

The Limón Legacy Still Thrives After 70 Years

By

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The Limón Dance Company - Photo by Joseph Schembri

"There is a dance for every single human experience."

José Limón

[The Limón Dance Company](#) lit up the stage at the [Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts](#), presenting three works choreographed by José Limón over seventy years ago, and two recent works by Colin Connor and Kate Weare. Thanks to dance artists like Carla Maxwell, Risa Steinberg, Gary Masters and the new Artistic Director Colin Connor, the company has kept the Limón legacy alive and vibrant. In addition, the company continues to present new works by seasoned and up-and-coming choreographers.

Born in Culiacan, Mexico, José Limón (1908-1972) formed his company in 1946 after performing for 10 years with modern dance pioneers Doris Humphrey and Charles Weidman. Throughout his life, Limón continued to create new works; his last one

being *Carlota* in 1972, the year of his death. In 1997, this great dance master was inducted into the Hall of Fame at the National Museum of Dance in Saratoga Springs, NY.

The program opened with Limón's *CONCERTO GROSSO* which premiered in 1945 at the Humphrey-Weidman Studio in New York. Through his choreography, Limón artfully and brilliantly visualizes Antonio Vivaldi's *Concerto #11 in D Minor, Opus 3*. The work is, simply put, pure and joyful dancing. Staged and directed by former company member Risa Steinberg, dancers Kathryn Alter, Elise Drew Leon and Jesse Obremski performed with great musicality, clarity and ease. *CONCERTO GROSSO* is a jewel and these three dance artists are wonderful in it. The pastel-colored costumes by Keiko Voltaire move beautifully and Christopher Chambers' lighting captures the work's celebration of life.



José Limón in "Concerto Grosso" – Photo from the web.

Chaconne is a type of musical composition that was popular in the baroque era "*when it was much used as a vehicle for variation on a repeated short harmonic progression*". It is also a dance form originated in what is now called Mexico. *CHACONNE*, choreographed in 1942, also had its premiere at the Humphrey-Weidman Studio. Performed to J.S. Bach's *Partita #2 in D Minor for Unaccompanied Violin*, the dance is built on a series of repeated movement themes that build and travel primarily along the diagonal. First choreographed on himself, Limón designed this work for both male and female dancers. It is rich with slow, controlled movements that build into rapid turns

finishing in suspended position. These are followed by drops to one knee that demand a strong technical skill from the performer. For this performance of *CHACONNE*, the dancer who delivered all the above was Logan Frances Kruger. The costume by Christina Giannini was an effort to bring the character up-to-date, but one which failed.

Suddenly, we were thrust back into the present with Colin Connor's beautiful work titled *CORVIDAE* (2016). Corvidae are birds that include crows, ravens, rooks, magpies and others of the crow family. These birds are considered among the most intelligent of animals. Some Native Americans, such as the Haida, believed that a raven created the earth, man, and responsible for placing the Sun in the sky.

Colin Connor and Keiko Voltaire have appropriately dressed the 7-member cast in all black; the men in leather pants or jackets and the women in varying textured outfits. Some of Connor's movement patterns reflect those of flocks of birds, as do his use of individual gestures that mimic one bird grooming or inspecting another. The dance is dramatic, athletic and full of beautiful images of these mysterious creatures who many think of as messengers or omens of doom. Designed by DK Kroth and executed by Michael Klaers, the lighting enhances the dance's strength and mystery.

Considered by many to be Limón's masterpiece, *THE MOOR'S PAVANE* (1949) proved that it is a work that has withstood the test of time. Created to the music of Henry Purcell, it is Limón's interpretation of Shakespeare's *Othello*. Carla Maxwell, who worked extensively with Limón from 1978 until 2016, has kept the work's purity, Limón's sense of weight, and the unembellished, but powerfully dramatic staging alive. It is a classic work; one that I have seen performed by the Limón Dance Company throughout the years. The cast: The Moor, Bradley Beakes; His Friend, Jesse Obremski; His Friend's Wife, Kathryn Alter, and The Moor's Wife, Elise Drew Leon were brilliant. They evoked wonderful memories of such great dance artists as José Limón, Betty Jones, Pauline Koner and Lucas Hoving. It was a pleasure to see this great work performed again and done so with such loving care. The lighting design was by Steve Woods, executed by Michael Klaers, with beautiful renaissance style costumes by Pauline Lawrence.

The program concluded with a work by [Kate Weare](#), who received her bachelors of arts degree from California Institute of the Arts. *NIGHT LIGHT* (2014) is filled with staccato movements that cut short or alter another dancer's direction. Lifts are begun or ended with a push of a head or elbow, and bodies briefly hover mid-air. The

choreography is pure-movement based, but layered with aggressive personality behaviors. Groups easily dissolve into solos, duets and trios. There is a beautiful duet with Elise Drew Leon and Leon Cobb that one wishes were longer, and a demanding, almost confrontational duet between Jesse Obremski and David Glista which brings the dance to a sudden but powerful conclusion. Savannah Spratt has a strong presence and my eye followed her throughout the piece. The costumes by Fritz Masten are wonderful over-sized shirts in different shades of blue that half-way through are discarded to reveal the dancers in black underwear. Clifton Taylor's lighting design brings depth to Weare's choreography and I look forward to seeing more of her work.



The Limón Dance Company – Photo by Paula Lobo

Few companies survive for 71 years, as the Limón Dance Company has managed to do. The repertory continues because it is amazing work by an incredibly gifted artist. It also survives due to the respect, love and hard work by his loyal disciples. The Limón Dance Company has one more performance at the Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts. If you can, go! For information and tickets, click [here](#).