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Li Chiao-Ping Dance stirs the soul and the nerves

KARYN SAEMANN | Special to The Capital Times | 77tips@madison.com Apr 2, 2011



State Journal archives
Li Chiao-Ping in 2005.

Intensely personal and sensorial, Li Chiao-Ping Dance's latest concert stirs the soul and the nerves.

"Take 2: Multimedia Dance Performances and Screen Dance," opened Friday night at the Overture Center's Promenade Hall. It will be repeated Saturday night at 7:30 and Sunday at 2 p.m.

The evening's four premiers and three past works wove movement around and through a rich multimedia experience of video, live and recorded sound (not always traditional music), lighting and other special effects.

The night began emotionally with "RE: Joyce," a 1997 work performed solo by artistic director Li Chiao-Ping. It spoke of the hardships faced by Li's mother as she immigrated to the United States from China.

"It is my hope that your life is not as hard," Li's recorded voice said, as video of her mother played alongside audio about her arrival in America and subsequent employment in a laundry, washing and pressing sheets. Li's arms made crisp rectangles, mirroring her mother's labor. A few moments where Li was stripped down to her underclothes suggested raw vulnerability.

For a short time the vocals paused, giving the audience time to reflect on how the infant cries of Li's sister, in an upstairs apartment, could be heard by their mother in the laundry. Their grandmother insisted she not leave work to comfort her child, that a weak character would result.

Li made only one other onstage appearance in “Hado,” an auditory rush of heartbeats, flowing and dripping water, bells, strings, drums, chants and other sounds. “Hado” culminated with company members and community dancers of varying ages and abilities pouring a cup of water from person to person. Ultimately the partially filled cup was held up. The suggestion of “half full or half empty” in this, the night’s final work, poignantly book-ended the life challenges in “RE: Joyce.”

“Hado” also featured a really beautiful, partnered interlude by the four company dancers, backed by a classical rhythm.

Emotions again ran high in “Shifting Ground,” a tribute to the survivors of the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake near San Francisco. Background audio spoke of buildings collapsing, people running for their lives and buckled interstates, and in a great effect a newspaper clipping of the disaster was projected onto the dancers’ white costumes.

“Water’s Edge,” another premiere, was an exquisite, ethereal experience with dancers captured on video swimming underwater amid swirling, filmy scarves and a torrent of bubbles.

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Nature also figured into “Circling,” the evening’s third premiere and another video-only piece in which dancer Sally Gross walked through a field, accompanied by a string musician.

“Lessons in Flying” blended video of children and audio about childhood games, memories and dreams with movement by a large troupe of UW-Madison dance students. The dancers, clad in pajama pants and T-shirts and backed by a live musician and a vocalist, moved skillfully and confidently.

Finally, “Grafting,” a 2000 work, featured some interesting floor lighting but the dancing stole the show. Soloist Rachel Krinsky impressed as she deftly and coolly maneuvered inside a small square.

An abundance of veteran and new talent, and a creatively masterful marriage of movement and media.



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