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Spring Renewal at Li Chiao-Ping Dance

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When Igor Stravinsky premiered *The Rite of Spring* in May 1913, his Parisian audience responded so negatively and furiously to the ballet's avant-garde choreography and inharmonic music that a riot broke out.

Both this groundbreaking work and its spirited reception inspired [Li Chiao-Ping Dance's *Riot of Spring*](#), which premiered this weekend at Overture Center.

In true Li Chiao-Ping form, the production is no mere replica of the original, but rather uses it as a starting off point for powerful choreography and a beautifully inclusive narrative.

The performance opens with a white parachute spread out across the stage. Dancers lie still underneath until a trombone player walks by. The dancers begin to move and a woman emerges from the center of the chute, turning the material into an expansive skirt. Soon, other dancers, clad in shades of cream and white, begin to move about the stage.

From here, the dancers—thirteen core dancers plus Li's seven "community performers," whom audiences may remember from the company's *Knotcracker* productions—offer a stunning mix of contrasts. At times, a single dancer occupies the stage, but seconds later more than ten others accompany her. In moments, there's stillness and silence; then comes an absolute frenzy of activity, perhaps dancers running at full tilt across the stage, over and over.

The choreography is strong, dynamic and athletic. Dancers push and pull, drape on and hoist one another. It's a testament to Li's talent as a choreographer that dancers of such different sizes, shapes and ages are able to convey her movements so succinctly. You can easily envision Li herself carrying out each step, twist and bend.

Li also sprinkles in playful elements, from a quick game of Duck, Duck Goose to a take on Red Rover.

As striking as the diversity of the dancers is the use of color in their costumes. This is not an afterthought or embellishment; the colors help push the narrative along. The cream and white of the opening scene are starkly replaced by khaki and black. Later, the dancers perform in white, but bits of red slowly creep in. Before you realize it, all of the dancers are clad completely in red and fill the stage together in a powerful ending.

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Along with this title performance, *Riot of Spring* included three other works that took place beforehand.

Fin de Siècle from 1996 features company principal Liz Sexe. Wearing a futuristic red and black outfit with a silver apron, she carries out sometimes jerky, sometimes yoga-esque movements while black and white film imagery plays out behind her. The scenes range from abstracted clocks to lines of men walking to a vintage science fiction movie—all evoking a deep sense of foreboding, a future no one wants.

Next is *daughter*, a 2012 screen dance work dedicated to Li's mother, Gim Har Lee. This staggeringly beautiful tribute opens with Li standing on a raft in the ocean. As the water swells and recedes, she moves in ways that mimic her mother's motions, revealed in footage that's interspersed with black and white flashes of Li dancing. Li speaks of her mother's journey across the ocean to America and her strenuous work in a laundry. "It is my hope that your life is not as hard," she recalls her mother saying.

Also highlighted is *L'Altra Notte*, a solo work that New York choreographer Sally Silvers created for Li. It opens with Li silent and unmoving, bathed in a circle of light. She goes on to dance to arias from *Adriana Lecouvreur* and *Mefistofele*.

Each of the four works offers a sense of a journey, of an individual battling circumstances. There's sadness and conflict, but ultimately strength, humanity and hope, ideal sentiments for the heart of spring.

For more information on Li Chiao-Ping Dance, visit lichiaopingdance.org.

Photo courtesy of Li Chiao-Ping Dance.

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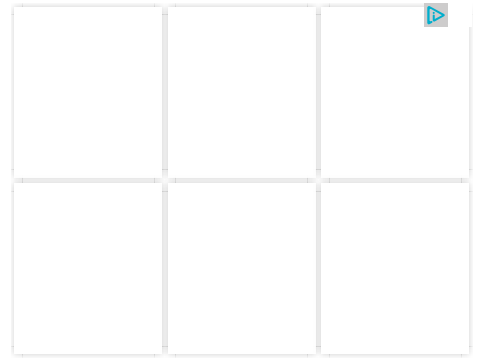
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