

Limón Dance Company Returns With Its Founder's Vision Intact

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By Diana Dunbar, Artburstmiami.com



Christopher Duggan

"I saw the dance as a vision of ineffable power," explained dancer and choreographer José Limón, before his death in 1972, "dance as Michelangelo's visions dance and as the music of Bach dances." The late dance pioneer's vision still endures in the company he founded, now in its 70th year — a tribute to the man and the artist, and those who believe in his gifts.

This weekend the Limón Dance Company presents a program of works in recognition of the company's milestone birthday. Colin Connor, a former dancer with the troupe and now its artistic director, says the company will be presenting *"a massive program — three Limón pieces and two contemporary works,"* brought to life by a *"community of people who believe in the*

work, the value of the work,” including Limón's pieces *Concerto Grosso* (1943), *Dialogues* (1951) and *The Moor's Pavane* (1949).

Limón did not set out to be a dancer, rather a painter. Early exposure to the works of modern dance pioneers Doris Humphrey and Charles Weidman pulled him to dance. Limón took great literary and music compositions and gave them new interpretation, leaving behind a creative legacy that supersedes genre.

Limón was born in Mexico in 1946, into a world not unlike ours today. Countries had been at war, governments were rebuilding, turmoil was a constant, and artists struggled to be heard above the continual clamor of discontent and xenophobia. Limón was not untouched by the violence of the Revolution in his country. At age 5, he witnessed his young uncle being shot to death. The family immigrated to the United States shortly after.



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It was while serving in the U.S. military that Limón created *Concerto Grosso*, to music by Antonio Vivaldi. Connor describes it as a “three-part choreographic invention that evokes the formal beauty of the high Baroque and reflects the contrasting moods of the music’s movement: the elegance of the opening fugue, the tender melancholy of the largo, and the brilliance of the finale... Limón’s *Concerto Grosso* is the promise of a world, and a way of living, we have yet to see.”

Dialogues was lost to the world for many years until it was reconstructed by Carla Maxwell from a newly found film in the archives of the Jacob's Pillow dance center in the Berkshires. Maxwell worked closely with Limón and was artistic director of the company from 1978 until Connor took over in 2016. She reassembled this silent and unfinished piece into what we see today. Here, Limón looks to history for his inspiration. Connor describes it as “a dramatic double duet based on two pivotal moments in Mexican history involving foreign invaders who seek to dominate, and the Mexicans who defend their soil and integrity.” *Dialogues* is the struggle between people tied to their way of life and those pushing forward. It is about the winners and losers of history.

The Moor's Pavane, to music by Purcell, is a masterpiece of the 20th century. Based on Shakespeare's Othello, it succinctly captures the bonds of humanity. Love, fear, anger, jealousy, deceit, evil, and naivety are condensed in Limón's terse quartet as the stately Pavane is performed to its tragic conclusion. Patterns open and close, partners circle each other with suspicious glances. Whispers are exchanged, seeds planted.

“Jealousy rips apart the formal dance meant to contain it, but the choreography that reveals this is built to endure,” says Connor.

The two contemporary pieces in the program, *Night Light* and *Corvidae*, address many of the themes Limón wrestled with throughout his career. *Night Light* (2014) by Kate Weare “is a combative piece that doesn't flinch in the face of manipulative violence,” explains Connor. “It carries the work of Limón forward with its clarity of form, musicality, sense of touch and visual architecture.”

Colin Connor's *Corvidae* (2016), with music by Philip Glass, draws on the innate power of animals, especially crows. Connor points out that crows, throughout history, have been seen as mythological messengers – seeing things that maybe we are not seeing, that perhaps Limón saw and examined throughout his life and work. The crows, like Limón's work, are a messenger of the human condition – then and now.

Limón Dance Company

Saturday, 8 p.m. at South Miami-Dade Cultural Arts Center, 10950 S.W. 211 St., Cutler Bay.
Tickets cost \$25-\$45. Visit smdcac.org.