

LarLubovitch_20150820_Trint.3gp

Jenai Cutcher [00:00:31] I realize that most of your work has happened outside of Chicago but you did grow up here. You didn't start studying dance formally until college though, right?

Lar Lubovitch [00:00:40] That's correct.

Jenai Cutcher [00:00:44] Im curious about what, you know what was your relationship to dance, or to movement in your childhood

Lar Lubovitch [00:00:44] Well I was um... Given to dance just intuitively. And I danced whenever I had a chance. In the living room I was I was making up dance as child and. Dance the school dances and off made solo appearances with people making a circle around me. Things like that but it was just a fun natural thing that I was drawn to do.

Jenai Cutcher [00:01:16] What neighborhood did you grow up in?

Lar Lubovitch [00:01:16] I was born on the corner of Halston Maxwell. And my family was from Maxwell Street. My grandparents emigrated to the US from Russia. And settled there on Maxwell street. Legendary Maxwell Street.

Jenai Cutcher [00:01:33] Yeah. I'm new to Chicago, what's legendary about Maxwell street?

Lar Lubovitch [00:01:38] Oh well any native Chicagoans know what that means.

Jenai Cutcher [00:01:41] I'm new [laughter]

Lar Lubovitch [00:01:41] Well Maxwell street was the equivalent of New York's Lower East Side. It was the melting pot of Chicago where all the immigrants gathered. And um, Ultimately a very multinational multiracial multilingual, fascinating and historic place.

Jenai Cutcher [00:02:05] Oh wow. Actually I think thats not far from where I've just moved. I'm in Printers Row. Its probably...

Lar Lubovitch [00:02:05] Yeah not too far.

Jenai Cutcher [00:02:06] Yeah

Lar Lubovitch [00:02:06] There is no actual street anymore there's just a corner with a sign that the entire area was torn down to make way for the University of Illinois campus.

Jenai Cutcher [00:02:22] Got it. Okay. Do you remember...Did you ever go see preformances, or anything like that?

Lar Lubovitch [00:02:23] No, no I really didn't know that dance existed as a profession. But from what I saw on television. Or movies.

Jenai Cutcher [00:02:32] So. I came across the video of your solo from University of Iowa that surfaced.

Lar Lubovitch [00:02:40] Mm.[nodding] First thing I ever choreographed

Jenai Cutcher [00:02:44] Yeah. And, and I've heard you talk about noticing like how many things from that piece of choreography you realize you already knew in a way...

Lar Lubovitch [00:02:57] Mhm

Jenai Cutcher [00:02:57] ...Where do you think that knowledge or that spirit came from?

Lar Lubovitch [00:03:02] Um, from intuition know very valuable source. Something that is very important to be reminded enough to keep in touch with. Something that can be educated away if, if you're not mindful. But it's it's probably where the truer voice comes from one's individual voice. And. It's very important not to lose touch with it. If you're pursuing the life of an artist.

Jenai Cutcher [00:03:30] Can you identify maybe a few key components of your voice?

Lar Lubovitch [00:03:39] uh, could identify it...Well... I probably can't. And you know I'll leave it to others to describe in words, I make it in movement. And uhm, no, otherwise I would be a writer I guess but [clears throat] it's a language that expresses it exactly as I need to. And I think putting in other words...in a way digresses from the main point.

Jenai Cutcher [00:04:08] Okay. Um, let me try this then...

Lar Lubovitch [00:04:11] [Sips and shakes a drink]

Jenai Cutcher [00:04:11] Are there any elements of Chicago culture, growing up in Chicago that have maybe influenced your particular style or vocabulary?

Lar Lubovitch [00:04:13] Probably architecture. Because I was very wary of architecture as we grew up in Chicago it is known for its architecture. Clearly. But if you grew up in Chicago I think that your eyes begin to be educated to structure, and... visual acuity. And I was working as an artist. I was wanting to be an artist so I was studying art of course. And um... I... had a teacher who invited me take classes when I was in high school uh, the Art Institute, and that of course initially opened my... my eyes to seeing. And um...I think Chicago and seeing are uh, very close.

Jenai Cutcher [00:05:11] Yeah it's pretty unavoidable here, right? Spatial composition's just all around

Lar Lubovitch [00:05:16] Well it is. Yeah. There's a kind of visual music going on all the time. For those who, you know, who have opened their eyes and see what's what they're surrounded by.

