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Review: Shen Wei Dance Arts expands form



[Stephanie Burg](#) for The Post and Courier in Entertainment: Spoleto

Jun 6 2015 11:12 am



Shen Wei Dance Arts. Briana Blasko

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As the human experience expands, so too does creative expression. That which *was* is stretched, into that which *is* now. If dance is the art form of bodies moving to music, then Shen Wei Dance Arts goes beyond dance to create a new awareness of how audiences see movement.

A man of many talents, Shen Wei draws from his vast array of tools to create such diverse work it almost becomes a genre of its own. Combining music, visual art and a wide range of kinetic expression, Shen Wei's works unfold seemingly without subtext in their exploration of dance as a medium. No two works are alike.

In "Map," set to sections of "The Desert Music" by Steve Reich, lights go up on bodies strewn about the stage — limbs and torsos initiating movement, while hands and feet stick to the ground as if pulled by magnets. As "Map" progresses, various types of shape, energy and intention are explored by the dancer's bodies, utilizing concepts created by Shen Wei.

As the dancers' rotate joints, bounce and rebound, flow and expand, we cease to see simply the body in motion, but instead see kinetic energy being created before our very eyes. It's as if the dancer's tool is more than just a body, but an expression of each musical note, mapping chords through space like paintbrushes depicting energy through time in varying forms.

Each dancer brings his or her own personality to the movement, unfolding a depth of texture and humanity that creates a beautiful diversity among the ensemble. Worth mentioning is Jordan Isadore, whose manipulation of physics and spinal articulation are truly stunning. One gets the sense that audiences are drawn to Shen Wei's choreography because it allows them to visually inhabit what it must feel like for a dancer to move.

Second (and last) on the program, "Untitled #12-2," a world premier commissioned in part by Spoleto Festival USA with American Dance Festival and Brooklyn Academy of Music, is a subtle, walking montage of sorts. Dressed in neutral colors, a long line of dancers explore varying heights and shapes, in silence and to simple beats of a metronome — melding expressive fingers, spines and elbows with undulating hips and outstretched limbs.

The simplicity of "Untitled" is complemented by projections of Shen Wei's other untitled works — paintings for oil and acrylic on canvas — on a screen at the back of the stage. The soft, watery focus of the dancers' eyes lends itself to the ambiguity of movement that seems both abstract and clearly defined at once. Patterns swirl and unfold as dancers move from walking steps to using their bodies in exploration of the full range of the human form.

Each new physical progression in "Untitled" and "Map" seems to push dance as a medium a little further, reworking the human anatomy in space, one step at a time. If Friday night's performance by Shen Wei Dance Arts is indicative of where dance is headed, we have a lot of expansion to look forward to.

Stephanie Burg is a dancer, choreographer and holistic health expert in Charleston.