CREATING SELF THROUGH DANCE PERFORMANCE:
A SELECTIVE INQUIRY INTO THE LIFE AND WORK OF
JOSÉ ARCADIO LIMÓN (1908 – 1972)

A Thesis
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José Limón (1908 - 1972) was one of the most prominent American modern dance choreographer-performers of this century. His work survives through contemporary performances of the José Limón Dance Company, and through his students' teachings. However, Limón's contribution to the field of dance remains dramatically under-researched. While there are at least two forthcoming publications which will address Limón's life and work, dance research to date has largely neglected the contributions of this major artist. My thesis project addresses this gap in dance scholarship, exploring the manner in which Limón created his identity through dance. By studying José Limón, I also seek to understand the artistic heritage in which I place myself, as a dancer trained in the Limón style.

I have investigated José Limón's life and work by consulting a wide variety of source materials. These include Limón's personal correspondence and handwritten autobiography, films of Limón's dancing and choreography, my own physical experience of dancing his choreographic movement, personal and previously recorded interviews with Limón dancers, and dance criticism texts which include analyses of Limón's work. From this research, I have written a thesis and performed an MFA project.

The performance project is summarized in an appendix to the thesis.
The written thesis contains three main chapters which address three facets of Limón's identity: family, masculinity, and dance artistry. I demonstrate that Limón situated himself within these contexts through his dance work, thus asserting his identity as a respectable and masculine artist, working within a community which held him in high esteem. I conclude that Limón excelled in dance because the art form allowed him unique strategies for constructing an honorable, coherent, and stable identity out of a life of many challenges and conflicts. Limón negotiated the path of his life through dance, creating an autobiographical record through his choreographic and written works.
Dedicated to Frances McStay Adams and Celia Shubek O'Neill
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INTRODUCTION

At the time of this writing, there are at least two forthcoming publications which address the dances and life of José Limón. An edited version of his previously unpublished autobiography will be published with contributions from a number of leading dance scholars; the periodical Choreography and Dance will devote one issue to Limón-related investigations. This current surge of interest in Limón's work most likely stems from the fact that the Limón Company celebrated its fiftieth anniversary with their 1996-97 season. Returning to the American Dance Festival for the first time in over ten years, and producing a New York season at both the Joyce Theatre and Riverside Church, the Company asserted its vitality last year, and dance scholars took note.

I embark on a study of Limón's life and work for more personally specific reasons: an interest in the artist whose work has strongly influenced my own teachers and training, a curiosity about the legend of a great performer, and the goal of engaging in an academic investigation of dance. At the time I began to consider this project, there also existed the motivation of carrying out research that had not yet been done. This impulse remains; Limón's work is under-researched, even with the forthcoming publications mentioned above.

I title this project "Creating Self..." following Deborah Jowitt, whose book Time and the Dancing Image introduces Limón in a chapter called
"The Created Self." Jowitt's chapter addresses the singular efforts of modern dance pioneers Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, Charles Weidman, Helen Tamiris, and Hanya Holm. With a companion chapter, "Group Spirits," Jowitt explores the creative tensions between the Individual and the Group in American modern dance of the 1920s and 30s. Together, these two chapters form the section, "Modern Movers." While not generally considered a "pioneer" of American Modern Dance, José Limón remains undoubtedly an important participant in the development of the art form. His performance work, in particular, is remembered in near-mythic terms, as exceptionally charismatic and riveting.

This thesis demonstrates that José Limón excelled in dance because the art form allowed him unique strategies for constructing an honorable, coherent, and stable identity out of a life of many challenges and conflicts. My use of "creating self," then, is more literal than Jowitt's. I suggest in the following pages that Limón used dance, and in particular, dance performance, to construct a specific identity for himself. While multifaceted (personal/public, gendered, ethnically-situated), this dance-bound identity cohered as a respectable and stable position, at least within the context of the Modern Dance community and its values. In other professions Limón might have been identified, and identified himself, as an immigrant, working-class Mexican-American, with uncertain status in terms of sexual preference. Within the developing field of American modern dance, Limón could identify clearly as an American artist. As a dance performer, he could take on definitively masculine roles that may have been more difficult for him to enact within a homophobic culture as a man whose sexual preference did not seem limited to heterosexuality.
In this thesis, I utilize the terms "masculine" and "feminine" as ideological constructs, enacted through social custom and regulated by shifting cultural values. I adopt this perspective in part from the work of Judith Butler, who suggests that gender exists through constitutive acts which both create meaning and serve as a mechanism "through which meaning is performed or enacted" (1098). Butler provides a complex analysis of the process by which gender is thus continually created, rather than occurring naturally or essentially. I do not use "masculine" or "feminine" to refer to fixed realities of human experience, but rather, as descriptions of activities and expectations within culture.

This thesis investigation occurs in three sections which address three facets of Limón's identity: Family, Masculinity, Artistry. I capitalize these terms to reflect the idea that Limón operated on a referential level in which he "stood for" or suggested identification with broad categories of human experience. His mode of living and working, and especially his performance style, suggested more than a single person at a specific time; he referred to archetypal categories through larger-than-life communication styles. His use of language, both in speaking and writing, utilized a broad vocabulary and frequent metaphor. His dancing was characterized by a bold and forceful use of space and weight. Photographs of Limón show a man with an uplifted focus and a regal posture. Through both movement and words, Limón sought to communicate the triumph and tragedy of human experience.

Adopting the values of Doris Humphrey and Charles Weidman, Limón's dances and dancing claimed an affiliation with Humanism, in which "universal" human concerns, experiences, and ideas are valued above other possible subject matter, and in which human concerns are noble
concerns. At the same time that Limón adopted the broad strokes of a Humanist approach, he also addressed the specificity of his own life experiences through his dancing. In dance performance, the artist operates not only as one of the materials of the work, but also as a subject, at least indirectly. Even as he portrayed fictional or archetypal characters on stage, Limón also presented himself to audiences through his dance performances, through his dancing body. His roles as Family member, Man, and American Artist, rooted in the physical form of dance, interacted to form the person known publicly as José Limón.

In building the arguments of this thesis, I have drawn on a variety of primary and secondary sources. The Dance Collection within the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts houses the José Limón Papers, an archival collection. This collection includes Limón's handwritten autobiography, hundreds of personal letters as well as professional correspondence, assorted choreographic notes, and many other rich materials. The Dance Collection also offers secondary resources from which I have gathered information about Limón's life and work. These include recordings of television interviews with dancers who worked with Limón, audio recordings of interviews with Limón and his colleagues, and films of Limón's choreographic and performance work.

In addition to the materials within the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, this thesis utilizes a number of dance history and criticism texts. I have found detailed insight about Limón's life and work in Dance is a Moment, a biography of Limón by Barbara Pollack and Charles Humphrey Woodford; the Illustrated Dance Technique of José Limón, by Daniel Lewis; and Days on Earth, a critical biography of Doris Humphrey by
Marcia Siegel. I have also been inspired and influenced by contemporary
dance writing such as Meaning in Motion, a collection of essays edited by
Jane Desmond. This 1997 text contains work by scholars Ann Cooper
Albright, Susan Leigh Foster, Brenda Dixon Gottschild, and others who are
shaping a new space for analyzing dance within the academic realm of
cultural studies. Meaning in Motion does not discuss Limón's work in
dance, nor do many contemporary dance criticism texts (Burt Ramsay's The
Male Dancer is a notable exception), but the various essays offer examples of
approaching dance not only as a theatrical art form, but as movement of
human bodies within intricate historical-social-political-economic-sexual-
personal contexts. In this thesis, I attempt to construct a multi-faceted view
of Limón's dancing, within the context of my own academic, dance, and
personal experiences.

While there are many relevant materials available to me in this
investigation, my work is limited by several factors. Most significantly, I
never had the opportunity to speak with José Limón, nor did I ever see him
perform. I rely on the memories of others for descriptions of Limón's
dancing and personality. I have watched many films of Limón dancing, but
these do not offer a direct experience of the fullness of his artistry. For
insight into his ideas, on the other hand, I am able to draw from his
writings. Beyond the limitations of distance from my subject, I am also
limited in my work by the time and energy constraints of a three-year MFA
degree program with accompanying graduate associateship responsibilities.
What I begin in this thesis is, I hope, a first stage of a larger exploration.

Complementing this written thesis is my performance project, which
explored the lasting legacy of the Limón heritage within contemporary
dance, and within my own dance experiences. A report summarizing this project can be found in the Appendix. While I write this thesis as a dance scholar, I also write as a dancer. My physical experience with the Limón style and select Limón repertory informs my written work; my dance experience offers information used most directly in Chapter 3, "Becoming an Artist." As this thesis shifts from historical information to analytic theorizing, I draw from a wider variety of sources, including my experience of dance itself.

This thesis does not catalogue Limón's choreographic works, nor does it offer detailed movement description for most of the performance and choreographic examples cited. I have not written a detailed biographical essay. For more thorough historical treatment of Limón's life and work, the reader is directed to the Siegel, Pollack and Woodford, and Lewis texts, as well to Selma Jeanne Cohen's *Doris Humphrey: An Artist First* and Pauline Koner's *Solitary Song*. In this thesis, what the reader will find is a discussion of José Limón in the context of three broad themes: Family, Masculinity, and Dance Artistry. Within these analytic frameworks, I seek an understanding of who Limón was, and how he came to be himself: an icon of American modern dance.
CHAPTER 1

FINDING FAMILY

José Limón begins his autobiography by announcing his dance lineage, and pronouncing that his dance heritage is his family. The document opens boldly, "Late in the year nineteen hundred and twenty eight I was born at No. 9 East 59th Street, New York City." Limón goes on to explain:

My parents were Isadora Duncan and Harald Kreutzberg. They were not present at my birth... Presiding at my emergence into the world were two people who became my foster parents, Doris Humphrey and Charles Weidman. It was at their dance studio... in their classes that I was born (Papers, autobiography 1).

After two pages elaborating on the circumstances of his "birth," Limón turns back chronologically to his biological origins, introducing the reader to his "carnal father, Florencio Limón... a musician, pedagogue, conductor, the director of the State Academy of Music... [who] played the clarinet and cello" and his mother, "in terms biological, ...Francesca Traslaviña" (3). Limón's mother was sixteen years old when she married Florencio Limón and began having children. José Arcadio Limón was her first child; he was born January 12, 1908, in Culiacan, Sinaloa, in Mexico. Twelve other children followed, five of whom did not live past infancy (4 - 5).
While Limón does continue in his autobiography to discuss the events of his childhood, one may take from his opening paragraphs that the family with whom he identifies most strongly is not his biological family, but rather, his dance family. These two connections differ in many ways, among them the length of time during which they each shaped his daily life. Limón spent his first twenty years with his biological family, first in Mexico, and then from 1915 until 1928, in Arizona and California. For twice as long, from 1928 until his death in 1972, Limón made his home in New York, with dancers. There were weeks and months of performance tours across the country and around the world, and a brief period in California working with May O'Donnell, but for all intents and purposes, New York was Limón's home for forty-four years. In his autobiography, Limón remembers arriving in New York City in 1928: "... and then one ineffable afternoon I crossed the Hudson on the 125th Street ferry, and I was home" (36).

Within the Limón Papers in the Dance Research Collection of the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, one finds occasional letters between Limón and members of his family, most of whom remained in California. Some of these letters indicate that José Limón visited his family when the Humphrey-Weidman Company and later, the José Limón Dance Company, performed in California. These visits were infrequent, however, and based on the letters available, Limón's communication with his family seemed to become more regular only toward the later part of his life. There are two letters from 1970, for instance, from a niece and nephew, calling on Limón for assistance with college recommendations and advice. By that time, Limón's name was well-known and respected; his recommendation carried weight. On a more personal level, Limón was also a treasured
brother, at least to some of his younger siblings. His sister Nena, calling herself "your middle-aged little sister" wrote in 1971:

I remember when in 1928 you received a phone call... and you went to the porch and told my father you were going to New York? Well, something went out of my life – the only one who showed any concern for us five kids (Papers, correspondence series).

By moving to New York City, Limón experienced great geographical distance from the rest of his family in California. From the letters available in the correspondence series, it would seem that this distance was emotional, as well.

Limón might have remained closer to his family had his mother not died in childbirth in 1926. Her death created a rift between Limón and his father. The Limóns' doctor had warned that Francesca would not survive another pregnancy, and José blamed his father for his mother's death (Pollack and Woodford 9). Although Limón spent a few years helping care for his young siblings after his mother's death, he soon left to pursue a studio art career in New York City. In his autobiography, Limón describes a reconciliation with his father in the late thirties, when Limón was on tour in California with Humphrey-Weidman. "I towered above the fallen enemy," he recalls, "and then my vigor and pride and arrogance were annihilated, quite literally, by a compassion and tenderness more terrifying than all hatred and hostility" (209). By this time, however, Limón had established a life quite independent from his family, and he participated in their lives only from a distance.