Jenai Cutcher [00:05:27] Yeah, I know this is a story that you've told many times. Um. But for our record can you talk about... Coming to dance...for the first time at university of Iowa

Lar Lubovitch [00:05:38] Well actually I came to dance the first time when I was about three years old in a... In a very... Well in childlike way in an unknowing but, but an reactive way. I lived on Halsted Maxwell and there was across the street from us was a Woolworth's Five and Dime. Which was a very marvellous and wondrous and carnival like place for me as a child. And in the middle of the extremely bitter winter, the Woolworhts

caught fire overnight. And it made an incredible blaze and it was right in front of our building we watched it from the windows. And um.... in the morning when we woke up we, of course, ran downstairs to see what had happened and the building had been inundated with water. And what was left was cascades of water pouring out of the second floor windows had been frozen by the winter. It was very bitter winter. And inside the cascades of ice were tiny toys, and lipsticks, and mascaras, and paper, and books, and it was it was wondrous and very very magical. And for some reason it made me do a wild dance. And I imagined myself as a teddy bear and the dance, caught in the deluge and then frozen in space.

Jenai Cutcher [00:07:02] Wow, That's incredible

Lar Lubovitch [00:07:02] And that was the first.

Jenai Cutcher [00:07:03] It's giving me chills

Lar Lubovitch [00:07:03] That was the first dance I ever did. But I really didn't know I was making a dance but in fact I was making a dance.

Jenai Cutcher [00:07:10] So it's just been your way of always responding--

Lar Lubovitch [00:07:13] I was expressing my exuberance in movement. It seemed to be something that...Overtook me.

Jenai Cutcher [00:07:27] Okay. And then so by the time...it came to you in a more formal way...What was that like? Where you thinking like, oh okay this is the world of dance and...I've already been living it?

Lar Lubovitch [00:07:36] Well I went to university of Iowa as an art major. I had been dancing all the time as I grew up. But just I was called the dancer. It was just kind of my nickname. And uh, I discovered dance there in University of Iowa. I did not know much of the world of dance or anything of the world of dance. I was also a gymnast and a woman at the University of Iowa whose name was Marsha Thayer was instituting the origins of a dance program. There was no dance program. It was an occasional class in the women's gymnasium. And she came to the gymnastics uh...workout uh... looking for men to lift women as she put it. And it intrigued me. And uh... I understood it was lifting women in the context of a dance of some kind. And she introduced me to what dance was, gave me my first dance classes. Then that year I saw dance for the first time. Uh... the Josie Limon Dance Company came to University of Iowa. And of course when I saw it I recognized... who I was and what I was meant to do. It was everything that I did and loved put together art and gymnastics.

Jenai Cutcher [00:08:47] Yeah. One of the things we...are trying to touch on with this project is the concept of dance lineage. Um...And where you fall in line of that. So, teachers or whatever, I'm wondering if you could just.... I know Limon was later a teacher and an influence. Can you maybe talk about a few of the important individuals that shaped your career and artistry?

Lar Lubovitch [00:09:13] Well, when I discovered that this world of dance and dances existed I was advised to go to New London Connecticut to explore the American dance festivals. Very uh...early part of the nation festival going on for some years. Now it's the Duke University and it's much larger in scale. But it was quite small then. And so I did go

there and Josie Limon and his company were there as were Martha Graham and her company and a very young Alvin Ailey. And I had class with Alvin and Martha and Josie, and those were my first teachers. And from there I was advised that if I wanted to go further into dance that I should try the Juilliard School since I was in college and had some idea I wanted to continue an academic program. And so I, um, went to New York to audition for the Juilliard School on the advice of those particular people. And I had to make up a dance. I didn't know that actually till I got there. I had the application made of the application I went there to file that application and the audition was the next day. And I was staying at a YMCA on 34th Street in a very tiny room about the size of a cot. And uh...they told me that there was an audition next day which I didn't know about, and that I would have to present the dance. So I went back there in the YMCA and put the cot up against the wall, and made up a dance. And did it for the audition the next day and it was the dance that you saw on the video, because when you went back to University of Iowa... I put it to music and made a dance out of it.

Jenai Cutcher [00:10:51] Oh wow... Quite and unconventional--

Lar Lubovitch [00:10:51] And so I auditioned, then for uh... well the panel that I auditioned for was Martha Graham, Josie Limon, Anthony Tudor, Anna Sokolow, and Lucas Hoving.

Jenai Cutcher [00:11:06] Not intimidating at all.

Lar Lubovitch [00:11:06] Not to me because I had no idea basically, what I was doing or who they were. I did know from the summer actually I shouldn't say that. I had been pretty moved by the performances by both Graham and Limon that summer. It was the first exposure I had to the back side of dance now taking classes and these watching people in class and then seeing their work on stage it was deeply moving. So yes I had some idea but I really didn't know much about who they really were, the history of it or what they had done. They were just these impressive first teachers and...

