

UC Irvine

UC Irvine Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Title

How José Limón's Cultural Identity Influenced Three of His Choreographic Works: Danzas Mexicanas (1939), La Malinche (1949), and Missa Brevis (1958)

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9p45d0gh>

Author

Lanuza, Celeste

Publication Date

2015

Supplemental Material

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9p45d0gh#supplemental>

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,
IRVINE

How José Limón's Cultural Identity Influenced Three of His Choreographic Works: *Danzas Mexicanas* (1939), *La Malinche* (1949), and *Missa Brevis* (1958)

THESIS

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

in Dance

by

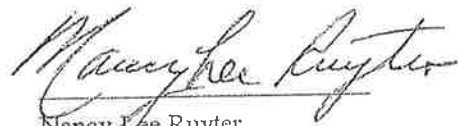
Celeste Lanuza

Thesis Committee:
Professor Nancy Lee Ruyter, Chair
Professor Alan Terricciano
Assistant Professor Chad Michael Hall
Professor Leo Chavez

2013



The thesis of Celeste Lanuza is approved:



Nancy Lee Ruyter
Professor of Dance
Committee Chair



Alan Terricciano
Professor of Dance
Committee Member



Chad Michael Hall
Assistant Professor of Dance
Committee Member



Leo Chavez
Professor of Anthropology
Committee Member

DEDICATION

To

my grandmother

María Lúz Pérez

In memory of her tenacious and passionate spirit for art, learning, and life

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iv
ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS	v
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 1: <i>Danzas Mexicanas</i> : Limón's quest for self-identity led him to his Mexican heritage	12
CHAPTER 2: <i>La Malinche</i> : Limón's evolution as a choreographer	18
CHAPTER 3: <i>Missa Brevis</i> : Limón as The Outsider Limón, the Mexican American experience	24
CHAPTER 4: <i>Al Camino del Alma (Journey to the Soul)</i> : Choreographic process and beginning revelations of the concert premiere	30
CONCLUSION:	42
BIBLIOGRAPHY:	44
ADDENDUM:	49

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost I want to acknowledge God for blessing me with many opportunities and for speaking through me to my dancers, colleagues, and students.

Thank you to my family more specifically my parents and mentors, Cynthia Morales and Federico Lanuza, because without them none of this would have been possible.

I am grateful to the members of the Department of Dance for their administrative, academic, and artistic support.

I would like to express the deepest appreciation to my committee chair Professor Nancy Lee Ruyter for her generous insight and persistent help from the beginning.

Thank you to my thesis committee members, Professor Alan Terricciano, Assistant Professor Chad Michael Hall, and Professor Leo Chavez for having faith in me.

I would like to thank Phoenix Alexander and the Graduate Resources Center for their guidance.

I'd like to thank my unforgettable instructors, Donald McKayle, Chad Hall, Norman Beede, Bobby Rodriguez, Lonnie Alcaraz, Kei Akagi, Alan Terricciano, Mary Corey, Loretta Livingston, Lisa Naugle, and Tong Wang, for their council, academic, and artistic mentorship. Continue to share your light and wisdom with this department.

To my fellow graduates and friends for their encouragement.

To Mlondolozzi Zondi for always being my support system and a listening friend.

I'd like to show gratitude to Francisco Ruvalcaba, current principal dancer of the Limón Dance Company for invaluable training; Daniel Lewis, Limón protégé and teacher who is currently staging his works; Carla Maxwell, current artistic director of the Limón Dance Company; Ann Vachon, current director of the Limón institute; Colin Connor, former principal dancer of the Limón Company; Debra Noble, former guest dancer in the Limón Company; and Brenna Monroe-Cook, former principal dancer of the Limón Company.

To my musicians, my father Federico Lanuza, my friend and lifesaver George Macias, my cousin David Morales-Boroff, Nicolas Maldonado, and Milton Salazar for sharing your magic of live music with the dance department.

To my dancers, Felix Marchany, Janine Montag, Katie Jo Turk, Brittney Taylor, Tanya Antonio, Erick Espino, Ivana Valenzuela, Jazmyne Mcneese, and Sarah Castro for bringing artistry and commitment to transcend the spirit of Limón and projecting the essence of human honesty through performance. Thank you for always having faith in me, and for believing in my work. Thank you for your time and dedication.

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

How José Limón's Cultural Identity Influenced Three of His Choreographic Works:
Danzas Mexicanas (1939), *La Malinche* (1949), and *Missa Brevis* (1958)

By

Celeste Lanuza

Master of Fine Arts in Dance

University of California, Irvine, 2013

Professor Nancy Lee Ruyter, Chair

This research focuses on the life and work of José Limón, (1908-1972), one of the most influential figures in twentieth-century modern concert dance. The way in which his Mexican and immigrant heritage influenced his unique contribution to American modern dance will be discussed in relation to three of his works: *Danzas Mexicanas* (1939), *La Malinche* (1949), and *Missa Brevis* (1958). As a dancer of Mexican heritage, I seek to better understand my artistic path and potential through this study of José Limón.

The introduction includes a brief description of José Limón's personal and professional life, and my connection to it as a Latina dance artist. The first three chapters present analysis of three Limón choreographies selected because they exemplify his deeply rooted and personal invocations of Mexican culture and an introspective relationship to self-identity and community. The final chapter is a description of my thesis concert inspired by José Limón's life and work.

The sources of information used in this work are books, academic articles, newspapers, archival documents, magazines, and photographs. This thesis includes interviews with artists who worked with Limón, danced in his company, and continue to

dedicate their artistic endeavors to his work.

INTRODUCTION

José Limón was one of the greatest American modern dance pioneers of the twentieth century. He was born in Culiacán, Sinaloa, Mexico in 1908 and immigrated to the United States where he became an internationally known dancer, teacher, and choreographer. In 1949 he formed the José Limón Dance Company in New York City. He died in New York City in 1972. In Brown's introduction to Limón's "On Dance," she expresses how Limón's works reflect his love for music and his cultural heritage (97). In his own words Limón has stated, "I try to compose works that are involved with man's basic tragedy and the grandeur of his spirit." (Limón "American Accent" 23).

Limón was of European and Mexican indigenous descent. Daniel Lewis, protégé and close friend of Limón, describes Limón's father in his book *The Illustrated Dance Technique of José Limón*: "His father, Florencio Limón, was a musician of French and Spanish descent, and his mother, Francisca, came from a proper middle-class Mexican family with a bit of Yaqui Indian blood in its ancestry" (Lewis 13). The increasing violence of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920), forced Limón and his family to leave their home in Mexico in 1915 when he was only seven years old. The young José Limón had lived a relatively comfortable existence in Mexico but this was soon to change (Vachon 72-74). The Limón family now assumed the identity of exiles escaping a war-torn country (Limón *Memoir* 8). His family crossed the border to Tucson, Arizona in 1915 (Pollack and Woodford 4). His family relocated to Los Angeles in 1923 (Seed 2). In my opinion, from the moment they entered the United States as exiled immigrants, the Limón family inherited all of the struggles that come with assimilating to a new country. I believe that from the time he entered the United States at the age of seven into

adolescence Limón faced the challenges of racism, poverty, minority status, misunderstood language, and cultural difference. It is my observation that José Limón and his family were now part of the thousands of marginalized immigrants struggling to survive in the United States.

Throughout my thesis I will use the word Chicano to describe an oppressed minority of Mexican ancestry in the United States, which strives to maintain its culture and assert its civil rights. In *Chicano! The History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement*, Chicano scholar Arturo Rosales describes how the Mexican Revolution affected people of diverse socio-economic backgrounds: “Now, large numbers of middle and upper-class Mexicans who lived comfortably before the conflagration joined the emigrant streams” (Rosales 26). Rosales also notes that,

thousands of destitute émigrés with few or no resources for survival crossed the border, not knowing what awaited them on the other side. Few other immigrants to the United States had weathered such traumatic experiences as they exited their home country. It compares to the ordeal of refugees fleeing potato famine-ravaged Ireland in the 1840s or Eastern European Jews escaping state-inspired pogroms at the turn of the century. This made the social and economic adaptation of Mexican immigrants in the United States extremely challenging (ibid).

These were the conditions that José Limón’s family faced as they crossed the border from Mexico to the United States.

Limón lived with vivid memories of the violence he had experienced as a child during the Revolution. He witnessed the death of his uncle and the turbulence in the early

years of the revolution (*Memoir* 3). Limón endured the challenges of the life of an exiled Mexican immigrant throughout his adolescence in the Southwest United States.

Limón describes how, in elementary school, he was harassed for being Mexican and unable to speak the English language correctly (ibid 9). Limón reflects on the painful experience of reading out loud to his classmates in a language he was just beginning to learn. He writes: “My first reading book started with the sentence: ‘Would you like to ride in a boat?’ There was a picture of a little boy in a boat. I read the sentence phonetically. Everybody started to scream with laughter. That was my first humiliation in this country” (qtd. Pollack and Woodford 5). With this event, the young José Limón decided to successfully dominate the English language in his first steps towards assimilation into his new American culture (*Limón Memoir* 9).