In both Limón's early family life and his career family chosen in adulthood, the arts were a central priority. Music, painting, and dance
figured prominently in Limón's life choices. In Mexico, Limón's father conducted a variety of bands, and he continued this sort of work in the United States. While José had some musical experience, it was the visual arts to which he was most drawn during his childhood and adolescence. He began formal training in the visual arts during high school, and found among other budding artists and art teachers a community of friends (Pollack and Woodford 7).

In his autobiography, Limón describes a certain crisis of identity and affiliation which these friendships provoked. The Pollack and Woodford book describes an Athenian Society organized for art students in his high school in which Limón participated. Limón's autobiography refers more specifically to a friendship with three young men who had a strong influence on his ideas and values about art. Naming Don Forbes, Perkins Harnley, and Fernando Felix as "mentors," Limón recalls:

They were slightly older than I, and to me seemed very mature and worldly-wise. I would be invited to their studio for 'evenings of enchantment.' By candlelight, sitting on a studio couch or sprawled on the floor, I would listen wide-eyed while they read Omar Khayam, Lord Dunsany, Oscar Wilde, Beaudelaire (sic). Or one of them, Don Forbes, would play, on an old tin pan of an upright piano, not only Debussy, but Satie, and a terrifying sound called Schoenberg. Bourgeois society and its values, pretensions and hipocrisies (sic) were not merely dissected, but dismembered and annihilated (31 - 32).

Limon continues with his recollection of this period, when he felt compelled to choose between his "bourgeois" friends and family and the world of the artist, which was somehow connected to an ideal of "emancipation" (33). It was a challenging time: "My mother's death, my
break with my father, my loss of religious faith, my disenchantment with matters at the University of California Southern Branch (as it was then called) were unmistakable signs that my young life was in a state of crisis" (33). Limón chose the life of the artist, and left California for New York, to join his artist friends.

Although music had shaped his life, Florencio Limón did not support his son's goals of becoming a visual artist. Perhaps he did not wish his own struggles as a musician on his son. Perhaps the values of contemporary artists were at odds with his own. Whatever the motivations of the conflict, José Limón's move to New York City was, quite literally, a move away from his father and family. It was an assertion of independence and adulthood.

This dramatic break makes it all the more striking, then, that Limón chose to become a 'child' again, in the sense that he put himself at the direction of Doris Humphrey and Charles Weidman to become a dancer. His description of the relationship suggests that he wanted to begin anew, that among other attractions to dance was the allure of the completely new and unknown. Limón could begin his life again by becoming a dancer, and he describes the choice in these terms.

Birth, being born, is like this: you put on a leotard, and trembling with embarrassment and a terrible shyness, you step into the studio. Doris Humphrey, a goddess, a nymph, a caryatid, makes you do things you have never done before... You learn that you are. You learn that all of the past... had been only a preparation for this one moment when you emerged from the womb and were born (39).
According to this account, Limon's first twenty years were a period of "gestation," and Humphrey and Weidman were his "foster parents" who would guide him in his new development as a person.

It is possible, of course, that this interpretation reflects the manner in which Limón mythologized his life in his autobiography, and not as much the way in which he experienced Humphrey and Weidman in the 1930s. Personal letters from this time period indicate close friendships between Limón, Charles Weidman, and Pauline Lawrence. If Limón was at first awed and respectfully deferential, he soon became a familiar member of the dance "family" that was the Humphrey-Weidman Company. Charles Humphrey Woodford, Doris Humphrey's son, was born in 1933. He relates in an interview with Billie Mahoney that during his early childhood:

...all the principals of the Humphrey-Weidman Company were living together in a big apartment at 31 West 10th Street: José Limón, Charles Weidman, and Pauline Lawrence, who later became Mrs. Limón, and my mother, and my dad when he was home, and then there was an extra room for dancers who had no place to live... What it was was a commune, before there were communes ("Dance On - Charles Humphrey Woodford").

Limon wrote affectionate letters to Pauline Lawrence from his tours with Humphrey-Weidman, and with Broadway shows. In an undated letter from sometime in the 1930s, Limón offered a representative closing: "Give Doris my love as ever – I miss you all... comme toujours, J." In a letter from Chicago in 1938, he writes to Lawrence, "... and now how are you? I hope all is well – both in N.Y. and Blairstown... have been missing you and Charles very much" (Papers, correspondence series).
Blairstown was a farm in New Jersey that Weidman and Limón owned jointly. It was a retreat from the city, and an alternative dance space for the Humphrey-Weidman dancers. In the Mahoney interview, Charles Humphrey Woodford recalls:

Charles Weidman had a farm, with José, in Blairstown, NJ, all during the 30s. And it was a place where the whole dance family went on weekends and during parts of the summer... Charles built a dance studio there, with the idea of having rehearsals, working on new dances, and what they would do on weekends would be to work on these pieces or work on class material, and then come back during the week and teach it.

In becoming a Humphrey-Weidman dancer, Limón joined a family. In this sense, it was a birth, a beginning of a close and lasting affiliation.

As with all relationships, however, this affiliation shifted over time. Limón left Humphrey-Weidman in 1940 "after a rift with Charles Weidman" (Pollack and Woodford 22). The company disbanded not long after Limón's departure. Pauline Lawrence travelled to California to marry Limón in 1941; they led a close personal and professional life together until her death in 1971. Limón returned to New York in 1942 to dance again with Humphrey; they worked together until Humphrey's death in 1958. Limón remained a father figure to Charles Humphrey Woodford throughout his life. These individual relationships shaped Limón's adult experience; they offered him a rich and complex family life.

Limón's relationship with Doris Humphrey molded his career as a dancer more than any other. Marcia Siegel wrote in 1973, after Limón's death:

The long, many-sided personal and professional
relationship of José Limón and Doris Humphrey is one of the most intriguing in all of dance. Each was a distinct, individual artist, and yet each imparted something essential to the other. It's clear that he was her heir choreographically. He danced and taught his version of her technique. He shared her musicality and her sense that dance ought to be about the progress of man (Watching the Dance Go By 164).

Although Limón did leave the Humphrey-Weidman company in 1940, he returned from working in California with May O'Donnell in 1942. He planned to choreograph and work with Humphrey, but was drafted into the army in 1943, interrupting although not halting his career for over two years (Pollack and Woodford 25). He was stationed in Brooklyn near the end of the war and "managed to get into the city often enough to maintain a visible presence in the concert world, with performances of a trio consisting of himself, Bea Seckler, and Dorothy Bird" (Siegel, Days on Earth 230).

Humphrey had a major role in these early choreographic efforts of Limón's, directing the trio's 1945 debut. Siegel notes in Days on Earth that this arrangement was unusual, that a choreographer's work would be directed by someone else, and that "precedent was further shattered when José formed his permanent company two years later and named Doris artistic director. Until her death, she not only choreographed regularly for this company... but also served as José's editor, advisor, and sounding board" (230 - 231).

Siegel's characterization of Humphrey's mentoring role with Limón is reinforced elsewhere, such as in Daniel Lewis's perception that "José found the perfect mentor in Doris Humphrey, whose cool hand restrained and guided him while at the same time she gave him all the encouragement he needed" (Illustrated Technique 19). Limón himself credits Humphrey as
"my mentor and preceptor, the uncompromising director and merciless disciplinarian" ("On Constancy"). As Humphrey is widely considered one of the most significant modern dance pioneers, the fact that Limón is characterized as her "protégé" (Jowitt 212), or the "inheritor of the Humphrey-Weidman succession" (Siegel, Days on Earth 90) carries great weight. He was not only a student, but an artist in whom she entrusted her ideas and values about dance.

Limón and Humphrey were also close personally. As previously mentioned, they lived together with Charles Weidman, Pauline Lawrence, Humphrey's son, and Humphrey's husband, Charles "Leo" Woodford for a period of time during the mid-1930s. This collective living arrangement, which helped the dance group minimize expenses during the Depression years, also involved shared familial responsibilities. Lucy Venable remembers that Lawrence often cared for Humphrey's son, at times playing the role of mother as much as Humphrey herself (Venable interview). In a letter to Pauline Lawrence in 1934, Limón asks if she has put up a railing to prevent the young Humphrey from falling out the window (Papers, correspondence series). Writing after Limón's death, Charles Humphrey Woodford claims him as a father-figure. He recalls in the Prologue to Dance is a Moment that Limón "taught me how to drive and helped me choose my first car... [and after his death] left me... the intangible influence of his fathering that continues with me every day" (xv). Limón writes in his autobiography that during the latter stages of Humphrey's pregnancy in 1933,

Weidman and I would get a dozen bottles [of beer] at the delicatessen, some limburger cheese and
pumpernickel bread, and go to the apartment Doris and Pauline shared, and have a very agreeable party and discuss the progress of the day's work and the pregnancy (100).

Limón does not discuss the company's more communal living arrangement in his autobiography, which focuses primarily on the dance works choreographed over the years. He suggests a respectful distance from Humphrey:

> I had only recently asked her permission to permit me the familiarity of addressing her by her first name... To me high artistry confers on those who possess it an aura of majesty, inviolate; any familiarity taken with it is presumptuous and impertinent (100).

Again, the autobiography paints a different picture than does the personal correspondence in the Limón Papers and the Pauline Lawrence Limón Collection in the Dance Collection of the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. While Limón does seem to have been closer to Weidman and Lawrence during the 30s, he certainly shared much of his life – personal and professional – with Doris Humphrey. Limón himself once recalled of Doris Humphrey, in a letter to the cast of The Moor's Pavane, that their "long association had made us truly understanding of each other" (Topaz, viii).

The personal closeness between Humphrey and Limón deepened their artistic collaboration. While Humphrey advised many choreographers, her work with Limón was most significant, since they were so "close as individuals" and working in the "same language" (Venable interview). Further, it was Limón's company that provided Humphrey with dancers for whom she could continue to choreograph after Humphrey-Weidman ceased
to exist, and after her crippling arthritis prevented her from dancing. Limón was fairly consistent in crediting Humphrey's role in his own successes. He wrote, respectfully:

In Doris Humphrey I found a master who knew that every dancer, being an individual, was an instrument unique and distinct from any other, and that in consequence this dancer must ultimately find his own dance, as she found hers. I was instructed, stimulated, trained, criticized, encouraged to look for and find my own dance (Cohen, Seven Statements 23).

From her role as a dance technique teacher, to her prolific work as a choreographer – creating many dances in which Limón performed – to her mentoring work as a choreographic editor and critic, Humphrey collaborated with Limón.

The Humphrey-Limon collaboration grew out of Humphrey's earlier partnership with Charles Weidman, and to a certain degree, it also developed out of a broken partnership between Weidman and Limón. Weidman and Humphrey, along with Pauline Lawrence, had met each other while working with the Denishawn company in California in the 1920s. "We became a closely knit trio," Humphrey wrote in her autobiography (Cohen, An Artist First 35), and all three left Denishawn together in 1928 to establish a school and dance company in New York. Limón entered the scene in this first year, with no previous dance experience but a strong desire to become a dancer. There is little documentation to shed light on the nature of his relationship with Weidman, but it appears that their close friendship throughout the 1930s had a romantic/sexual component. Marcia Siegel discusses their partnership
in *Days on Earth* in these terms, without specifically naming their relationship as homosexual:

José's relationship with Charles had been established almost from the beginning of Humphrey-Weidman. He had, in fact, been introduced to the young experimenters [Weidman and Humphrey] by one of Charles' more flaming old friends, Perkins Harnley, whom José had met in art school in Los Angeles. When the family moved in together at 31 West 10th Street in 1933, José was one of the permanent tenants, as firmly rooted there as Leo [Humphrey's husband, Charles Woodford]. He helped Charles buy and modernize the Blairstown farm, and like all the family members he took responsibility in the city and country for household chores, baby sitting, driving, and financial upkeep (187).

In 1940, this relationship ended. Weidman had befriended another man, Charles "Peter" Hamilton, who became a source of "emotional tensions" between Weidman and Limón (Cohen, *An Artist First* 162). They had a "disastrous fight that ended in a total break" (Siegel, *Days on Earth* 187), and Limón left for California.

Although Limón praises Weidman's dance work in his autobiography, he does not give any indication of the close relationship that they shared. In fact, he characterizes his depression in 1940 as stemming not from his personal life, but from his professional dissatisfaction working on Broadway, and from his horror at Hitler's invasion of Western Europe. "There is nothing more galling, come the dawn, as the realization that your whoring is neither high-class nor well-paid" (229), he wrote of his Broadway experience. He continued:

But worse was to follow... the news photo of the Nazi troops parading in triumph down the Champs
Elysées was almost more than I could bear. I hit bottom. So began for me years of desperation. Nothing seemed real and living was one long taut aching nerve. There was no mind, no spirit, nor will, only a feverish lump inside, weighing me down. I resigned from the show, trained a replacement, and left for California and Mills College (230 - 231).

Limón's writing maintains the personal struggle of this time period, but frames it as a time of global sorrow. Certainly, 1940 marked a major transition in his life, and in the lives of all of the Humphrey-Weidman family. Charles Humphrey Woodford related to Billie Mahoney that "this was like going through divorce, because this wonderful family that I had lived with all those years was gone." As explanation for the break-up, he offers that:

Partly it was economic. Everyone ran out of money at the same time, and my dad was the only one who had a steady job, and who was trying to support all of this... [But] there were other factors... Charles and José got into a fight and decided that they didn't want to live with each other anymore ("Dance On – Charles Humphrey Woodford").