Jenai Cutcher [00:11:42] Right, yeah not a bad start to a formal dance education [laughter]

Lar Lubovitch [00:11:43] No, no I've always thought I was very fortunate.

Jenai Cutcher [00:11:54] And, and so then what has inspired you since. What uh sort of influences do you look towards?

Lar Lubovitch [00:12:01] Well I mean you're asking me a question that's going to cover, you know, almost 50 years, over 50 years as a dancer and 48 years of my own company. So I mean it's a question that's generally impossible to answer at this point unless you want me to go at some particular point along the way. Talk about influences but...

Jenai Cutcher [00:12:19] Okay well lets, yeah sure let's go a little more chronologically, have there been some...

Lar Lubovitch [00:12:24] Well, well early on Balanchine was a very very powerful influence. When I went to Juilliard I also had to work to support myself and I had a job across the street from the New York City Theater which was being built, and the night that it opened I was fortunate to be invited to have a ticket because I have a tutor was one of my teachers at Juilliard. And uh, New York City Ballet was actually presenting a dance of his and their opening presentation on the Balanchine pieces. So I did go to that. And...So

who Balanchine was and then from that time on I attended those promises ardently and often as possible. And so he was clearly a very powerful influence. But I don't think there's any choreographer alive could not lay claim to that even if they don't know it.

Jenai Cutcher [00:13:15] Right. You kind of reminded me of another theme that's been coming up in the interviews we've been doing and that's serendipity. A lot happens because people are motivated and make it happen. But then also a lot happens because you find yourself in the right place at the right time or just happen to meet certain individuals coincidentally um-

Lar Lubovitch [00:13:39] Really I don't really believe that that's true at all.

Jenai Cutcher [00:13:42] Really?

Lar Lubovitch [00:13:42] No. I don't think that luck plays much of a part in it. But it can be described as luck and often is. But I think that once you put something in your mind and hold it fast and hold it strong that the things that you require to support that are drawn into your world, or you're drawn to the world that includes it. I don't mean that in any mystical or magical way. I just think that there is a great, uhh, Energy in imagining and imagining strongly that the energy has kind of a magnetism. And I think what you describe as luck is really holding an intent so powerfully that it draws you to the things that supported or the things that supported are drawn to you. So what appears to be luck I think is, is highly um..Intended.

[00:14:35] Yeah. That's a very good way to characterize it. It's come up mostly in a confluence of energy's around the Chicago dance community, there's been this era and this era. Every person I've talked to has kind of chalked it up to coincidence in the same six people being in a room at a time. I think you're right. Energy draws energy.

Lar Lubovitch [00:14:58] I think so. It's just a thought. I have no way of proving that.

Jenai Cutcher [00:15:03] But that was, you know that was the question. And that's a good perspective to add to the mix of what people are saying too. Yeah, I like that idea better the idea of serendipity. And that's something that's, you know, is beyond your control. Because it's true. You and everyone else we're talking to. Highly focused individuals and artists that's, got to be part of it.

Lar Lubovitch [00:15:32] Or not... And luck too. I guess, you know I'll own up to that possibility as well.

Jenai Cutcher [00:15:39] [laughter] Okay. You know like I said this is a pretty Chicago centric project but I don't want to completely exclude your work with your company or, you know, since youre based in New York-

Lar Lubovitch [00:15:54] There are a smattering of Chicago and...and dance prior to my discovery of dance as a world I would long to that I could mention. [clears thought] which were in a way incidental and I was recognized them peripherally but I think that they were building towards something as well. When I was in high school I used to super an opera, at the Lyric Opera, with friends of mine who are interested in music. We had members of mixed chorus and our mixed chorus he tried a connection with whoever it was that hired supers at the Lyric Opera. So we were spear carriers and various other walk-ons in opera but all these operas did feature dance. Many of them and the dance that was being

featured was the company of Ruth page and so I did see those people around saw them backstage watch them perform. I was not passionate about what I saw at the time but it happened near me I saw it. And now that I think back to it I realized that those images are very vivid in my memory. That they were having greater impact than I thought.

Jenai Cutcher [00:17:05] Do you think that also influenced your musicality as a choreographer? Being around that environment?

Lar Lubovitch [00:17:13] Well, I think that I was and I have a musical intuition. I think that goes hand in hand with dance from any people. Not all. For many people. So I was drawn to things musical.

Jenai Cutcher [00:17:26] I talked to former Ruth Page company members already and they talk about her being... Was sort of notorious for inserting choreography into the operas were ever she could. With supers...Did you experience that all?

