

LIMÓN

Journal

A PUBLICATION FROM THE LIMÓN INSTITUTE

Volume 2, Number 1, Spring 1997 ISSN 1073-7103

This issue of the Limón Journal commemorates an exhibition which was first seen at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center (November 1, 1996 to February 1, 1997) and then at the National Museum of Dance in Saratoga Springs, New York (May 28 to December 12, 1997). Visitors have been able to view original costumes, choreographic notes, posters, photographs and films of the Limón dances. Plans for the exhibition took root when the Limón Foundation began exploring ways to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Limón Dance Company, gaining additional significance when it was announced that José Limón would be inducted into the Hall of Fame at the National Museum of Dance in July 1997.

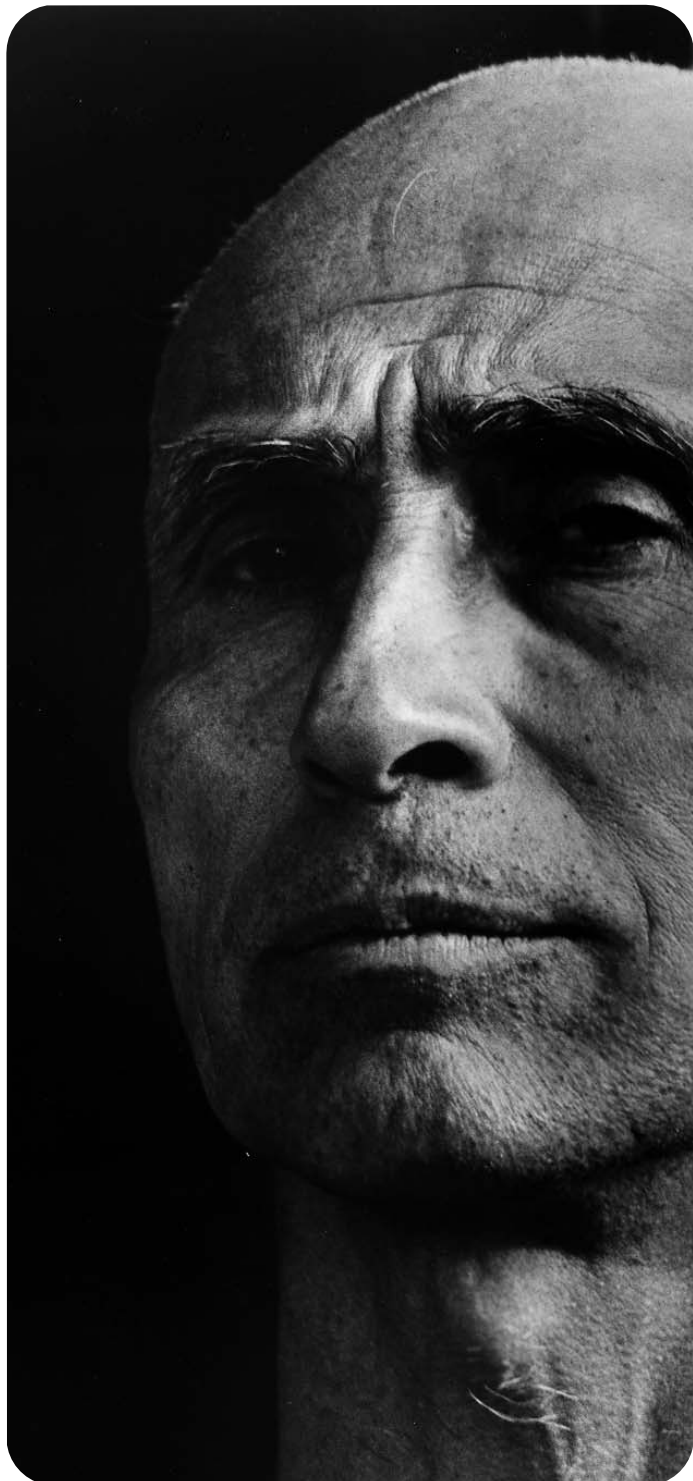
A quarter of a century after Limón's death, it is impossible to say what this exhibition and the Hall of Fame induction would mean to him personally. One can speculate that he would be honored to have his lifework appreciated and yet fiercely adamant that his creative output and philosophy not be set in stone. "There is a great difference between a pantheon and a mausoleum," he once remarked. This distinction is moot when viewing his dances in photographs that are virtually bursting with life.

Included in this Journal is the complete text and a few select images from the exhibition. This documentation provides a glimpse of the Limón Institute's activities and indicates the benefits of its close partnership with the Limón Dance Company. As the Company continues to breathe life into dances created decades ago, the Institute safeguards words and pictures that document the dances. José Limón once pointed out the limitations of the printed word: "If words were adequate to describe fully what the dance can do, there would be no reason for all the mighty muscular effort, the discomfort, the sweat, and the splendors of that art. For it has always existed to give us that which nothing else can." The intensely human movement of José Limón indeed gives us something unique, and this Journal is intended to communicate both the source and scope of his legacy.

Norton Owen, Editor

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JOSE LIMON (PHOTOGRAPH BY PAUL DRAPER)

THE DANCE HEROES OF JOSE LIMON



JOSE LIMON IN "DANZAS MEXICANAS" (PHOTO: BARBARA MORGANI)

Note: The following text duplicates the wall labels used in the exhibition. Items listed in bold type represent the artifacts on display, with lenders in parentheses.