Clearly, the Weidman-Limón partnership was a highly significant relationship, not only to them but to the Humphrey-Weidman company. Soon after its dissolution, with the added factor of the draft for WWII, Humphrey-Weidman ceased to exist.

While the Weidman-Limón relationship did not last, Limón found in Pauline Lawrence a partner with whom he could openly share his work and his life. Upon hearing the news of his marriage to Lawrence, a friend of Limón's wrote to him: "There could never be any other woman for you and I think we agree that the other relationships are inevitably degenerating and
disintegrating" (Papers, correspondence series 9/23/41). By marrying Pauline Lawrence, Limón entered into a partnership which would offer him a public respectability he could not have had by maintaining a relationship with Charles Weidman. A musician, costume designer, and company manager, Lawrence had run the business of Humphrey-Weidman from its beginning in 1928. When she married Limón, Lawrence effectively left one dance company to run another, although the José Limón Dance Company would not have its premiere performance until after the war, in 1946. More personally, she left one dance artist to support another. Lawrence had lived with Humphrey until marrying Limón in California; her work for Humphrey-Weidman included offering personal support, especially for Doris Humphrey. As described in the Seigel and Cohen biographies, Humphrey and Lawrence had a close and sometimes volatile friendship throughout their lives. Since Limón returned from California to work with Humphrey in 1942, however, Lawrence did not remain separated from her friend. Working and living apart from Weidman, the dance family nevertheless persisted, just in a new configuration.

Limón not only gained social respectability in marrying Lawrence; he also established a relationship that would give both partners various forms of personal and professional support, and a resulting source of stability. There was also romance between these friends; their correspondance over the years was highly affectionate and included professions of love. Proposing to Lawrence in 1941, Limón wrote:

...if you will do me the honor of becoming my wife I should be very happy. You know me - also I'm quite poor - and it would be difficult economically - but I'm strong and energetic and somehow we can
manage... The past is not easily forgotten - but you are a brave person - and I am also - let me know, darling... (Lawrence Collection 9/19/41).

He wrote again three days later, "...my darling I wish I were there right now to show you that there is left one member of that sad 'family' who loves you and wants you - very very much" (Lawrence Collection 9/22/41). Their marriage allowed a family to continue.

In addition to the family Limón found through the Humphrey-Weidman Company, his professional affiliations through the latter part of his life also offered support, and a sense of belonging. These connections included leading a dance company of his own, serving on the faculty of the Juilliard School, and teaching and performing at the American Dance Festival (ADF), held each summer beginning in 1948 at Connecticut College. His employment during the academic year at Juilliard, and every summer through 1968 at ADF, offered reliable work settings. Not only did his teaching bring in a steady income; his faculty status included access to studio space and to large groups of young dancers to use in new choreography. In fact, these professional affiliations allowed steady work for some of his company members, as well. Lucas Hoving, Betty Jones, Pauline Koner and Lucy Venable, for instance, taught regularly at ADF (Anderson, The American Dance Festival). Perhaps most significantly, the José Limón Dance Company had a regular performance season each summer at ADF between 1948 and 1968. While modern dance was still struggling to gain popular support from American culture at-large, Limón found himself well-established within the dance field itself. Choosing to claim his modern dance heritage rather than breaking from it, Limón worked in what came to be known as "historic" modern dance, according to Don McDonagh in his
The Rise and Fall and Rise of Modern Dance. With his long tenure at ADF and Juilliard, Limón was a central figure in the growth of dance as an academic pursuit, through college programs. In this context of leadership, teaching at Juilliard and ADF, Limón found a support structure for his primary career of choreographing, performing, and directing a dance company.

McDonagh writes that into the 1960s, "Limón... continued to be the cornerstone of the Connecticut College seasons and was seen by Dance Observer as the major direct connecting link with the past" (35 - 36). From his own writings, it seems that Limón cherished his links with the short history of American modern dance. Having separated himself from his childhood family by moving across the country to become an artist, he nonetheless seemed more at home in his adulthood within the family of American modern dance, rather than as a lone maverick. Even when he established his own company, it was under the guidance of Doris Humphrey, whom he designated the company's artistic director. Limón wrote in 1965:

I view myself as a disciple and follower of Isadora Duncan and of the American impetus as exemplified by Doris Humphrey and Martha Graham, and by their vision of the dance as an art capable of the sublimity of tragedy and the Dionysian ecstasies" (Cohen, Modern Dance 23).

Limon had already lost his mother to an early death, and had renounced his father as a cause of her death. Other than his break with Charles Weidman, Limón chose not to rebel against his "foster family." He remained personally and aesthetically loyal to Doris Humphrey; as a result, he inherited a place in the legacy of American modern dance. Limón created dances, such as The
Moor's Pavane, which continue to live in contemporary performances as part of a modern dance canon. He became a father-figure to Limón Company members, to hundreds of dance students at Juilliard and ADF, and to many generations of modern dancers to follow. In becoming a dancer, Limón became a patriarch.
CHAPTER 2

ASSERTING MASCULINITY

Over six feet tall, muscually built, with the brawn, stamina and power of an all-American footballer, Limón still found dancing tougher than tackling or blocking. His disdainful notions of dancing as effeminate scarf-waving or sinuous tangoing evaporated under the hours of rigorous technique he had to undergo (Limon press release 1).

This picture of Jose Limon comes from the collections of the American Dance Festival Archives. While it is poorly documented, without record of its author or the date it was written, this three-page account of Limón's dance work offers a unique perspective on his public image. It was probably written in 1946, based on its references to Limón's discharge from the Army and his upcoming work with an "assisting company" performing in a piece set to Garcia Lorca's poem, Lament for a Bullfighter (Humphrey's Lament for Ignacio Sánchez Mejías). With its detailed information about Limón's life and career, either Limón himself or his wife, Pauline Lawrence, are the likely authors. They probably drafted it as a press release to describe the artistic personality Limón wanted his audience to know. This Limón was hardworking, successful, and distinctly masculine. He was not merely a dancer; he was a serious dance artist and a strong man.

In pursuing a dance career, José Limón took on the responsibility of defending modern dance as a legitimate art form, a project which will be
discussed again in Chapter 3. Many of Limón's writings reflect his effort to win over a reluctant public to the expressive potential of modern dance. The powerful sexism of the time undoubtedly strengthened the case against modern dance, insofar as the movement's leaders were primarily women: Duncan, St. Denis, Graham and Humphrey. Men in modern dance thus had special cause to assert the form's seriousness. As Marcia Siegel writes in *The Shapes of Change*, a thorough review of American dance from Duncan through Tharp, "the specter of homosexuality – or at least societal inadequacy – haunted generations of American male dancers and still exerts its influence" (305). Regardless of a male dancer's actual sexual preference, homosexuality was not an acceptable option in the closeted culture of America through the 1960s. To create a successful career in dance, as in all facets of public life, a man had to assert a heterosexual identity. To do this, he could emphasize in himself attributes considered "masculine," such as physical strength and aggression. A male dancer could also support the appearance (or reality) of a heterosexual identity by asserting the significance and weighty seriousness of his chosen career.

José Limón took on this project with vigor. He made and performed dances which presented the male dancer as a masculine, if not hyper-masculine, artist. His work emphasized physical strength and assertive, forceful charging through space. Through his performance persona and critics' writings, Limón developed a reputation as a noble artist. Walter Terry described Limón's dancing in 1947: "In addition to his technical skills, to meticulousness in dance execution, he possesses a commanding stage presence, sensitivity, and manliness." John Martin wrote in 1953 that Limón's dancing was "that of a strong and mature man in command of all
his powers, and it gives completely new meaning and range to male dancing"("Dancer as Artist" 19). Limón wrote for Walter Sorrell's The Dance Has Many Faces that "the male of the species has always been a dancer" (82), continuing to expound on the possible applications of the dance, from majesty to degeneracy. Writing in the midst of Cold-War fear and paranoia, Limón concluded: "It is precisely because the danger of extinction is imminent that men of caliber and dedication are needed to affirm man's sanity and dance it" (85).

Limón's belief in the power of dance, and the responsibility of male dancers to guard this power, relates back to his initial "conversion" experience in seeing Harald Kreutzberg perform. Various documents cite a New York performance by Kreutzberg in 1928 as the event which inspired Limón to pursue a career in dance. In his autobiography, Limón wrote in characteristically florid prose:

Suddenly onto the stage, borne on the impetus of the heroic rhapsody, bounded an ineffable creature and his partner, and did something which transformed me, instantly and irrevocably. I knew with a shocking suddenness that I had not been alive, or rather that I had not yet been born. There was a joy and terror and panic (38).

In Selma Jeanne Cohen's collection of dancers' beliefs about modern dance, Limón wrote that in Kreutzberg's performance, "I saw the dance as a vision of ineffable power. A man could, with dignity and a towering majesty, dance" (23).

Throughout his career, Limón worked not only to defend modern dance as a realm worthy of male participation, but also to establish a masculine approach to dancing. This project was in certain respects a
continuation of the efforts of Ted Shawn and Charles Weidman to forge a distinctly male form of American modern dance. In his autobiography, Limón wrote:

[Weidman] was always interested in the intrinsic capacities of the male dancer, and devoted much thought and time to devising a syllabus of technical studies quite distinct from that of the women... The entire vocabulary of the dance came under a close scrutiny in terms of what men could or could not do... the male anatomy, because of its basic structure, had its advantages and limitations. It was musculously more powerful than that of the female; it could jump higher, but its leg extensions, because of the narrower pelvis, were more limited. The quality of its movement could be heavy, massive, monumental, in contrast to the softness and delicacy of the female. The sexual differences must be observed and emphasized, as in the art of singing, with its separation of male from female voices (88).

This lengthy quote indicates the degree to which Limón, Weidman, and their contemporaries subscribed to the belief that the male and female sexes were equivalent to distinct masculine and feminine gender categories. "The sexual differences" of which Limón writes, determined by biological differences of musculature and pelvic construction, further determine qualitative differences defined as gender: "heavy, massive, monumental, in contrast to the softness and delicacy of the female." Men, in dance as in society in general, should be strong and powerful, Limón asserts, while women should be delicate and gentle. This pervasive and strongly polarized view of gender influenced American politics and culture, from discriminatory wage differences to images in advertising and the arts.
A 1957 children's television program, "Let's Take a Trip," illustrates the insidious quality of this sexism. In the program, an adult interviewer takes two children on a visit to The Juilliard School Department of Dance. Purporting to offer an inside view of a variety of careers for young children to consider, the program also offers clearly prescribed gender distinctions. The interviewer, Sonny Fox, tells the young girl she is "very pretty" in her leotard and tights, while he assures the boy he looks "properly virile and manly" in his t-shirt and pants. The children and Fox meet with José Limón and Doris Humphrey and discuss the demanding training required to become a dancer. They observe a showing of Ritmo Jondo, Doris Humphrey's 1953 work which demonstrates "different rhythms for men and women," according to Humphrey herself. The interviewer notes that the men are "agressive, bold." He characterizes the women as "shy, retiring," and emphasizes to the young girl that this is "as you should be, Ginger." Both men and women dance, children learn through this program, but they dance differently. Dance movement, reflecting other forms of social interaction, must illustrate clear differences between men and women.

There are other instances in which the dancers themselves articulated a desire to reflect differences between men and women within dance. Interviewed by Marian Horosko in 1964, Limón said:

On the stage I like to recognize the fact that there are men and there are women, and that they're beautiful together. I don't like to dehumanize... to desex my dancers... I like to have the wonderful polarity between men and women. I like to have the men move like men and the women move like women.
In this context, the gender distinctions displayed through dance movement function as an element of Limón's humanist perspective. Part of being human, he asserts, is living as either a man or a woman, with corresponding gender characteristics.

What are these characteristics, exactly? That they are rarely named in Limón's writings indicates the degree to which ideas about gender norms were believed to be "natural," not requiring any explanation. Ramsay Burt discusses this phenomenon in his chapter of The Male Dance which addresses the representation of masculinity through dance.

If gender is an underlying essence, there is no point in questioning its nature as there is no possibility of change. Furthermore if this is accepted as the reality of how men and women are, then there is no incentive to analyse representations of gender (31).

Burt proceeds from these "conservative notions" to an examination of the influence of contemporary feminist theory, followed by theories of expression, phenomenology and hermeneutic philosophy... [which propose] that representations in dance are made up of discursive and affective symbols which are ideologically produced and historically and socially situated" (32).

He adds to his exploration the influence of structuralist and post-structuralist theory, concluding that "representation in dance is contingent upon beliefs about the body, and that the gendered body is therefore an area in which the embodiment of socially produced norms is defined and contested" (32).

