

dance

Moving to Mozart

Oregon Ballet Theatre's spring program features famous choreography

by Rebecca Ragain

In 1987, choreographer Lar Lubovitch spearheaded "Dancing for Life," an AIDS benefit at Lincoln Center's New York State Theater.

"I organized it because there had been no response to AIDS from the dance community, which had been heavily afflicted already," says Lubovitch, who has been cited in *The New York Times* as one of the best choreographers in the world.

Lubovitch's personal contribution to the fundraiser was an excerpt from *Concerto Six Twenty-Two*, which had premiered in its entirety the previous year at Carnegie Hall.

The excerpted section, a duet featuring two men, had "tremendous resonance" at the occasion, says Lubovitch. From that moment forward, the piece became known as a symbol for the AIDS crisis.

Lubovitch originally conceived the duet as an essay on friendship, not as a direct response to the AIDS crisis. But he says the situation at the time did have some influence on his artistic process.

"I chose friendship as an essay and as a metaphor for the moment in time we were experiencing because at the time so many men were helping their friends to die. Friendship became a very powerful emerging theme," explains Lubovitch.

In 1993, Anna Kisselgoff wrote about the work in the *Times*: "The dancers' mutual support speaks of a caring relationship. Yet what is now the most famous male duet in the international dance world is more about love than lovers."

During the past 20 years, *Concerto Six Twenty-Two* has been performed consistently, remaining in Lubovitch's active repertoire. It has been toured nationally and internationally by ballet companies such as the American Ballet Theatre and Mikhail Baryshnikov's White Oak Dance Project.

Today, the central duet is still requested regularly by organizers of AIDS benefits. Because Lubovitch does not want the duet to lose its context as part of a larger dance, he limits the number of times it can be performed as an excerpt. But it does appear at certain benefits on occasion.

When asked if the AIDS connection is as relevant today as it was in 1987, Lubovitch replies that it is not. He hastens to add that although AIDS certainly has not gone away, he believes that in the United States there is a cultural illusion that it has.

"This is one of the subjects around which there is an illusionary hypnosis taking place," says Lubovitch.

Though the work's association with AIDS might have garnered it more publicity, *Concerto Six Twenty-Two* is a strong, timeless dance in its own right. In fact, Lubovitch says it has taken on "its own reason for being."

"It's a very good dance, and far recognized," he says. "I have to treat it with respect, just as anyone else would, and try to do it correctly and see that it's kept alive."

The longevity of *Concerto Six Twenty-Two* has only been helped by the fact that the piece is set to the music of Mozart, who is honored with endless celebrations the world over.

In fact, it is the Mozart connection that spurred Christopher Stowell, artistic director of Oregon Ballet Theatre, to bring *Concerto Six Twenty-Two* to Portland. OBT has never performed one of Lubovitch's works, but when local arts organizations began planning Portland's Month of Mozart, it didn't take long for Stowell to think of *Concerto Six Twenty-Two*.

Stowell was acquainted with Lubovitch from years before, when he danced a leading role in the choreographer's piece *Othello* for the San Francisco Ballet. "I enjoyed working with him very much and really liked his movement," recalls Stowell.

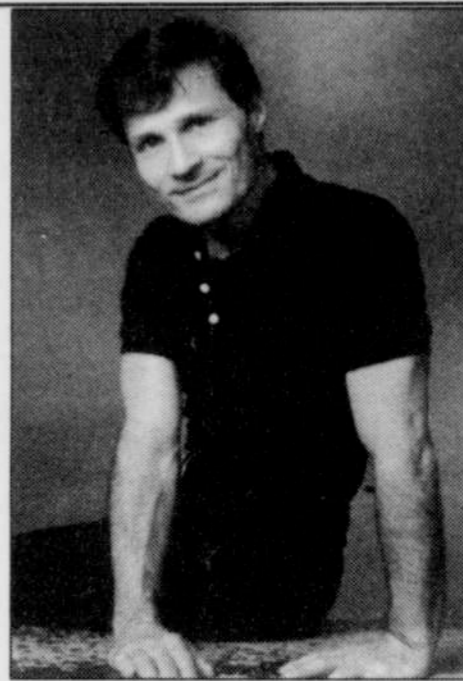
Concerto Six Twenty-Two also appeals to Stowell because it complements the other two works in this spring's "All Mozart" program.

"With this ballet performance you're going to see three works with three totally different approaches to creating—three different vocabularies, three different artists," says Stowell, who wanted to present a diverse performance exploring Mozart's music from a variety of perspectives.

Almost Mozart is a world premiere created especially for the occasion by contemporary Canadian choreographer James Kudelka. By deconstructing and restructuring some of Mozart's compositions, Kudelka offers audiences "Mozart reimagined," as Stowell puts it.

The program opens with a classic from 1956: George Balanchine's *Divertimento No. 15*. Stowell describes this 36-minute work as the best of its kind, "a real gem."

He says: "I think when people see *Divertimento*, they're going to think, 'Yes,



Lar Lubovitch has been cited in *The New York Times* as one of the best choreographers in the world.

exactly, a beautiful ballet set to Mozart!' I want people to have that satisfying moment. But I also want them to be surprised and delighted that it could be something so different."

That's where *Concerto Six Twenty-Two* comes in.