Former dancer, choreographer, and current professor of history at the University of California Irvine, Patricia Seed, states that in the 1920s Mexican immigrants in Los Angeles faced discrimination and were valued only “as a source of cheap labor by the ruling Anglo community” (Seed 2). Richardo Romo, author of *East Los Angeles: History of a Barrio*, describes the city of Los Angeles in which Limón lived: “From 1910 to 1920 Los Angeles attracted thousands of new immigrants, principally Mexican, while the influx of immigrant labor slowed in other American cities. More so than in earlier decades, Americans appeared terrified by the spectre of ‘racial degeneration’” (Romo 6-7). In Limón’s memoir he describes the difficult conditions that his family faced as they adapted to their new circumstance. “As the family grew, the struggle to feed, clothe, and house us became ever more brutal. We were poor. There were Mexicans we knew who, affluent to begin with, had managed to escape across the

border with their wealth more or less intact. They were lucky” (Limón *Memoir* 10).

Charles Humphrey Woodford (1933-present), the son of modern dance pioneer Doris Humphrey, describes the difficult period that Limón experienced in 1926 after completing high school and entering college (Pollack and Woodford 9). Limón shares the pain he suffered when he was eighteen with the tragic death of his mother. In his memoir he describes how he observed his mother’s health slowly deteriorating from multiple pregnancies (Limón 11). He blamed God as well as his father, for his mother’s death saying, “You killed her. And God permitted you” (Limón *Memoir* 12). Limón reveals his thoughts about this period of his life: “My mother’s death, the break with my father, my loss of religious faith, my disenchantment with the University of California, Southern Branch (As UCLA was then called) were unmistakable signs that my young life was in a state of crisis” (ibid 13).

As the oldest child, he then took the responsibility of taking care of his eight younger siblings. Woodford relates that Limón left college in 1926, and that “his next two years were some of the most painful in José’s life.” Pollack and Woodford quote Limón as saying “I kissed the University of California good-bye and took a job in a tile factory. I took tiles from one wagon and put them in another. At home, I helped take care of the children and I gave money to help the family” (9). I am suggesting that Limón experienced the hardships that many Mexican immigrant families faced. For example, part of the reason he dropped out of school was because he could not afford to continue, due to the burden of feeling an obligation to support the family.

Limón set out on a journey to New York City in 1928 to achieve his goal to pursue a professional career as a painter (Lewis 13). With his father’s permission he left

his one older stepbrother in charge of the family while he set off on this quest that would lead him to an unimagined destiny (Pollack and Woodford 10).

In New York, Limón realized that he did not fit in as a painter with what were then the contemporary artistic trends and he was too discouraged to further pursue a career in painting. According to Daniel Lewis,

the twenty-year-old aspiring painter arrived on the New York art scene at a time when Braque, Matisse and Dufy were all the rage and many American painters were heading for Europe to study. But El Greco and Michelangelo were José's idols. An incorrigible romantic, José simply didn't fit in, and what must have begun in a spirit of youthful adventure rapidly became a letdown (Lewis 14).

It was in the depths of this depressing realization that he discovered his reason for existence – dance.

During this time, in 1929, a friend took Limón to see his first modern dance concert. Norton Owen, former institute director of the José Limón Dance Foundation, and current director of preservation for the Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival, notes that the experience of watching the German dancer and choreographer Harald Kreutzerg (1902-68) "immediately convinced him to pursue a dance career and led to his apprenticeship with Doris Humphrey and Charles Weidman" (Owen "The Dance Heroes" 20). In his unfinished memoir José Limón explicitly describes the impact that this experience had on him: "There was joy, terror, and panic in the discovery. Just as the unborn infant cannot know the miracle of light so I had not known that dance existed, and now I did not want to remain on this earth unless I learned to do what this man—Harald Kreutzberg—was

doing” (16). His dance studies with Humphrey and Weidman were the beginning of his training as a dance artist. As Limón writes, these modern dance pioneers became his life long artistic mentors (ibid 1).

Charles Weidman and Doris Humphrey demanded both passionate commitment from their dancers, as well as that their dancers be aware of the progress of the other art forms relative to dance. In Limón’s words:

To justify their revolutionary fervor and iconoclasm, my teachers constantly pointed to the other arts, where an identical revolt had taken place, though much earlier. It was not only illogical but also absurd that dance should remain in the nineteenth century, when Debussy, Cézanne, Schoenberg, Ibsen, and Picasso, to name only a few, had catapulted the other arts into the twentieth (*Memoir* 22).

Limón was immersed in a world of artists filled with the fervor to create art that was beyond entertainment—and that could provoke deep thought, and inspire self-introspection and social commentary. Limón states in his essay, “On Dance,” that “Dance can remind us of the greatness of man’s spirit and of his creativeness, not his destructiveness. The Dance is many things. It is a Power” (104).

Limón’s professional life filled with road tours, performing, and teaching with the Humphrey-Weidman Company came to an end in the late 1940s after a break with Charles Weidman (Pollack and Woodford 22). Jim May, former principal dancer of the José Limón Dance Company and current director of the Sokolow Dance Theater, worked very closely with José Limón. May stated in my interview with him that Limón left the Humphrey-Weidman Company because his intimate relationship with Weidman had

come to an end. Within that same year he married Pauline Lawrence, who he met the first day he visited the Humphrey-Weidman studio back in 1929. Limón faced a life-changing challenge when he was drafted into the army in 1943 during World War II (ibid 23). As stated by Pollack and Woodford, he was at the peak of his career and was fortunate to be able to serve in the special services where he directed and performed in many army camp shows during his last two and a half years of service (Pollack and Woodford 24).

In his “Afterword” in *José Limón: An Unfinished Memoir*, Norton Owen, quotes one of Limón’s journal entries about this period:

On my return to civilian existence I was faced with a serious problem. I was thirty-seven years old. The years in the Army had meant to 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 (118).

Limón chose to work harder than ever, regaining his physical strength as a dancer; and in addition, he was driven to create a company to perform his works.

After the war, Limón developed into a renowned dancer, choreographer, and teacher whose works have been performed throughout the world. His early concerts were successful with new choreographies for his company such as, *La Malinche* (1949), and *The Moor’s Pavane* (1949). The latter would become one of Limón’s most famous classic works. In *The Illustrated Dance Technique of José Limón*, Lewis describes Limón’s early company. When Limón formed his company, Doris Humphrey chose to become the company’s artistic director. Limón had a total of four dancers in his original company, including; Pauline Koner (1912-2001), Lucas Hoving (1912-2000), Betty Jones

(1920s-present), Ruth Currier (1926-2011), and himself (Lewis 22). *New York Times* dance critics Clive Barnes (1927-2008) and John Martin (1893-1985) praised Limón's works (Lewis 23). In 1954 José Limón represented the United States government on a tour to Latin America and later in 1957, his company toured Europe (Pollack and Woodford 36-37). His company has survived over fifty years beyond his death and has continued to tour internationally.

I affirm that Limón's works continue to impact the development of modern dance through his repertoire and the influence that his dance technique continues to have on new evolving styles. Throughout the world, his choreographies continue to be reconstructed and Limón's students have passed on his artistic legacy as dancers, teachers, and choreographers. In my opinion, his students continue to impact the next generation with their passion for Limón's technique, his works, and his spirit. Limón left an artistic legacy as a passionate performing artist, influential teacher, and a prolific choreographer who was committed to expressing the depth of the human condition.

In the words of Limón's protégé, Daniel Lewis, "Throughout his career, José touched hundreds of audiences with dances that expressed a profound understanding and respect for the joy and pain of human experience" (Lewis 13). The American modern dance pioneers largely came from Anglo or European roots. José Limón's cultural and social identity as a Mexican immigrant granted him a perspective unique among these artists. Limón's works reflect his life. His choice of subject matter reveals his fascination with his culture, his connection with his Mexican heritage, and his conflicts and aspirations as an immigrant American artist.

Because my mother, Cynthia Morales is a Juilliard graduate who studied Limón

technique and performed repertoire directed by Daniel Lewis, I have had many opportunities to meet and work with artists associated with Limón. When I was sixteen years old, I discovered Limón through a dance technique master class with one of the principal dancers in what is now referred to as the Limón Dance Company. I was stricken by the joy and the new kinesthetic experience of the movement and wanted to know more about Limón. As my experience in dance deepened with studies at the University of the Arts in Philadelphia, I began to discover the significance of Limón's impact on the world of dance. I became intrigued by the fact that he was a Mexican immigrant raised in southern California who found his artistic mentors and home in New York City, 3,000 miles away from his family. I found it fascinating that a Mexican immigrant to the United States would have had such a tremendous influence on the world of dance. I was even more impressed that most Hispanics from my performing arts school, situated only twenty miles from the Mexico – US international Border, did not know about José Limón. Because of Limón's cultural background, his quest for a life in the art of dance, and his love of his cultural heritage, I began to see a parallel between his life and mine. The most truthful connection I experience with Limón is dancer to dancer. I embody a visceral joy of movement through his technique and repertoire.

