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Photo by Meems.



Member of the José Limón Dance Company in Anna Sokolow's Rooms.

Details:

José Limón Dance Company
Joyce Theater

In Sokolow's *Rooms*, fastidiously mounted and coached by Jim May, nothing is blurred. The only flaw in a gripping performance opening night was the overamping of Kenyon Hopkins's fine jazz score; the too-blaring horn takes the city-streets ambiance to an ear-splitting level and counters the isolation of Sokolow's characters. These people sit in lonely rooms, defined by chairs set in squares of light (lighting design by Joshua Rose). What Sokolow shows us so simply and so powerfully are their dreams and fears. There is nothing of Limon's expansive lyricism here. These individuals are taut-bodied, narrow, unable to yield. They rise from their chairs as if in response to a hoped-for voice and sit back down. They paddle their feet in the air or slide them back and forth relentlessly. Every movement stems from a gesture, a silent outcry. Alone together, they lie across their chairs, drop their hands to the floor with a thud, and raise them like inadequate wings before dropping them again. The sound has the force of a muffled scream.

We see men and women suffering nightmares (Boumaïla) or reaching for a way out of loneliness, perhaps for a dream lover (the eloquent Roxane D'Orleans Juste). Hopkins must have collaborated closely with Sokolow, for every pause, every burst of music is integral to the choreography. In one of the most stunning solos, "Going," a man is literally goaded by a passage of drumbeats; they seem to be under his skin like red ants, driving him. He runs without getting anywhere; at the end, collapsed in exhaustion, he's still snapping his fingers (a terrific performance by Francisco Ruvalcaba). In "Panic," Daniel Fetecua Soto can't run enough to get away from his demons. And in the final solo, fragile Wang's wriggling fingers seem to be talking to her; standing on her chair, she trembles on the verge of suicide, as the others re-enter and take their places in a solitude that seems unending.

I wonder if Limón happened to see *Rooms* back in the 1950s. His visions were never this grim, but the strength, integrity, and human insights of the choreography would surely have impressed and moved him.