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Renowned dance artist Alice Condodina connects students with dance lineage

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Despite her retirement in 1994, dance artist and choreographer Alice Condodina, a professor emerita in the Department of Theater and Dance, has continued to stage performances to international acclaim. Because of her unique ability to reconstruct the work of Mexican American choreographer José Limón (1908–1972), Condodina has been invited far and wide to stage Limón's repertoire with top professional dance companies. Her stagings of Master Dance Works have been celebrated in Russia, Italy, Greece, Puerto Rico, and in the United States for Pacific Northwest Ballet, Los Angeles Ballet and Santa Barbara Dance Theater.

Her career has also kept her active in her home department at UC Santa Barbara, where she has been invited to return each year to reconstruct Limón's pieces. Now, for the third time, Condodina has been named UCSB's Dickson Emeriti Professor. She previously held the title in 2012 and 2018.

“This academic year provides a very special opportunity,” said Condodina, whose work will involve the UCSB Dance Company, a group of senior dance majors selected to perform and tour. “A key part of my project will be incorporated within the ‘Border Crossings’ events, a part of which features the dance art and legacy of José Limón, with whom I performed for over a decade of my career.” A prominent modern dance choreographer, Limon’s work often focused on human drama, incorporating themes from literature, history and religion.

During winter quarter, the “Border Crossings” program will offer a performance by the José Limón Dance Company at the Granada Theatre, and a matinee performance at the Hatlen Theater featuring dance works by various groups, including Condodina’s project, direction and staging of “Homenaje a Limón” with the UCSB Dance Company. “This homage will include excerpts from Limón’s masterworks, ‘Missa Brevis’ (1958), and ‘Psalm’ (1967),” she added. In spring, during the company’s European Tour, Condodina will serve as a mainstay of the International Dance Legacy Project, continuing this year in Poland, Czech Republic and Italy.

“It was in Poland during a Limón post World War II tour, that the ‘Missa Brevis’ was born in the artist’s soul,” she said. “No doubt for the student dance majors, all these experiences will imbue a rich and meaningful fulfillment of their study at UCSB. I cherish the opportunity to engage in this research project, and to witness again the rich effect that the beauty of the great performing arts gives to us all.”

As Dickson Emeriti Professor in 2018, she reconstructed excerpts from Limón’s “The Unsung,” with a mixed male and female cast — a first — and a groundbreaking decision that has been followed widely. In St. Petersburg, Russia, for the exceptional success of her three stagings in 2008, 2012 and 2017, of Limón’s masterpiece “The Moor’s Pavane,” she has been acclaimed as a pioneer in motivating enthusiasm within the Russian classical repertory to include American contemporary choreography.

She staged another of Limón’s monumental works, “Missa Brevis.” Her reconstruction efforts were filmed and archived with the Limón Foundation in New York City. In recognition of her accomplishment, she was nominated in 2021 for the Constantine Panunzio Distinguished Emeriti Award for outstanding and exemplary service to the University of California and beyond.

“Dance depends upon direct transmission from generation to generation to carry forward its legacy of discovery and innovation,” said Irwin Appel, the department

chair. “Professor Condodina’s expertise and knowledge present a golden opportunity for our students to connect with a direct lineage through a master teacher. Such intergenerational integration strengthens identity, deepens cultural memory and amplifies the potency of the art form as well as our curriculum.”

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