I believe that one cannot look at Limón without considering the trials and challenges that he faced as a Mexican immigrant in the United States in the early 1900s. I myself am not from Mexico, but my grandmother María Lúz Pérez (1922-2007), emigrated from Nogales, Mexico in 1937. My father, Federico Lanuza, also lived in another Mexican border town, Tijuana, as a child in the late 1950s. Because of my personal connection to a similar heritage as Limón's, I feel a responsibility as a dance

artist to better understand these aspects of his life. As a second generation American I am very familiar with issues of racism, cultural and language discrimination, and minority status. I can relate to the humiliation that Limón experienced in regards to being ridiculed for speaking English with an accent.

At the age of five, I attended a predominantly Latino and African-American Spanish language-immersion school where the majority of my studies were in Spanish. A difficult transition for me occurred when I was nine. After four years at the Spanish immersion school, I transferred to attend the fifth grade in a predominantly white school where all the instruction was in English. At home, Spanish was spoken more frequently than English because I spent the majority of the time with my Spanish-speaking Mexican grandmother. She lived with us for many years so that both of my parents both could pursue full-time careers in education and the arts. At school, I became very shy and quiet because of my accent, and a stuttering habit developed. Because of my deficiency in the English language, I struggled with written and oral communication. I can relate to the humiliation that Limón experienced when being ridiculed by his peers for speaking English with an accent because I also faced similar criticism. During these trying times in my life, I realized how fortunate I was to have grown up in a family of artists, and to be nurtured and educated from a young age in the arts. This is where I experienced confidence and freedom of expression, through music and dance. These are languages that all individuals could understand regardless of their background.

I will be looking at specific aspects of José Limón's work through an analysis of three of his choreographies: *Danzas Mexicanas* (1939), *La Malinche* (1949), and *Missa Brevis* (1958). I will include biographical information to reveal the importance of his

cultural heritage to his artistic endeavors. I chose *Danzas Mexicanas* and *La Malinche* to demonstrate how his Mexican cultural heritage and search for identity are evident in his choreography. The nine years between the premieres of *Danzas Mexicanas* and *La Malinche* included many significant world events and also personal changes in José Limón's life. *Missa Brevis* does not deal with Limón's Mexican cultural heritage, but I chose this work because Limón focuses on the tenacity of an oppressed people to survive against all odds with faith and also presents an interesting character who exemplifies The Outsider.

CHAPTER 1

***Danzas Mexicanas*: Limón's quest for self-identity led him to his Mexican heritage**

In the summer of 1939, José Limón was presented with an opportunity to choreograph a work for the American Dance Festival (ADF), a prestigious annual summer festival that was normally held at Bennington College in Vermont, but which took place that year at Mills College in Oakland, California.

ADF had been launched by Martha Hill (1900-1995), the first director of dance at the Juilliard School, and Mary Jo Shelly an educator and dance arts advocate. In 1934, ADF was established as a venue for innovative artists to teach and compose new works in dance and music (Limón, *Memoir* 61). These artists included several modern dance pioneers, such as Martha Graham (1894-1991), Doris Humphrey (1895-1958), Charles Weidman (1901-1975), and Hanya Holm (1883-1992). Limón's first involvement with the festival was as a performer in Doris Humphrey's *With My Red Fires* in 1936. For Limón, as he wrote, "The Bennington summers became a way of life" (ibid 74).

In the summer of 1939, because of the festival's west coast location, the established choreographers did not participate in the creation of new works. This opened the door for emerging artists, such as Limón, to choreograph and perform. In his unfinished memoir Limón describes the work that he created, *Danzas Mexicanas*, as a series of five solos that drew from his Mexican heritage (ibid 90). American composer Lionel Nowalk (1911-1995) composed the music for this work and it premiered at Lisse Hall on August 4, 1939 (Garafola 135).

In *Danzas Mexicanas*, Limón demonstrated his powerful performance ability as he portrayed five symbolic figures from Mexican history: Indio, Conquistador, Peón,

Caballero, and Revolucionario. Limón drew his inspiration for Indio from Mayan and Aztec sculptures, which he describes as “primitive yet complex.” The character Conquistador was inspired by the Mexican painter José Clemente Orozco’s (1883-1949) depiction of Hernan Cortéz while Peón symbolizes three centuries of indigenous peasants’ servitude to European conquerors. The Caballero is the decadent “descendant of the conquistador,” portrayed by Limón as cruel but gutless. The character of Revolucionario embodies centuries of repression finally liberated through a renewed sense of purpose and courage to demand a better quality of life (Limón *Memoir* 90-91).

I believe Limón was inspired to examine his Mexican heritage through the art of dance partially because of a growing interest in Mexican culture within the New York art scene of the early 1930s. Dance historian Shelly Berg writes that “In October 1931, the Metropolitan Museum of Art hosted a major exhibition of Mexican art, an event that was ‘widely and most favorably noticed in the press;’ it drew twenty-five thousand visitors” (Berg 22). That same year, further interest in Mexican art involved Orozco, who was invited to create a group of murals for the New School of Social Research. Another famous Mexican painter, Diego Rivera (1886-1957), was also commissioned to create a mural in 1931 at the New Rockefeller Center (Berg 23).

Limón had been a painter. It makes sense that he would be drawn to these artists who shared his love of painting, his Mexican culture and his desire to create meaningful art. Berg states, “The possible confluence of Orozco’s artistic epic with Limón’s early musings on Mexican thematic ideas—and his vision of the conquistador in his first Mexican historical dance—seems a tantalizing possibility” (Berg 23). I would agree that the growing presence of Mexican art in New York City inspired Limón to investigate his

Mexican cultural identity through choreography that reflected this significant heritage. By the time he created *Danzas Mexicanas* in 1939, Limón realized an ambitious choreography he had been contemplating for years (*Memoir* 90).

The first time I ever experienced Mexico City in March 2013, I saw many murals by Rivera and Orozco that depicted Mexican history. Standing before those great works of art, I imagined the visceral connection that Limón must have felt when he viewed works by these monumental artists. To intensify the experience, I realized that Limón viewed the recently completed paintings 3,000 miles away from his Mexican culture, family, and heritage. His choreography *Danzas Mexicanas* called upon his Mexican ancestry to look at diverse aspects of his historical identity. During an interview in New York City in December 2012, Ann Vachon (current Limón Institute director and former principal dancer of the José Limón Dance Company) reflected on Limón's *Danzas Mexicanas*: "He was really exploring all the aspects of the Mexican and he was saying I am all of these people" (Vachon Interview).

On April 14, 2013, I had the privilege to interview legendary choreographer Donald McKayle, Professor Emeritus at the University of California, Irvine in the Dance Department. McKayle had known Limón, seen him perform, and is very familiar with his works. He shared his perspective on the way Limón depicted the Conquistador in *Danzas Mexicanas*.

He chose to choreograph *Danzas Mexicanas* and *La Malinche* because I feel like he was always showing the strength and the battle in terms of cultural heritage. And the fact that we will always rise again and we will never be pushed down. It's so interesting how in his choice of vocabulary,

even when he also did things that had nothing to do with his cultural background, it was there in the way he danced (McKayle).

Here McKayle confirms that Limón's heritage deeply influenced how he approached his art.

In his memoir, Limón describes the inspiration he derived from his Mexican heritage:

The cruel, heroic, and at the same time beautiful story of my native land has long 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. The confrontation of the blood and the culture of the European and the American Indian, resulting in centuries of unrelenting conflict, has been resolved within me into something harmonious, into an acceptance and an understanding (90).

Limón recognized the impact of his complex cultural heritage on his desire to clarify his own personal identity.

Limón acknowledged the conflict inherent within his own Mexican identity. He described the continual presence of the mestizo lineage and the forced integration of the Spanish and Native American cultures (ibid). The conflict is reflected in his descriptions of the choreographic process for *Danzas Mexicanas*. I believe that the objective of this work ultimately included a search for self-identity. As Limón writes, "All I knew was that I wanted to find out who and what I was. For almost ten years I had been a pupil, disciple, and follower. Now the time had come for me to assume full stature" (*Memoir* 91). Limón began to find his voice as a choreographer through his works inspired by his

Mexican heritage.

Danzas Mexicanas received a very positive notice for a later 1943 performance in a review written by the respected critic John Martin of the *New York Times*. Martin applauded Limón's development of choreographic materials, and proclaimed Limón a dancer who should be taken seriously (Delaney 41). Rare film footage of Limón performing one of the solos from *Danzas Mexicanas* is presented in actor/director Malachi Roth's 2003 film, *Limón: A Life Beyond Words*. This footage reveals a strikingly powerful and charismatic presence that typified Limón's performances. The fact that this entire piece is not available on film is a huge loss for the dance community, because it is very important in the trajectory of the early American modern dance. The small amount of footage I viewed of Limón dancing *Danzas Mexicanas* left a deep impression on me. Lewis describes the power of Limón's performance quality. "He threw himself into everything he did without worrying about balance, or shape, or what dancing was supposed to look like—and audiences were enchanted, and excited by the daring, strength, virility, and riskiness of his dancing" (34).