BEGINNINGS

The artistic life of Mexican-American dancer/choreographer José Limón (1908-1972) was defined by heroes. Like the revolutionary dancemakers who blazed a trail for him - Isadora Duncan, Ted Shawn, Ruth St. Denis and Martha Graham - Limón was a monumental figure whose big ideas, strong points of view and dynamic personality commanded attention. Both his inspirations and his creations were painted with broad strokes on large canvasses. His influences loomed as towering artistic forces, inspiring him to "dance as Michelangelo's visions dance and as the music of Bach dances." With Doris Humphrey and Charles Weidman as mentors both on and off stage, Limón had a direct line to the originators of modern dance in America. His unfinished autobiography, exhibited and quoted extensively in this exhibition, refers to Isadora Duncan and Harald Kreutzberg as his parents, with Humphrey and Weidman as foster parents. Humphrey's influence was particularly far-reaching, culminating in her pivotal role as co-founder and artistic director of the José Limón Dance Company. Under her tutelage, Limón came to view dance as "an art capable of the sublimity of tragedy and the Dionysian ecstasies."

The eldest of eleven children, José Limón was born in Mexico and moved with his family to the United States when he was seven years old. He was undoubtedly influenced by his father, a musician, and especially by his mother, whom he adored. "What you were blossoms into what you are," he once said. "I am very much what I was at six years of age. I knew what I was then as much as I know now."



JOSE LIMON, CA. 1926

- **Silver cross worn by José Limón's mother (Collection of Charles Tomlinson)**
- **Photograph of José Limón, 1909**
- **José Limón in an undated childhood photograph**
- **José Limón in Los Angeles studio photograph, ca. 1926**
- **Francisca Limón and her son, José, 1910 (NYPL Dance Collection)**

Limón considered himself to be an artist from early childhood, but his concentration was on the visual arts. "It was taken for granted by everyone, including myself, that I was destined for a painter's career." After entering UCLA as an art major, he left to make his career in the New York City art world. It was here at the age of 20 that he saw a performance by the German expressionist dancers Harald Kreutzberg and Yvonne Georgi, changing the course of his life. "I knew with a shocking suddenness that I had not been alive, or rather that I had not been born," he later wrote. "Now I did not want to continue on this earth unless I learned to do what this man was doing."

- **Harald Kreutzberg in two uncredited photo montages**
- **Harald Kreutzberg in THE FIRST MAN and in a studio photograph by S. Enkelmann (NYPL Dance Collection)**

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Two of Limón's high school friends (the artists Don Forbes and Perkins Harnley) were acquainted with Charles Weidman, and they suggested that Limón should go to the Humphrey-Weidman School for his first dance training. The school registrar who enrolled him was the former Denishawn dancer Pauline Lawrence, who would later become his accompanist, costume designer, tour manager and wife. Barely a month after his first dance class, he was chosen to appear in a lavish Broadway production of *LYSISTRATA* choreographed by Humphrey and Weidman. He formed a close personal relationship with both of his mentors, and they established both a literal and an artistic home together. Throughout the 1930s, Limón's activities were inextricably linked with Humphrey-Weidman, in concerts and in such commercial ventures as a production of *CANDIDE* at Broadway's Booth Theatre.

Limón also began choreographing his own works for group concerts, and collaborated with Weidman on dances "of men, by men and for men" which prefigured some of the works that he would later create for all-male casts.

- **Review of Solo Dance Recital from NEW THEATRE, February 1936**
- **Program for MEN IN THE DANCE, 1935**
- **Charles Weidman, José Limón and company in CONFLICTS, 1932**
- **William Matons, Charles Weidman and José Limón in CANDIDE, 1933 (NYPL Dance Collection)**

Throughout the 1930s, Limón was a leading member of the Humphrey-Weidman group, appearing in almost all of their productions. Weidman's *QUEST* was the epitome of the idealistic, big-themed works produced by the company. The program note for this work read, "The artist, in his endeavor to find or create conditions under which he may achieve full and free expression, encounters many obstacles, in many lands." One of these obstacles might be the failure of an artistic effort, a circumstance from which Limón derived the following wisdom. "Heroic failure often carries with it a cathartic aftermath. One can find a somber solace in a superlative debacle. But how to endure living with a half-success, half-failure? With the knowledge that you failed to move, to transfigure, the spectator? That he left your performance untouched, unravished, merely lukewarm? The years gave me, inevitably, experience."

- **Humphrey-Weidman program from Washington Irving High School, 1937**
- **Humphrey-Weidman flyer, ca. 1937 and souvenir program, ca. 1938**
- **José Limón and Charles Weidman in QUEST, 1936**
- **Gouache by Gerard Gentile showing his set and Pauline Lawrence's costumes for QUEST, 1936 (NYPL Dance Collection)**

In *MODERN DANCE IN AMERICA: THE BENNINGTON YEARS*, Sali Ann Kriegsman provides a glimpse at the economic realities of modern dance in the 1930s, highlighting the crucial contributions made by summer festivals in general and Bennington in particular. "They struggled with the difficulties of trying to produce dances without means, finding theaters in which to mount them, attracting audiences, and keeping their dancers together without money to pay them. There was no subsidy of any kind for the modern dance at this time - private or public. Bennington offered a few weeks respite from these concerns." Limón first ventured to Bennington in 1935, a summer when he also taught at Charlotte Perry and Portia Mansfield's camp in Steamboat Springs, Colorado.

- **Charles Weidman, Doris Humphrey and José Limón in EXHIBITION PIECE, photograph by Thomas Bouchard**
- **José Limón in his first solo, TWO PRELUDES, ca. 1931**
- **Doris Humphrey at Bennington, as pictured in the New York Times, 1937 (NYPL Dance Collection)**
- **Perry-Mansfield Camp brochures, 1936 (José Limón Dance Foundation, gift of Marion Rice)**

Musical theatre work for dancers in the 1930s and 1940s was both a blessing and a curse. It represented a steady paycheck, but for Limón

and his peers Broadway represented the antithesis of their artistic goals. Remembering the long run of Irving Berlin's AS THOUSANDS CHEER, Limón wrote, "I would lie awake often, in a cold sweat, sick with abhorrence, knowing that the next week, month, year, for all of an appalling eternity, I was condemned to go to the Music Box Theater, and paint my face, limber up my muscles, and wearing the specious gaiety of a prostitute, would dance to HEAT WAVE, MISS LONELY HEARTS, EASTER PARADE and REVOLT IN CUBA."

