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Limón's Spiritual Heights and Depths

By **CLAUDIA LA ROCCO**



José Limón's "Missa Brevis" had its premiere 53 years ago, and it can take a bit of time and concentration to sink into its religion-infused depths today, especially for the agnostically inclined. (I cannot speak for the atheists out there.) It is worth the effort, however, at least it was on Wednesday evening at the Gerald W. Lynch Theater, when the Limón Dance Company performed the work with intensity and palpable joy. Limón choreographed the dance after touring Poland and being struck by the postwar fortitude of its people. "They have a heroic serenity," he wrote.

And yet for a central role he created a man of doubt and anguish (on Wednesday, the stirring Raphaël Boumaïla), a man apart from the crowds that coil, gather and rise to the soaring score, "Missa Brevis in Tempore Belli" ("A Short Mass in Time of War"), written by the Hungarian composer Zoltan Kodaly in 1945.

To create these crowds the company has augmented its troupe with a number of guest dancers from Mexico who were chosen by national audition last year. It is lovely to see such a diversity of bodies onstage and good also to see how uncertainty is a crucial element of Limón's theatrical faith. Bodies collapse under the weight of what they do not or cannot comprehend. They are buoyed up by those same forces, which cast them up and out into space.

Gravity, so central to Limón's choreography, has a spiritual dimension here. Though the unrelenting underscoring of emotions can leave the viewer longing for ambiguity, the force of this vision is undeniable. When at the end the dancers (save for Mr. Boumaïla) huddle once more, turning their heads to gaze up into the rafters, you can almost feel another gaze staring down at them.

Jiri Kylian's "Cathédrale Engloutie" (1975) also deals in spiritual questions. It is set to Debussy's [music by the same name](#), which was inspired by a fifth-century Brittany legend about a cathedral visible at sunrise to a few chosen people living within a godless society.

Four dancers move back and forth among four tree posts, perhaps the remnants of a wharf. They are held within the sound of crashing surf and the sideways glow of the morning sun (the lighting design is by Joop Caboot, executed by Joshua Rose). Their restless, roiling bodies toss and turn like waves themselves, undulating at the joints and twining about one another.

Logan Frances Kruger, Durrell R. Comedy, Kristen Foote and Dante Puleio were all handsome and evocative on Wednesday, with Ms. Foote offering an especially captivating performance. Here and in the two other works she brought an added dimension to her dances, offering a complexity that can be hard to find in a Limón concert.

It was nice to get a dose of venality in "The Moor's Pavane," Limón's 1949 take on "Othello." Francisco Ruvalcaba (the Moor), Kathryn Alter (his wife), Mr. Puleio (his friend) and Ms. Foote (his friend's wife) are utterly committed to this material, and the play of desires, though again somewhat too underscored, is powerful. We all know how this will end, and yet it is difficult to look away.

The Limón Dance Company performs through Sunday at the Gerald W. Lynch Theater, John Jay College, 899 10th Avenue, at 58th Street, Clinton, (212) 279-4200, limon.org.