In *Danzas Mexicanas*, I believe that Limón was doing an introspective self-analysis while also depicting aspects of his cultural heritage. I can only imagine the significant contrast of each historical character, and how he united them all within his dynamic interpretation in performance. *Danzas Mexicanas* evokes a sense of mystery because there is little film footage, but the photographs of this work are very memorable. In viewing the photographs of Limón as *Revolucionario*, I am moved by the power of his physicality, his spirit of fight, revolution, and victory. The honest sense of conviction in his stance captured in these images continues to captivate and inspire.

Danzas Mexicanas was Limón's testament to the multifaceted and complex nature of his Mexican heritage. I feel this work was radical not only because it was very personal but because it focused on Mexican culture within the realm of American modern dance. This work's authenticity cannot be denied, because it was choreographed and performed by a Mexican. The audiences seeing Limón perform *Danzas Mexicanas* must have been very impressed upon viewing something so personal and powerful. Limón personifies an intimate interpretation of five figures from his Mexican cultural heritage. He brought these characters to life. He made their pain, their faults, and their aspirations real. The experience of this choreography is at once personal, cultural, and historical. Limón's *Danzas Mexicanas* provides a direct connection to the next significant work that would focus on his Mexican heritage, *La Malinche* (1949).

CHAPTER 2

***La Malinche*: Limón's evolution as a choreographer**

La Malinche premiered March 24, 1949 at the Jordan Hall in Boston, Massachusetts. Norman Lloyd (1909-1980) created the original musical composition for the work (Garafola 138). The program notes from the premiere performance of *La Malinche* include a description of the piece:

Malintzin, an Indian princess, was given to Cortéz on his arrival in Mexico. She became his interpreter and mouthpiece. Her astuteness and complete devotion served his cause so well that he conquered Mexico. She became a great lady and was baptized Doña Marina. After her death popular legend made her repentant spirit return to lament her treachery. For her there was no peace while her people were not free. During their struggles for liberation she returned as the wild Malinche to expiate her ancient betrayal (Garafola 138-139).

Limón wrote a detailed description about *La Malinche* so that his audience could understand her role and symbolism in Mexican cultural history.

La Malinche was the first piece that Limón choreographed for the José Limón Dance Company, which he founded in 1946 (Lewis 22). The characters include *La Malinche*, *El Indio*, and *El Conquistador*. In *La Malinche*, *El Indio* takes on a new significance. This character now embodies the fusion of two other figures from *Danzas Mexicanas*, the *Peón* and *Revolucionario*. Also derived from *Danzas Mexicanas*, “*El Conquistador* embodies the Spanish influence on the Mexican male as he becomes a distillation of the characters of *Conquistador* and *Caballero*” (Delaney 40). The dancers

included Pauline Koner (1912-2001) as La Malinche, José Limón as El Indio, Lucas Hoving (1912-2000) as El Conquistador, and Betty Jones as the singer. Betty Jones was a dancer with the José Limón Dance Company from 1947-1972, but for this production she was featured as a singer.

Limón begins *La Malinche* with the entrance of the three dancers who appear as traveling troubadours. They bow to the audience and introduce their characters individually. According to Carol Maturo, lecturer on the iconography of Malinche and Cortés,

The dance expresses the eternal triangle of love and hate. At the outset of the dance, the female character, Malinche, allies with the European male character, El Conquistador, who represents Cortés and the Spaniards who conquered and ruled Mexico. Together Malinche and El Conquistador defeat the Indian male character, El Indio. El Indio then rejects Malinche for her collaboration with El Conquistador, and she dies in sorrow. Her spirit rises, however, and as *La Malinche* ends it becomes the spirit of the *soldaderas*. El Indio, now the landless revolutionary peon, gains the strength he needs from Malinche to overthrow El Conquistador and reclaim his country (Maturo 60).

In *La Malinche*, Limón develops the psychological and emotional aspects of the characters through movement motifs in the character development, and symbolic props and costumes.

Maturo reveals the symbolism of the costumes and props in *La Malinche*. El Conquistador enters with and never relinquishes a cross/sword/phalanx symbol, which

represents religion, violence, and sex (Maturó 63). She notes that the black “cape/skirt symbolizes, European cultural and sexual domination” (Maturó 66-67). I believe that Limón was a master at using costumes and props for dance to bring more depth and power to the work.

Important information about the music for *La Malinche*, is incorporated in the DVD included with Patricia Seed’s book. The music for *La Malinche* consisted of a collaboration between Norman Lloyd and José Limón. Limón had Lloyd incorporate trumpet calls and drum sequences, inspired by Limón’s childhood memories in Mexico. The beginning and closing musical sections were derived from an authentic Mexican children’s song. Each actor was characterized by a musical instrument: El Conquistador – the trumpet, El Indio – percussion, and La Malinche – the soprano voice (Seed DVD).

Limón scholar, Daniel Lewis describes *La Malinche*, as a work based on a “Mexican legend of love, politics, and betrayal” (Lewis 22). It was based loosely on historical events and personages. The real La Malinche was a Nahua indigenous woman, who was given to Cortéz by the people of Tabasco. She served as Cortez’ translator with the Aztec emperor and as his mistress (Kellogg 80). Her role in Mexican history has always been controversial, given her pivotal role in the Spanish Conquest (ibid 80-81). She also bore a son she produced with Cortez, which was a symbol of the new *mestizo* (mixed Spanish/Indian parentage) people of Mexico (88-89).

According to Shelly Berg, in creating *La Malinche*, “Limón did indeed come to terms with his European and mestizo heritage” (30). In my view, Limón presents a sympathetic portrait of Malinche, showing how she is caught in between two worlds and torn between two cultures, the oppressed and the oppressors. Limón’s choreographic

rendition of the story of La Malinche demonstrates his empathy with El Indio who faces oppression but will rise above it and reclaim the future for his beloved country. But I would suggest, that the character Malinche captures the complex duality built into Limón's own persona. In my opinion, Malinche was an intelligent woman whose destiny led her to assume a second-class status in her country ravaged by war and European invasion. That she became a translator and conciliator for Cortés in 1519 is significant (Kellogg 80). In his memoir Limón notes an insight he had regarding his new reality in a foreign country: "And I was soon to learn that for the rest of my life I was to be a translator and conciliator" (8). I believe that Limón identified very closely with the qualities of Malinche. Like Malinche, he came from an educated family in Mexico and would inherit the responsibility of diplomacy. From my perspective, José Limón's destiny, similar to that of Malinche forced him to adopt a new country, learn a new language, and assimilate into a foreign culture.

In an interview on April 12, 2013, former principal dancer of the Limón Dance Company Jim May, comments on insights gained from working with Limón. May is the artistic director of the Sokolow Theater Dance Ensemble and a major interpreter of the works of that important modern dance pioneer. In discussing Limón he states, "He used choreography to save himself, to keep his sanity. He used his choreographies to deal with issues coming at him." He acknowledges that in Limón's artistic journey "He needed to go back to his roots with his historical ballets."

I believe that Limón knew how important it was for him to set a work on the historical figure La Malinche, because he brought a different perspective of her identity. For many Mexicans, the name Malinche has become synonymous with the term traitor.

As Delaney notes, “La Malinche’s role in the Spanish Conquest has been a constant source of conflict in Mexican society, wavering according to the sociopolitical climate of that time. Was she a trusting and resourceful victim of circumstance? Or a self-serving temptress/traitor?” (35). Limón sympathized with Malinche’s controversial dual role: at once a traitor to her indigenous culture and a survivor in a society ravaged by oppression.

Discussing the significance of El Indio, Pablo Francisco Ruvalcaba, current principal dancer with the Limón Dance Company, comments:

La Malinche seems more of a tale of redemption than what it’s like to be Mexican. At the end El Indio gains power and harmony reuniting with the source and together defeat the scourge. With all this, Malinche seems as much a criticism of historical events as a declaration of the enduring spirit of the Mexican Indio (Ruvalcaba Interview).

As one further analyzes the choreography of *La Malinche*, it is evident that the three characters symbolize the multi-dimensional and complex qualities within the Mexican identity.

José Limón, now an established American modern dance artist, visited Mexico in 1950. This was the first time he returned to his native country since his childhood. The Mexican dance historian Tortajada Quiroz, writes that Limón returned the following year and served as choreographer, artistic director, teacher, and performer for the Academy of Mexican Dance during its first season, March and April of 1951 (138-139). His presence and the performances of his works left a lasting impression that would contribute to the development of modern dance in Mexico (ibid 133). This visit inspired Limón to further investigate the culture and history of his native Mexico. In Tortajada Quiroz’s essay, she

includes a statement by Limón that was originally published in a Mexican newspaper in 1951:

One needs to go to the true source of Mexicanness: the one that we all carry inside. The choreography should be based on personal experiences, on the most intimate part of the artist. Himself. This is why my choreographical work, like my style, my rhythm, my movement and gesture, comes from the depths of my inner self, as atavisms... If an artist responds to the call from the blood, from his spirit, his work will catch the spirit, the contour of his country. And it will be universally valid (139).

José Limón articulates the importance of valuing all aspects of one's being to create universal art. His identity as a Mexican was imperative to his identity as a human being. I believe that his choice to choreograph *La Malinche* reflects his quest to delve deeper into his Mexican heritage. This process of his artistic development played an important role in the creation of his subsequent choreographies including the classic *Missa Brevis*.

