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DANCE



Q & A with Lily Cai Chinese Dance Company

Posted November 1, 2010

Lily Cai is the former principal dancer of the Shanghai Opera House Dance Troupe, when it was known for the excellence of its dancers. She founded the Lily Cai Chinese Dance Company in San Francisco in 1988.

Lily Cai is known across the country and internationally for her beautiful choreography that blends Chinese dance with contemporary movement. The performances feature the all-female dance troupe of first and second generation Chinese women.

The company has been presented in major theaters including the Kennedy Center in Washington DC. The performance at the Ferst Center is one on a three state tour through Georgia, South Carolina, and Alabama.

The performance at the Ferst Center is Silk Cascade, featuring exquisite choreography with contemporary ribbon dancing, a dance performed with lit candles, and a suite inspired by the Dai minority from Southern China. All of Lily Cai's creations explore the beauty, complexity, and internal power of the Chinese woman.

GAT: Share with our readers your background and introduction on the Lily Cai Chinese Dance Company.

LC: The Lily Cai Chinese Dance Company offers the audience a unique performance – Chinese art, history, culture, and movement combined with Western ballet and modern dance. We are honored when the audience members tell us how beautiful the performances are.

Our dancers are all Chinese and Chinese-American women. They have all trained in my specific dance technique. My technique combines the concept of Qi for movement and Yin/Yang philosophy for strength. These professional dancers have beauty and power.

I am the Artistic Director, Choreographer, and Visual Designer of the Company. I am from Shanghai, where I was the principal dancer of the Shanghai Opera House Dance Troupe. My dance training in Shanghai, and my own research around China, gave me the background to use in my art. In each dance, I combine an element from my Chinese heritage with my own unique ideas and creativity.

The Lily Cai Chinese Dance Company is based in San Francisco. We have toured all over the United States, and to Europe and Mexico. I have been honored to receive many awards and commissions to create new dance works. In 2008, we celebrated the 20th anniversary of the Company.

GAT: You are well known for your group’s beautiful choreography blending Chinese dance with contemporary movement. Your performances also feature all female dancers of first and second generation Chinese women. What is the inspiration behind the all female cast?

LC: From the moment I began the Company, my passion has been to reveal the soul and the internal beauty of the Chinese woman through dance.

Of course, our dedicated female dancers are the best to reveal the Chinese woman’s complexity, beauty, and power!

I have selected dancers who have a passion for dance and dedication to giving audience around the country a memorable performance. With their dance, they are honoring their families, their own Chinese heritage, and their chosen art.

My training helps the dancers focus on the sense of their bodies and the power of their movements. The results are gorgeous!

GAT: Your dance company is also known for using effective lighting and “props” as part of the performances. What are you trying to achieve with the lighting and props?

LC: Dancing is a visual art. Every element in the performance – costume, music, lighting, choreography, staging – cannot be separated. All elements must come together for the overall visual quality of a concert performance.

In *Bamboo Girls*, the audience will sense the innocence and beauty of the young women in the Dai minority living in the Bamboo forests. The scene takes place over 24 hours. The staging and lighting convey the rain in the forest and the day-long journey up the mountains.

In *Candelas*, as in Chinese poetry, candles symbolize selflessness and self-sacrifice. The candles burn themselves to give light to others. The dancers dance holding these burning candles.

Some of the most beautiful effects are in the *Silk Cascade* finale. We start with traditional ribbon dance then go to the contemporary dances I created, with non-traditional imagery. The last scene, with long colorful silk ribbons, was inspired by the modern paintings of Jackson Pollock.



GAT: What experience do you want your audience to draw from your show?

LC: The audience will sense the beauty and power in the dance and how the elements of our Chinese heritage are combined in unique ways with modern dance. The audience members will experience the program at many levels; they will have their own interpretations of the emotions and the meaning of each number.

GAT: Describe the type of music that will accompany your dance performances at Ferst Center.

LC: Selecting the right music for each dance is an important part of my creative process. I listen to many different kinds of music and many variations of the same music before I come up with the right combination. Our music director, composer Gang Situ often arranges or composes the music for the performances.

The music in this program draws from both Chinese and Western sources, traditional, pop, symphonic, and modern. For example: The Bamboo Girls suite combines music played on bamboo instruments with Chinese pop music. The Silk Cascade suite opens with Spring Overture by Huan Zhi Li then ends with modern music composed by John Adams.

GAT: What can the audience expect from your group's "Silk Cascade" performance at Ferst Center?

LC: A unique and special evening performance. We thank the Ferst Center for the Arts for inviting us to perform. We have only one show in Atlanta on Friday, November 12th at 8 pm – then the company continues its tour. We look forward to performing for your readers in our audience!

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