It is from this sort of theoretical perspective, furthered by the work of Judith Butler, that I approach Limón's expression of gender through dance.
Working in a cultural context in which ideas about sex, gender, and sexual preference spring from an ideology of bipolar opposites, Limón adopted and reinforced the dominant power structure through his depictions of men and women dancing. Limón did not contest ideological gender norms in his dance work; he reflected and even accentuated these norms by re-enacting them.

The television program from 1957 offers as clear a picture as any other of what these norms were. Masculine and feminine are clearly defined as bold versus shy, or aggressive versus retiring. These characteristics are diametrically opposed; they set men and women as polar opposites. Yet Limón's use of these gender distinctions also implied complementary contrast. Men and women danced differently; together they danced harmoniously. Limón thus reinforced a "compulsory heterosexuality" (Butler 1101), an idea that men and women are matched to exist in pairs, that they are, in Limón's words, "beautiful together."

Limón's choreography offers examples of his ideas about masculinity and femininity. In the "A Time to Speak and a Time to be Silent" section of There is a Time, a man and woman move separately and distinctly from one another. Each needs the other to illustrate, by contrast, the quality they embody. The silent woman glides smoothly across the stage, her head covered by a dark shawl or veil. The man charges into the space, slapping his legs and disturbing the peace. Interviewed by Billie Mahoney for her television program, Dance On, Lucas Hoving said in 1986 that the veil had no "meaning" other than serving as a prop and offering a sort of "medieval feeling." It did not indicate, he stressed, the woman being "muzzled."

Hoving, who danced the man's part in its original cast, discusses that Limón
meant the dance to illustrate merely that "there's a time to speak, and a time not to speak. That's all."

Yet there seems to be more to this dance than a difference in quietude and noise. For instance, it does not seem possible that Limón could have chosen to cast a woman as "Speak" and a man as "Silent." While it would be going too far, I believe, to claim that Limón intended to demonstrate that women should be silent and men's voices should be heard, the casting does seem intentionally gender-based. Within prevailing gender norms, a woman could better embody the idea of quiet, while a man was chosen to dance the idea of noise, or breaking the silence. This casting reflects the same set of gender distinctions presented in the children's television show: men should assert themselves, while women should withhold themselves from overt expression.

Within the same choreographic work, there are further examples of stereotypical images of gender expectations: a man and woman dance together in "A Time to Love," a group of men demonstrate violence in "A Time to Kill" and work in "A Time to Plant and a Time to Pluck Up that which is Planted." A trio of women dance "A Time to Mourn." A woman opens "A Time for War," not unlike the female "Partisan" in Kurt Jooss's *The Green Table*. One of Limón's boldest solos for a woman, Betty Jones first charged through the stage space in the "War" solo. She pulls and scatters the space with bold and forceful gestures, her hair flying loose around her head. Yet it is the men who make war, as we might expect from prevailing gender norms. One senses it is the woman's fault that the men have been incited to violence and destruction, yet she is not a full participant in their drama. After Jones introduces the movement theme and incites the men to action,
she crouches downstage to watch the men's battle. While both men and women are caught up in the destruction, their roles are clearly delimited.

Limón's *The Exiles* serves as a better example of the harmonious interaction between men and women, the prescribed heterosexuality. This piece, originally danced by Limón and Letitia Ide, tells the Biblical story of Adam and Eve. A filmed performance of Limón and Ruth Currier from 1956 shows the dancers entering the stage space together, exiled and writhing in constrained anguish. They remember the freedom and joy of Eden, and the shame of realizing their nakedness. In solos and together, they recall their paradise lost and find themselves united in a reality characterized by awkward and inhibited movement. While their dancing shares a bound and restrained quality, Limón supports Currier; his movement is more earth-bound while hers skips and hops with a degree of lightness. Her long hair is down, offering identification with popular images of Eve, and serving as contrast between her and Limón. Both dancers are costumed to suggest nakedness, although they are clothed. Currier wears a beige leotard; Limón wears beige tights. It is a sensual piece with frequent partnering, and it ends with the dancers facing each other in a close embrace, slowly travelling downstage right in deep lunges. The final image suggests that the man and woman are united in a struggle with their environment. They move differently and face distinct struggles, but the dance presents them not as separated individuals but as a pair, a sort of "matched set." Their stories are so connected as to become a single story; they are linked in their journey into the future.

*The Moor's Pavane* provides yet another set of images of masculinity and femininity, highlighted in dramatic action. In this quartet, arguably
Limón's most famous work, two men and two women dance the basic plot of Shakespeare's *Othello*. As the Moor, Limón kicks his legs and slashes his arms through space. He is angry and forceful, moving aggressively toward His Friend, originally danced by Lucas Hoving. Limón's heavy, burgundy robe swings and whips around his legs, emphasizing the strength and power with which he dances, fighting Hoving. The two women are listed as The Moor's Wife and His Friend's Wife in the program notes (Topaz, i), underscoring that this is the Moor's story, and that everyone else operates only in relation to him. Originally danced by Betty Jones and Pauline Koner, respectively, these two women glide across the stage space, their legs masked by long, heavy dresses. The men carry out the primary action of the story; the women play crucial yet secondary roles to the men.

In *The Moor's Pavane*, it is the scheming of His Friend which sets in motion the drama of betrayal. The quartet begins their dance together, but His Friend begins to taunt The Moor by whispering in his ear. Already familiar with Shakespeare's plot, the audience knows he is suggesting that The Moor's Wife has been unfaithful. His Friend's Wife unwittingly assists in the betrayal through her fascination with the handkerchief dropped by The Moor's Wife. The Friend's Wife has a beautiful solo dance with the handkerchief, using it to emphasize suspension and weight through her body. This dance is merely a diversion, however. Her frivolous distraction with the handkerchief serves only as a means for it to arrive in the hands of His Friend, who uses it to advance the plot.

While the women are vital to this story, they are acted upon more than they are actors. It is the men who carry the story; they are responsible for the tragedy of The Moor killing his wife. While the men's movements
carry them around the stage space, intermittently sharing each other's weight and articulating movement through their arms and legs, the women remain more demure. The Moor’s Wife dances with The Moor with trusting abandon, giving him control of her weight as she falls backwards, foreshadowing her precarious vulnerability.

The primary story of *The Moor's Pavane* can be read in this manner as the story of a relationship between two men. Ramsay Burt analyzes the dance from this perspective, suggesting

>[It is possible to read] the violence and aggression between this pair of men (and other similar male pairs in Limón's oeuvre) as an expression of the tensions in male–male relations that result from homophobic conditioning... Men are in a double bind in that, while they are encouraged to work closely together in the interests of men, there is no clear dividing line between approved forms of male homosocial bonding and expressions of male homosexuality (*The Male Dancer* 126).

One may even read the tragedy of *The Moor's Pavane*, the murder of The Moor's Wife, as a strict punishment for the physical interaction between the two men. Instigated by the devious Friend, their close contact proves fatal. Keeping in mind Limón's personal relationships as described in Chapter 1, it is possible that one reason for the dramatic success of *The Moor's Pavane* was its clear portrayal of struggles within Limón's personal life, generalized through literary source material. While he could place himself within the accepted canon of Western literature by creating a dance based on Shakespeare's work, Limón could also present a formalized and abstracted version of male–male tension in this work. *The Moor's Pavane* offers a warning that relationships between men carry a threat to the women they
are "responsible" to support and protect, through the conventions of patriarchy.

As alternative to this dangerous interaction, Limón also offered images of proper or acceptable masculinity. Through his military service in WWII, Limón gained experience which could later be presented to the public as patriotic heroism. The ADF press release previously cited reports:

> While stationed at Camp Lee, Virginia, Limón won nation-wide acclaim for a dance-drama he directed, entitled WE SPEAK FOR OURSELVES. In this production Limón not only danced the solo part but also composed the musical score and directed a dance chorus of twelve husky infantrymen.

He presented other versions of leadership and heroism in works such as La Malinche, in which he danced the role of a Mexican peasant fighting against the European Conquistador.

Limón also offered more abstracted versions of "masculine" strength and control, most memorably in his early solo work, Chaconne. Described further in Chapter 3, this solo served as a signature piece for Limón. It highlighted his technical skill and performance presence, and offered a model of nobility for men in modern dance. In a letter responding to John Martin's critique of the work (he later became a staunch supporter of Limón's dancing), Doris Humphrey wrote:

> I see in the Chaconne implications of what one of the Greek philosopher meant when he said, "every man should dance in order to understand the State and be a good citizen." Here are courage, balance in every sense, authority without boastfulness, power tempered with intelligence, the possibilities of the whole mature man brought to a high degree of perfection (Cohen, *An Artist First* 255).
Limón performed the *Chaconne* over the course of his career, offering his particular expression of masculinity in modern dance.

Limón's performance of masculinity expressed numerous qualities, then, including strength, leadership, partnership with women, power, patriotism, courage, heroism, and nobility. Additionally, Limón claimed through his writings a sense of responsibility he held as a dancer, further defending his masculine position in society. He wrote in his autobiography:

> When you have done again, nothing less than consecrated yourself to be a dancer, and you spend your life sweating at the studio, and you live, constantly obsessed with bringing new dances into the world, their conception, their instrumentation, their rehearsal, costumes, accompaniment, decor, lighting and finally their presentation, *yours is a heavy moral responsibility*. To yourself and your dedication, and to the fellow-human sitting in the darkened theater out front (135, emphasis added).

Dancers, Limón writes, play a significant role in the cultural life of our society. As a male dancer, Limón took as part of his responsibility the task of representing masculinity. Relying in part on literary sources for content material, this complex project of gender performance involved multi-layered images of men. Limón danced and choreographed men in relationships with women, men, communities, and their individual environments. He presented men overcoming external challenges as well as their own foibles, offering a view of masculinity as ennobled humanity.
CHAPTER 3

BECOMING AN ARTIST: PERFORMING DANCE

That Limón's life experiences were riddled with conflict and struggle became apparent in his dances. José Limón was a Mexican-American struggling to learn English as a young student in California, a high school student with artistic interests that set him apart from other teenagers, an oldest son whose mother died as he was on the brink of adulthood, a man with romantic interests in other men within a viscously homophobic society, and an artist working within a performance form without popular support or approval. Among other experiences, these facets of his identity offered ongoing crises and conflicts. Limón negotiated these challenges through dance, and in the process built a successful career as an American artist.

In what manner did performing dance offer him the opportunity to create, recreate, and understand himself? What did José Limón know through his dance work? In what sense is dance a mode of knowledge or understanding?

These are primarily philosophical questions, inquiries into the epistemology of dance. I have not discovered discussion of these sorts of questions within correspondence in the Limón Papers, nor within Limón's published writings, but I believe they are central to an understanding of
Limon's life as a dancer. These questions underly Limón's claim: "Dance my dances – they tell you about me" (quoted in "Dance On – Clay Taliaferro"). Sarah Stackhouse restated this idea at the 1997 American Dance Festival by asserting that the "best autobiography of José Limón is his work, knowing him kinetically" ("Looking at Dance"). How does one know Limón through dance? More specifically, how does one know him through the experience of dancing?

To establish a philosophical context for answering these questions, I have chosen to draw from the writings of Susanne K. Langer. A contemporary of Limón's, Langer developed a complex theory of art which includes an analysis of dance. In the first chapter of her Problems of Art: Ten Philosophical Lectures, she examines dance as a "dynamic image." By this she means that the dance itself, as opposed to its materials, is fundamentally "an appearance; if you like, an apparition" (5). Langer goes on to describe this apparition, a real yet intangible entity:

...the more perfect the dance, the less we see its actualities. What we see, hear, and feel are the virtual realities, the moving forces of the dance, the apparent centers of power and their emanations, their conflicts and resolutions, lift and decline, their rhythmic life (6).

Langer posits further that this dynamic image "expresses the nature of human feeling," with "feeling" referring broadly to human experience, or "life as it feels to the living" (7). She writes that dance, like other forms of art, offers knowledge that language cannot: "the nature and patterns of sensitive and emotional life" (8).

While many dancers might take issue with Langer's perspective, which sets expression as a fundamental goal of art, her work complements
Limón's philosophies. In response to a request from the Director of the International Theatre Institute for writing on dance, Limón wrote in 1957:

I find it difficult to conceive of a future era in which the dance will be more 'abstract' than representational. This I believe for the reason that the instrument with which the dancer and choreographers work, the human body, is the most expressive, most 'representational' entity in existence... Isadora Duncan called the dance the Dionysian ecstasy. Those who would make of it a linear abstraction will perhaps succeed, not in purging it of its humanity and power to represent, to express, but in making a most 'representational' confession of their own emptiness and spiritual bankruptcy and their incapacity to deal with existence and its realities (Papers, correspondence series).

Not only does dance express meaning, Limón wrote, it expresses the human experience, even in spite of dancers' intentions otherwise. Not unlike Martha Graham's famous utterance that "the body never lies," Limón's writing suggested that dancing bodies have the potential to tell the "truth." Dance can be truthful not only about individual artists, but also about universal human experience.

