made me feel that Spring just might just be around the corner after all.

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