

A strong celebration of love from Limon dance troupe

By Janice Berman

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

The Limon Dance Company is at Fort Mason's Cowell Theater tonight. That's right. It's a Monday, but somebody's dancing. These

REVIEW

Limon Dance

Company: Under the artistic direction of Carla Maxwell, the program includes "The Unsung" and "Angelitos Negros" and is part of the In Performance Series. One night only, Jan. 26. Cowell Theater, Fort Mason, San Francisco. 8 p.m. Tickets: \$25.

particular somebodies are wonderful, and seeing them is likely to blow you away. Limon, to borrow a title from the program, is undeservedly unsung.

The Limon company, which presented the same

program at the Mexican Heritage Plaza Theatre in San Jose Friday night, is the last of the true believers — oh, maybe we could add the Graham and Cunningham troupes. True believers carry the spirit and the work of a great leader forward, through repertory, revivals and new works.

The Limon Dance Company bill mourns injustice, celebrates love, rails against fate. Irony, that staple of contemporary performance, is refreshingly absent. Jose Limon, a Mexican American who began studying with Doris Humphrey in 1928, began his company 57 years ago and died in 1974, passed what he knew to the current artistic director, Carla Maxwell, who joined the troupe in 1965.

This program has no weak links. Maxwell has kept works like "The Unsung," (1970), which had its revival premiere in San Jose in 2002, and "Psalm" (1967), restaged for the 2002 Winter Olympics with a score by John Magnuson that has

overtones of eastern as well as western culture. She's added "Angelitos Negros," choreographed by Donald McKayle, a solo for senior dancer Roxane D'Orleans Juste. And then there's "Phantasy Quintet," a supple, stunning, nonstop whirl of music and motion choreographed by Adam Houglan. It too premiered in San Jose in 2002.

"Psalm" is amazing, with its choral movement by the company, designated as Psalmists, its Expiatory Figures (Mary Ford and D'Orleans Juste), its solos and its premise. To wit, there's an ancient Jewish legend that all the sorrows of the world are borne by 36 Just Men — mere mortals, often ignorant of the burden they must bear. The ballet profiles one Just Man, a role articulated Friday by Jonathon Riedel with a mixture of bafflement, defiance and woeful acceptance worthy of Job.

The Psalmists, in somber grays, surged across the stage, elbows akimbo, or swept forward and back

in canonical formation, or hurtled across the stage in trios and quartets. They lifted their eyes as if verging on ecstasy, then bent contemplatively low, intermediaries in a constant negotiation between heaven and earth, moving embodiments of doubt and belief.

"The Unsung," powerfully danced by six bare-chested men whose footfalls are the only accompaniment, pays tribute to great American Indian chiefs: Metacomet, Pontiac, Tecumseh, Red Eagle, Black Hawk, Osceola, Sitting Bull and Geronimo. The dancers each have a solo, and their individual fates — as strength is thwarted and struggle ensues — constitute a poignant document of injustice. The superb dancers were Roel Seeber, Charles Scott, Francisco Ruvalcaba, Raphael Boumaila, Robert Regala and Riedel.

The Bay Area premiere of McKayle's "Angelitos Negros," set to a Roberta Flack song whose Spanish lyric asks why there are no

black angels on the ceiling of the Vatican, received a performance of tremendous presence from D'Orleans Juste. She wore an exceptionally ruffly flamenco dress that bared her torso. A leg thrust sidewise from the hip said more about the heat of flamenco than a dozen estampas might have. As it ended, she raised her arms and whirled like a dervish.

The music of Ralph Vaughn Williams framed the dazzle and fluidity of "Phantasy Quintet," and the moves Houglan devised constituted nonstop float.

The ballet was beautifully costumed in shining white by Marion Williams. Clifton Taylor supplied the lambent lighting scheme. Brenna Monroe-Cook and Ruvalcaba embodied the weightless delight of love, ably supported, sometimes in mid-air and sometimes in mid-phrase, by their compatriots Kristen Foote, Ryoko Kudio, Regala, Scott and Seeber.



Limon Dance Company's "The Unsung," a tribute to American Indian chiefs.