



Strong Emotion in Pre-Ironic Modern Dance

posted by Wendy Perron on Monday, Mar 08, 2010

When all the stars are aligned in certain Limón works, the emotional rewards are tremendous. *There Is a Time* (1956) is one of those pieces, and it left me emotionally sated at the Y last Friday. You feel like you've been through so many heavy situations, and yet you feel uplifted by the community onstage, by the embrace of the circle. The leaning, twisting, breathing circle of Limón's dancers.

Kristen Foote (a 2005 "25 to Watch"), embodied the extremes. Her "A time to laugh" was positively infectious. She strutted, swirled, and crowed around the space. She looked from left to right as though making sure she was alone, then erupted in barely contained (silent) chuckles. And her laughter went seamlessly into dance. "A time to laugh... a time to dance." Later she returned, almost shockingly, in "A time to hate, a time of war," in vehement contractions.



Earlier on the program, too, Foote had grabbed at my heart. She danced "Johnny Has Gone for a Soldier," an excerpt of Donald McKayle's *Heartbeats* (1997). What an expressive face! She was so impassioned, so full of desire and sorrow, that I felt myself choking up.

Another piece, Limón's *La Malinche* (1947), also got to me. This time it was Daniel Fetecua Soto as El Indio (the rebel, I suppose) who embodied strong emotions. This little trio depicts a play in a Mexican plaza during a fiesta. The three dancers act out the conquest of Mexico, but watching Soto, I forgot that this was a play within a play. He was so passionate to defend his country, so believable in his anger toward the princess who is a traitor, that I couldn't take my eyes off him.

In terms of artistic sensibility, my own taste is more aligned with (ironic) postmodern dance. But, given fully committed performances, I realize I am still susceptible to the powerful emotional pulls that José Limón had a gift for portraying.

Photo of the Limón Company in There Is a Time by David Levy, Courtesy Limón

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