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REDLANDS: Lily Cai dance troupe performs at Bowl

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The Lily Cai Chinese Dance Company displays dance styles that span centuries.

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BY HOLLY LA PAT | CORRESPONDENT | July 11, 2013; 07:56 AM |
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“People know Chinese food. People don’t know Chinese dance,” said Lily Cai, director and choreographer of the Lily Cai Chinese Dance Company.

Before the audience leaves the Redlands Bowl on Friday night, Cai intends to give them a sense of Chinese dance — and the beauty and power of the Chinese woman.

The performance of the Lily Cai Chinese Dance Company is part of the 90th Redlands Bowl Summer Music Festival.

Cai founded the all-female dance company in 1988. Currently, the company has six dancers, all of them Chinese. Some were born in China; others, like Cai herself, were born in Shanghai.

“We want to give people a little bit of an idea that China is a very old country, with many different dynasties,” Cai said.

The Dynasty Suite which opens the evening is based on four classical Chinese dances from dynasties from 770 B.C. to the present. The show continues with a blend of Chinese dance traditions such as fan dance and ribbon dances mixed with Western ballet and modern dance.

“Many times when we are on the road tour, the critics want the dancers to move around,” Cai said. “Our culture is different. My new creation is basically moving in space, just like writing calligraphy.”

While Western handwriting moves quickly across the page, Cai explained, Chinese calligraphy spends more time within a given space, drawing in detail to form a single character which represents a complete word. Similarly, Cai’s dancers perform their movements within a given amount of space, rather than covering distances across the stage.

Although Cai honors the traditions of her country, she came to America because she found some of her native culture’s limits too constricting.

“When I was young we were always taught to follow tradition — follow what the teacher shows you to do,” she said. “Myself, I always wanted to do something a little different. American culture encourages people to find a different way. In China it’s



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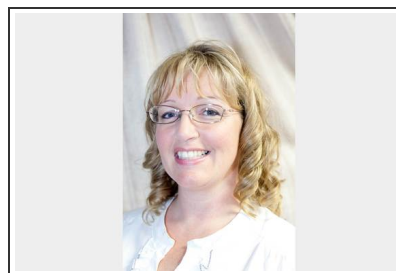


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impossible. You need to follow.”

Still, the influence of her culture remains in Cai and her work — now more than ever.

“Even though I’ve been living in this country 30 years, I’m still Chinese,” Cai said. “After almost 25 years since 1988, I find that I’m back to my cultural roots.”

The Chinese woman is a model of what Cai describes as internal power.

“I know some Chinese women — they speak very softly, they present themselves as very gentle, very sweet — but powerful,” Cai said. “Very powerful.”

Such women are able to express their authority with a smile. It’s that type of internal power that Cai works to express on stage, through grace, beauty and control rather than force or broad movements.

Cai loves working with older dancers and scoffs at the prevailing notion that a ballet dancer should retire by the age of 35.

“To me it’s a ridiculous waste,” Cai said. “After 35 you are mature. Your body, your wisdom, your movements — they just come together.”

Cai has developed a technique for her dancers that allows them to continue dancing all their lives.

“I taught them, you should dance into your 80s,” she said. “The technique I’ve developed within the last 20 years just makes your body young.”

The Lily Cai Chinese Dance Company’s performance was made possible thanks to special funding through a grant arranged by Redlands Bowl Executive Director Beverly Noerr.

LILY CAI CHINESE DANCE COMPANY

WHEN: 8:15 p.m. Friday, July 12

WHERE: Redlands Bowl, in Smiley Park off Brookside Avenue between Eureka and Grant streets, Redlands


ADMISSION: Free to the public; donations accepted

INFORMATION: 909-793-7316, www.redlandsbowl.com

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