CHAPTER 3

Limón, the Mexican American experience

Missa Brevis: Limón as “The Outsider”

Missa Brevis premiered in New York on April 11, 1958 at the Juilliard Concert Hall with members of the José Limón Dance Company and the Juilliard Dance Theater. Limón secured permission from composer Zoltán Kodaly (1882-1967) to use his original composition entitled “Missa Brevis” in Tempore Belli” (Garafola 143). This work is described by Norton Owen as a “formally abstract dance with dramatic undertones which pays tribute to the Polish people, and their efforts to persevere after World War II” (Owen “Dance Heroes” 23). Limón responded to this situation in Europe with, “complicated feeling of admiration, sorrow, anger, and guilt” (Lewis 26). These conflicting emotions stimulated the classic work, *Missa Brevis*.

Many significant events in his personal and professional life occurred during the decade before the creation of *Missa Brevis*. Limón was gaining respect internationally as an important American choreographer, and, as noted in the previous chapter, he had been invited to Mexico. The invitation was from Mexican painter Miguel Covarrubias (1904-1957), Director of the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes (INBA) in Mexico City; and Limón’s company was in residency there in 1951 (Lewis 24). In addition, in 1954, his company was chosen by the United States State Department as a cultural ambassador for a tour to South America, and then for a second ambassadorial tour to Europe in 1957. According to Lewis, that set the foundation for the masterpiece, *Missa Brevis* (Lewis 25-26).

Referring to his experiences in Poland, Limón describes his impressions of the

people who survived the destruction of their cities during World War II:

Against a background of cities still lying eviscerated by the savagery of war, I met human beings of courage, serenity, nobility. There was no rancor, no bitterness. Only a tremendous resolution, a sense of the future. Poland had to be rebuilt. I am in awe of these brave people, of their passionate love for their identity, their tradition, their beautiful survival—but above all their unspeakable courage (qtd. in Owen “Afterword” 122).

Limón was deeply affected by the tenacity and faith of the Polish survivors. He honored them through the choreography *Missa Brevis*.

My knowledge of this work was gathered from observing the Limón Dance Company in rehearsal and then its culminating performance at Alice Tully Hall in New York City on September 17, 2012. Below is a list of the sections in José Limón’s *Missa Brevis*.

1. “Introitus” – (Organ)
2. “Kyrie” – (Ensemble)
3. “Gloria” – (Ensemble)
4. “Qui Tollis” – (The Outsider)
5. “Cum Sanctu Spiritu” – (Men’s trio)
6. “Credo” – (Three male and three female)
7. “Crucifixus” – (Female Solo)
8. “Et Resurrexit” – (Ensemble)
9. “Sanctus” – (Female Trio)
10. “Benedictus” – (Trio including The Outsider)

11. “Hosanna” – (Female Solo)

12. “Agnus; Ite, Missa Est” – (Ensemble)

The first section presents the ensemble united, illuminated in a pool of light. The group seems to gaze up into the heavens, and the scene behind them implies a barely visible war-torn cathedral. The group breathes and moves together as if one body in God’s hopeful light. The Outsider, apart and alone, looks intently at the ensemble. The powerful presence of the music is immediate with a beautiful large choir and organ music that is at once very sad and hopeful. *Missa Brevis* is a collection of beautifully choreographed group movements that emphasizes the collective community. The large ensemble resembles architecture that moves in spatially complex musical patterns. This evokes a feeling of interdependency and interconnectedness. I suggest that the ensemble relies on one another as the sense of unity heightens their purpose for living. At times the men are set apart from the women. In other sections, Limón unifies both men and women to dance together. Certain sections highlight small groups of dancers emphasizing the strength of their faith and pain.

In viewing the work I sense that at times The Outsider makes an effort to be a part of the group but is unable to assimilate. It seems that his role is heightened towards the end of the piece when he performs a passionate, soul-searching solo as the entire community looks on. I believe he confesses his deepest longings to the community and to God. He appears to evolve into a being that has the strength to reveal his vulnerability as a human being.

Through sections utilizing the large ensemble, small groups, and solo variations, the dancers seem to express a collective sense of purpose and faith. At the end, it appears

that the community resolves its sorrow with a sense of collective celebration and strength. The work ends just as it began, with the ensemble looking up to the shaft of light as The Outsider stands apart, gazing at the community.

Missa Brevis is a classic work that emphasizes the redeeming power of collective faith amidst unimaginable devastation. Although the ensemble sections dominate the majority of the choreography in this work, The Outsider presents an especially intriguing soloist. I believe that The Outsider raises issues of isolation and exclusion from mainstream society. I find interesting the use of The Outsider character as it relates to my idea of Limón's identity as a Mexican in the United States of America. Limón belonged to a group of Mexican immigrants exiled from their war-torn country in the early 1900s who had to find their place in American society. In the book, *Chicano! The History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement*, author Arturo Rosales describes the Mexican in the southwest United States in 1919 as follows: "Mexicans accepted an outsider role in American society, and in this respect they differed from their Mexican American children of later years who resorted to a rhetoric of equal rights under the Constitution" (Rosales 60). A refugee or 'minority' population continually deals with the feeling of being outside of society. I suggest that this is currently, and has been historically, a strong aspect of the Chicano reality.

In the process of assimilation into the majority culture, it is common that the immigrant may lose his or her strong cultural ties to the motherland. In a letter to Pauline Lawrence dated November 5, 1958, Limón refers to Mexico, "I can have a sniff of Mexico submerged and distant tho it is-" ("Limón, Letters to Pauline" NYPL). With this comment, Limón seems to have a deep longing to reconnect with his native country.

In the performance of *Missa Brevis* that I saw, The Outsider was performed by Pablo Francisco Ruvalcaba. I felt it was important to interview Ruvalcaba, because like Limón, he left his home in Southern California in his early twenties to relocate to New York City. Ruvalcaba pursued his profession as a dancer and continues to perform with the Limón Dance Company. He comments on the significance of The Outsider:

The Outsider is presented as a man attempting to understand truth that is apparent to the group of which he does not belong. He does not seem to see past what is within himself. He lives inside. He is the question. Why? How? Throughout trials and labors he strives to join. Still at the end, he again stands alone. Yet something is different. Something has happened. He has become a strange sacrifice. The final vision is of the group ascending and The Outsider is left behind. We sense it almost as martyrdom and are compelled by its mystery. We feel hope in his attempt to arrive at the truth, and see the group transcend and ennobled by this quest. We the audience have also been transformed for having witnessed it (Ruvalcaba).

Ruvalcaba's detailed reflection on the role of The Outsider in Limón's classic *Missa Brevis* reveals his intense connection to this masterwork.

As an immigrant to the United States, Limón experienced racism, poverty, language discrimination, and other challenges inherent in the task of assimilation into a majority culture. I value how Limón used The Outsider character to emphasize the struggle of the human condition and the strength of the individual and collective spirit to overcome oppression. Through the message of healing and hope in *Missa Brevis*, Limón

transcends the conflicting duality of his existence, the curse of *The Outsider*, by honoring the powerful spirit of a community united. Limón humbly recognized that he was first a human being and then a person with tradition, culture, conflict, and history. This universal identity allowed him to create powerful art that transcends cultures and time. In an interview, Jim May describes why Limón needed to feel a connection with *Missa Brevis* and that this masterpiece is very relevant today with the elements of the soloist against the group, the humanity of the community, the solitude of the soloist, and the presence of God (May). May emphasizes the timelessness and the relevancy of the choreography today.

Whereas *La Malinche* appears to symbolize Limón's harmonious resolution of his conflicting *mestizo* heritage, I believe that the character of *The Outsider* in *Missa Brevis* presents a passionate commentary on human courage, compassion, and inner conflict. It mirrors the complexity of Limón's existence as a Mexican immigrant in the United States of America. During much of the choreography he stands alone, looking at the community in admiration. I find a parallel between the survivors of World War II that so inspired Limón and the Mexican immigrant exile culture of which Limón was a part. At the same time Limón may have viewed the ensemble as the majority culture of which he would never be a part. He at once acknowledges the basic solitude of all humans but juxtaposes it that with the compassion of a collective sense of community.

CHAPTER 4

Al Camino del Alma (Journey to the Soul): Choreographic process and beginning revelations of the concert premiere

My concert included a program with seven sections of choreography entitled, *Al Camino del Alma (Journey to the Soul)*. My work includes the following sections –

1. The Journey – Entrance The Community (Full Company)
2. Hope – Dreams for the Future (Lovers)
3. Conflict – Dreams Thwarted (José and the Community)
4. Defeat – Visions of Mine (India Mexicana, Soldadera, and Madre/Amiga)
5. Comfort – My New Skin (Madre/Amiga and José)
6. Courage – Renewed Purpose (José and Full Company)
7. Celebration! – Mine and Ours (The Community)

An important part of my artistic quest as a dance artist in preparation for my thesis concert included immersing myself in the study of Limón technique and repertoire. I had the privilege of watching what is now known as the Limón Dance Company perform *Missa Brevis* at the Lincoln Center's Alice Tully Hall in the summer of 2012. This performance was heightened through live accompaniment provided by an organist and the Simón Bolívar National Youth Choir from Venezuela. I also participated in the Limón Foundation dance intensive where I trained with Risa Steinberg and Sue Bernhard. These dance artists were past principal members of the José Limón Dance Company and worked directly with Limón. I worked intensively on Limón technique and repertoire during private lessons with a current principal dancer of the Limón Dance Company, Pablo Francisco Ruvalcaba. The lessons focused on developing a better

understanding and interpretation of the movement vocabulary from Limón's repertoire. Ruvalcaba informed me that he was using verbal imagery and teaching styles that have been continually passed down through Limón's protégés. I felt extremely privileged to be a part of the Limón legacy as shared in the dance studio through these private lessons.

