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DANCE

THIS WEEK

Modern Dance's Cabinetmaker

ART, the way Lar Lubovitch sees it, is the province of other choreographers. "Calling yourself an artist is a big accolade," he mused after a day of rehearsals and costume checks, fidgeting over his coffee cup. "That's why I call myself a craftsman. My dances are like a good cabinet: the seams are tight, it stands up, it has balance, it has function. Artistry is something beyond one's own understanding."

Jennifer Dunning of The New York Times has compared Mr. Lubovitch's work to "blocks of paint on a canvas." The analogy fits, and Mr. Lubovitch, 61, whose first bouts of artistry — not his word, of course — occurred behind an easel, applies it to his latest work, "Pentimento," a loosely autobiographical tribute to a 35-year career that has played itself out on makeshift platforms, Broadway stages, opera houses, film and even ice rinks. Performed by the Lar Lubovitch Dance Company, "Pentimento" was choreographed for Washington Square United Methodist Church, where a stage divided by scrims, one in front of the other, is filled with movement often presented simultaneously in two of the three spaces. The dance "creates the theatrical illusion of seeing dances emerge from behind other dances, or appear and disappear," he said. It runs from Tuesday through May 22.

"'Pentimento' is in many ways a summation of my history, a way to convey the sense that the past emanates through the present," continued Mr. Lubovitch, whose aesthetic preferences were shaped amid the skyscrapers of his native Chicago and later at the Juilliard School by Antony Tudor, José Limón, Martha Graham and Anna Sokolow. "'Pentimento' reflects a way of painting a dance by using large, mellifluous strokes, much like the use of a painter's brush."

In "Pentimento," eight dancers — three women and five men — coil, writhe, extend and intertwine in duos and trios or glide almost imperceptibly like organisms shape-shifting under a microscope's lens. Richard Woodbury's shimmering score washes over the movements,

layering Mahler, Strauss, Bach, Schubert and Coltrane with calliope whistles, popular songs and electronic sounds. Mr. Lubovitch likened this musical pentimento to "a sonic web of shifting dynamics in which pieces of music emerge from other pieces much like the shifting seas."

Those hoping for a snippet of Mr. Lubovitch's "Othello" or allusions to his "Men's Stories" won't glimpse it here. "They would not find references to dances I've made, but they would find references or allusions to the language of dance that my work has embodied," he said.

In a field rife with "serious age-ism, where my kind of numbers freak people out," Mr. Lubovitch said he felt no hesitation in glancing backward. "My work tends to honor the history from which I've emerged," he said. "I do not work in order to create anarchy against the past."

KATHRYN SHATTUCK



Chris Callis

Lar Lubovitch and Jennifer Howard in Mr. Lubovitch's "Pentimento."