- José Limón with Daphne Vane and Marjorie Moore in KEEP OFF THE GRASS, choreographed by George Balanchine, 1940 (José Limón Dance Foundation, gift of Ruth Currier)
- José Limón and Mary Ellen Moylan in ROSALINDA, choreographed by George Balanchine, 1942
- José Limón and Letitia Ide in AS THOUSANDS CHEER, choreographed by Charles Weidman, 1933 (Vandamm Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, NYPL)

Limón's criteria for choosing partners from among his fellow Humphrey-Weidman dancers was simple and direct: "They were the ones I considered the most beautiful, and the best dancers." With them he formed a small company called "The Little Group" which performed to enthusiastic audiences in 1930 and 1931. At first baffled by the tumultuous reception, Limón later found the explanation for his early success. "Nothing is so electrifying, even enchanting, as the magical freshness and beauty of youth, especially when it has talent."

- José Limón with Letitia Ide in ETUDE IN D FLAT MAJOR, photograph by Helen Hewett, ca. 1931
- José Limón with Ernestine Henoch (later Ernestine Stodelle) in TANGO, 1931
- José Limón with Eleanor King in MAZURKA, photograph by Helen Hewett, 1931 (NYPL Dance Collection)

Although he had already choreographed numerous short works and a Broadway musical, Limón considered the 1939 DANZAS MEXICANAS to be one of his first serious choreographic efforts. Here he turned to his native heritage and created five solos based on symbolic figures from Mexican history: Indio, Conquistador, Peon, Caballero and Revolucionario. "The cruel, heroic and at the same time beautiful story of my native land has held a singular fascination for me. It is never entirely absent from my thinking. I am certain that it has been a strong influence in shaping me into the person I have become."

- Costume sketches for DANZAS MEXICANAS by Pauline Lawrence, 1939
- Choreographic notes for DANZAS MEXICANAS, 1939 (NYPL Dance Collection)
- José Limón in DANZAS MEXICANAS, photograph by John Lindquist, ca. 1946 (NYPL Dance Collection, copyright Harvard Theatre Collection, The Houghton Library)
- José Limón in DANZAS MEXICANAS, photograph by Barbara Morgan, ca. 1940 (José Limón Dance Foundation)

After leaving the Humphrey-Weidman company in 1941, Limón forged a new alliance with May O'Donnell, one of Martha Graham's

leading soloists. This partnership, based on a strong mutual admiration, was to prove artistically and personally rewarding to both artists. Limón remembered, "Our ideas would complement and stimulate each other. We would criticize and evaluate and modify with all appreciation of each other's efforts and capacities." O'Donnell and her husband, the composer Ray Green, played a part in one of Limón's most enduring partnerships when on October 3, 1941, they served as witnesses for Limón's wedding to Pauline Lawrence.

- José Limón and May O'Donnell in CASEY JONES, photograph by Romaine, 1941
- José Limón and May O'Donnell in THIS STORY IS LEGEND, photograph by Romaine, 1941
- José Limón and May O'Donnell in THIS STORY IS LEGEND, photograph by Barbara Morgan, 1941 (NYPL Dance Collection)

Limón choreographed CHACONNE for an all-Bach program in 1942, and it has most recently been widely performed by Mikhail Baryshnikov. Of his struggles in creating the dance, Limón wrote, "It took a tremendous amount of sweat - not only of the body but of the mind and intuition. There was no dramatic idea or story on which one could lean. Here was the challenge which must be met and transcended if totally abstract formal beauty was to result."

- Costume for CHACONNE worn by José Limón, designed by Pauline Lawrence (José Limón Dance Foundation, gift of Ruth Currier)

Directing and performing in Army camp shows during his 32 months of military service in World War II, Limón extended his stylistic range to include everything from burlesque shows to a Nativity pageant. Among his collaborators on these productions were the composers Frank Loesser and Alex North. One memorable Limón dance number in SONG OF THE MEDICS was called "This is a Machete, Eddie." Whether dressed in army fatigues or a blonde wig, Limón's strong stage presence still made itself felt.

- José Limón and soldiers in DELIVER THE GOODS, 1944
- José Limón and troops rehearsing WE SPEAK FOR OURSELVES at Camp Lee, VA, 1943
- José Limón in makeup for HI, YANK, 1944
- Script for WE SPEAK FOR OURSELVES, 1943 (NYPL Dance Collection)

After his military service ended in 1945, Limón established a trio with Beatrice Seckler and Dorothy Bird to present his choreography. Although its lifespan was brief, the trio was significant as the immediate predecessor of the José Limón Dance Company. It also marked Limón's return to the dance world after almost three years in the Army. "I was thirty-seven years old. The years in the Army had meant for me an inevitable retrogression as a dancer. I could accept this and turn to something else, or I could work harder than ever and get myself back. I chose the latter course."

- Facsimile of poster advertising the Limón trio, 1945 (Collection of Dorothy Bird)
- José Limón, Beatrice Seckler and Dorothy Bird in Limón's

CONCERTO GROSSO, 1945

- Line drawing of José Limón, Beatrice Seckler and Dorothy Bird by Emily Genauer, 1945 (NYPL Dance Collection)

From the Limón Dance Company's inception in 1946 until her death twelve years later, Doris Humphrey served as its artistic director, contributing a sizeable portion of the repertoire. Her first work for the new company, LAMENT FOR IGNACIO SANCHEZ MEJIAS, was based on Federico Garcia Lorca's poem about a fallen bullfighter. Humphrey's script for LAMENT states that Limón's character "is intended to signify the struggle of all men of courage who contend in the ring of life and who meet a tragic end." This was a reference not only to Lorca's hero, but to all those who had died in World War II. LAMENT was the major work on the Company's New York debut program at The Belasco Theatre on January 5, 1947.