Lar Lubovitch [00:17:43] I wasn't, I wasn't aware of it. I think that they just looked like very eccentric people to me. And I came from a very conservative household and anything that was not of that just seemed very eccentric to me. I wasn't judging it and it was colorful and interesting but I hadn't quite made sense of it either.

Jenai Cutcher [00:18:09] Okay. How was your family and How did you feel about you being in the opera and being just a mover in general?

Lar Lubovitch [00:18:19] My family had very little to do or say about it. And in fact as I grew up I was very independent and I was never really told what to do or what not to do either. I was kind of left to be free which as far as I was concerned was terrific. I didn't do anything bad or evil that I was aware of. I had lots of energy and it needed to be spent in a variety of ways. But I was never advised I was never directed. I was simply let out to discover in some very marvelous way. I appreciate now. But when dance was coming into my life more seriously they didn't understand it and couldn't relate to it and did not support it.

Jenai Cutcher [00:19:03] When when was the first time you returned to Chicago after being at Julliard? Was it before you established your company? After?

Lar Lubovitch [00:19:15] Well I mean I came back to Chicago because my family was here-

Jenai Cutcher [00:19:18] Sorry meaning in some dance compacity. Performing or presenting work.

Lar Lubovitch [00:19:23] Well. I think that. Trying to remember. Well, I formed a company in 1968. I started dancing in around 1960 something like that. And I believe that we performed in Chicago. Sometime in the late 60s early 70s probably Ravnica for some reason. I'm not really sure. There might be some records some reviews by Ann Barzel or something that would give some accuracy to that. Oh I know we performed at the Goodman Theater, the old Goodman Theater when it used to be part of the Art Institute. It was a marvelous old theater all covered with beautiful walnut paneling. And we did perform there early on. I think that was in the mid-70s.

Jenai Cutcher [00:20:14] Okay. Does Chicago feel like your hometown?

Lar Lubovitch [00:20:20] Well, I've always thought of it as home. Absolutely. And I've always felt very connected to Chicago. I have always felt that Chicago was really where my aesthetic was formed. And not only my aesthetic but my particular spin on humanity which is all a part of the aesthetic as well. I couldn't exactly describe to you in detail, and you're going to ask me to talk about that. And I can't really except to say that whatever my aesthetic is I believe it was informed here as I grew up and that it has remained very very strong part of my expressivity.

Jenai Cutcher [00:20:56] Is there... have you ever experienced different feelings about presenting work here as opposed to any other city because you are from here?

Lar Lubovitch [00:21:07] I like to present work in Chicago very much, yes. And I have always hoped that'd be recognized as something of an expression of the city of Chicago.

Jenai Cutcher [00:21:20] Okay. Well I do... I definitely um... want to touch on, again, your company and your work in general regardless of having any direct connection to Chicago. So. I'm going to try and ask a question that I don't think you'll answer, but let me-

Lar Lubovitch [00:21:45] I'll give it a shot. Go ahead.

Jenai Cutcher [00:21:49] Um, You're you're incredibly prolific your company has existed for i know 40...

Lar Lubovitch [00:21:54] 48 years.

Jenai Cutcher [00:21:58] I guess. Let me ask this. Can you identify maybe two or three...Important lessons or discoveries that you've made in your creative research as a choreographer.

Lar Lubovitch [00:22:21] Um....Let me see. I mean it's it's it's very hard to nail down an answer to something like that. That seems relevant and makes sense because it's very broad. Because there are many ways to think about what it takes to make a dance and what one is trying to do. I think that it has been a long process of rediscovering...a voice that was mine from the beginning. And abandoning it...not really abandoning it intentionally, but by going out to the real formal dance world and learning what dance really is and then trying to be a part of it, trying to create dances. And. An effort to over the years to hearken back to what I understood at the beginning to make sure then that I was speaking in my own voice. Which takes many years for a choreographer or any artist to find their own voice and to have the nerve to speak with that voice and, and accept the criticism that goes with it. You can create a work that's not true to yourself and hide behind it and let people criticize that. Probably easier than making work that truly truly does speak from your gut. And then receiving the responses to that it's very exposing. And the willingness to be vulnerable to expose the real essence of who you are as a creator which is very much for you are as a person takes a long time to do that to be true to oneself and speak to one's own voice. To put it in a more cliché way.

Jenai Cutcher [00:23:59] I would imagine during...I'm sure every piece that you make is this different in it's a process. But are there some key components of your choreographic process that you can identify? Even nuts and bolts level. When you walk into the room with the dancers. On a very quotidian level what is that process like for you?

