

Grantee spotlight

Performing Arts Touring and Presenting

The Lily Cai Chinese Dance Company

Bio

Elegant, sensual and captivating, the Lily Cai Chinese Dance Company meld ancient Chinese dance forms with modern dance in an artistic marriage of styles – from spectacular court dances of Chinese dynasties to contemporary works fusing classical Chinese, Russian ballet, and American modern dance. Bridging the continuum from past to contemporary, the company offers full-length evening concerts, school shows, and master classes, complemented by dazzling intricate costumes, original music and multi-media designs.

A former principal dancer with Shanghai Opera House, Artistic Director Lily Cai is a major authority on Chinese dance in the San Francisco Bay Area and a recipient of major choreography awards and fellowships.

Interview

What inspires your work the most?

I am most inspired by 2 things – the vast richness of Chinese dance traditions and the culture of American creativity. For example, modern dance started in this country. From that creative sense people just started creating all kinds of new works. I admire that spirit. Whereas in China, people want to preserve culture. That's because the environment where I grew up has 5,000 years of history, 56 different minority groups and different dynasties each with their own kind of dancing. I want to expand this rich resource of Chinese dance into newer contemporary forms.

Which artists have had the greatest impact on your work?

My 2 all-time favorite choreographers are Alvin Ailey and Alwin Nikolai. Alvin Ailey took the roots of African dance culture as roots to create a new vivid and moving American dance spirit. Alwin Nikolai created exquisite and fascinating visual forms. His sculptural designs using dancers' bodies attract me so much.

What is the relationship between art and life?

To me, life directly affects my art. My entire life is focused on the arts. Everything that I do in my life feeds my art, goes directly to benefit my art – my creation of new dances.

If you were not an artist, what would you have become?

I may have become a doctor. I have always wanted to save people's lives.

What advice would you give to young artists?

If you want to succeed as an artist, first you have to love your work and what you are doing. Second you have to be persistent in being the best.



Bamboo Girls - Lily Cai Chinese Dance Co.



Dance from Qing - Lily Cai



Strings Calligraphy - Lily Cai