- José Limón in LAMENT FOR IGNACIO SANCHEZ MEJIAS, photograph by Jack Mitchell, 1950 (NYPL Dance Collection)
- José Limón in LAMENT FOR IGNACIO SANCHEZ MEJIAS, photograph by John Lindquist, 1950 (NYPL Dance Collection, copyright Harvard Theatre Collection, The Houghton Library)

One of the enduring masterworks of modern dance, DAY ON EARTH was created by Doris Humphrey for the Limón Company in 1947. Limón was cast as an Everyman, with his onstage lifespan encompassing all the key events in a man's life: work, love, parenthood and loss. Limón once explained that this dance "compared human existence to the sunrise, the morning, high noon, the afternoon, the sunset, and the end of the day, when all is rest and peace."

- José Limón in DAY ON EARTH, photographed at Jones Beach by Carmine Schiavone, ca. 1947 (NYPL Dance Collection)
- Costume for DAY ON EARTH worn by José Limón, designed by Pauline Lawrence (José Limón Dance Foundation, gift of Ruth Currier)



JOSE LIMON IN "CHACONNE" (PHOTO: WALTER STRATE)



JOSE LIMON & LETITIA IDE IN "DAY ON EARTH" (PHOTO: CARMINE SCHIAYONE)

LIMÓN DANCES

José Limón's creations were often epics, encompassing legendary figures such as Othello (THE MOOR'S PAVANE), Brutus Jones (THE EMPEROR JONES), Adam and Eve (THE EXILES) and Judas Iscariot (THE TRAITOR). It was through these and other works that he made his most eloquent statements, believing that his dances should speak for themselves. He once wrote, "If words were adequate to describe fully what the dance can do, there would be no reason for all the mighty muscular effort, the discomfort, the sweat, and the splendors of that art. For it has always existed to give us that which nothing else can."

Limón returned to his Mexican heritage in 1949 with LA MALINCHE, his first work with two dancers who would figure strongly in his creative life for the next twenty years: Lucas Hoving and Pauline Koner. The idea for this dance had been in his mind for several years, and he had originally conceived it to be danced by Martha Graham as the Indian girl and Erick Hawkins as the Conquistador. "She seemed interested. We had several conferences, but the draft board had other choreography planned for me," Limón later wrote.

• José Limón, Pauline Koner and Lucas Hoving in LA MALINCHE, photographs by Walter Strate, ca. 1949 (José Limón Dance Foundation)

Because it is now one of the most widely-known modern dances in the world, it is difficult to imagine that Limón had harbored doubts about the idea when he created THE MOOR'S PAVANE in 1949. "This dance might prove, in the eyes of the public, to be an impertinence, an almost sacrilegious presumption. I know how hard I had tried not to make a "dance version" of Shakespeare's OTHELLO. I had worked with all will and conscience to find a form which might prove valid and pertinent in terms of dance."

- Watercolors of José Limón in THE MOOR'S PAVANE (NYPL Dance Collection)
- José Limón, Lucas Hoving, Pauline Koner and Betty Jones in THE MOOR'S PAVANE, photographs by Walter Strate, ca. 1949
- José Limón and Betty Jones in THE MOOR'S PAVANE, photograph by S. Enkelmann, 1957

- **Costume for THE MOOR'S PAVANE worn by José Limón, designed by Pauline Lawrence (José Limón Dance Foundation)**
- **José Limón's shoes for THE MOOR'S PAVANE (Collection of Daniel Lewis)**
- **Original handkerchief used in THE MOOR'S PAVANE (Collection of Betty Jones)**
- **Pauline Koner's shoes for THE MOOR'S PAVANE (Collection of Pauline Koner)**

Limón choreographed several works with biblical themes, of which THE EXILES was the first major one (appropriately, as it was based on the story of Adam and Eve). His original program note in 1950, no longer used in current productions, hints at some of his personal associations with this story of banishment from Eden. "According to Dante, there is no greater anguish than past joys remembered in the midst of adversity. This dance was inspired by and dedicated to those desolate ones who remember some lost paradise, or serenity, or innocence, or homeland. The work is, like the symphony [Arnold Schoenberg's Chamber Symphony No.2], in two parts: The first describes the man and the woman lamenting their expulsion from a paradise. In the second movement, they remember the ecstatic and innocent joy which was theirs, and how they came to forfeit it. The choreographic style reflects the neo-romanticism of the Schoenberg score: the poignant, voluptuous beauty of the first movement, and the coruscating joyousness of the second; the somber coda marks the return of the protagonists to the cruel reality of their exile."

- **José Limón & Ruth Currier in THE EXILES, photograph by Peter Basch, ca. 1950 (NYPL Dance Collection)**
- **Louis Falco & Sarah Stackhouse in THE EXILES, photograph by Jack Mitchell**
- **José Limón in THE EXILES, photograph by Walter Strate, ca. 1950 (José Limón Dance Foundation)**

Ironically, just after THE EXILES brought out Limón's feelings for his lost homeland, he was welcomed back to Mexico as a distinguished native son. In 1950, his company was invited to take up residency at Mexico City's Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, then under the direction of the artist Miguel Covarrubias. Here he was given the opportunity to experiment with creating large ensemble works, with the full technical support of a major theater. Covarrubias himself designed the costumes and set for TONANTZINTLA, which was, like all the works Limón created in Mexico, based on a Mexican theme. Even so, Limón sought to distance his works from being perceived as folkloric dances. "My works were not native, nor did they contain authentic folk dances. They were created by a Mexican who had lived abroad and who had another perspective. Yet, I found I had much in common with the Mexican dancers. They are also interested in the dance humanistically; they use dance to talk about human experience."

