

By Julia Sopalski, Daily News music reviewer  
Tuesday, April 30, 1996

## East meets West in night of dance, music

The Asian community celebrated its diversity and unity with “Asian Culture Night 1996” Saturday night in West High School’s auditorium.

The Asian Alaskan Cultural Center, in association with Out North, presented a program of dance and music in which local groups performed traditional pieces and a guest dance troupe demonstrated unusual new forms created by U.S. artists drawing on their Asian roots.

The show began with a Chinese lion dance. To the clang of cymbals and the pulse of a drum, young men from the Chinese community took turns under the lion’s form to shake its head and scare off evil. Lion dances can go on for hours, but this opener was just long enough to give the audience a good taste of what was to come.

All of the performances by local groups were smaller gems rather than long pieces. This made for a program that flowed well and maintained the audience’s interest.

Women from the Thai community wearing traditional striped skirts portrayed the planting and harvesting of rice. Indian women in shimmering saris celebrated spring in a playful dance from Bengal. In long, satin dance gowns with lace shawl, a group from the Filipino community danced a graceful waltz and Hispanic polka. Among the local groups, the well-rehearsed Korean fan dance seemed to be an audience favorite.

The Lily Cai Chinese Dance Company opened the second half of the program with “Static and Dynamics,” a dance performed at a 1994 Grateful Dead concert. Inspired by statues of the thousand-armed *bodhisattva* of Compassion found throughout East Asia, the dancers remained static in a tight line high on a pedestal, but they constantly moved their arms and hands, creating the appearance of the thousand arms that protect the universe.

Projected on a scrim in front of the dancers was a constantly changing array of the Buddha’s hands, black silhouettes of the palms with eyes in their centers – first a few, then many, then seemingly a thousand. Meanwhile, the dancers continued to move their arms gracefully to the strains of modern synthesizer music while the jewels on their fingers caught and reflected the dim stage lighting.

After “Static and Dynamic,” the troupe let out all the stops. In “Dynasties” and “Begin From Here,” the audience experienced a meld that could only happen in America –

ancient Chinese techniques blended with modern dance in a marriage that was artistic and inventive.

In “Dynasties,” Lily Cai drew on artistic research of what women and dance may have looked like in different historical dynasties, from the ribbon dancers of the Tang Dynasty to the stately women on wooden platform shoes in red brocade of the Qing Dynasty. Cai made heavy use of the S-shaped body posture, which before the dances she explained was considered a most attractive stance for a lady.

In “Begin From Here,” the dance became increasingly energetic, and the Chinese techniques verged on acrobatic. Dangling 18- to 20-foot streams of cloth from their arms, the dancers twirled and swirled about stage at a dizzying speed. They walked past each other twirling big vertical circles. They spun in circles, weaving the scarves in concentric circles around themselves, barely missing each other as they traveled across the stage, and they jumped over the swirling ribbons as though skipping rope.

All the while, they displayed finely tuned modern dance skills. The audiences responded with gasps, “wows” and plenty of applause.