Limón's ideas about the expressive potential of modern dance were highly influenced by his education at the Humphrey-Weidman school. Humphrey and Weidman asserted a clear objective in their development of the art form: to create dance works relevant to the modern American experience. In a 1966 interview with Marian Horosko, Charles Weidman defined modern dance as "the dance of today. It's depicting the American scene." Weidman continued to explain that modern dance expresses "what is going on individually or with anything which you feel should be expressed." Interviewed for the video biography "Charles Weidman On His
Own," Weidman related that modern dancers of the 1930s felt an "urgent need to express [themselves]" and that this new art form revolted against earlier dance in two respects. On the one hand, Weidman reflected, modern dancers revolted against the "-eses" of pseudo-ethnic dancing such as the "Japanese" and "Javanese" dances of the Denishawn Company. As well, modern dance revolted against the ballet and its fairy-tale or historical subject matter. What modern dance presented in the place of these "-eses" and stories of swans and fairies was a reflection of "man and woman in America today." Modern dance was therefore gendered, American, and contemporary.

As his statement to the International Theatre Institute indicates, Limón believed, like Weidman, that dance expresses the human experience, or the "reality" of human existence. Marian Horosko asked Limón as well as Weidman for a definition of modern dance, during a radio interview in 1964. Limón replied that modern dance is: "an attempt on the part of American dancers to find an identity as Americans... to find a way of speaking for themselves as Americans." Limón explained that the movement styles developed in modern dance were a rejection of ballet. "It became a very personal vocabulary... modern dance allows for individual expression."

Beyond the goal of relating contemporary American experience, what did the individual dancer José Limón seek to express? In his radio interview with Horosko, Limón said that his dances expressed "human experience in all its facets... the joy, tragedy, the ecstasy, the travail... life as we know it." Earlier in his career, Limón wrote for Dance Observer: "The kind of dance which interests me is that which strives to be adult. Solemn, tragic, austere
dances" ("Young Dancers" 7). To a large degree, Limón’s seriousness reflected his compulsion to defend modern dance as a serious art, rather than a frivolous form of entertainment.

During the 1930s through the 1950s, when Limón established a career as a dancer, modern dancers worked not only to develop as dancers, but also to earn respect for their art form. Part of becoming a modern dancer meant championing the form, a fledgling art initially dismissed by American culture at large as a frivolous pastime of women and girls. Speaking for the case of modern dance, Charles Weidman said in his 1966 interview with Horosko that "ultimately, we wanted to bring the dance... to a level on a parallel with music, art, and literature... and take it out of just sheer entertainment. That was our great aim." Early American modern dance should be taken seriously, according to artists like Weidman, Humphrey, and Limón. To them, the form held artistic significance and cultural value, primarily because of its potential to express human experience.

José Limón believed, then, that modern dance expressed the human experience of contemporary American men and women. Along with other modern dancers, he defended the art form as one which could address the significant issues of his time. As discussed in Chapter 2, he believed that men had a particular societal responsibility to offer through dance the rationality and dignity of modern masculinity. Framing these broad concerns, however, there remain Limón’s specific life experiences. These too, I suggest, were expressed through the body of his dance work.

Limón often drew from literature and music in selecting thematic material for choreographing dances. Marcia Siegel’s claim that "Limón particularized Doris Humphrey’s humanism" (The Shapes of Change 168)
may be understood through the specific subject matter about which he chose to make dances. Shakespeare's *Othello* provided source material for *The Moor's Pavane*; the Ecclesiastes verses in the Bible offered inspiration for *There is a Time*; and Limón's signature solo *Chaconne* was built on J.S. Bach's *Partita #2 in D Minor for Unaccompanied Violin*. In using these materials, Limón chose to highlight their dramatic or conflictual elements.

Limón's performance as the Moor in *The Moor’s Pavane* articulates agony and struggle of a man betrayed and manipulated. The ensemble work *There is a Time* juxtaposes images of birth with those of death, and Limón himself performed both sections. The work continues with duets, trios, and larger groups, cycling through dynamic tableaux of love and hate, silence and speech, war and peace. In *Chaconne*, a more abstract work, Limón appears pulled between two points of the stage, along a diagonal path. This tension repeats within his body, as his arms and legs reach in opposing directions, until their taut energy provides momentum for a turn or a travelling path.

In his movement style as well as his choice of dramatic material, Limón embodied conflict through opposing forces and imbalance. Humphrey's principles of fall and recovery, the "arc between two deaths," provide a basis for Limón's style. Her dynamic use of weight and space suggests mobility between fixed locations. The body never comes fully to rest and is therefore engaged in ongoing effort and release. Limón added in his own work a further emphasis on independent actions of specific body parts. The hands, for instance, move separately from the larger movements of the arms, which are themselves distinct from articulations of the torso, and so on. In general, the upper and lower parts of the body work with some degree of opposition, such as in the opposing twists and reaches of *Chaconne*. 

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Sometimes the opposition occurs dynamically, as between the extended, held torso and the quick, percussive feet of the "Laugh" solo in There is a Time.

Limón's students relate that he called this attention to independently active body parts the "voices of the body" (Jones interview). In an interview for the television series Eye on Dance, current Limón Company director Carla Maxwell recalls that Limón "talked of the body being an orchestra," an orchestration of parts which together create a harmonious whole. On the other hand, the distinct parts can be employed for "counterpoint in the body" ("José Limón’s Legacy"), such that the dance communicates multiplicity rather than wholeness. This latter interpretation, I believe, is more frequently valid in Limón's work. While the overall impression is not dissonance, neither do Limón's dances or dancing suggest unified oneness or harmony.

Instead, Limón created dance performances characterized by imbalance in the whole body, with distinct "melodies" played through isolations of different parts of the body. This is a style of multiplicity; it embodies struggle and conflict. Nina Watt, a dancer who has performed with the Limón Company for twenty-six years, reflects that the Limón style is "satisfying" in that the falling, struggling, and rebound are "like life... very expressive of life." She continues with an articulate description of Limón's concern with the human dilemma of:

being this part angel and part devil. That dilemma was a very serious issue for him – and I sense it in the movement style, even, purely physically – the way the lower body is held almost perched a lot of the time, on the forced arch [of the foot], and slightly tilted forward, almost like an animal; and the upper
body is so majestic, so dignified and full of breath. I really think it was a big issue for him: the search to be good, and what keeps us from doing that ("José Limón's Legacy").

Watt's description of Limón's interest in this primary conflict between good and evil offers context for Limón's writing about the responsibility of artists to create reason or balance in light of "Man's" inherent conflict. In his autobiography, he wrote:

"Order, clarity." These have been mentioned often as the twin goals of artists and scientists and philosophers. Ultimately the cosmos is the supreme manifestation of these concepts. The organization of the entire universe from the gigantic stars to the minutest basic components of all matter is a work of choreography, awesome in its structure and precision. All of sentient life as we know it is subject to its pattern and rhythm. Only man, capricious, perverse, and fallible, seems intent on violations and infringements of this order. Only he seems predisposed to create darkness where there is light. But architects and philosophers and poets and musicians compensate for this propensity to nihilism in man's nature (129-130, emphasis added).

Limón clearly locates the source of world chaos as residing in "Man," rather than in the ordered universe. While artists fall into this troublesome category of human beings, they are responsible for illustrating the "natural" order and beauty in experience. Limón was writing about Doris Humphrey's ordered and clear choreography as greater context for the citation above. Ironically, his own choreography more often presented images of human conflict, both internal and in relation to oneself - a certain "darkness" - than it presented clear order. Human experience is complicated and conflict-ridden; these qualities mark Limón's dances and dancing.
The preceding pages have discussed what dance expressed in Limón's experience. Returning to Langer's basic tenet, embraced by Limón, that dance is an expressive form, a series of further questions arise regarding the nature of its expressivity. Namely: how, when, and to whom does dance express meaning? For the purposes of this work, we may answer the when and to whom questions by determining that Limón was most concerned with expressing meaning during public performances, to public audiences. A communication of meaning to the dancers with whom he worked was a byproduct of the expressivity intended primarily for audiences. This leaves us with the question of how dance expresses meaning, an exploration which may guide us back to the queries at the beginning of the chapter about how one knows Limón through his dancing, and how Limón knew himself.

How does dance express meaning? This is perhaps the most slippery question of the lot. In traditional dance forms such as ballet which have a movement vocabulary developed over centuries of performance, representational values may become attached to specific movements, not unlike pantomime. For instance, a ballet dancer may circle her arms and hands above her head to indicate "let's dance" to a corps de ballet. In modern dance, however, there are no such direct referential values for specific movements. A Humphrey-Limon leg swing has a distinct quality, but it does not directly refer to anything external to the dance. Further, the leg swing does not carry referential meaning distinct from, say, a similar swing of an arm. While other theatrical elements of a modern dance performance may carry associative or referential meaning, such as the costume and sword for the Conquistador in Limón's La Malinche, the movement itself does not carry meaning as language does.
Limón probably would have argued against this perspective. In 1959, he and his Company recorded a television program, "The Language of Dance." In this program, the Company performs excerpts from There is a Time, and Limón discusses with Martha Myers the idea that movement does, in fact, communicate as language communicates. Myers and Limón first establish that the basic materials of dance are the human body, and human response and feeling. So far this is in keeping with Langer's formulation. They proceed to discuss the manner in which dance expresses human emotion. Limón demonstrates how he began to choreograph There is a Time by isolating everyday gestures which express specific emotions, and then "abstracted" these gestures. From this point, he moves away from his earlier assertion that movement can be "read like an ordinary sentence." Limón explains:

The dancer elaborates on an emotion, makes it larger than life. He shows it to you from different angles and in different degrees. He amplifies the emotion to make his audience respond more deeply to it... By making the human body, rather than words, the means of communication... [dance can] suggest certain feelings rather than literally describing them.

There are several confusing points in this description. How can movement "elaborate on an emotion?" Perhaps if the word "gesture" is substituted for "emotion," the passage above can be read more directly in terms of movement. The question would remain, however, of how movement can "elaborate." Further, if feelings are "suggested" rather than "described," then is not dance a different sort of communication mode than language after all?
Martha Myers asks the relevant question: "How does the audience understand [this dance language]?” Limón's reply will not satisfy those seeking practical guidance. He suggests to audience members: "Don't try too hard. Don't try to know specific meaning at every moment." He explains that specific movements contribute to the total feeling of the dance. Again, it seems that these specific movements do not operate referentially as words or phrases of language do. They are rather suggestive of an overall feeling. Even if Limón's starting point is everyday gesture, his abstraction of that movement does not "read like an ordinary sentence."

If dances can be read at all, I suggest that they are read poetically. In poetry, one arranges language not as much for its direct meaning as for its associative, metaphorical and aural effect. Similarly, dances employ movement – some of which may be derived from common gesture – to associatively refer to human experience, and to create a kinesthetic effect. There are instances in which the dance movement refers to the gestures themselves, such as the work movements from Limón's solo in Humphrey's *Day on Earth*. For the most part, however, everyday gestures offer movement material for more abstracted expression.

Again, Limón would take issue with my argument, as would Doris Humphrey. "I consider dance to be firmly in the area of communication," Humphrey wrote in her *The Art of Making Dances* (111). She continues with a discussion of the necessity of motivation for movement, and the idea that gesture provides access to such motivation. Humphrey understands gesture as "patterns of movement established by long usage among men, a sort of language of communication or function which has been going on since the beginning of time, and which is most useful because it is so
recognizable" (114). Humphrey further distinguishes four types of gesture: "social, functional, ritual, and emotional" (114). While I agree that there are gestures understood conventionally within specific cultural settings, Humphrey discusses gesture as a universal mode of communication. This, I argue, is going too far. Physical movement does not have a necessary nor direct connection to meaning in linguistic terms. Physical movement can provide real motivation for further movement, but the cause-and-effect logic of movement does not correlate with the logic of referential language.

If Langer's ideas are compatible with Limón's, and dance expresses elements of experience, it may do so insofar as dance performance itself creates an experience. This experience is shared by the dancer and audience, and occurs on a physical level, through space and time. John Martin writes about this experience in his explication of the "sixth sense" of kinesthesia, the body's physical awareness of movement (Introduction to the Dance 43). Martin writes that one perceives all sensory information through kinesthesia, without which the information would remain in the realm of sensation. He asserts the primacy of this sense in perceiving dance, as it allows an audience member to "translate" a dancer's movement to her own "present and active experience" (47), thus forming a sympathetic understanding of the work. The activity of perceiving dance, he argues, involves relating oneself to others or to other things, yielding a kinesthetic experience and an understanding of this experience (51).

As a kinesthetic experience, then, a Humphrey-Limón leg swing does refer to something outside the dance: the physical reality of gravity. Insofar as gravity is a universally shared physical phenomenon, a member of Limón's dance audience makes an association between her bodily experience
of gravity and the performed suspension and fall of the dance performer. Similarly shared are the physical experiences of momentum, pull, change of direction, disorientation, balance, and so forth. It is precisely because of the universality of physical experience that dance expresses meaning. Physical experience is not the same for all people, but everyone experiences life physically. Meaning in dance operates not as a referential system like language, but as a sort of empathetic or sympathetic reaction about physical experience between dancers and their audiences.