- **Pen and ink rendering of TONANTZINTLA by an unidentified artist**
- **Costume designs for TONANTZINTLA by Miguel Covarrubias (NYPL Dance Collection)**

In THE VISITATION, Limón interpreted the the Annunciation as the story of two lowly people whose lives are transformed by the visit of a celestial messenger. He cast himself as the man, Pauline Koner as the wife and Lucas Hoving as the stranger. Koner described the dance in her book, *SOLITARY SONG*: "The only props we used were a small bench and a plank. The plank became a symbol of the man's work as a carpenter, then a bed, and finally I stretched along it as José held it horizontally. Holding me against the plank, he lifted it to a vertical position, which seemed to predict the Crucifixion." While the work was an instant success at its premiere and it remained in the repertoire for awhile, no record exists of it other than these and a few other photographs.

- **Pauline Koner and José Limón in THE VISITATION, photograph by Peter Basch (José Limón Dance Foundation)**
- **Pauline Koner and José Limón in THE VISITATION (NYPL Dance Collection)**

The TRAITOR was choreographed in 1954, at a time when the U.S. arts community was torn apart by Senator Joseph McCarthy and the House Un-American Activities Committee. The dilemma faced by many prominent individuals when they were asked to incriminate their friends must certainly have been on Limón's mind when he wrote this program note: "The arch-betrayer, Judas Iscariot, is used in this work to symbolize all those tormented men who, loving too much, must hate; these men who, to our own day, must turn against their loyalties, friends and fatherlands, and in some fearful cataclysm of the spirit, betray them to the enemy. This work, in its treatment, costuming and decor suggests our present era."

- **José Limón in THE TRAITOR, photographs by Matthew Wysocki, 1954 (NYPL Dance Collection)**
- **José Limón, Lucas Hoving and Company rehearsing THE TRAITOR, photographs by Matthew Wysocki, 1954**
- **Reproduction of costume for THE TRAITOR worn by José Limón, designed by Pauline Lawrence (José Limón Dance Foundation)**



JOSE LIMON & BETTY JONES IN "THE MOOR'S PAVANE" (PHOTO: WALTER STRATE)

In Eugene O'Neill's play, *THE EMPEROR JONES*, a fugitive from a chain gang sets himself up as emperor of an island domain. He becomes a tyrant, and his mistreatment of his subjects causes them to rebel, hunt him down and bring him to an ignominious end. As with *THE MOOR'S PAVANE*, Limón resisted creating a literal dance translation of the play. For his *EMPEROR JONES* in 1956, Limón and his collaborator, the composer Heitor Villa-Lobos, attempted "a symbolic synthesis of a man's disintegration through terror." Limón told an interviewer, "We concentrated on the psychological possibilities Jones presented. The human body can be more powerfully expressive, because the expression is not specific. A chain gang, a ship, and other scenes are suggested. But these things are in the mind of Jones, which is tortured by phantasmagoria of his recent deeds."

' **José Limón, Lucas Hoving and Company in *THE EMPEROR JONES*, photographs by Gjon Mili, 1956**

' **Reproduction of costume for *THE EMPEROR JONES* worn by José Limón, designed by Pauline Lawrence**

' **Set for *THE EMPEROR JONES* designed by Charles Tomlinson (José Limón Dance Foundation)**

"THE TRAITOR" (PHOTO: MATTHEW WYSOCKI)



Another of Limón's great biblical works, *THERE IS A TIME* uses dance to explore the well-known verses from Ecclesiastes, beginning with, "To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven." In her book, *DANCE IS A MOMENT*, Barbara Pollack quotes Limón as he searched for this dance's central image. "The problem was to find a dance theme for time. Time is that which there is most of. What shape is it that most nearly approaches the endless? The circle. It has no beginning and no end. It is the shape closest to the abstraction of time and we are dealing with time. At times, our circle will be a serene, unbroken thing, at times it will be convulsive. The idea of the circle will be present in every form in the dance." By the time the dance premiered in 1956, Limón had formalized these thoughts into the following program note: "A circle, endless, with no beginning and no end, appears as symbol of time and timelessness. That is the theme from which emerge other circles, like variations on the initial theme. These are in turn joyful, lyrical, somber, violent, but

ever recur to the circular time motif, to remind the spectator that the great opposites, birth-death, love-hate, etc., are contained, and endured, in time." These concepts were further underlined by Limón's original title for the work, *VARIATIONS ON A THEME*, and by the title of the Pulitzer Prize-winning musical score that was commissioned from composer Norman Dello Joio, *MEDITATIONS ON ECCLESIASTES*.

' **Original cast of *THERE IS A TIME*, photograph by Gjon Mili, 1956**

' **José Limón's choreographic notes for *THERE IS A TIME*, 1956**

' **José Limón in *THERE IS A TIME*, photograph by Matthew Wysocki 1956 (NYPL Dance Collection)**

One of Limón's most deeply felt creations, *MISSA BREVIS* grew out of a 1957 European tour which included extensive performances in Poland. Limón was tremendously moved by the resilience of the Polish people who had rebuilt their country after the devastation of World War II. "The Poles have this tradition of heroic survival," he commented. "They have a passion for their identity." While the dance was set to an existing score, it would seem that Zoltán Kodály's "Missa Brevis in Tempore Belli" (Mass in time of war) was tailor-made for Limón's conception. The music was composed in 1945 and received its first performance in Kodály's native Budapest in the cellar of a bombed-out church. In the dance, Limón as the central figure watches the faithful with anguish and inspiration and tries in vain to allow himself to join them. *MISSA BREVIS* marked a turning point in Limón's utilization of a large group of dancers. The group would become even more important in later works, but here it first comes into its own. John Martin commented on this aspect of the work in his *New York Times* review. "His use of the group as a group is a natural outgrowth of the subject and the material; when the individual emerges he is nonetheless an individual, and when he takes his personal flashes of emotional realization back into the group he is no less a part of the group. There is a remarkable awareness of the solitude of the individual, and yet also of the group as something more than a mere aggregation of solitudes."