Lar Lubovitch [00:24:26] When it's working very well I feel I'm not as doing making it up but that I'm discovering it. I've heard other people say that also and it sounds as though I believe it pre-existing. But there is a channel that opens that seems to be delivered the information back. Rather than the searching out. And I'm aiming at a rehearsal to come to that mind. That open mind where I'm free falling to my imagination so that I can...remove the obstacles that are preventing me from falling freely. And at that time when the fear gets out of the way, which is one of the major obstacles, this sense of discovering the movement rather than creating it seems to come into being.

Jenai Cutcher [00:25:26] What are some, at this moment in time because I'm sure again it changes, but what are some of...what are some the memorable pieces to you, right now, um, throughout the course of the company?

Lar Lubovitch [00:25:40] That I have done? I. I. This is strictly taking a question to a totally different direction. I'm not comfortable boasting. And I don't feel an attitude towards my work. Such that I could respond to your question any way that is totally honest.

Jenai Cutcher [00:26:06] Okay [laughter]

Lar Lubovitch [00:26:06] I've done my works I've done a lot of them. I prefer some over others. It's all part of process and every time I make a dance I'm trying to make it better than a dance I've ever made before. And each dance that I've made, in retrospect, has something to teach me about how to make a better dance. So. I can't single out any of them and say oh that's the one I got it right. And there is no right. It's all a process and and...And therefore my next dance is the one that I'm most proud of the one I have made yet. The one that I believe in most and invest in most.

Jenai Cutcher [00:26:52] Got it. You've had a anniversary celebration in which you've revived pieces right? How do you decide which ones you bring back?

Lar Lubovitch [00:26:52] Well think i probably decide more in terms of the dancers in my company at that time. And what I think they would benefit most from doing, would enjoy most, and do best, because dancers have changed over the years and early works don't seem suitable to some of the people I work with now. And so I tried to bring the works that are relevant to them as well.

Jenai Cutcher [00:27:27] Just curious, what are you presenting here in Chicago this year?

Lar Lubovitch [00:27:28] A brand new dance. The last thing I create is called The Black Rose. And it's a story dance from an evening I did called ancient tales. And it was one of the ancient tales. And its Based on the writings of a 15th century Italian writer who is the first to write down folktales and legends that, much much later were called fairy tales. But when he wrote them down they were very very frightening cautionary tales. Full of most violent and dark behavior and they were cautionary educational stories you might say to keep young people in line from making terrible mistakes. But then I realized that fairy tales even though they're considered dark now seems they're not dark the way they were originally dark. So I decided to go back to the ancient tale and tell one of the ancient stories the way it really was represented at that time. So the Black Rose is actually an original telling of the Sleeping Beauty Myth.

Jenai Cutcher [00:28:44] Ahh okay even with a darker title...

Lar Lubovitch [00:28:44] Yeah

Jenai Cutcher [00:28:44] Okay

Lar Lubovitch [00:28:48] Turns out that the myth of the Sleeping Beauty is a story that is in almost every country in the world in one form or another way way back long before the written word. They're just a couple of things that are consistent but the stories not...not too different in the long run amongst all these different countries. Its almost always about a young girl who falls into a hypnotic spell at the brink of becoming a woman, basically. And it happens in a variety of ways a perfume, a flower, or a flax, a poison, an animal, an enchantress. Many things put this young woman into a sleeping spell and many things happened to her in these different stories. But in the story that I've based mine on she gets treated pretty badly in her sleep. [laughter]

Jenai Cutcher [00:29:48] [Laughter] So stories sometimes, maybe a point of origin for you right?

Lar Lubovitch [00:29:54] Literal stories I've done a few times but I do think that every dance ever made is a story but not a a linear ABC story, but it's a story of time. It's a story of music. Whether it tells us Pacific story or just feels like a journey that has a beginning middle end it is still a story.

Jenai Cutcher [00:30:21] Right, How often do you start with music. I really admire your musicality and diverse choices?

Lar Lubovitch [00:30:27] As often as I can. I always try to start with music. I have a few times commission music and been a part of writing music to support the dance. But the music has always come first for me. And then telling the story of that music.

Jenai Cutcher [00:30:47] So maybe similar to early connections that you can make to your dancing. Like working at the opera or whatever-

Lar Lubovitch [00:30:57] Well I told the story of the teddy bear in the deluge. That was my first dance was a story dance and..

Jenai Cutcher [00:31:04] Do you think, do you have a few of those connections to explain your sensitivity to the music?

Lar Lubovitch [00:31:09] No I just think that I always was moved into movement by music. I mean when I dance it wasn't a silence. There was music on the radio I was in my living room I was home alone. And so I was dancing to it. It made my body move.

Jenai Cutcher [00:31:27] OK. Again, this is kind of a selfish question; What are you listening to right now?

Lar Lubovitch [00:31:37] Umm...