If Limón experienced struggle and conflict in his life, and applied this to the physical act of dancing, it is possible that performing dance offered him an outlet for personal instabilities, as well as for the larger idea of human struggle. While he may have also found moments of coherence and stability in the individual moments of performance – limited as they are in time and space – dance seems fundamentally to have allowed him an honorable situation for his lack of stability.

Through dance, Limón lived respectably off-balance. A sense of honor and stability arose from the formalized structure of the choreography, and from his appropriation of literary works for source material. The sense of off-balance persisted through his explorations of broad human struggle and through conflicts within the specific reality of Limón's life. As audience members, even removed from his performances by layers of documentation and memory, we know Limón through our own understandings of conflict and imbalance. As dancers, we not only empathize with but also retrace those physical paths of falling, rebounding, suspending, and moving in opposition to ourselves. Within the Limón style, the sense of being off-balance becomes a literal, physical experience.
I experienced this sense of off-balance in both solo excerpts I danced in November 1997, from Mazurkas and from There is a Time. Both solos begin with travelling circular paths, establishing a centrifugal force against which one resists falling. The "Laugh" excerpt from There is a Time continues with energetic variations on laughing through various body parts, whether shaking in the hands or head, or doubling over at the waist, or rolling to the floor. The foot-work is quick and lively, contrasting a more suspended upper body. For as quickly as the movement progresses, one repeatedly must draw out – or balance – a suspension before falling into a new situation. Dancing the work requires modulating energy and effort such that one allows the body weight truly to fall, but also to fall in the proper timing.

The Mazurkas solo calls for similar articulations of phrasing, with its own quick foot work in a series of jumps and turns. In this dance however, the arms operate more sculpturally around the body, helping to counterbalance weight shifts in the lower body. In both dances, one discovers the dynamic possibilities inherent in balancing parts of the body against each other.

Limon would be pleased, it seems, for his work to persist in contemporary performances, as he made dances with the idea that they could offer audiences important experiences which were inaccessible outside of dance. Again, from his autobiography, comes this manifesto on the potential of dance performance for universal communication:

The public... is interested in the same thing you are, else he would not be here. He is looking for excellence where there is mediocrity, for order in the midst of chaos, for beauty where there is squalor, for many things for which there are no words, and which, of all the arts, only the dance can
give. For the dance gives with that 'lingua franca' common to all men, white and black and pink and brown and yellow, human movement and gesture, which can cross barriers of oceans and mountains and rivers and deserts, and the chaos of national frontiers and parochialisms (134).

We relive Limón's struggles by moving – literally – through his particular interpretations of "universal" human drama.
CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

History is a fable agreed upon. So too is identity, which is a story not only arrived at by the individual but conferred by the group. -John Lahr (cited by Brenda Dixon Gottschild in Meaning in Motion)

All dance, all choreography, is autobiographical, whether one knows it, or likes it or intends it, or not. -José Limón (autobiography 233)

While this thesis focusses on José Limón's expressive dance work, the artist also lived a creative life through his public writings, and he carried on an active personal correspondence with friends and colleagues. These writings offer an interesting contrast between the private and public Limón.

In the public sphere, one characteristic of Limón's earnest efforts to promote American modern dance was a grand and exaggerated prosaic style, mentioned earlier and evident in some of the citations within this thesis. While possibly symptomatic of his concern to defend dance as grand and important with similarly grand and important language, this style seems also to have been a personality trait established early in Limón's life. Language was significant to Limón. He struggled to learn English after moving to the United States at the age of seven, already cognizant of the
connection between social status and language skill. In Mexico, he had been taught to differentiate between dialects of Spanish. The Limón family spoke Castilian Spanish, and this dialect had a role in establishing their respectability (Pollack and Woodford 4). Limón recalls his father as a man who, in Mexico, "had been somebody, a man of education and accomplishment and status" (Papers, autobiography 24). Limón strove for this sort of respectability in his own life, and language was one means to that end.

Pauline Koner recalls Limón's "staccato style of speaking," and quotes Humphrey as having warned her, "some people find José's manner a little strange, overdone. He is extremely baroque, almost overpolite, but you'll get used to it" (Koner 191). Koner says she found Limón's manner "charming" (191), but later criticizes both Limón and Humphrey for behaving without a personal warmth she sought. Limón's autobiography is chock-full of heavy prose that begins to weigh down the stories themselves, making the reader pause to question his sincerity. His description of Helen Tamiris serves as a good example: "This superb creature, by turns amazon, earth mother, celebrant of the Negro's joys and miseries, and devotee of Walt Whitman, was one of the most robustly alive human beings ever created" (76). Hyperbole abounds.

Betty Jones offers a more personal point of view, describing the playful friendship she had with Limón for over twenty years. As an example of his sense of humor, she tells how Limón liked to say goodbye to her by teasing "goodbye sow – I mean, goodbye cow – I mean, goodbye now!" She remembers, "there's a side of José that was very regal and Spanish and warm and cordial, and then there was another side that was a little boy, which is
probably true of everybody" (Jones interview). Jones' first-hand account of working with Limón for more than two decades offers great insight into the person behind the public figure. She retells stories told elsewhere, of Limón's struggles with editing his choreography, and of his non-stop schedule which mixed teaching with touring and choreographing and making public appearances. But she also adds a more human perspective, with anecdotes of his interactions with the dancers, such as his cajoling her to come to last-minute rehearsals, promising payment in emeralds. Jones recalls her own response, after hearing this promise one too many times, that she was "too full with emeralds! Please don't give me any more emeralds!" And she remembers that in 1960, when the Limón Company was on tour in South America, Limón followed through on his promise of jewels by giving Jones a turmelione brooch, a semi-precious emerald – and a precious gift (Jones interview).

Despite acclamations such as Billie Mahoney's that "He was the great José Limón... I can't think of him as just a normal human being, living a normal life" ("Dance On – Charles Humphrey Woodford"), Limón was, of course, a normal human being. As with other human beings, his life cannot be summarized neatly without revealing layers of complexity, inconsistency, and struggle. He experienced difficulties and successes. By examining traces of his life through the various records of dance performance and choreography, personal correspondance, public essays, autobiography, interviews, and secondary sources, it is possible to construct a multi-faceted view of Limón's identity. He created autobiographies, then, not only in the handwritten document currently residing in the New York Public Library.
for the Performing Arts, but also in his dances, which continue to move and breathe twenty-six years after his death.

Limón's dances and writings reveal a man who lived in relationship to family, who presented an articulation of masculinity which supported popular beliefs about gender, and who devoted his life to an art form he believed held the potential to communicate life's most fundamental realities. Through a bold and assertive performance style which reflected contemporary cultural and moral values, he won public support and enduring respect. His legacy persists in the realm of modern dance, especially in the pervasive influence of the Humphrey-Limon style. Dance offered Limón the opportunity to create himself within a setting which offered unique strategies for negotiating the conflicts within his life. He seized this opportunity and created an identity as a heroic figure. In remembering his life and work, we may re-humanize this identity by acknowledging his underlying complexity and fallibility, and by consciously noting the manner in which he constructed a public image for himself. At the same time, we may honor and remember the artist he wanted us to see, a highly successful dancer-choreographer within the developing form of American modern dance.
APPENDIX

MFA PROJECT REPORT

Introduction

How do we come to know and understand ourselves? How is this self-knowledge related to our connections with other people? In what manner does dance provide a setting in which one can create a coherent self, in relation to other people?

For my MFA project, I attempted to address these broad questions through a specific investigation into the dance legacy of José Limón. With a focus on performance, I sought to explore Limón's legacy within my own dance heritage. I was curious about how the influence of the Limón style has helped to shape who I am, both as a dancer and as a person pursuing a life in dance.

I prepared and performed four solos, each of which represented a different "generation" of the Limón style. I danced two short solo excerpts from original Limón choreography ("1st generation"); one solo excerpt from choreography by Clay Taliaferro, a dancer formerly with the Limón company ("2nd generation"); and one solo of my own choreography ("3rd generation," insofar as I am a student of Taliaferro's). My goals for this project included learning more about the Limón repertory and movement style, working with artists who have been influenced by the Limón heritage,
and exploring in what manner my experience with the Limón style has impacted my choreographic and performance choices. By performing these solos together on a single concert, I also hoped to offer a perspective on Limón's work from the 1950s, and on how the style persists in work of the 1980s and 1990s.

Through my project, I collaborated with a number of people in a variety of settings. I worked with dance administrators, rehearsal coaches, a choreographer-director, a composer-pianist, a violinist, a lighting designer, other performers sharing the final concert, and my project committee. During the weekend of performances, I collaborated with the audiences as well, in terms of creating meaning from four short dances.

This MFA project is related to my previous performance work insofar as I have had several opportunities within the past two years to learn solo and group dances from the 1950s, the time period of José Limón's greatest professional prominence. Most recently, I performed the "Lavender" part in Ruth Currier's Quartet with The Ohio State University Dance Company, and the "Allegro Misterioso" solo from Anna Sokolow's Lyric Suite, as directed by my colleague Joukje Kolff. I also performed Rosalind Pierson's The Return in the autumn of 1996. These works, all choreographed in the 1950s, share not only historical context but also a similar set of movement priorities. The Sokolow work is somewhat less stylized than the Currier and Pierson solos, in that it utilizes "non-dance" movement such as running and shaking, as well as "technical" choreography with specific requirements for its physical execution, such as exaggerated arching of the back, and stylized jumping and arm positions. The Sokolow and Pierson works call for a dramatic performance style motivated by a psychological "story" or
situation. All three pieces rely on music to help build a sense of narrative and drama. And all three pieces call for physical strength, especially through the back and legs. My experience with the Limón work involved similar elements: a close relationship with the music, a dramatic performance stance, and physical strength.

In addition to building on recent performance work, my MFA project relates closely to much of my previous modern dance technique training. My movement education has been highly influenced by the Humphrey-Limon style, through dance technique teachers such as Clay Taliaferro, Betty Jones, Susan Hadley, and Michael Kelly Bruce. Finally, my recent training in Labanotation, with Sheila Marion, has offered me new opportunities in the realm of dance reconstruction. I drew from these movement and notation skills in learning the original Limón repertory.

My project may have also reflected current interest in the Limón repertory among the modern dance community, an interest heightened by the Limón Company's fiftieth anniversary, celebrated during their 1996-1997 season. There has been a similar rise in interest surrounding Doris Humphrey's work since 1995, when the dance world celebrated what would have been her 100th birthday. As we dancers look forward for new directions and change, we also look back to our heritage to understand the art form. At its core, my performance project sprang from a curiosity about the dancers whose ideas and dancing have laid a foundation for contemporary dance, and for my own dancing in particular. My MFA project was, in this sense, a dance genealogy.
Procedures

In carrying out this project, I gained experience with the process of arranging rights for a reconstruction, negotiating a long-distance rehearsal process, and collaborating with a composer. In all three parts of the project, therefore, collaboration became a distinguishing feature, even though I danced alone.

I prepared the four solos I would perform in the November 1997 concert simultaneously, through the late summer and early fall. I believe that my work on each piece influenced the others in some manner, but these influences were not as conscious during the rehearsal process as in performance. An exception to this experience was my choreographic process for Jitterbird Remembers, which intentionally drew from my experiences with the Limón style.

For all four solos, my faculty committee members provided feedback during the rehearsal process. I found it difficult to share my material in its early stages, but towards the end of the rehearsal process, it was quite useful to have others' input for my work. Finally, I videotaped some of my independent rehearsals and watched the tapes on my own. This, too, I found very helpful, especially for my choreographic process with Jitterbird Remembers.

In the following pages, I trace the preparation process I followed with each of the four solos.
LIMÓN: solo excerpts from Mazurkas and There is a Time

After considering a number of options, I decided to reconstruct and perform a solo from Mazurkas, originally danced by Betty Jones, and the "Time to Laugh" solo from There is a Time, originally danced by Pauline Koner. Of my four dances, these two short Limón solo excerpts involved the most coordination with other people, even though together they constituted a mere three minutes of performance. I worked primarily with Norton Owen, director of the Limón Institute, in making arrangements for performing these solos, but I also spoke with people in dance programs around the country as I searched for a costume to rent for "A Time to Laugh." I arranged for use of the score and video for Mazurkas through the Dance Notation Bureau in New York City. I obtained the score and supporting materials for "A Time to Laugh" from the Dance Notation Bureau Extension here at The Ohio State University. I met for several weeks of rehearsals with Lucy Venable, a dancer who performed with the Limón Company from 1957 until 1963.

Venable served as Director of the Dance Notation Bureau between 1961 and 1967 before joining the faculty at The Ohio State University in 1968. She wrote the Labanotation score for There is a Time between 1983 and 1986, after Jennifer Scanlon directed the work for the University Dance Company in 1983. I used Venable's score, Ray Cook's Mazurkas notation score, and videos of the two solos in learning the Limón choreography. In addition to helping me read the notation scores, Venable provided invaluable movement and performance coaching.