' **José Limón's choreographic notes for *MISSA BREVIS*, 1958 (NYPL Dance Collection)**

' **The José Limón Dance Company in *MISSA BREVIS*, 1958**

' **Betty Jones and Company in *MISSA BREVIS*, photograph by Fannie Helen Melcer, 1958**

' **Painted canvas advertising the Limón Company's 1991 performances of *MISSA BREVIS* in Poland (José Limón Dance Foundation)**

' **Set design for *MISSA BREVIS* by Ming Cho Lee, 1958 (Collection of Charles Tomlinson)**

When he was creating *A CHOREOGRAPHIC OFFERING* in 1964, Limón described it as "a memorial bouquet which I present to my great master Doris Humphrey. I have taken all the flowers which are her movements and put them together as a memento vitae, to the music of her beloved Johann Sebastian Bach." The critic P.W. Manchester perhaps best summed up the inspiration and the effect of the work: "A *CHOREOGRAPHIC OFFERING* is at once a great work and a classically

beautiful memorial, offered by a man who, once a pupil, himself became a master and never forgot the debt to his teacher." It represented yet another stride forward in manipulating large groups of dancers, utilizing movements from fourteen of Humphrey's dances. Deborah Jowitt called it "a baroque symphony of dance steps, more serene and balanced than earlier Limón works, in which Humphrey's breathing rhythms and tilting, arching phrases are set into huge wheeling circles, parades, spirals, criss-crossing flights."

' Louis Falco and Sarah Stackhouse in A CHOREOGRAPHIC OFFERING, photograph by Fannie Helen Melcer, 1964 (José Limón Dance Foundation)

' José Limón rehearsing A CHOREOGRAPHIC OFFERING, photograph by Martha Swope, 1964

' The José Limón Dance Company in A CHOREOGRAPHIC OFFERING, photograph by Farrell Grehan, 1964 (NYPL Dance Collection)

The year 1997 marks the 50th anniversary of the José Limón Dance Company. The Company was led by Limón for the first 25 years and it has survived him for another 25. Much of the credit for this unparalleled record goes to Carla Maxwell, the dancer who joined the Company in 1965 and has served as its artistic director since 1978. The Company maintains a significant representation of Limón works in its repertory while pursuing the vision of a modern dance repertory company that was set forth by Limón and Doris Humphrey from the beginning.

' CHOREOGRAPHIC OFFERING Nº24 AND 25: PAMALA JONES and CHOREOGRAPHIC OFFERING Nº17: CARLA MAXWELL, chromogenic prints by William Boorstein, 1995 (Collection of the photographer)

SET DESIGN FOR "MISSA BREVIS" BY MING CHO LEE



THE OTHER SIDE OF LIMÓN

Today, Limón's legacy is perpetuated through the work of the José Limón Dance Foundation, which keeps his influence alive through educational programs, the licensing of Limón dances and, most visibly, through the ongoing activities of the Limón Dance Company, celebrating its 50th anniversary this year. While now accepted as part of the dance establishment, Limón always considered himself an outsider, and his accomplishments testify to the importance of heroically following one's own vision. He once wrote, "It is the good fortune of society that the supremely individual nature, the nonconformist, the questioner, the rebel, the heretic, the iconoclast does exist."

In a 1972 *New York Times* profile by Deborah Jowitt, published just two months before Limón's death, he is described as "occupied with his private vision of art and tired out from the hard work necessary to articulate it. When he talked to you, his eyes - solid black pits in the marvelous Indian skull - seemed fixed on a point either deep inside himself or miles behind you."

' José Limón, photographs by Paul Draper (José Limón Dance Foundation)

' José Limón, photographed in his apartment, ca. 1950 (NYPL Dance Collection)

Many years after his wedding to Pauline Lawrence in 1941, Limón wrote about how he felt at the time. "Here was someone to whom I would devote myself and be responsible for until death. I think she sensed my feelings, and she has been, ever since, secure in the knowledge that no matter what, I would be there, and could be counted on." When Pauline Lawrence Limón died of cancer in 1971, her husband was at her side.

' José Limón in Angkor Wat, photograph by Charles Tomlinson, 1963

' José Limón and Pauline Lawrence Limón, photograph by Charles Tomlinson

' José Limón and Pauline Limón's sister, Betty Hamilton, photograph by Charles Tomlinson (Collection of Charles Tomlinson)

' José Limón and Pauline Lawrence Limón in their apartment, ca. 1950

' Anniversary card from José Limón to Pauline Lawrence Limón, 1968 (NYPL Dance Collection)

JOSE LIMON IN "A CHOREOGRAPHIC OFFERING" (PHOTO: MARTHA SWOPE)



A twenty-five acre farm between Flemington and Stockton, New Jersey became the Limón home in 1948. Doris Humphrey's son, Charles Humphrey Woodford, helped convert the barn into a distinctive dwelling, and he described the scene in the epilogue to *DANCE IS A MOMENT*: "The spaciousness of the barn and its acres was on a scale that suited José. By the mid-fifties a dance studio had been built in the granary and the hayloft had been turned into a two-story living room. The milking room had become a huge kitchen and dining room with a stone fireplace at one end. Constructing all of this had taken a great deal of time and most of the money he had earned, but he took pride and pleasure in having created his own environment."

* **Two uncredited photographs of José Limón at his farm, ca. 1955 (José Limón Dance Foundation)**

"Rest was not easy," wrote Charles Humphrey Woodford in remembering José Limón. These photographs reveal a relatively peaceful man, but one whose mind was always at work.