Jenai Cutcher [00:31:37] Or what do you find yourself continuously going back to?

Lar Lubovitch [00:31:42] Right now I'm more interested in new music like very very contemporary music and I've worked to all sorts of music and probably to keep myself from

being bored. And not seeing on one particular channel. I keep changing it up but I have an interest in very new music now.

Jenai Cutcher [00:32:06] Let's talk about the Chicago Dancing Festival that's why you're here now. It's in its 8th year?

Lar Lubovitch [00:32:12] Ninth.

Jenai Cutcher [00:32:16] Ninth year, okay. I'm curious about its inception. I mean technically you can produce this anywhere, in any city. First can we start with why specifically Chicago?

Lar Lubovitch [00:32:29] Well a dancer who is in my company for several years, J Frankie, who is a co-founder of the festival with me is from Chicago. He's lived in Chicago for many years and we had a very very close creative relationship. He was a dancer who was inspiring to me and upon whom I choreographed and he was my implement for choreography, if I was choreographing for other people, so we had a very excellent creative relationship. And Jay decided to retire from dance after a wonderful career with my company, with Twyla Tharp company, and several other notable dance things. I had realign myself with Chicago actually a few years before that because I was in and around Robert Altman movie that took place in Chicago. And I came to Chicago to do the film with Altman and it kind of re inspired me to come back to Chicago. I just felt that it was time to come back. So I had been Chicago already for a couple years. J lived here for many years and he had retired, and at dinner one night we were just talking about what could we do about dance in Chicago that doesn't yet exist and that Chicago needs in order to progress as a dance destination. Which is a phrase that we've used over the years, and we looked around and what we saw immediately was that Chicago did not have a major dance festival. So we decided to make one. We had a very modest idea at first. We wanted to do a small performance at the Museum of Contemporary Art at their 300 seat theater. I've been dancing for so many years and I have so many associations with people in dance; I knew that I could ask some wonderful dancers to come here from all over the country, really, to do this first performance. We got together with the people, who were at that time directing stage of the NCAA, and they said well why do the NCAA? As long as you're going to do it, why don't we go to the park commission and see if we could do it outdoors at the Pritzker? So we did that and we met with the directors the Pritzker and they liked the idea, and so we aim a little higher and got larger companies interested. We did our first performance at the Pritzker and we had a little party for the Pritzker for people who had become the benefactors of the event. It was a couple blocks away from the theater. And we left rehearsal that afternoon and went to this party and when we came back there were about ten thousand people in Pritzker [chuckling] and we were stunned. We had no idea how it happened. And that was the beginning and the show that night was like a rock concert. The audience was like nuts. It was completely pandemonium and we had amazing dancers because I pulled all my connections with great dancers from New York and other places all over the country and Joffrey Ballet of course, Hubbard Street the local best dance we could get. And we had an amazing performance and then we realized we had gotten ourselves into something very serious and potentially very important.

Jenai Cutcher [00:36:06] It's free.

Lar Lubovitch [00:36:07] Oh yes. That was all that was right from the get go, it had to be free because, I really do believe that art belongs to everybody and that it should be free to everybody that all art should be free. And too frequently people do not have access to the

art because, economically they're divided from it. And I did not want that to be the case for Dance. Dance in particular I wanted to be viewed as something that belonged to everybody.

Jenai Cutcher [00:36:34] And so ten thousand attendees, your first Dancing Festival. Philanthropists and supporters who are able to make this free from. What does that say to you about Chicago dance audience?

Lar Lubovitch [00:36:55] I just thought. That Chicago and dance were meant for each other. I just always thought that. I guess it's because, I danced from the time that I was born and it was in Chicago, and so Chicago, and dance, and me, and dance, and Chicago. I don't know why, I had the idea that dance in Chicago were a perfect pairing. I guess it has to do with the architecture and what people have to live with in Chicago; what they're surrounded by, the things that that educate the eye and the wonderful history of music here and the Art Institute, which is an extraordinary place always always has been an extraordinary place. Only dance wasn't here. Everything was here, but it just seemed like dance was a natural art for Chicago.

Jenai Cutcher [00:37:50] From that first festival to the ninth, can you talk about how it's grown? Cause it really has.

Lar Lubovitch [00:37:58] Well. It's the largest free dance festival of its kind in America that I know of. It's become nationally internationally known of course. We started with one performance and now we are in four different theaters during the week of the festival. Sometimes more than four theaters. It seems to be a premier event of the year for people in the arts. The tickets are released at some point in June July and usually the entire festivals sold out in an hour. So. It seems to be pretty popular.

Jenai Cutcher [00:38:44] It's like a rock concert.