By sharing with me her knowledge of the Limón style and Limón repertory, learned from working directly with José Limón, Venable offered
me a link to the Limón dance family. As she coached me in the movement, she recalled her experience dancing in both *There is a Time* and *Mazurkas*. She remembered, for instance, that she and other company members encouraged the "Laugh" soloist for *There is a Time* by laughing backstage during the solo, egging her on to embody the laughing spirit of the piece. Venable also recalled Limón teaching some of the movement from the *Mazurkas* solo in his technique classes, namely the hopping turns in low *arabesque* and on forced arch. Venable told me that Limón gave this movement in class frequently, although its inclusion in *Mazurkas* was one of the only dances in which he incorporated the turns in his choreography.

Venable's understanding of the Limón style from dancing his choreography has been strengthened by her notation work; the process of notating dance involves close analysis of the movement, from its style to its structure. In my reading of both solos, I generally underestimated the degree of bend in the torso, for instance, and this was a movement element which Venable clarified for me. In addition to numerous other physical details of the dances, she also coached me in their overall phrasing qualities, encouraging me to rehearse the solos without music to find phrasing inherent in the choreography itself. Rather than mathematically matching steps to counts in the music, a tempting approach when reading notation, Venable's direction emphasized finding the dynamic qualities of the movement itself, independent of the music. For the "Laugh" solo, this meant finding the variations on laughing within the dance, and using momentum to maintain quick speed without sacrificing qualities of suspension and falling. Quickness was also an issue for the *Mazurkas* solo; the music felt a bit fast to me, and even through the performances, I
struggled to keep the movement moving with the music. In this dance, Venable encouraged me to keep in mind the connection between Limón's choreography and a folk dance mazurka. This approach emphasizes the grounded and musically-based nature of Limón's dance, and makes the motivation or intention of the piece simply "to dance."

In preparing these two solo excerpts for performance, Venable suggested one choreographic change. Within the larger context of *There is a Time*, the Laugh soloist ends her dance by "inviting" the six "A Time to Dance" dancers onto the stage. To do so, she faces off-stage right and then off-stage left for her final foot stamps, before exiting. Since I would not be addressing dancers waiting off-stage, Venable directed me to address these final movements to the audience. This change in intention meant that my body facing changed slightly as well.

Other than this one adjustment, my intention in performing the *There is a Time* and *Mazurkas* solo excerpts was to recreate the dances in keeping with Limón's original choreography and style. I aimed to present the dances through my dancing. That I also presented myself through the dances I tried to keep as a secondary project, mainly in the service of performing the pieces as fully as possible.

The technical support for these two solos was fairly simple, with the intention of illuminating the work without distracting from it. Heather Greer, an undergraduate student studying lighting, created the lighting designs for all four of my solos. For the Limón excerpts, she created two distinct environments. The "Laugh" solo was lit with warm, bright lights against a peach-colored scrim. Greer lit the "Mazurkas" solo with somewhat cooler lights, with just a bit of color on the scrim, giving the piece a
somewhat more formal tone. Since both solos ran a mere minute and a half, there were no lighting changes within the dances.

Costuming these solos proved to be a bit more complicated than I had expected. I had hoped I could rent costumes from the Limón Company, but their *There is a Time* costumes have become old and brittle, and they no longer rent them. There are no set costumes for *Mazurkas*, which is not currently in the Company's active repertory. Norton Owen, Limón Institute Director, advised me to contact several different colleges and conservatories to locate a *There is a Time* costume. After several failed attempts elsewhere, I arranged with Pamela Risenhoover at Randolph-Macon Woman's College to rent a chiffon skirt for the "Laugh" solo. I bought and dyed a leotard, and made a headpiece to complete the costume. For *Mazurkas*, I followed Owen's advice to use a simple leotard dress. I purchased a burgundy camisole leotard dress through a mail-order catalogue.

**TALIAFERRO: Night Music solo excerpt from Out of Doors**

For Clay Taliaferro's solo, I coordinated schedules with the choreographer to find five days when we could rehearse together in Durham, North Carolina, two months before the concert. Once there, I learned an excerpt from a group piece he choreographed in 1985. Due to a knee injury, Taliaferro was not able to fully demonstrate most of the movement. I learned the choreography from a video and from Taliaferro's coaching, which emphasized both physical articulation and performance images and metaphors. Once back in Columbus, I rehearsed on my own, showing the piece to my committee members only a few times. Several weeks before the concert, I videotaped a rehearsal and sent the tape to
Taliaferro for his feedback over the phone. He and I spoke several times, and communicated by email, a new mode of "rehearsal" for me.

Not unlike my work with the Limón solos, one motivation in restaging Taliaferro's solo was to present the choreography as clearly and accurately as possible. Taliaferro did not make changes to the dance for my performance of it. However, much of the phrasing relies on the performer's choices, so my performance of the work is distinct from that of the dancer recorded on video in 1985. Although the specific steps are important to the piece, it is more the performance intention and attention which create the atmosphere or mood of the dance. In my rehearsal process, I found that literally talking to myself as I danced the movement helped me maintain the psychological story-line of the piece, as well as helping me keep Taliaferro's "voice" in mind. I worked to maintain a dialogue with myself that reflected the images with which he had directed me in North Carolina. These ideas ranged from specific visual images, such as walking over a ditch filled with snakes, to more abstract feelings, such as fear of the unknown.

The costume for this piece affected my dancing more than in the other three solos, as it included a silk covering for my head and face. I borrowed the costume from a dance company in Seattle, on whom the work was originally choreographed. I worked with this company, Co-Motion Dance, for six months in 1994-1995, dancing another Taliaferro piece, among other repertory. Borrowing the costume offered me the opportunity to renew my connection with the group, furthering my awareness of the dance family in which I have developed and continue to work. Due to a mix-up at the post office, however, I did not receive the costume until a week and a half before the performance, which gave me little time to rehearse with the
head covering. Fortunately, I was able to see through the costume fairly well; it weakened my sense of balance substantially, but I did not become particularly spatially disoriented. My reduced ability to see may have even enhanced the tentative, anxious quality of the movement.

Ultimately, my understanding of this piece was that it should have an emotional effect on the audience. Taliaferro’s coaching encouraged me to dance the uncomfortable and twisted movement with as much integrity as possible to the idea of a difficult journey through thick, unknown "night." The audience should not enjoy the movement. Rather, they should have a visceral or kinesthetic experience of uncomfortable fear, and they should feel compassion for me as I travel through the piece. Ideally, this specific mood is created through the intention with which I execute the choreography.

The lighting and costume assisted greatly in creating a mysterious, night-like setting. The lighting was fairly dim, with blue tones, except for a bright white light dramatically illuminating a diagonal path from upstage left to downstage right at the beginning of the piece. This strong light "caught" me as I ran into the stage space; it diminished as I travelled back downstage and into the movement story that comprised the bulk of the piece. I found that as the lights became more dim throughout the piece, I could actually see more clearly through my mask of silk. The costume, which left only my hands and feet uncovered, created a sort of loose, silk cocoon. Taliaferro and I discussed that my face being covered offered me an "identity-less" performance situation, for which the audience is not aware of any specific personality, but rather, focusses on the performer's physical circumstances. Taliaferro called his costuming "an experiment with the
universality of the moving body." This costume provided an interesting challenge, both physically because of its hampering my sight, and in terms of performance intent because of its erasing my specific identity as usually recognized through the face. I tried at once to be Taliaferro's "universal" body but also a specific figure travelling on a specific movement journey.

**ADAMS: Jitterbird Remembers**

For my own solo, I met with David RaIley over a four month period as he composed music and I choreographed movement which eventually became my piece, *Jitterbird Remembers*. A few weeks before the performance, RaIley and I met with another musician, violinist Ian Jessee, who performed with us in the concert.

I spent more time preparing this piece than any of the other three. During the summer, between June and September, I improvised in the studio to create two key movement phrases on which the choreography would be built. These improvisations were built on two main ideas: David RaIley's music, and the stylistic influence of José Limón. RaIley had composed one section of the music five years earlier, as a duet for piano and violin. Over the summer, he played the piano part for me several times and then made a rehearsal tape with both parts recorded electronically. This music felt melancholy and reflective to me, and my improvised movement was informed by this interpretation. Interestingly, I found myself moving quickly across the "spaces" within the music, with small details in the arms, hands, and shifts of weight. I experimented with the idea of having a sort of conversation with the music.
Informing my movement choices during the improvisational stage were also my ideas about Limón's stylistic influence on my training. I eventually decided to work with two specific movement ideas: initiating full body movement with the arms and dropping weight through the body. These two ideas became the salient characteristics of my improvising, in which I also explored elements of rhythm, falling, timing and energy fluctuations, shifting axes, sculpting with the arms, loose head movement, flying limbs, centrifugal force through spinning, and deep knee flexion. By mid-August, I had created the main phrase of the dance, from which most of the choreography draws. In September and October, I set a second, more travelling-oriented phrase which offered contrasting material to my first phrase.

As I began to choreograph, RaIley wrote a second section of music. We met periodically to share and discuss what we had been working on independently. I found that my movement idea of leading with the arms became connected to my experience of the music in that I found my dancing both reacting to and guiding the music. I remembered a technique teacher, Tere O'Connor, referring to directing arm and hand movements in class as "teacher hand," a practice of indicating to students what the movement is. I decided that the idea of "teacher hand" had applicability to my dancing, as my arm and hand movements "directed" the rest of my body. More specifically, my arm and hand movement sometimes operated as "conductor" for the "orchestra" of my body, a metaphor of Limón's. Not only did they conduct the dancing, I sometimes felt my arms directed the flow of the music.
Once I set the movement phrases built from improvisation, I was ready to begin arranging the movement into a coherent piece of choreography. Ralley had been composing a lively, fast section, and he recorded a version with which I could rehearse. I started working with the new music, experimenting with variations on my two phrases within the faster music section. It seemed to me that this new section was a bit too long; Ralley and I discussed which part of it might be cut. He made revisions to the music and I continued to set material. I found this process extremely slow; I had a great deal of difficulty setting the piece, even though I had been deeply inspired in the process of improvising. I found myself shifting into a more conceptually-oriented process, reflecting on the emotional qualities of the two music sections. Dancing to the new section, I felt joy, vigor, assertiveness, confidence, and playfulness. In the slower section, I felt a certain beauty mixed with pain and loss – an aching melancholy. I found myself thinking of these two sections in a "before and after" sense, with the fast section offering a child-like glee that is remembered wistfully in the slower section.

This theme recurs in my art-making, and it may be summarized as identifying pain and loss in moving from childhood to adulthood. In a different yet related vein, I have been interested in the theme of connections or lack of connections between people. I recognized these themes emerging as Ralley finished the new section of music and I heard it together with the original section. I decided that I did not want to present the child/adulthood theme literally, but that it would inform the spirit of my performance. I chose to focus more directly on my interaction with the musicians onstage, in terms of making a story-line for the movement material. On the one
hand, I wanted to create a dance that did not overtly refer to an experience external to the performance itself. The dance should be just that, a dance. On the other hand, I was interested in exploring psychological experience through the movement and music. In this sense, the dance is also a sort of journey.

The dance journey of _fitterbird Remembers_ begins onstage with the music; Ralley and Jessee enter the space and begin playing before I enter. I made this choice in part to establish the centrality of the music to the piece. The music is not accompaniment; it instigates and directs the movement. Ralley wrote the new section to precede the older section; this order also worked for my emotional-psychological "story." The new, lively section offers me the opportunity to establish a space for child-like energy and movement. I run, slide, jump, and turn through the full stage space in this section, and I present the two primary phrases in their entirety and with variations. This section is exhilarating to dance, and part of my enjoyment comes from interacting with the musicians. Initially, I dance in response to their music with my focus returning again and again to their location downstage right. When Ralley needs his music page turned in the middle of this section, I remove the first part of the score from the piano, as a part of the dance. This moment offers the most direct interaction between me and the musicians.

As the first section of music ends, I let the movement settle and begin to walk stage right, as if to exit. Once again, it is the music that initiates and guides my movement. The second section of music begins before I am off-stage, and I am prompted to "remember" the joyful dancing of the first section. Only now, there has been a change. The lighting becomes cooler, I
turn my focus away from the musicians, and I have the sense of being older and alone. The movement in this section is based entirely on the same phrases that were established in the first section, but the dancing is slower, more weighted, and more internally focussed. It is worth noting that I initially created the movement phrases for the entire piece using this second, slower section of music. In the choreography, however, I establish the movement motifs in the first section and "remember" them in the second section.

It was not until approximately one week before the performance that I finished choreographing Jitterbird Remembers. I was not certain until then whether or not I might have to cut the slower section, since it was the quick section which was more fully set. I pressed forward with both sections mainly because of the thematic issues mentioned above, which would have been impossible to portray through the fast section alone. Also, I felt quite attached to the slower section, which had provided me with inspiration not only for the movement but for the thematic ideas. I did finish both sections, and decided to end the piece by joining the musicians, following a suggestion by Rosalind Pierson. By ending the dance standing by the piano, with us three performers lit for a moment in stillness and silence, I found a sort of resolve or acceptance – perhaps even hope – about the emotional journey that had come before.