* **José Limón, photograph by Jack Mitchell, ca. 1960**

* **José Limón in Mexico, ca. 1951**

* **José Limón and Pauline Lawrence Limón at their New Jersey farm, ca. 1955 (José Limón Dance Foundation)**

One thing which remained constant throughout Limón's careers as dancer, teacher and choreographer was his love of motion and the

kinetic possibilities of the dancer. "The important thing is, and should be, the movement," he once said.

* **José Limón in the studio of his New Jersey barn, ca. 1955**

* **Rehearsing A CHOREOGRAPHIC OFFERING at Connecticut College, 1964 (José Limón Dance Foundation)**

* **José Limón in the studio, photograph by Milton Oleaga, ca. 1960 (NYPL Dance Collection)**

Miscellaneous artworks and mementos on display:

* **Cast stone bust of José Limón by Anita Weschler, ca. 1940 (José Limón Dance Foundation)**

* **Charles Tomlinson, oil on wood by José Limón**

* **Pauline Lawrence Limón, oil on wood by José Limón**

* **José Limón's silver bracelet and engraved key ring**

* **Items from José Limón's pewter collection (Collection of Charles Tomlinson)**

* **Sarah Stackhouse, oil on wood by José Limón (Collection of Sarah Stackhouse)**

* **José Limón on tour, photograph by Daniel Lewis**

* **José Limón's engraved key ring and half moon key ring**

* **José Limón's black wool sweater (Collection of Daniel Lewis)**

* **José Limón, oil on canvas by Doreen Vallis (Collection of the Estate of Martha Hill)**

* **First page from José Limón's unpublished autobiography (NYPL Dance Collection)**

JOSÉ LIMÓN CHRONOLOGY

- 1908 José Arcadio Limón is born on January 12, in Culiacan, Mexico.
- 1915 Limón family moves to Tucson, Arizona, then later to Los Angeles.
- 1926 Graduates from Lincoln High School and enters UCLA as an art major.
- 1928 Moves to New York City to study at the New York School of Design.
- 1929 Sees dance performance by Harald Kreutzberg and Yvonne Georgi and decides to become a dancer, enrolling in the Humphrey-Weidman school.
- 1930 Appears in *Lysistrata* on Broadway in production choreographed by Doris Humphrey and Charles Weidman. Creates his first dance, *Etude in D Minor*, a duet with Letitia Ide.
- 1931 Forms The Little Group with Letitia Ide, Eleanor King and Ernestine Stodelle.
- 1932 Appears in the musical revue *Americana* on Broadway, featuring dances from Humphrey-Weidman repertoire.
- 1933 Appears in Irving Berlin's *As Thousands Cheer* on Broadway, choreographed by Charles Weidman. Choreographs Jerome Kern's *Roberta* (featuring Bob Hope) at Broadway's New Amsterdam Theatre.
- 1935 Appears in Humphrey's *New Dance* at Bennington School of the Dance.
- 1936 Appears in Humphrey's *Theatre Piece* and *With My Red Fires*, and Weidman's *Quest*.
- 1937 Selected as one of the first three Bennington Fellows.
- 1938 Appears in Humphrey's *Passacaglia* and *Fugue in C Minor*.
- 1939 Creates first major choreographic work, *Danzas Mexicanas*, at Mills College (Bennington Festival).
- 1940 Appears as featured dancer in Broadway's *Keep Off the Grass*, choreographed by George Balanchine. After breaking ties with Charles Weidman, leaves Humphrey-Weidman Company to work with May O'Donnell, with whom he creates *War Lyrics*.

- 1941 Co-Choreographs *Curtain Raiser*, *This Story is Legend* and *Three Inventories on Casey Jones* with May O'Donnell. Marries Pauline Lawrence on October 3.
- 1942 Dissolves partnership with May O'Donnell. Creates *Chaconne* for all-Bach program at Humphrey-Weidman Studio Theatre. Final appearance in a Broadway show, partnering Mary Ellen Moylan in Balanchine's *Rosalinda*.
- 1943 Appears in Humphrey/Limón dances on American and folk themes at Studio Theatre. Drafted into Army in April.
- 1944 Choreographs several works for U.S. Army Special Services, collaborating with composers Frank Loesser and Alex North.
- 1945 Debut of Trio with Beatrice Seckler and Dorothy Bird, directed by Humphrey. Choreographs *Concerto Grosso*. Discharged from Army in December.
- 1946 Attains American citizenship. Formal debut of José Limón Dance Company at Bennington College. Creates roles in Humphrey's *Lament for Ignacio Sanchez Mejias* and *The Story of Mankind*.
- 1947 Limón Company makes its New York debut at the Belasco Theatre on January 5. Creates lead role in Humphrey's *Day on Earth*.
- 1948 Limón Company appears at the first Connecticut College American Dance Festival, where it remains in residence each summer until 1973.
- 1949 Choreographs *The Moor's Pavane* and *La Malinche*.
- 1950 Appears in Paris with Ruth Page in the spring, becoming the first American modern dance company to appear in Europe. First tour to Mexico in the fall. Choreographs *The Exiles*. Receives Dance Magazine Award for *The Moor's Pavane* as the year's most outstanding choreography.
- 1951 Joins faculty of The Juilliard School's new dance division. Accepts invitation to Mexico City's Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, where he creates six works including *Tonantzintla*, *Dialogues* and *Los Cuatros Soles*.
- 1953 Creates roles in Humphrey's *Ruins and Visions* and *Ritmo Jondo*. Choreographs *The Visitation*.

