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THE MONTHLY

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PERFORMING

Critic's Choice: Lily Cai Dance Company

by Rita Felciano

July 28, 2011

Content

RSS Print



Marty Sohl

Eastern exposure. "Candelas" by the Lily Cai Dance Company.

Chinese translation

Those of us who saw Lily Cai in the early 1990s were enchanted by the former Shanghai Opera principal dancer's luxuriously unfolding limbs and her torso's elegant S-curve, which seemed to embody the heart of Chinese female dancing.

Trained in the Russian ballet style as well as in indigenous Chinese dance, Cai brought a profound knowledge of China's complex cultural traditions. Her dancer's repertoire included classical court dances and works from Chinese ethnic minority groups.

Cai doesn't perform anymore, but she wanted to present these traditions here. Founded in 1988, her Lily Cai Dance Company has allowed her to develop an independent choreographic voice. Her dances today look both ancient and fresh in the way they embrace contemporary influences, including Western music and that of her longtime life and artistic partner, Shanghai-born composer Gang Situ.

The witty 2007 trio, "Sun Yun," for instance, suggested Chinese village girls at home in modern life. The multimedia "Red Typhoon" from the same year paid tribute to victims of the Cultural Revolution.

Cai's all-women ensemble (its first members came from San Francisco's Newcomer High School) is trained in traditional and modern styles. Their increasingly strong performances do not sacrifice the femininity integral to Chinese dancing.

For its home season, the Lily Cai Dance Company will perform two world premieres and an audience favorite. Chinese theories on the nature of movement inspired "What is Missing"; "Shifting" explores

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theatrical props from traditional and contemporary perspectives. The program also includes Cai's most popular work, the inventive 1997 "Candelas," choreographed to Mahler's "Adagietto" from his Symphony No. 5.

Lily Cai Dance Company, Aug. 13, 8pm, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, Novellus Theater, 700 Howard St., San Francisco; \$25-\$40, (415) 978-2787; ybca.org.

by **Rita Felciano**

July 28, 2011

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