Lar Lubovitch [00:38:44] It actually got a little too big one year and then Jay and I met about what that meant to us. What it meant to us is that we... Thought that it was going beyond what we could control and that meant what we can control qualitatively. We didn't want to become about big. We wanted to become about excellence. So we actually decided to cut back and not be as big because he wanted to guarantee each year that we could count on the quality that we had promised that very first year. So there is a size that we could contain and that's as big as we wanted to get as big as we choose so far to remain.

Jenai Cutcher [00:39:24] It's pretty big.

Lar Lubovitch [00:39:26] It's as big as it can be within the quality that we want to be represented. We we set out to show only excellence. Particularly in lieu of all the many people in Chicago who may not have seen dance before we wanted the first dance that they saw to be excellent dance the best dance they could possibly see, so they knew from the get go what it is they could expect from the world of dance. So when we invite people to the festival we don't invite them simply to come and do what they want. We curate programs based on dances that companies are doing with particular dances we have sought to present and waiting for certain companies to have them. Jay and I both see a lot of dance and we curate the festival according to what we've seen. In both historic and contemporary dance. So that the programs are made up of specifically the dances that we have chosen to show.

Jenai Cutcher [00:40:19] And so, I mean you kind of said it, there really is nothing quite like it anywhere else in the country. What are some of the reactions that you've heard from audience members, one, but also from dancers and the companies that you bring in? Who get to perform in this type of environment and Pritzker is quite a unique venue.

Lar Lubovitch [00:40:44] Well the Pritzker, and the Harris, and the auditorium, and the Museum of Contemporary Art, and we hope to stretch next year into the Goodman Theater as well. Well the dancers who come here love it and they're always startled by what it is and by how the audience reacts. Because Chicago audience is.... the great thing about Chicago audiences they're very informed and not cynical. So they are very very happy to show their appreciation and show it openly, and I think this is different than audiences who know dance in many other cities. Chicago is very generous in expressing their appreciation. The dancers that come here are startled sometimes by how well appreciate they are.

Jenai Cutcher [00:41:32] Kinda of refreshing

Lar Lubovitch [00:41:32] Yeah. Yes of course dancers loved to get together because people who are in companies don't get to see other companies that often, or collaborate with their colleagues from other companies, and so they have a wonderful time.

Jenai Cutcher [00:41:46] Especially on a festival this scale, it doesn't really happen that much. This isn't your first time producing, sort of, the festivals that brings lots of companies together, right?

Lar Lubovitch [00:41:58] Well yes, Chicago dance festival is my my one and only active curation.

Jenai Cutcher [00:42:06] Oh right. I guess it was a festival, but dancing for life....

Lar Lubovitch [00:42:08] Oh yes yes yes yes. Dancing for life was something special. That of course was in the 80s and it's when the dance world, and the arts world, and the world largely ravaged by AIDS. And there had been no response from any of the arts communities to that time about what was going on. So I decided that the dance world had to respond. And so I gathered together, actually gathered together the executive directors and managers of dance companies in New York City. And wanted discussed with them a reaction and from that grew the first performance dedicated to raising funds for AIDS and awareness. It was called the Dance For Life. It took place in New York State Theatre and all the major inner city companies were there, New York city ballet, American Ballet Theatre, major moderns;, Twyla Tharp Martha Graham, Paul Taylor, my own company. It was a wonderful very momentous event. Yes I do take pride in that. It was my idea and I'm glad of it.

Jenai Cutcher [00:43:21] Yeah, I can't think of another choreographer, artistic director as established as you, you know, actively brings together various companies in the same time and space.

Lar Lubovitch [00:43:33] I think that dance too often is regarded as something decorative and entertaining. Which it is both of those things. But when the opportunity for dance to take its place as an art that has depth and meaning, it can actually have purpose in the world besides decorative. I try to seek and address those opportunities.

Jenai Cutcher [00:44:01] I'm curious, you mentioned uh, coming back here to work with Robert Altman and the company. What was it about that experience that triggered the thought of "I should come back to Chicago"?

Lar Lubovitch [00:44:10] Let's see well. It was being filmed in Chicago, and Robert Altman's staff got in touch with me. I don't know how really or why but they had a specific dance in mind that they had seen or they'd been advised to see that they wanted in the movie. And when I went to the meeting with Altman, and he wanted me to look at the script, I saw that I was actually in the movie. [chuckles] I didn't know that but here I was looking at this pages of which I was a character playing myself in the movie. So that was a nice surprise then I realized I would be going to Chicago to be part of this adventure. I hadn't been to Chicago for quite a few years actually at that time for some reason. And it was a beautiful fall and Chicago look its best and I just walked for miles and miles and just realized I love this city deeply, that I love Chicago, and that it meant something very personal to me. So before I left I decided to live in Chicago again, and part time. So I went to start walking on Chicago and look for a place to live, and I won't go into detail but I did find a place to live. I decided to live part time in Chicago again with no particular purpose in mind other than starting that way. And I did think that I would hope to contribute to dance in Chicago. I wasn't sure how but there were by that time very excellent dance companies in Chicago that didn't exist when I grew up here. And I'd hoped the opportunity to work in those companies could could unfold if I if I lived in Chicago again.

