

## The Limón Dance Company Celebrates 65 Years

Simply stated, watching the Limón Dance Company is an emotional experience. The concepts that inspired founder and choreographer José Limón 65 years ago remain fresh today and challenge the audience. This unspoken conversation is the hallmark of American modern dance and part of Limón's legacy.

The program opens with *The Emperor Jones*, Limón's 1956 reimagining of the Eugene O'Neill play of the same name. Daniel Fetecua Soto, as the Emperor, offers a harrowing glimpse into the mind of a tyrant. But as the story develops, the Emperor is overthrown. He slips back in time reliving various periods in his life, including a time when he was enslaved and an atavistic African ritual. Throughout his hallucinations, Durrell Comedy plays the Trader, his nemesis. While the Emperor grows exhausted and desperate the deeper he is in his delusions, the Trader remains cool and collected. At one point the Trader challenges the Emperor, stepping up on his throne. The Emperor carries the much taller Trader forward, his legs straddling the Emperor's shoulder. By the end of the piece the Emperor is a broken, disheveled shadow of himself.

While *The Emperor Jones* expresses a clear emotional narrative, *Chaconne* (1942) takes an abstract approach. This much earlier example of Limón's work creates a feeling through the marriage of movement and music. One solo violinist (Kinga Augustyn) stands in the downstage corner performing Bach's *Chaconne* from the *Partita no. 2*, while Roxane D'Orleans Juste dances in answer. Juste's measured, even steps imply formality, especially when she lunges to one knee. She pivots her body changing direction to face opposite diagonals, then tilting forward and back like a lever. The beautiful score combined with Juste's simple, elegant lines resonate with the audience long after the last notes of Augustyn's violin fade.



A highlight of the evening was the revival of *La Cathédrale Engloutie*. Choreographer Jiří Kylián's interpretation of Debussy's piece of the same name created a whole other world on stage. Two couples begin on stage, the women kneeling in front of their partners, the men resting one hand on their heads. This duality continues through the piece as power shifts within the partnership as steadily as the crashing waves heard over the piano (Anna Shelest).

There is a cyclical, relentless feeling to *La Cathédrale Engloutie* that is peaceful, almost like a lullaby. Every movement is organic and fluid, even the most improbable. At one point the men partner each other. From the floor, Dante Puleio rests his ankle on Durrell Comedy's shoulder. Comedy promenades Puleio, twisting him over and around his head on the floor.

The world premiere of *Come With Me* is another treat. Rodrigo Pederneiras (Grupo Corpo) choreographed this piece to a new work by Paquito D'Rivera commissioned for the occasion. Strong Afro-Cuban rhythms translate into the dancers' fast footwork and accentuated hips. The tone is upbeat and festive, though there are some serious allusions. D'Rivera cites the Cuban "Ladies in White" as one of his influences composing the music and there is a slightly violent undercurrent buzzing beneath *Come With Me*. The men repeatedly lead the women by the neck, like a dip from salsa dancing taken out of context. In this setting the move is more aggressive and adds an edge to Pederneiras' work.

The company builds to a climax as the program progresses, taking the audience on a journey through 65 years of history. It is wonderful to see the Limón Dance Company carry on José Limón's tradition of pioneering new works and exploring the art of dance.

Submitted by **Stephanie Sirabian** on 22nd June 2012

Image credit: *The Emperor Jones* with Daniel Fetecua Soto as The Emperor Jones and Durrell Comedy as The Trader © Rosalie O'Connor