As with the three other solos, costuming Jitterbird Remembers presented an unexpected set of challenges. I had in mind a costume that would cover my legs so that I could slide on the stage; keep my arms and back bare, to accentuate the upper-body movement; and move fairly freely with the dance. After weeks of shopping, finding pants but not an
appropriate top, I purchased a dress at a second-hand store and had its
neckline altered to leave my back, shoulders, and arms uncovered. This
process was more costly, time-consuming, and last-minute than I had
planned, but I was pleased with the end result.

Again, Heather Greer's lighting helped emphasize the contrast
between the first and second sections of the piece. The first section was
brightly illuminated with warm, full lights. These faded into a cooler, more
subdued wash for the second section. Rather than lighting the stage as
evenly as in the first section, Greer left the edges of the stage somewhat dim
in the second section, separating me from the musicians.

Analysis and Critical Evaluation

After performing the two Limón solos, the Taliaferro solo, and my
own solo with Ralley and Jessee, I found that the works together had
elements in common, as well as distinct differences. In a very broad sense, I
believe that all four pieces are concerned thematically with elements of
human experience. More specifically, I believe they are interested in
emotional experience, although this is perhaps least direct in the Mazurkas
solo. "A Time to Laugh" overtly explores the human experience of laughter,
literally taking its movement motifs from gestures associated with laughing,
such as shaking, doubling over, and throwing the head back. "Night Music,"
the Taliaferro solo, uses more abstracted movement to trace an emotional
journey, as does Jitterbird Remembers. It occurred to me, in fact, that the first
section of my piece was on some level a recapituation of the "Laugh" solo,
followed by a contrasting journey distinct from "Night Music," yet similarly
solitary. Where Taliaferro's piece is stark and eerie, however, the second
section of my work was more reflective and sad. Ultimately, however, I believe that all four pieces communicate a hopefulness or spiritedness. This is most evident in "Laugh," but also present within the formal designs of Mazurkas, in the resolved exit of "Night Music," and in the unified and quiet ending of Jitterbird Remembers.

In addition to thematic similarities, there are commonalities and divergences between the movement vocabularies of the four pieces. I found that my own choreography had in common with the Limón work an active use of torso and arms, with the lower body functioning primarily to propel me through space, moving through a variety of weight shifts and spatial levels. The torso is mobile: bending, arching, and accenting the shifting use of weight. In the Limón excerpts, the arm movement usually initiates centrally from the torso to shape or carve space around the body, indicating three-dimensionality and roundness. My own choreography utilizes more of a mix of peripheral and central initiation for actions of the limbs. In both cases, the legs sometimes join in the project of carving space, but their gestures generally accent the upper-body work.

The Taliaferro piece is less readily comparable in this manner with the three other solos, but serves as a clear extension of Limón's ideas about the "voices of the body." Taliaferro creates dramatic or theatrical tension by designing complex and often opposing isolations of body parts. The lower body moves not only to carry me through space, but also to create sculptural shapes and to initiate movement in the torso, arms, and head. As I progress along the path of the dance, my dancing should create the impression that I am surprised by unexpected movement from within my own body. More often than not, these moments of surprise are initiated in the pelvis. In this
sense, they have more in common with the central initiation of Limón's movement than does my choreography. Other movements within the Taliferro work directly resemble Limón vocabulary, such as successional arm movements. Some technical challenges of Taliaferro's work, too, relate to the Limón style more directly than my choreography. Slowly pivoting on one leg in "Night Music," for instance, with the gesture leg bent behind the body, prioritizes shape and balance, as does movement in the Limón excerpts. Those elements are less important in Jitterbird Remembers, which emphasizes weight and flow.

Overall, the Limón solos call for the most vertical or upright carriage of the body, although there is some floor work in "Laugh." The Mazurkas solo is the most balletic; its turns and jumps utilize quickness in the feet and legs similar to ballet technique. All four pieces require flexibility and mobility in the torso, which sometimes operates as a sculptural element, and at other times initiates weight or directional shifts in the body. A lifted chest, yearning upward, recurs in throughout all four solos. The arms are almost always active, except in the walking section of Taliaferro's piece, in which they hang to the side of the body. Leg gestures are less important in the Limón excerpts than in the Taliaferro work. In my choreography, the legs move as an extension of the torso more than as independently gesturing parts. In general, there is a greater sense of suspending weight in the Limón works and in my piece than in the Taliaferro piece, which involves more detailed articulation of different parts of the body.

In use of focus there are also differences between the four solos. The Limón works are danced directly for the audience; my focus was almost always out to them, addressing them. Since my face was covered in "Night
Music," I had to indicate focus with my body rather than with my eyes. This piece does not address the audience directly. Instead, I tried to create as much as possible a distinct "world" onstage for the audience to see, but without referring to them. In Jitterbird Remembers, my focal intention was to create and demonstrate a relationship between myself and the musicians, between the dancing and the music. I did not address the audience with my focus, yet I danced with awareness of their presence.

While the four pieces of music were stylistically quite different, the music was central to all of the pieces, as previously mentioned. In addition, three of the musical pieces employed piano, either solo or with a violin, making that instrument a sort of musical marker for my dancing. The "Laugh" music is fully orchestrated; in this sense it stands out among the four works. In all four solos, however, the music not only provides an environment for the dancing, but also guides movement details. None of the dances would be considered movement visualization, yet movement motifs repeat with repetitions in the music; musical variations, especially in Jitterbird Remembers, guide variations in movement. The structure of Bartók's music, used in Taliaferro's work, is least easily perceived. The choreography, too, is least obviously structured, except in its overall ABA form that is also found in the music.

A number of physical challenges arose among the four solos, some of which have been briefly mentioned earlier in this discussion. Overall, I believe that I struggled to maintain a sense of groundedness in the dances. I felt that I ran into difficulties in all four of the pieces when I lost resiliency in my knees, a vital component of rising from and lowering to the floor, as well as of jumping, travelling quickly, shifting directions, and moving
slowly. Related to this challenge of resiliency, especially in my legs, was the issue of breathing. While I was winded by the aerobic challenges of "Laugh" and the first section of my piece, it was the suspensions of Mazurkas, followed by quick jumps and weight shifts, and the balances of "Night Music" which offered more subtle demands on my use of breath. Not unlike a loss of resiliency which I sometimes experienced, especially in Mazurkas, I sometimes found it difficult to keep my breath supporting my movement.

I did gain from this project highly applicable experience in restaging solo works, and in choreographing for myself. I have learned how to carry out the practical requirements of arranging for a reconstruction, and I have practiced rehearsing on my own and with coaching. I am interested in maintaining and expanding a solo repertory for future performances; these four works provide a diverse set of solos on which to add others. I understand about my own choreographic process that I work slowly; I do not expect to create prolifically in the near future, but I do hope to continue making dances, at my own speed. Even more central to my current goals, I hope to continue exploring my creative ideas within performance.

Conclusion: Creating Self and Finding Family

Throughout the process of preparing and performing this project, I realized that working on dance solos in no way meant working in isolation. In part because my intention was to explore my identity as a dancer in the context of my influences, I actively sought out collaboration, and these interactions were the most satisfying parts of the project. I was particularly energized by the opportunity to learn original Limón choreography, thereby joining a group of dancers who have brought his work to life over the past
forty years. Pauline Koner, the original dancer for "Laugh," is a performance legend within the Limón tradition; dancing a version of her solo allows me an experience of her vivacious energy. I have studied technique with Betty Jones, so dancing her solo from Mazurkas offers a more personal connection. Not unlike trying on her clothes, dancing her dance involves appropriating something related to a person whom I admire greatly, and whose teaching has strongly influenced my dance work.

I am different from these two women, Pauline Koner and Betty Jones. I am physically larger; my personality is informed by a different social and cultural setting, as I am approximately forty years younger. I have trained differently in dance; I am inclined to move my weight differently, with more frequent use of my arms for support, for instance, and with more time on the floor. Yet I also share a ballet background with Koner and Jones, and subsequent training in the Humphrey-Limon style. In dancing their dances, I have moved through similar physical paths as Koner and Jones. By identifying in this manner with them, I found new parts of myself.

The "Laugh" solo, in particular, was a challenge to my sense of self. While I enjoy laughter and value a strong sense of humor, I did not feel particularly lighthearted during the preparations for my MFA performance project. I found it extremely challenging to embody laughter in the rehearsal process. The dance is hard work, and my more natural reaction to its movement challenges is to take it very seriously. Yet the movement does not really work without the performer "laughing" her way through it. It requires a physical buoyancy that is nearly impossible without a corresponding buoyancy of spirit. Dancing this solo challenged me to find that gleeful laughter within myself. Interestingly, I found this work much
easier to dance in the context of performance. Once I had an audience to whom I could address my expression of laughter, the dance made more sense to me, and I enjoyed embodying its exuberant spirit.

I am more readily drawn to the emotional landscape of "Night Music," which is marked by difficulty, anxiety and trepidation. I do not mean to suggest that these are the primary emotional states of my everyday life, but rather, that I access them more easily in dance performance. I certainly do carry a share of anxiety and struggle in my life, as everyone does; I find dance explorations of struggle to be cathartic on the one hand, and informative on the other. By this I mean that I recognize the embattled parts of myself more clearly by dancing them. Taliaferro's work offers a very real physical challenge. The choreography includes difficult balances, quick articulations of the legs against the torso, and full body weight and shape changes within quick bursts of energy. It demands of the dancer a finely attuned use of breath. There are sections of the piece that I never fully fulfilled in performance, particularly those that required balancing on one leg while moving the torso and second leg independently. The movement challenges offer a reference point for the performance challenge of creating an atmospheric "story."

This story of struggle is not new to me in my repertory experience. I have danced similar struggles in other works by Taliaferro; I have also danced conflict- or angst-ridden parts in Anna Sokolow's Lyric Suite, Rosalind Pierson's The Return, Susan Hadley's Commonplace, and Barbara Dickinson's Arbolé, Arbolé, just to name a few works. Within this body of dance pieces, Taliaferro's "Night Music" was not as much a departure or new challenge as it was another perspective on a theme that has pervaded
my performance experience. As well, the opportunity to perform
Taliaferro's work carries for me a reassuring sense of continuity and
persistance of affiliation over time. Not only do I explore old thematic
territory anew in his dance, I reaffirm my connection to him. I have worked
with Taliaferro intermittently since 1987; our continuing professional
involvement supports my sense of working within a dance "family," a
group of people gathered neither arbitrarily nor temporarily, but held
together over time through a sense of affiliation or commonality. I value
the persistance of relationships through time; my continuing work with
Taliaferro offers me a sense of belonging and connection. In preparing for
"Night Music," this sense of belonging was further underscored by my
communication with Co-Motion dance in arranging for costuming, and by
rehearsing at Duke University, my alma mater, where Taliaferro continues
to teach and choreograph. Insofar as Taliaferro worked with José Limón for a
short time before Limón's death in 1972, I also claim a connection to Limón,
once-removed, in my study with Taliaferro.

In choreographing a piece of my own, I begin to extend this sense of
family forward from myself, into the future. I consciously drew from
Limón-influenced movement preferences in my choreography, and I was
certainly influenced by other choreographers with whom I have worked
recently, especially Ronald K. Brown and Irene Hultman. Yet Jitterbird
Remembers is ultimately about me. It is autobiographical in the sense that
its exploration of the childhood-to-adulthood transition has been significant
in my personal development, as has my concern with the tension between
living fundamentally in isolation versus living in community and
partnership. These are highly personal concerns on one level. They are also
very general human experiences that offer rich material for artistic creativity and expression.

*Jitterbird Remembers* is also autobiographical in that it extends from my friendship with David Ralley, and from my love of music. Making the dance with Ralley offered me the opportunity to create a work in partnership with another person. Although we worked independently, the dual composition involves a clear relationship between dance and music, and between dancer and musicians. The two elements do not simply coexist without referring to each other. With Ian Jessee joining us for the performances, I had the sense of having extended my artistic and personal community. I danced *Jitterbird Remembers* with attention to its influences, but also with attention to its creative potential. The piece refers to Limón and other choreographers, and it responds to Ralley's music. It also asserts an independent voice: my own.

Certainly, the process of creating oneself is on-going, and one's "family" affiliations shift over time. I have already changed considerably by the time of this writing, seven months since my performance project. In some sense, the solo form I chose for my performance project offers a metaphor for my experience of "creating self." I danced alone on stage, identifiably singular and specific in my experience. Yet the dances happened only in the context of complex interactions, affiliations, and partnerships. I claimed a set of people as my "family:" Limón, Koner, Jones, Venable, Taliaferro, Ralley. Through these affiliations, and through my physical dancing, I created specific manifestations of myself. These dance "selves" cannot offer a view of my full identity, but this is due to the nature of identity rather than to the limitations of dance. Identity is a collection of
experiences, perspectives and expressions over time; my dancing articulates parts of this collection. My dancing also creates part of who I am. Through dance, I become myself.
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