Jenai Cutcher [00:45:55] And they did right?

Lar Lubovitch [00:45:55] Yes, yeah subsequently worked with Hubbard Street, and Joffery.

Jenai Cutcher [00:45:55] Right, so those commissions where after?

Lar Lubovitch [00:45:55] Mhm

Jenai Cutcher [00:45:55] And so, as we talked about a little bit before the cameras rolling. You do have this sort of unique perspective compared to other people we're interviewing that you're very very familiar with Chicago, but don't spend all your time here. So I'm curious to hear from you, how have you seen the dance scene in Chicago and the dance community change over the years.

Lar Lubovitch [00:46:29] Well there was no dance community in Chicago when I grew up. If there was a I surely wasn't aware, but I know there were ballet classes that took place in downtown Chicago somewhere. Not that I had anything to do with. I know that Ruth Page and her dancers were in the opera company, I knew a little bit about that. There was no career in dance Chicago there were no dance companies in Chicago per say. When I discovered dance I was told I had to go to New York to be a dancer. And I did that, I became a dancer and did everything that I did subsequently along the way dancing began to pick up energy in Chicago. I think there was some key people; I know that Lou Conti was key in the development of a dance audience in Chicago. He had New York experience as well. And there were other people, I wish that I knew them by name, I do not. And by the time I came back Chicago to do the movie with Altman I looked around and said "gee there really is dance in Chicago." And I was very glad of that.

Jenai Cutcher [00:47:36] So, I guess, Let's see if you'll answer this one. Is there anything you can identify that makes the Chicago dance community distinct?

Lar Lubovitch [00:47:54] I don't, I don't think I can answer that in a really lucid way. Dance is an international world and it's not that big of a world, and if you're in dance long enough you meet everybody. And if you haven't met anybody you know them anyway and once you do meet them you know them just because, in dance we all understand something about each other. So it's a community that that is nationally international. And in Chicago growing up and having a wonderful extremely high quality dance voice of its own and become part of that international community.

Jenai Cutcher [00:48:33] Yeah. You know, we're hoping to enlarge the scope of this project as much as possible. Um and I'm just curious from you is there... Well first of all, if there's anything we haven't talked about that you'd like to talk about? But also any other people we should talk to, or ideas about Chicago dance that we should investigate from your perspective?

Lar Lubovitch [00:48:59] Well I hope you've talked to the Lou Conti.

Jenai Cutcher [00:49:02] Yes

Lar Lubovitch [00:49:02] And a number of people who were making dance at that time. Who were really the local. I say they were local, they were the inspiration for what is now the Chicago dance community.

Jenai Cutcher [00:49:20] Ok. Is there anything we haven't talked about that you'd like to make sure we mentioned?

Lar Lubovitch [00:49:28] If you have anything else you want to bring up I'm still here but...

Jenai Cutcher [00:49:30] Okay. Um... Yeah I think... thats- oh, yea actually I do have another question. I came across your really generous letter to a young dancer? Yea I just thought it was ust written with such generosity and spirit and wish there was something like that when I was younger. Im curious, if you had a longer letter to write, what might you impart to young dancers about dance history?

Lar Lubovitch [00:49:30] Well that letter you mentioned it was one of those things that can only happen now because of the Internet age. I was asked to write that by a choreographer friend of mine who's teaching at a university. He found out that his students didn't know what to do when they left school to become dancers. And he asked me if I would write something, and he asked several people, actually, to write essays or ideas for these young dancers. So I wrote this, which I called a letter to young dancer, and as things happened it, I wouldn't say went viral but it got around [laughter] and I hear of it many places I go "Oh we posted that letter." "Oh you read that letter." I said what I thought needed saying but I have been startled sometimes to find out that young dancers don't know the history of dance. Something that interested me tremendously when I started dancing and so I did a lot of reading about it, a lot of investigating about it. I know a lot about dance history but I did find that there are many young dancers who don't know history. And I think it's extremely important very beneficial, fulfilling, rewarding, enriching, to know what happened before you. It gives a whole platform to a young dancer to stand on, which which feels less fought with unknowns.