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JOSÉ LIMÓN DANCE FOUNDATION NEWS

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A Conversation with Betty Jones



Betty Jones performs in José Limón's *The Moor's Pavane*.
Photo by Walter Strate.

Limón master teacher and original founding Company member Betty Jones was in New York teaching a workshop on Limón technique and choreography from October 5 through October 15. Here, Betty discusses what it was like to work with José and create the original production of "There is a Time:"

How and when did you meet José?

I met José at Jacobs' Pillow in 1945. I was a student, and I had just come back from being in "Oklahoma" as a singer/ dancer during the war. I performed with the USO, and I was in the Philippines for V-J Day. I had spent the prior summers studying at Jacob's Pillow, and it was my fifth summer there when I met José. I was very intrigued by him. While taking his class, I remember that he did

something across the floor and he stopped to explain, and he slightly stuttered. Well, not stutter, but he was choosing his words. And I thought "aah, that's someone I can relate to," as I have a hard time expressing myself. But then I realized immediately that I was so wrong because all he was doing was waiting for the exact, precise, perfect word to express what he wanted to say. There was nothing inarticulate about José.

One weekend I was given the chance to dance a solo on the same program that José did his "Chaconne," (I was learning the "Chaconne" in this week that he was there), and Pauline, his wife, asked me: "are you interested in concert work, Betty?" And I said, "well... I am" but I wasn't, really. But in some ways I didn't know what concert work was. I was more into probably being a ballerina. However I was very open to the Modern, and I had decided that I would try to come back from what I was doing in the Philippines, and that I would go to college at Columbia University. Go to college, then get in a Broadway show.

What were you going to study in college?

Oh, I don't know. I wanted to go to college and do dance at the same time. I was not sure where I was going to dance. So I came back from the war and went and studied with José. And then I danced on the same program as José, I did one of Ted Shawn's solos [founder and creator of Jacob's Pillow] that he picked for us, *Barcarole* or *Amethyst*.

And after he saw you then, that's when he asked you to join the company?

No, I went back the following summer to study with him. Then Pauline Koner tore her Achilles tendon, and they needed someone who could do the Vivaldi Concerto Grosso. He chose me. That was the start, in 1947 with Vivaldi. Beautiful piece, and I learned it very fast. So that was how I was chosen.

You were one of the original cast members for *There is a Time* which the company is doing again this year, and you performed "a time of war." I heard that José originally perceived you and your work as sweet, young, and innocent. And then you were cast in this part. How did that transition happen?

Ruth Currier was also choreographing at that time and she did a piece for the two of us called "The Antagonists." It was a fantastic piece, and a fantastic piece for me. There was a pen and I was like an animal trapped in this pen. I think that it came from that. It was with that piece, that I got "War."

And did you help create that section? How did that collaboration work?

José had an idea of what he wanted. If you know the piece, you know how he made this idea of the circle, Eternity. So he just had me start dropping and rolling, in circles, and this almost killed me! The rehearsal was so strenuous. He wanted me to use my hands like claws, so I was scratching my face, my body. I think he originally thought to make it double, twice the length. Now he has the men doing it, because it was too strenuous, impossible to do. He had the men coming in on my music and then I made an entrance later with the men. The men turn out to be like swine and they're all down on the floor and I come in and I kind of ride them out.

José was right there and I was right there with him, and he was giving the ideas to me. I was killing myself, but I was illustrating war and hate. And I think it is important to also note that this segment includes "a time to rend" [in the original Ecclesiastes text]. He thought of it as three negatives, "a time of war," "a time to rend" and "a time to hate." Those were the three things involved in that solo. And that's also where you get the tearing, the rending.

And you did other sections too?

Oh yes, the opening, and "a time to dance," "a time to mourn" which is very beautiful and then of course, the finale.

What parts of that piece spoke to you, which parts did you enjoy the most?

Well, there's nothing wrong with "War!" Probably "War," which is strong

and I am strong. But I loved "a time to mourn" too, which is completely the opposite and I think is a stunning piece.

You also performed the role of Desdemona in *The Moor's Pavane*. What was it like to be kissed so many times by José? And did he really kiss you?

No. What you should ask is "how did I like being killed by José!"

Yes, tell us!

Well, you know, he would pound on my chest. And a couple of times I wasn't sure I was going to make it through to the next part. It depended on his passion. If he was really turned on and got fully into the performance, he really "killed" me by pounding on my chest. I wanted to say "whoa, José!" Anyway, no, he didn't really kiss me.

What is your interpretation of the Limón technique?

I really think, I still think, the work that we do, and the people who love to study with us, that the Limón technique is such a wonderful technique for use of the body. I think it is the best technique, has the most beautiful quality. I obviously love it and try to have people understand it and to become beautiful themselves because it is something that is unique to each person. José was very clear about that, he said "do not copy anybody else. You are unique, each person is unique and must find their whole dance." And this was his purpose in what he taught. He worked with the voices of the body, different parts of the body and how they resound and the quality that would come from them. He talks about the piccolo being in the shoulder, and the bass drum in the pelvis. From all of these ideas, you're to find your own dance and you will find your own dance because it won't be the same as me, or him.

