

Enrico Labayen's Flood Plain Series: A Master's Work

“So rich in texture, taste and was complex with multi-layers unfolding of a deeply emotional place; it was like an organism joined as one, separate with their own storyline dancing but together acted as one. It was breathtaking”

By Jacoby Rancher, Ph.D 09/August/2011

First up was the immediate difference between Wright's "Divine Journey", Talledos' "Danzon" and Labayen's Flood Plain Series #3-6 was apparent, (Labayen) who's work so rich in texture, taste and subtle layers that each morsel is savored. You don't want to end with a swallow or you might lose the moments forever. It flooded my senses with memories so that each morsel craved yet another bite to go further into the enjoyment of the experience to last a lifetime.

Labayen's Flood Plain Series #3-6 was complex with multilayer unfolding of a deeply emotional place in time for that young lad powerfully essayed by the beautiful Victor Talledos. The work seemed to begin in the middle and ended before finished as the relationship of the two prime characters (danced to perfection by the stunningly statuesque and regal Diane Mateo and Talledos) were already established before the audience got there. This was not swirling skirts but something deeper.



Understated power of Victor Talledos & Diane Mateo

Something else was happening as well within me, Mr. Talledos has an amazing body. I remember his performance in Glass and Icarus and my eyes were riveted on his body. I had wished he was in a loincloth at that time! But for some reason during Flood Plain Series, my eyes could not leave the women. For the first time I really wished I was heterosexual so that I could hold and experience what a woman was like...as long as it could be one of these women.

Flood plain Series #3-6 was a young man's coming of age—but much more complex than that as it is reminiscent of a man surrounded by women so much that his own identity as a man is held back in check until he finds the true nature of his power or a lover who questions his love as he finds himself changed from the first touch of his love; he questions his own identity as in love making he loses everything for that love. As a man though, he must hold emotions in check. The love spurs on more emotions and the man loses more as he fights for his own identity. The love created emotional chaos in the heart of a man who never felt these feelings before.

With each unfolding sections that followed, he began to come alive as he let himself love. Whereas from the start the women were all pulsing; I felt each one had a firmly established "back history". They were not "corps de ballet" on stage as had a story that would be revealed in their own good time. Their movements deliberate as it seemed that they were imparting this (their life experiences) on Talledos with each section that followed.



In the first section entitled **"Interference"**; Mr. Talledos was a very special as not many "actors" would willingly give up their lead role to highlight the "extras". My eyes rolled off his body and went into where the women (performed with exacting technical precision by Karen Meyers, Caitlin Max Perna, Alyson Abriel Salomon and Leda Pennell) were spinning the tale. Their dancing had impeccable timing. Their bodies held in odd places in perfect unison with each other. At first, Talledos' expressions seemed muted at first. With each section that followed his ability to feel emotions blossomed. His virtuosic dancing dynamics as well as how the women responded changed as well.

The second section, **"...hold me, neighbor, in this storm..."**, Talledos' simple roll on the floor towards a kneeling maternal image and finally laying on her knees reminded me of La Pietà and the four women laid out on their backs and started to slide away from the center opening up the space for the mother and son to dance was one of the most breathtaking moments in dance I have ever witnessed: simplicity! It was a place I identified that the man was coming into his own as each subtle movement of him echoed, sort of rippled out to the four women that surrounded him, movements so subtle yet detected by the others even when they were not looking at him. It reminded me of flexing a fist as one finger moved the others followed so naturally, it was like one organism moving in space, joined as one; each one separate with their own storyline dancing but together acted as one took one's breath away. You can hear the whole audience gasp!



The women in Flood Plain Series

One moment that sticks to my memory is when the young man places his foot gently on the mothers abdomen, like a karate movement he placed the sole of his foot on her abdomen – thought of mother/son adolescent conflict. He obviously loves her and the second female principal dancer (performed by the fearlessly virtuoso in the making Leda Pennell) responded with emotional support. The second time the same move was repeated, the women swooped around him and his mother disappeared in the distance. Then those women like Cybele's warriors hovered over him, their faces flushed with steel intent ready to show this man what he had done.

Section 3, **"Oh Mother, the handsome man tortures me"**, two women (feline beauty and aggressive Karen Meyers with Ms. Pennell) became militaristic in their movements. It was as if they were trying to show him what his lack of love, impetuosity and respect to the action he showed to the mother image looked like. A dose of his own medicine. These two women were like the man. At first he marched between

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the two of them as this was the life he instinctually knew and the women consciously locked him behind them. Then he became and unfolded as his movements while mimicking the women became more fluid, more feminine. He was learning fast.

Left alone in Section 4: *“Listen to me, my fellow county (wo)men”* ; Mr. Talledos was intense when he carried his stomach into a circle, I had never seen a body do that; a spine that could go in opposite direction? As soon as I saw this action, my idea on the story telling shifted.

The yang he was flowed to the yin he was to be. It was during this movement that one suddenly noticed or even saw the Man. He was gaining an identity which then climaxed. There was one moment where he searches for her, grabbing at other woman who are in a dancing frenzy, only to realize it's not the woman he truly loves, this was the moment of his realization, his love for his mother. The way the dancers sweat hit the lights in a bacchanalia of choreographic tour de force on such beautiful bodies of the dancers had me on the edge of my chair...it was a cliffhanger. The man sprawled on the floor in fetal position while the mother hovers over him, beckoning and calling him back while her elbows dangled with the sound of church bells. Then it was all over. The audience started to applaud, yell and stomp their feet and I was coitus interruptus as I did not want the experience to end.

I found Jamie Wright's "Divine Journey" to be incredibly beautiful but very preachy. It was blatant, like giving cliff notes. The way the story was told was like a preschool primer as each tale spun was in a LARGE LETTERS with lots of illustration so the reader really could not miss the point. Pretty to look at but not something I would spent the night mulling over unlike Labayen's works.



Lightning fast virtuoso Leda Pennell in Talledos' Danzon

Then came Mr. Talledos world premiere work "Danzon". Mexican, family, heritage, legacy, birthright, mother, daughter, grandmother, wife. The swirling skirts added to the rich pageantry of costume and movement but something was missing. This was just too easy to view. The dance did not have the gravitas of Labayen's work other than picturesque to watch. It made me feel I could dance like that? The dancing looked so easy yet I know how difficult some of the movements were (huge drops on the floor, rapid formation and directional change plus the gigantic skirts!) yet I know how hard that performance was.

Were these the same dancers in the Wright pieces? In Wright's work, these women look like silly high school girls. In Talledos' *“Danzon”* and Labayen's *“Flood Plain Series”* pieces they aged both in performance ability as well as in features. These were women. Hard to describe except the sensation was fulfilled when Labayen's *Flood Plain Series* began. Labayen's choreography and each move the dances displayed had a subtle meaning to the entire length of *Flood Plain Series* #3-6 performance.

One must never attend only one Labayen Dance/SF's performance. Labayen's works demands repeat viewing, as well as center stage. He was generous in sharing the stage with the DanceWright Project but next time I want more of Labayen's opus.

Talledos' "Danzon" makes a great opening act to Labayen's "Flood Plain Series". He needs to share with somebody that has a strong dancing ancestry to weave sincerity with the audience making them ready for Mr. Labayen, then they can fill their expectations with a strong dancing expertise under the tutelage of an experience master and that is Enrico Labayen.

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Photos by Weidong Yang and Andrew Faulkner courtesy of Labayen Dance/SF