Because Lubovitch is a contemporary choreographer, his movement vocabulary is "wildly" different from Balanchine's, says Stowell, adding that Lubovitch's style is both "looser and freer."

"Nothing in it is sharp...it's very fluid and organic," says OBT dancer Brennan Boyer, who is performing in *Concerto Six Twenty-Two*.

The two pieces are structured differently, as well. Whereas *Divertimento* follows the classic ballet hierarchy of ballerinas and corps de ballet, Stowell points out that *Concerto Six Twenty-Two* is about democracy and equality among the dancers. "Everybody has their opportunity, their moment. It feels like getting to see OBT 'the family.'"

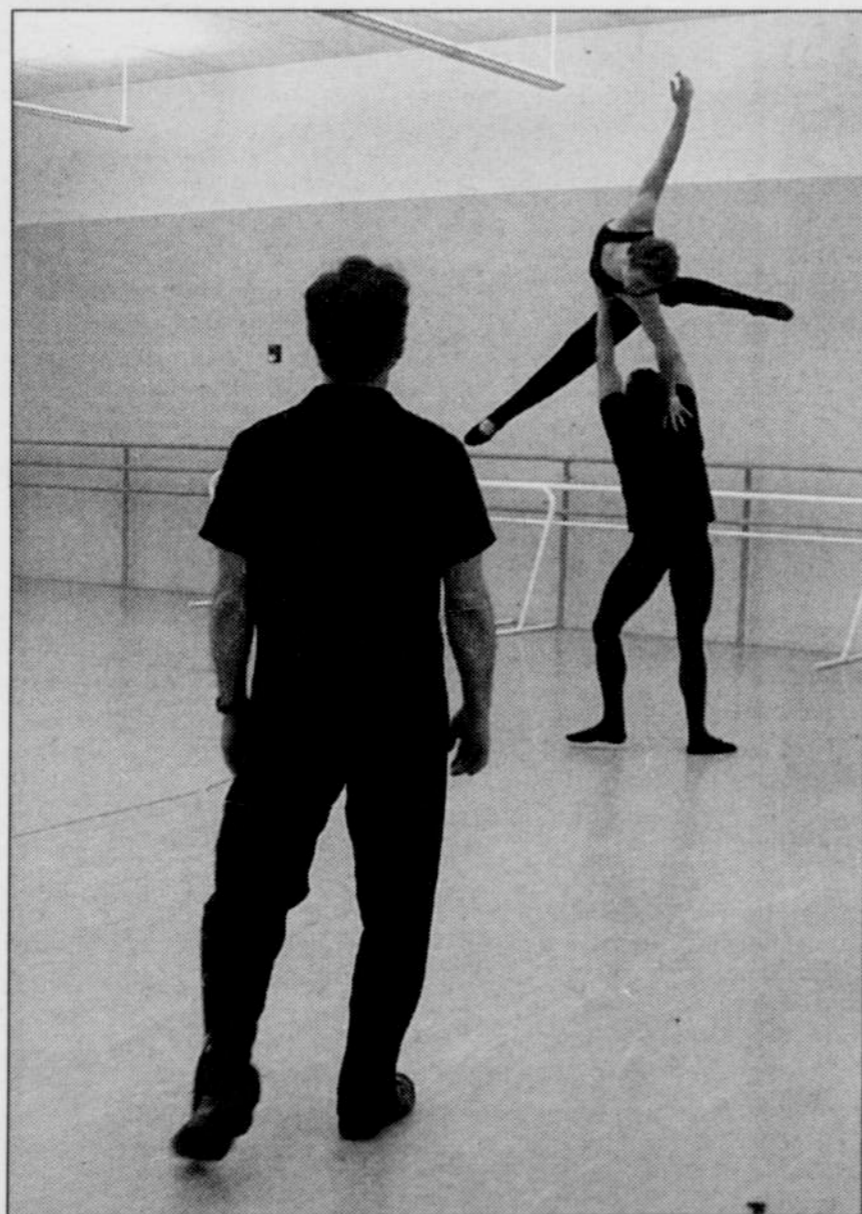
Boyer adds, "It shows everyone's range." In addition, Stowell likes that *Concerto Six Twenty-Two* captures the sweetness, poignancy and hopefulness of Mozart's music. Dancer Steven Houser also comments on the upbeat nature of the 30-minute piece, likening some portions to "frolicking in a meadow."

But the main reason Stowell chose *Concerto Six Twenty-Two* for the spring program is simply the high caliber of Lubovitch's choreography.

"Here is a craftsman at the top of his game, who is equal to the quality of the composer, which is hard when it's Mozart," says Stowell, adding with a laugh: "You don't want a young, inexperienced, fledging choreographer trying to match wits with Mozart. That's just not a good idea." jo

OREGON BALLET THEATRE'S "All Mozart" program runs 7:30 p.m. April 22, 28 and 29 and 2 p.m. April 23 at Keller Auditorium, 222 S.W. Clay St. Tickets are \$13-\$66 from 503-222-5538.

Portland free-lancer REBECCA RAGAIN enjoys both watching and writing about dance. Write her at rebeccaragain@yahoo.com.



Oregon Ballet Theatre's Ronnie Underwood and Jon Drake rehearse with Lar Lubovitch for *Concerto Six Twenty-Two*.

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