I also studied Limón technique during the summers of 2011 and 2012 at the Limón West Coast Intensives at California State University, Fullerton. There I learned repertoire from two former principal members of the Limón Dance Company, Colin Connor and Brenna Monroe-Cook. The repertoire learned included solos from Limón's *Missa Brevis* and excerpts from *Psalms* and *A Choreographic Offering*. I found that this study with master teachers was essential to my understanding of the intent and spirit of Limón's technique and repertoire. This intensive work provided valuable lessons and inspiration that I used in the planning and production of my thesis concert.

I chose to create choreography with a story line that was inspired by an imagined journey that a young immigrant to the United States might encounter. The spoken word and movement scenes were drawn from Limón's writings and choreographies. My concert program notes state: "The story follows the journey of one man, José - his quest for identity through hope, disappointments, and renewed courage." For my thesis rehearsal process I chose to work with dancers and musicians whose cultural heritage included Latino background. My goal was to create an environment of trust, creativity, and respect for the work. It was important to inspire a sense of dignity and humanity that reflect the spirit of José Limón and his work.

I incorporated an original score created for this concert through a creative musical collaboration with my father, Dr. Federico Lanuza. We co-composed, arranged, and

recorded the music for the entire work, entitling the musical composition, *Solo y Juntos - Al Camino Del Alma*. The score was recorded at our home studio with my father performing the piano, bass, trap drums, and guitar on a synthesizer. My father also performed acoustic flute, saxophone, and accordion for the recording. I performed rhythmic components in the recording, including work with the *cajón* (box) and *palmas* (hand-claps). The violin was performed by my cousin David Morales-Boroff, an accomplished emerging musical artist. I co-wrote the lyrics for the song, “Tu Alma Vale” with my mother and artistic mentor Cynthia Morales. I also composed the music and lyrics for the final song, entitled “Vamonos.” I perform the lead vocals in both songs for the recording and performances. The musical recording was necessary for dance rehearsals. All of the music was re-created by the musicians in later rehearsals and for the concert. The musicians contributed their own musical inspiration within the form of each composition through improvisation. The dancers and musicians truly inspired each others’ artistic expression at the moment of performance.

The opening choreographic section of the concert, “The Journey—Entrance,” introduces the character José. The powerful quality of José was inspired by the photograph of Limón, as El Revolucionario in *Danzas Mexicanas*. This section also introduces The Community, whose presence changed throughout the concert to reflect the life journey and challenges that José faced. This opening section of the concert begins without music, with only spoken word and dancers creating percussion through foot stomping and hand clapping. After my inspired interview with current artistic director of the Limón Dance Company, Carla Maxwell, I decided to construct a choreography specifically using the words of José Limón (See Addendum). All of the spoken word are

extracted from Limón's writings, his unfinished memoir, and a documented lecture entitled, "Dance: Projection in the Future, Impulse 1968. " In an effort to emphasize his native language, some of the text is spoken in Spanish.

In the opening, the dancers embody the power of individual strength combined with community through their strong physical presence and spoken word. I strive for a bold percussive quality of movement and voice that confronts the audience with thought-provoking dance theater. A couple of weeks before the concert date, the dancers had not captured the dynamic quality necessary to bring a sense of urgency to the spoken word. So I recruited an acting vocal coach to work with the dancers, and this improved the intensity and performance tremendously. The coaching not only intensified the spoken word, but the movement also became much more powerful.

The second section of my concert "Hope - Dreams for the Future," begins with the character of José alone. In the transition he is seen walking upstage center, quietly singing a beautiful melodic theme of hopefulness. This seemingly spontaneous melody is the first time that music is heard in the work. The humming transitions to a musical section, which features an acoustic guitar, violin, and flute. The guitar strums a soothing background for an idyllic melodic line performed by the violin and flute in a 3/4 time signature. The violin weaves a melody that has a European waltz feel as the flute plays birdlike calls reminiscent of ancient Aztec flutes. This is the same melody that José hums and sings before the musicians begin to play.

As this music plays, José watches two young lovers who enter together from upstage right with bounding, running-like movements, which playfully weave throughout the space. They run side-by-side testing their compatibility with lifts and drops to the

floor. The earth tones of the woman's humble clothing are complimented by the young mans' soft grey poncho and matching pants. The two figures appear to be simple Mexican peasants from the country who live in close harmony with the earth, but also enjoy the freedom of flight through lifts that travel through space. José watches, happily and hopefully, thinking about his own future adventures in a new country. Their ending, which leaves them exiting in opposite directions, is an omen for a future filled with separation and challenges that José will face alone as he steps into this new country. This duet echoes the first duet in Limón's *La Malinche* between Indio and Malinche, where innocence and hopefulness reign.

The third section of my concert, "Conflict - Dreams Thwarted," features a strong musical accompaniment, which invades the serene mood set by "Hope - Dreams for the Future." The music begins with an abrupt attack of percussion on the *cajón* followed by a menacing melodic rhythm on flamenco guitar. I want to present a newly arrived immigrant, filled with hopes and dreams, facing the oppressive reality of intolerance, poverty, and all of the challenges inherent in life on the fringes of society. Lights intensify as José moves into the space with a determined traveling movement to an abrasive 5/4 tempo. It evokes the tension of a flamenco jam session through accented sounds played on the *cajón* and *palmas*. The violin emerges first very quietly and builds to a threatening, dissonant, and erratic melody. The meter changes unexpectedly from 5/4, to 6/8, to 4/4, and finally to a 3/4 while the violin's ominous sounds crescendo and invade the frenzied rhythm. This rhythmic dynamism combined with the mysterious Phrygian mode creates more tension as the community enters, now draped in blood red tops. Their jilted movements indicate that they want nothing to do with José, turning

away, rejecting him, with no tolerance of his different ways.

José is alone as he valiantly faces oppressive forces of racism, poverty, cultural misunderstanding, disrespect, and low socio-economic status in this new country. The dancers in the community symbolize these negative elements. These forces mean to overwhelm his creative, powerful, and hopeful spirit with calculated hatred and institutionalized racism, ever-present in the new adopted country. The dancers surround José as the tempo evolves into a driving 6/8 pattern.

The music changes dramatically when the percussion drops a beat, the guitar and violin end abruptly, piano attacks with aggressive rhythms, and a saxophone begins to wail loud strains of painful, dissonant screams. Now these oppressive forces are in attack mode, aggressive, and openly full of hate. José is now completely on the defensive, fighting, and desperately tries to survive. He tries to escape but the circle becomes two lines of militaristic formations, forcing him to conform to the spatial patterns as though imprisoned. The hateful community beats him down and drags him to his final plea for justice. In a beam of light in center stage, he reaches up to the heavens, enclosed by the forces of oppression, and collapses to the floor in defeat. The screaming saxophone, pounding piano and percussion come to an abrupt stop.

The rehearsal process for this section was challenging because I could not get the tension and urgency that I needed from the dancers. I tried various approaches and finally had the dancers verbally express how they relate to feelings of being on the outside, marginalized, in some way alone, against the odds and challenges of society. In this respect this process became very personal but also gave a sense of unity, which allowed the dancers to be successful as individuals and as a community. They have to

express hatred, racism, and every negative societal force towards the character José.

The fourth section, “Defeat - Visions of Mine,” is a trio who embodies three different characters that represent aspects of the *mestizo* lineage: Madre/Amiga, India, and Soldadera. It is about José’s dream visions, as he lays defeated by the onslaught of negativity he encountered as a newly arrived Mexican immigrant in the United States. These three female solos depict important aspects of Limón’s character and life. The dance begins with the three women entering individually but then uniting in a series of connected movements intertwining with each other, holding hands, in a series of gestures and freezes like snapshots. The sound of the wind played on the synthesizer is combined with haunting harmonics that are barely audible from the violin. The side lighting creates mysterious shadows that imply imaginary travel back in time. The women’s movement patterns depict their uniqueness but also their common cultural roots. For this section, I was inspired by a beautiful trio, which Limón created for three women in *Missa Brevis*. The trio evolves into solos for each woman. The music changes to create an environment solely for that individual, giving each dancer a solo instrument, genre, and melodic theme. I was inspired to use individual instruments for each character, the way Limón chose to use specific instruments for each character in *La Malinche*.

