

JACK NEAL'S

DANCE

REVIEWS

Dance Reviews

Feb 12, 2000 - Lily Cai chinese Dance Company Enchants at the Pioneer Center

By [Jack Neal](#)

In an extraordinary fusion of ancient and modern dance, the Lily Cai Chinese Dance Company embroiders filigrees of dance across the sands of time with wistful, magical enchantment.

This remarkable troupe of seven female dancers radiates the beauty of dance and illusion that emanates from the ethereal moving sculptures created by the company's artistic director and choreographer, Lily Cai. Under the sponsorship of Nevada Festival Ballet, remarkable things have been happening the past two days in Reno as Miss Cai's company performed for and inspired students during the day at Lawlor Event Center and enthralled a large Pioneer Center audience Friday night (2/11/2000). This exceptional experience was the dream of, and made possible by, Nevada Festival Ballet's new artistic director Lesley Bandy Beardsley.

Friday night's three-part program included untraditional settings of traditional Chinese dance and a luminous contemporary setting of Mahler's haunting Adagietto movement from the composer's fifth symphony. Miss Cai's work is never affected, never a reach to make a point, but is always affecting.

"Dynasty Suite," which opened the program, is a ballet in four sections. Beginning with "Basket Girls - Dance from Zhou," an interpretation of dance nearly 3000 years old, to "Straw Hat Girl," a sensuous dance (although never anything more than demurely sensuous) in modern Dai style, "Dynasty Suite" is never less than hypnotic. The suite's stylized presentation set the tone for the statuesque elegance that permeated each presentation. Serpentine inverted arm movements, gracefully arched backs, the unusual yet handsome penchant for

side hip extension that gives Chinese dance its unique look, the use of costumes - some ornate, some simple - and vividly colored and gorgeously manipulated ribbons were combined together into colorful and exotic visuals that dazzled the senses.

"Begin From Here" is a splendor of swirling color and geometric patterns. The work "stands as a metaphor," the program notes read, "for the points between the known and the unknown, the real and the surmised, and what is possible and seemingly impossible." Set to the music of Gang Situ and Gary Schwantes - a mix of gongs, chimes, flutes, and all things old (and probably some synthesized things new) into a sound that is neither old nor new - "Begin From Here" is neither wholly east nor wholly west, it's simply universal and it's electrifying.

"Candelas" by candlelight and the music of Mahler is a beacon for the beauty and wonders of life. With vague touches of lighting beyond candlelight (all of the company's superb lighting designs are by Matthew Antaky) subtlety abounds through every breath this luminous piece takes. The physical control, the eloquence of movement, the superior extension of limb over reality work in tandem for one of the most translucent experiences dance theater offers. "Candelas" is a gorgeous work.

Bravo to Lily Cai for her talent, skills and perseverance at keeping Chinese classical dance pure and alive by both re-creating it as it was and by combining it with the realities of a 21st century world. Her choreography is always a revelation and is always sublime. Her costume designs are each one pinnacles of taste and loveliness. Bravo also to Lesley Bandy Beardsley for having the connections and sound artistic and business sense for bringing the Lily Cai Chinese Dance Company to Reno. The Nevada Festival Ballet's new artistic director is a find. The company is in good hands.

With music by Prokofiev and choreography by Lesley Bandy Beardsley, Nevada Festival Ballet will present "Cinderella" on April 1 and 2, 2000, at the Pioneer Center for the Performing Arts, 100 South Virginia Street, Reno. For information about "Cinderella" and other Nevada Festival Ballet events call 775-785-7915.