- 1954 Choreographs **The Traitor**. Inaugurates U.S. State Department's International Exchange Program with Company tour to South America.
- 1955 Choreographs **Scherzo** and **Symphony for Strings**.
- 1956 Choreographs **There is a Time**, with Pulitzer Prize-winning score by Norman Dello Joio, and **The Emperor Jones**, with a commissioned score by Heitor Villa-Lobos.
- 1957 Embarks on a five-month Company tour of Europe and the Near East. Receives second Dance Magazine Award.
- 1958 Assumes the role of Artistic Director of the Limón Company upon the death of Doris Humphrey. Choreographs **Missa Brevis** and **Mazurkas**.
- 1960 Choreographs **Barren Sceptre** with Pauline Koner, based on the story of Macbeth. Leads the Company on a twelve-week State Department tour to South and Central America. Receives honorary doctorate from Wesleyan University.
- 1962 Limón Company opens the first dance performance at the New York Shakespeare Festival's Delacorte Theater in Central Park.
- 1963 Tours the Far East for twelve weeks with the Company under the sponsorship of the U.S. State Department. Creates **The Demon** to a score by Paul Hindemith, with the composer conducting the premiere.
- 1964 Creates **A Choreographic Offering** in tribute to Doris Humphrey. Receives the Capezio Award. Appointed as Artistic Director of the American Dance Theatre at Lincoln Center.
- 1965 Appears in nationally-telecast NET special, **The Dance Theater of José Limón**.
- 1966 Creates **The Winged**. Performs with the Company at the Washington Cathedral. Receives his first government funding, a \$23,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.
- 1967 Choreographs **Psalm**. Performs **The Moor's Pavane** (with the original cast) at the White House for President Johnson and King Hassan II of Morocco. Receives honorary doctorate from Colby College. Undergoes first of several operations for prostate cancer.
- 1968 Establishes the José Limón Dance Foundation as a not-for-profit corporation. Receives honorary doctorate from University of North Carolina.
- 1969 Appears for the last time onstage as a dancer, performing The Leader in **The Traitor** and The Moor in **The Moor's Pavane** at Brooklyn Academy of Music.
- 1970 **The Unsung** is premiered as a work in progress.
- 1971 Creates **Dances for Isadora**. Receives honorary doctorate from Oberlin College. Pauline Lawrence Limón dies.
- 1972 Choreographs **Orfeo** and **Carlota**. Films a solo dance interpretation of Martin Luther for CBS television. José Limón dies of cancer on December 2, at the age of 64.
- 1973 Limón Company tours to Soviet Union, becoming the first American modern dance company to survive its founder. The José Limón Collection is given to the New York Public Library Dance Collection by Charles Tomlinson.
- 1984 Daniel Lewis's **The Illustrated Dance Technique of José Limón** is published by Harper & Row.
- 1986 The José Limón Dance Foundation is authorized by Limón's heirs as the official legal entity to license José Limón's dances to other companies.
- 1989 Limón is named as a posthumous recipient of the Samuel H. Scripps/American Dance Festival Award, along with Doris Humphrey and Charles Weidman.
- 1993 Barbara Pollack's **Dance Is a Moment: A Portrait of José Limón in Words and Pictures** is published by Princeton Books. Larry Warren begins research for a biography of José Limón.
- 1994 The José Limón Dance Foundation publishes **A Catalogue of Dances** and the inaugural issues of **The Limón Journal**.
- 1995 Ann Vachon begins work on a José Limón documentary.
- 1996 A commemorative exhibition, **The Dance Heroes of José Limón**, is mounted at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.
- 96-97 The Limón Dance Company celebrates its 50th anniversary.
- 1997 José Limón is inducted into the National Museum of Dance Hall of Fame.

VIDEO PROGRAM

(Total running time: 40 minutes)

· **TWO PRELUDES** Choreographed and performed by José Limón and

· **B MINOR SUITE** Choreographed and performed by José Limón, followed by informal shots of Limón, Eleanor King and Charles Weidman. Filmed by G. Mortimer Lichtenauer in Westport, Connecticut, 1931 (Silent, 5 minutes)

· **CURTAIN RAISER** Choreographed and performed by José Limón and May O'Donnell. Music by Ray Green. Filmed under the supervision of Betty Lynd Thompson at Corvallis (Oregon) High School as part of the series **DANCES ON AMERICAN THEMES, 1941** (6 minutes)

· **THE LANGUAGE OF DANCE** Choreographed by José Limón, Music by Norman Dello Joio, Performed by José Limón, Pauline Koner, Lucas Hoving, Betty Jones, Lucy Venable, Lola Huth, Harlan McCallum, Chester Wolenski and Robert Powell. Conceived, written and hosted by Martha Myers. Produced by Jac Venza and directed by Greg Harney at WGBH-TV, Boston, for National Educational Television, 1959 (29 minutes) Courtesy Thirteen/WNET New York

· All videotapes are from the Jerome Robbins Archive of the Recorded Moving Image, Dance Collection, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts

The Dance Heroes of José Limón was organized by Norton Owen and designed by Kevan Moss and Stephen Horne for the National Museum of Dance. This exhibition was originally developed by The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts: Robert Marx, Executive Director; Barbara Stratyner, Curator of Exhibitions, in cooperation with the José Limón Dance Foundation; Mark W. Jones, Executive Director; Carla Maxwell, Artistic Director. The materials on display are primarily from the The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts Dance Collection, and from the José Limón Dance Foundation. We gratefully acknowledge the following for the loan of additional artifacts: Dorothy Bird, William Boorstein, Betty Jones, The Juilliard School, Pauline Koner, Daniel Lewis, Sarah Stackhouse, Charles Tomlinson and Nina Watt. Most of Limón's words quoted in the captions are derived from an unpublished autobiographical manuscript in the NYPL Dance Collection (transcribed by Ann Vachon), and from Barbara Pollack's **Dance is a Moment**, published by Dance Horizons/Princeton Book Company.

Design: Beverley Perkin
The Limón Journal is a publication of the Limón Institute, a component of the José Limón Dance Foundation.



JOSÉ LIMÓN AND PAULINE LAWRENCE AT THEIR NEW JERSEY FARM