The first solo, Madre/Amiga (Mother/Friend), represents three significant women in Limón’s life embodied in one loving character. Madre/Amiga symbolizes his mother who died at a young age in childbirth when he was only eighteen years old, Doris Humphrey who he referred to as his artistic mother, and Pauline Lawrence, his wife. Madre/Amiga’s white skirt, blouse, and flower in her hair symbolize the purity of her soul and the light that she brings to José. The indigenous flute that accompanies her

movement captures the tenderness of the character but also reflects the power of the Native American heritage of the *mestizo*. Her moment of relating to José who is downstage right lying in a semi-unconscious dream state, is embodied in a maternal embrace that evolves into rocking a baby in her protective arms. Limón's life and work were profoundly influenced by the life and death of each of these three women-his mother, Doris Humphrey, and Pauline Lawrence. Madre/Amiga is the symbol of perseverance, forgiveness, faith, and love.

The second character in the trio, India, represents the nobility and pride of the indigenous Mexico, her connection to the earth, and also her inner desperation for respect in a threatening future existence. India constantly acknowledges José with percussive movements close to the ground, that depict a yearning to connect and not lose the relationship between José and his Native American heritage. Her solo ends with movements on her knees where she reaches up to pray but falls to the ground, signifying her humbleness before her fate. She gathers the sun and the moon, and honors the earth with her repetitive kneeling rolling movement. India wears a bright red skirt and top in the style of the folk costume from Tehuantepec, Mexico. The lilting romantic Mexican waltz, indicative of the early 1900s Mexican popular dance melodies, represents an ironic juxtaposition of the strong Native American India with the lyrical, European-influenced musical arrangement with a romantic melody performed on violin and piano.

The character of the Soldadera is the last solo in the trio. She represents the powerful revolutionary who is willing to endure pain and suffering to attain fulfillment, as the spoken words describe in the opening section (See Addendum). Soldadera has two movement gestures that come directly from *Missa Brevis*. I learned these movements

from former principal dancer in the Limón Dance Company, Brenna Monroe-Cook. The arms rise up and extend over the head, pierce the heart, and hands open up, pressing palms forward in a gesture that offers something important to the audience. Soldadera relates to José with agile, quick, and animal-like movements close to the floor, representing her aggressive and tenacious spirit to survive. I chose music featuring a solo guitar in the passionate Spanish classical style with a melancholic quality to capture the inner conflict that Limón had with his Spanish European heritage. Once again, I present an ironic juxtaposition to provoke thoughts of the inner conflict that Limón describes in regard to coming to terms with his European Spanish roots and his Native Mexican heritage. I choreographed the strong and assertive, very Mexican Soldadera to a melancholic melody played by the Spanish classical guitar.

The fifth section, “Comfort – My New Skin,” evolves into a tender duet that highlights the characters Madre/Amiga and José. It is the first section that includes lyrics sung with the musical arrangement. The lyrics are in Spanish and are translated to English in the written program. Madre/Amiga’s initial movements to an awakening José embody the encouraging message of the song, whose theme gently proclaims, “Your soul is valuable! God created you with a unique purpose!” This dance is a duet, which features Madre/Amiga (Mother and Friend) and José. The lights brighten and the audience senses that we are now out of José’s dream/state and back to his true reality. His dear friend, “Madre/Amiga,” comforts and inspires him to carry on. The tender melody is performed by folk guitar and violin, evoking the style of a ballad from the genre of Spanish Rock. Madre/Amiga gently encourages José. He reacts at first with anger, and then softens as she shows grace and forgiveness. They bound and travel through space, as the first couple

did in the second section. But here, there is a deeper sense of the inherent sense of pathos and promise of life's journey. The duet ends with an uplifting feeling of hope and renewed purpose.

The section, "Courage—Renewed Purpose," embodies an ensemble choreography that captures a spirit of empowerment and purpose. I was inspired by the way Limón used costumes in *La Malinche*, specifically how the Conquistador's threatening cape becomes Malinche's oppressive skirt. In my choreography I use Madre/Amiga's top skirt as a shawl to protect José and it quickly evolves into a triumphant cape. José takes a valiant run around the stage, which culminates with movements of a bullfighter liberated through his victory.

In José's sweeping run he inspires the community to join him in this declaration of triumph and belonging in society. The following movements echo militaristic discipline, but are tempered with a joy of newly found confidence. Regarding the musical accompaniment, I wanted a very contemporary sound of defiance and resolution with a driving force. The music opens with strong drum dynamics on the bass drum performed on a trap drum set. The screaming electric guitar instantly gives a feeling of the genre of rock music. Virtuoso violin riffs and wild percussive organ chords accompany the wailing guitar. This section is musically inspiring for the musician soloists because it allows them to improvise, and each performance is slightly different. Choreographically, this section ends with José alone, returning center stage in a spotlight, assuming the triumphant pose of Limón's Revolucionario from the famous photograph of Limón in *Danzas Mexicanas*.

The seventh and final section, "Celebration! - Mine and Ours," depicts the

ultimate victory of José overcoming life's obstacles through the intense journey that culminates with joy in celebration of community and culture. Once again José calls on the entire ensemble to join him, but this time in a carefree moment of happiness. The costumes change into colorful skirts, pants, and tops. For this, I wrote a song in the style of *nortec* fusion music. *Nortec* originated in Tijuana, Baja California, and combines Mexican *norteño* and techno styles. The instrumentation features a saxophone with piano playing Latin rhythms, a rhythmic bass pattern, and accompaniment performed on accordion and violin. The Spanish lyrics focus on the power of the collective culture, the importance of one's heritage, and how beautiful and irreplaceable "we" as Latinos are in this American society.

Part of the choreography includes joyful steps from Mexican folkloric dance and carefree partnering segments. It is important for me to include audience participation in a moment of surprise, thus after a short pause as if to end the piece, the dancers bring audience members onto this intimate studio stage to continue the celebration in a joyous collective dance. After returning the audience to their seats, the concert finishes with the dancers' bow. They then exit with a continuing celebration while the music keeps playing. In both of the dance thesis performances at the University California, Irvine, the final moment was received with a standing ovation. The overall process of creating the music, choreography, and theatrical aspects of this performance, results in a magical and inspirational experience. The story depicts a journey filled with hope, challenges, defeat, and ultimate victory through courage and celebration.

A theme that runs throughout my concert is Limón's search for purpose despite life's challenges. The difficulties are overcome through courageous self-reflection and

through the strength of the community. Several of the choreographic choices, and costuming were inspired by José Limón's choreographies. Many of the musical genres as well as costumes and movement themes, were also inspired by Mexican culture. I believe the concert successfully achieves the spirit of individual worth and power as well as the joy of a sense of belonging to a community.

The enduring spirit of Limón's works, inspire the course of my choreography to weave a life journey from innocence through conflict, defeat, perseverance, and courage. The ultimate discovery of power through self-knowledge and a strong sense of community, culminate in a victorious celebration of life.

CONCLUSION

José Limón could be regarded as a dance artist who expanded the repertoire of modern dance in the twentieth century. His works explored the strengths and weaknesses of the human character. I perceive Limón as a Mexican immigrant who learned how to adapt to the American culture in order to overcome his socio-economic and cultural disadvantage. I believe in the process of his self-discovery through his art, he succeeded in transforming the art of dance throughout the world.

In my opinion, José Limón continually used the multifaceted aspects of his Mexican cultural background as inspiration for his choreography. Limón's artistic trajectory included the completion of ninety-three choreographies from 1930 to the year of his death in 1972. He began to use his Mexican heritage as inspiration for his work, with the creation of *Danzas Mexicanas* in 1939. He expanded on a theme based on his Mexican heritage with his creation of *La Malinche* ten years later in 1949. His classic *Missa Brevis* choreographed ten years later in 1959, presents the character of The Outsider juxtaposed to the collective community. I would suggest that this character is significant because it captures Limón's sense of separateness and longing for community. I believe that throughout his life he continued to use his Mexican cultural background as inspiration for his choreography. His repertoire depicts a universal quest for identity and struggle in overcoming obstacles with faith in the nobility of mankind.

Limón died at the young age of sixty-four. But even forty-one years since his death, the legacy of his thriving technique, masterwork choreographies, and internationally renowned company live on. He impacted thousands of dance artists with his performances, teachings, and writings. José Limón was the first Mexican-born

immigrant to the United States who continues to inspire dancers and artists throughout the world with his uncompromising integrity. He has and will continue to be a vital force to those who seek depth in the human spirit.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Berg, Shelly C. "La Malinche: The Inspiration for the Dance." Seed, 20-34.

Brown, Jean Morrison, Ed. *The Vision of Modern Dance*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Book Company, 1979.

Cohen, Selma Jean, Ed. *The Modern Dance: Seven Statements of Belief*. Middletown: Wesleyan Press, 1972. 17-27.

Delaney, Patty Harrington. "José Limón's *La Malinche*." Seed, 35-41.

Dunbar, Jean, Ed. *José Limón: An Artist Re-viewed*. Newark, NJ: Harwood Academic Publishers, Inc., 2000.

Garafola, Lynn. "Works Choreographed by José Limón." Limon, *José Limón* 133-149.

