

## **DANCE REVIEW**

By Arielle Thomas Newman, Contributing Reviewer  
Monday, January 22, 2001

### **Lily Cai Chinese Dance Company imbues cultural classicism with contemporary flavor**

Chinese-American choreographer Lily Cai artfully applied the less-is-more approach to the three dances her company, the Lily Cai Dance Company, performed Saturday night at White Hall on the campus of the University of Missouri-Kansas City.

A resident of the Bay Area since emigrating from China in 1983, Cai, a former principal dancer with the Shanghai Opera House, honors the classicism rooted in her native Chinese culture. But she imbues her dances with a contemporary flavor that made watching her work a pleasurable voyage into novel dance terrain.

“Dynasty Suite” explored traditional Chinese dances from the Zhou, Tang, Qing and Dai dynasties spanning from 770 B.C. to the present. Each dance was simply presented with uncomplicated staging. However, the synthesis of colorful costumes, dramatic lighting and refined movements created an atmospheric whole that was greater than its parts.

The elongated green midsections in the “Basket Girls – Dance from Zho” costumes emphasized the swan-like curve of the dancers’ necks and the slow-moving, stylized arch of their backs.

“Dance from Tang” began with two dancers in angular still-life poses. They tossed twin scarlet flames of silk material in spirals, waves and arcs against a shadowy background, supported by a meditative score by Gang Situ and Gary Schwantes.

Strutting like French runway models, the dancers in “Dance from Qing” – clad in wooden platform shoes – put a sexy overtone in their facial expressions that pulled the dance from its ancient origins into the here and now.

And the “Straw Hat Girl – Dance from Dai,” had more in common with “The Girl From Ipanema” than any rural farm girl.

If only the final section of “Dynasty Quartet” had been able to make a statement about each dance or integrated them in some fashion.

Cai's "Begin From Here," based on her early experiences of moving to America, was beautiful to watch in the sections where the dancers manipulated long colorful swaths of colored silk, but the meaning was not clear.

In the closing dance, "Candalas," to Gustav Mahler's Symphony No. 5, dancers carried lighted candles on stage, which helped to suggest a mythic space and time. The poetic dance could be powerful if Cai explored more of the ritual nature of the piece.