

RENO GAZETTE-JOURNAL

Culture festival opens

Dancers' performance kicks off Artown

[Beryl Chong](#)

RENO GAZETTE-JOURNAL

7/2/2004 12:30 am

A Chinese-American who has lived in Reno for 20 years, Michael Gasuad doesn't often see an opportunity to show his children a part of their heritage.

So he took his kids, Darika, 7, and Mei Kin, 9, to the opening day of Artown when he found out Chinese dancers would be performing.

"I want to expose them to cultural diversity," Gasuad said.

He was one of about 2,500 people watching the Lily Cai Dance Company when it performed on opening night Thursday for the 2004 Artown Festival at Wingfield Park.

The event is one of 200 performances scheduled during the visual and performing festival, organizers said.

Hundreds sat on the grass, on rocks along the Truckee River or stood to see the six dancers with smooth porcelain skin combine deliberate, smooth, and slow movements inspired by ballet, Asian and modern dance.

Dressed in rice paddy hats with bright red fringes delicately moving around their faces, the dancers flirted, amazed and inspired the audience as they twisted their arms, hands and legs.

"I can see some of their motions, like Thai dancers, their hand motions, the way they raise their feet," said Gasuad, whose wife, Sansanee, is Thai-Chinese.

"I cannot believe they twist their bodies, they've got such balance," Nancy Nitz, 69, of Reno, said.



Andy Barron/Andy Barron

ONSTAGE: A dancer with the Lily Cai Chinese Dance Company performs Thursday afternoon at Wingfield Park in Reno.

WEEKEND EVENTS

Today: Rollin' on the River concert at 5 p.m. at Wingfield Park.

Saturday: American Arts Festival at 11:30 a.m. at Wingfield Park.

Sunday: Fourth of July Celebration of Youth Parade at 10:30 a.m. at Seventh Street and Arlington Avenue.

Cai's San Francisco-based dance company has opened for a Grateful Dead concert and the male chorus Chanticleer. She said earlier in the week her inspiration comes from the eyes and the gut, melding Chinese and modern dance styles.

"I think you have to be kind of strong to do those slow movements," said Carolyn Fricke, who came with her husband, Harlan, and watched the dancers with rapt attention. "I love to watch their grace and strength on stage."

The Reno couple has attended Artown events since the monthlong arts festival first began nine years ago.

The arts festival is a cultural feast for parents such as Kim Orenstein and Randy Genis, who chose to stay the July Fourth weekend in Reno because of Artown.

"This is our favorite month of the year," said Genis, who sat on top of a large flower-patterned towel with his wife, Sam, their 9-year-old son and his friends, Mallory, 11, and Michael Francis, 9.

"I really like dancing and I've seen Broadway shows and stuff like that," Mallory said.

Although her brother, Michael, preferred playing by the rocks along the Truckee River, he said coming to Artown with his friend, Sam, has become "a tradition" the past three years.

Sam, his teeth stained red from sipping Gatorade to stay cool said: "I just wanted to watch them, because they're different."

Organizers said Artown started hosting unique groups such as the hip-hop dance group Rennie Harris Pure Movement and Hawaiian dancers Na Lei Hulu to start the 2002 and 2003 Artown festivals.

"We really want to show complete diversity for all the cultures that we have living in our community," Beth Macmillan, Artown executive director, said. "It was a beautiful piece of art,"

Macmillan's choice was a hit with the audience who clapped and cheered enthusiastically after each piece.

"We need to have different things. It expands our knowledge of different kinds of dance, what different countries for dance to express themselves," Fricke said.

Said Nitz: "I love this Artown, we're lucky to have it."