Gonzalez, Roberto and Leo Chavez. "'Awakening to a Nightmare': Abjectivity and Illegality in the Lives of Undocumented 1.5 Generation Latino Immigrants in the United States." *Anthropology* 53.3 (2012): 255-81.

Humphrey, Doris. "What a Dancer Thinks About," Brown, 55-64.

Kellogg, Susan. "Marina, Malinche, Malintzin: Nahua Women and the Spanish

Conquest." Seed 79-94.

Lewis, Daniel. *The Illustrated Dance Technique of José Limón*. New York: Harper and Row, 1999.

Limón, José. *An Unfinished Memoir*. Ed. Lynn Garafola. Hanover, NH
Wesleyan University Press; University Press of New England, 1999.

———. "On Dance." Brown, 97-104.

———. "An American Accent." In Selma Jeanne Cohen, Ed, *The Modern Dance: Seven Statements of Belief*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1972. 17-27.

———. "On Magic. Opening Convocation Speech" -- Connecticut College American Dance Festival. José Limón Dance Foundation. New York: 1968.

———. "Dance: A Projection in the Future, Impulse." Lecture. José Limón Dance Foundation. New York: 1968.

Maturo, Carol. "Visual Communication: Props and Costumes." Seed, 55-78.

Mazo, Joseph. *Prime Movers: The Makers of Modern Dance in America*. New York: Morrow, 1977.

McDonagh, Don. *The Rise & Fall & Rise of Modern Dance*. Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 1990 (First Published 1970).

Monroy, Douglas. *Rebirth: Mexican Los Angeles from the Great Migration to the Great Depression*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999.

Owen, Norton. "Afterword." Limón, *José Limón* 117-123.

———. "The Dance Heroes of José Limón." Dunbar, 19-25.

Pollack, Barbara and Charles Woodford. *Dance is a Moment: A portrait of José Limón in Words and Pictures*. Pennington: Princeton Book Company, 1993.

Romo, Richard. *East Los Angeles: History of a Barrio*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983.

Roth, Malachi, dir. *Limón A Life Beyond Words*. Produced by Ann Vachon. Dance Conduit. Antidote Films, 2003. Film.

Rosales, Arturo. *Chicano! The History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement*. Houston: Arte Público Press, 1996.

Seed, Patricia, Ed. *José Limón and La Malinche: The Dancer and the Dance*.

Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008.

Stackhouse, Sarah. "The Director: Thoughts on Staging." Seed, 154-165.

Tortajada Quiroz, Margarita. "José Limón and La Malinche in Mexico: A Chicano Artist Returns Home." trans. from Spanish by Manuel Gómez. Seed, 119-153.

Vachon, Ann. "Limón in Mexico: Mexico in Limón." Dunbar, 71-84.

Personal Interviews Conducted by Celeste Lanuza

Lewis, Daniel. Lecturer, teacher, and choreographer at The New World School of the Arts and internationally. 18 April 2013.

Maxwell, Carla. Current artistic director of the Limón Dance Company and former principal dancer of the Limón Dance Company. 24 Sep 2012.

May, Jim. Former principal dancer of the Limón Dance Company. 12 April 2013.

McKayle, Donald. Current UCI emeritus professor, choreographer, and artistic mentor of Limón Dance Company. 14 April 2013.

Monroe-Cook, Brenna. Former principal dancer with the Limón Dance Company. 1 July 2012.

Ruvalcaba, Francisco Pablo . Principal dancer with the Limón Dance Company. 18 April 2013.

Vachon, Ann. Current director of The Limón Institute. 12 Dec. 2012.

Archival Documents:

New York City Public Library

Limón, José. *Letters to Pauline Lawrence*. New York City Public Library. Jerome Robbins Dance Division. Archival Documents. New York: 1951.

Owen, Norton, Ed. *Limón Journal Volume 2, Number 1*. New York Public Library. Jerome Robbins Dance Division. Dance Archives. New York: Philip Morris Companies Inc. 1997. Print.

José Limón Dance Foundation

Miller, Betsy and Ann Vachon. Ed. *José Limón Centennial Collection*. New York: 2008.

ADDENDUM: A



Celeste Lanuza at Zócalo, Mexico City, MX. 2013, mural by Diego Rivera

Celeste Lanuza MFA Dance Thesis Concert
SOLO Y JUNTOS - AL CAMINO DEL ALMA
(ALONE AND TOGETHER - JOURNEY TO THE SOUL)

University of California, Irvine
Claire Trevor School of the Arts
Dance Department
6 and 7 pm, April 9th, 2013 Gillespie Studio Theater 1100

Your soul is valuable in this world, this dark dark world, Your heart is filled with hope,
 It beats dreams illuminated with deep affection and love,
 Don't allow them to fill you with pain and bitterness with evil motives, & ugly hatred that
 oppresses. Your soul is valuable, God created you with a purpose a very unique purpose, your
 soul is valuable.... I am here, your friend, guardian of your heart,
 I am here, dear friend of mine, Guardian of your heart,
 My grand soul is valuable! I am a ray of light!, God is my moon and my sun! My soul is valuable in
 this world, this dark dark world! My soul is valuable! God created me with a purpose a very
 unique purpose!

6. Courage - Renewed Purpose

José y La Comunidad (Jose and Full Company)
 Félix Marchany and Company

7. Celebration! - Mine & Ours

La Comunidad - Full Company

Translation of Spanish Lyrics to English

We're going to see, all together, how we celebrate,
 What is ours- our collective culture!
 All of us together celebrate and enjoy life,
 My people, my people!
 We have to stand up and proclaim,
 We have arrived!
 We are Native American, we are Latino
 Long live Tijuana! Long live Sonora!
 I will change, but because I want to.
 I will always remember where I come from.
 I sing and I dance, I must be positive! I am positive!
 Look how beautiful we are! We are a community.
 We have an irreplaceable energy!

***"The contemporary artist can do no less than to dedicate the power of his spirit and the
 flame of his art to bring light to the dark places."***

José Limón

Celeste Lanuza Bio

I am blessed and continually thank God that I come from a family of artists and educators, who
 constantly create original music, productions and support my vision of integrating theater, culture
 and history through my artistic endeavors. Graduate of The San Diego School of Creative and
 Performing Arts, The University of the Arts BFA Dance and Minor Musical Theater. Dancer,
 singer, actress, composer, pianist, artist, thinker, catalyst, and always grateful for each individual
 who has been apart of this journey with me!

Acknowledgements

To God, I feel so blessed and privileged to work with such beautifully gifted group of people. To
 my beautiful dancers, gifted musicians, and amazing stage manager and lighting designer Ross
 and Kristen. Thank you to Cynthia Morales, Federico Lanuza, Donald McKayle, Francisco
 Ruvalcaba, Carla Maxwell, Ann Vachon, Brenna Monroe-Clark, Colin Connors, Debra Noble, Jim
 May, Daniel Lewis, my friends & my Thesis Committee.

Thank you to The Claire Trevor School of the Arts for providing me with Travel Research Grant
 funding for my thesis research.

Thesis Committee: Dr. Nancy Lee Ruyter, Chair

Prof. Alan Terricciano

Assistant Prof. Chad Hall

Dr. Leo Chavez UCI Anthropology, and Chicano - Latino Studies

Audience Advisory: Live Music Intensity will increase in volume at times.



José Limón as El Revolucionario in his "Danzas Mexicanas", 1939.

"The contemporary artist can do no less than to dedicate the power of his spirit and the flame of his art to bring light to the dark places."

José Limón

ADDENDUM: B

The following words were recited in the opening section of my concert entitled, “The Journey – Entrance.”

Community: Nosotros podemos hacer lo imposible real. (We can make the impossible real).

José: Nosotros podemos invocar a nuestros angeles, furias, y demonios dondequiera que se encuentren. We can challenge them, defy them, propitiate, and tire them. Quiza oiran. (We can invoke our demons, angels, and furies wherever they may be).

Community: Eschuchanos! (Hear us!)

José: Envienos! (Send us!)

The Community: ¡Envienos! Revolucionario! (Send us! Revolutionary!)

The Spirit: Be truly a revolutionary. Recuerde, que usted es incomparable. Vas a ser herido. (Remember you are peerless. You will be wounded).

José: (Screams).

The Spirit: You will not be appalled by the prospect of a lifetime full of rigors and atrocities. Pain will not frighten you. You have capacities unsuspected by yourself and by the entire waiting world.

José: I remember being awakened periodically during the night by the sound of machine guns and artillery. The world seemed to be falling apart. There was blood and terror.

Then, I was coming into an unfriendly country and I was very unhappy about it. They had told me that the gringos were monsters who castrated little boys and I didn’t know one word of English. The class was a mixture half Mexican, and half American . My first reading book. I read the sentence phonetically and everybody started to scream with –

That was my first humiliation in this country. I said to myself, “I’m going to learn this language better than any of you!” I am hoping most fervently that change is of a radical and drastic nature. The impossible will be palpable present and immediate. Make the impossible real!

The Community: Hacer lo imposible – (Make the impossible) -

José: Disparos! (Gunfire!)

All: Revolucionario! (Revolutionary!)