Betty Jones was a principal dancer and original founding Company member with the José Limón Dance Company from 1947 to 1970, having leading roles created for her in "Missa Brevis," "A Choreographic Offering," "There is a Time," "The Moor's Pavane," and many other classics of modern dance. This experience, together with assisting Dr. Lulu Sweigard in her "Anatomy for Dancers" course, have shaped her teaching. She was associated with The Juilliard School for many years, and her annual teaching residency at the American Dance Festival has been an important training vehicle for generations of dancers. In 1964, Betty Jones and Fritz Ludin formed their own company, Dances We Dance, which is now headquartered in Honolulu, Hawaii.



Betty Jones and José Limón perform in *The Moor's Pavane*. Photo by Walter Strate.

**See the Broadcast of "Limón: A Life Beyond Words" on
HITN**

October 18, 2009, 9pm EST

The Hispanic Information and Telecommunications Network, Inc. (HITN) will be showing the award-winning documentary "Limón: A Life Beyond Words" en español. Directed by Malachi Roth and produced by Limón Institute Director Ann Vachon and Jeff Levy-Hint, this film offers a compelling look at José Limón's life. The film won awards for Best Film Made for Television at the Montreal Festival of Films on Art, Best Documentary at Ajijic Festival Internacionale de Cine in Mexico, and Best Documentary on the Arts at the Wine Country Film Festival in California.



Click [here](#) for channel information.

Limón Professional Studies Program (PSP) in its Tenth Year



On September first, we welcomed this year's twenty entering students for the Limón Professional Studies Program (PSP). They have come from Brazil, Germany, Great Britain, Hungary, India, Japan, Mexico, the Netherlands, Switzerland and the United States. Many of them are living in New York for the first time. Of the twenty students, about half will be with us for the full nine-

months.

They all seem committed to plunging into this experience with great daring as well as discipline. Almost without exception, they are at a crossroads in their lives, and have chosen to immerse themselves fully into the life of a dancer for this period. The entire Limón "family" (faculty, staff, company members) make every effort to nurture, encourage and challenge them, and we look forward to watching their growth!

This year **Julia Kelly**, who is a **PSP alum**, will be joining the Company on the tour to China, as part of the cast of *Missa Brevis*.

For the first time this Spring we plan to offer a twelve week Spring Intensive similar to the Fall Intensive that we've offered for five years now. Again that program will be designed to serve as a junior or senior 'semester abroad,' or to provide international students an affordable program.

For more information about this program, click [here](#).

PSP Students Share Their Experience:

What attracted you to this intensive Limón program of study?

Denisse Landeros (Mexico): My first teacher and friend, Oscar Velázquez, who was also a student at the Limón Institute several years ago, has committed his work and life as a dancer, teacher and choreographer to these principles.

Ivilisse Esdguerra (Philippines): I was looking for a training that emphasized artistry and musicality in movement. Limón's repertoire is filled with drama, playfulness, articulation, lyricism, grandeur, and reverence. Inherent in the technique is an inner rhythmic singing, which I want to master through guidance and practice.

Silver Light (Buffalo, NY): One of the students in my masters program was also a student in the PSP, and did a wonderful job of informing current students of the Limón program. She spoke highly of it, and it helped that she was an amazing dancer with a bright personality. She invited us to the informal showing, and I found the choreography and movement wonderful.

Karina Jans (Holland): Back in Holland I had a great modern (Limón) teacher, Sanne van der Put, who inspired me to get to know this style better. She had so much passion and love for the Limón style that I felt inspired ... and where can I learn it better than in this Program?

You've only been here for a few weeks - but have you already learned anything you didn't expect?

Denisse: I feel that I'm recovering the sensation of true falling and the equilibrium between allowing gravity do part of the work and knowing when it's my turn to be active, and do something to direct the energy or give resistance and opposition.

Ivilisse: In our classes we are reminded, right from the beginning, of the elements that bring the whole sequence to life - using the principles of breath, succession, and initiation. They are really training us to be artists and not just dancers.

Silver: I've learned how integral the music is to movement - and more specifically, how each accompanist lends themselves to class and choreography.

Karina: I always thought that as a teacher, you already know everything there is to know about the Limón style, but the most beautiful thing about this style is that you never stop learning.

How do you see this program helping you with your future goals?

Denisse: Future projects include going back to México to share and keep applying with my community all that I've learned here, and working with some of my new friends here and bringing this work back to México and to their countries as well.

Ivilisse: I feel I will become more aware of myself as I am dancing - not just following steps, but integrating the awareness of what my left toe is doing while my pelvis is carving out space, and how this is expressing

something all at once!

Silver: I'm already loving the movement, the repertory/choreography, and how each educator is passionate about the technique. I will carry this with me.

Karina: I think I'll be a rich person because of all the knowledge I get from the teachers who are teaching in this Program!

Join the Limón Dance Company on Tour to Beijing, China, Nov. 28-Dec. 7

The Limón Dance Company has been invited to perform at the National Centre for the Performing Arts in Beijing, China and you are invited to go on tour with us! This will be the Company's inaugural trip to China, and will include four performances of two different programs featuring live music performed by the Chinese Musical Conservatory. This unique travel package includes accommodations in a five-star hotel, sightseeing trips and "behind the scenes" events with the Company.



[Click here for more information.](#)

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