

Li Chiao-Ping Dance concert features four new works, and gym socks

by **KATIE REISER**
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I came away from **Li Chiao-Ping Dance's** opening of *eVOLUTION*, Friday night at Overture Center's Promenade Hall, liking Li's sensibility as a dance maker and appreciating her qualities as a dancer. But my favorite piece of the night wasn't her choreography, and she didn't perform in it.

That was the smart and funny "Press," from choreographer Lionel Popkin, which opened the program and was the first of four premieres for the company. The four dancers, all of whom are quite good, do indeed press, push, pull and paw at each other as Popkin explores the impact of touch. Robin Baartman and Rachel Krinsky first assess Emily Miller as they wrap their hands around her rib cage, briefly hoisting her up, then laying hands on her and manipulating her body, even pressing their palms onto her face so her lips smush out. They lean into her, bodies cantilevered out.

They are then joined by Liz Sexe, who is a clean and efficient mover. In muted blue and gray costumes, two dancers engage in a lumbering embrace, swinging each other around. At times one stands on her partner's feet like a little girl dancing with her dad. A third dancer appears behind them to perform this same duet, but hers is with an invisible partner. In a clever moment, a dancer lopez across the stage in a low slung, simian fashion to insert herself into an embrace between the others. Later the dancers stack themselves neatly onto one other, each lying flat on top of the next.

In "Fin de Siècle Part I and II," Li performs a solo in a quirky little Cirque du Soliel costume (zippy stripes with knee and elbow pads, and a snug cap with chinstrap topped off with a stiff metallic apron). She drums her fingers nervously on her thighs to begin this dance set against a video by Li and Douglas Rosenberg. The video includes images of machinery, and a group of tightrope-walking, block-stacking, puffy-suited people wearing what looks like golden lucha libre wrestling masks, mashed up with scenes from a science fiction movie with a Plan 9-esque spaceship.

Li is always compelling in the piece, whether rounding the stage in a hurried grapevine or stringing together a series of complex hand gestures to David Byrne's tick-tocky music. She is joined by four dancers in midriff-baring red and black costumes with their own chinstrap caps. When she is paired with Miller, they share a similar physicality and attack. Ella Rosewood has some nice moments, especially when skipping backwards in a series of jumps. Several times the dancers begin a sequence of steps by chugging or scooting forward on a foot. Then, with toes folding under, the leg collapses down on top of the tucked foot, a movement that is at once perilous and



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Cynthia Adams' "Toddler on Board" explores motherhood, but ends up being a bit too cutesy and obvious with its spoken word references to "Go Dog Go," Dr. Seuss and Legos. Dancer Mariah Meyer LeFeber's pregnancy doesn't hamper her lovely movement and underscores the maternal theme. I did enjoy the "four little swans" section lifted from *Swan Lake*, with its iconic series of pas de chat, pas de bourrée, échappé steps. These are performed with arms linked as the women share feelings of inadequacy about mothering and their "fake it 'til you make it" parenting techniques. Earlier in the piece, a showdown involving two small stuffed animals also rings true.

In "Galapagos Olympiad," the dancers are brave to wear Adidas swimsuits over tights with 1970's style gym socks. There is some funny business with laundry baskets and movement punctuated with sports vocabulary: an umpire signals "you're out," a referee calls time out, and four dancers circle the stage as a horse race is called. Miller appropriately demonstrates her athletic style and nice musicality in her buoyant solo set to Haydn.

Another premiere, "Rust/Rise/Rest," is a solo for Ella Rosewood, who commissioned the piece from Li. With perhaps a nod to Remy Charlip's "Dance in a Bed," Li puts Rosewood on a featherbed, and at first she isn't allowed to leave those comfy confines. It's as though there is an electric fence, and she abruptly pulls back her foot if it crosses the invisible border. Rosewood is slight but strong and dances with a steely determination. While in a shoulder stand, she crinkles her toes and scrunches up her feet and later flops face down, spread-eagled on the bed. When she gets up and off the featherbed, she is a tenacious and graceful shadow boxer, rising and falling.

Li's final premiere, "d-evol.ve," was created during Li's residence at the Madison Senior Center (with assistance from 9-year-old Jacob Li Rosenberg). It may be a bit much for me with its balloons and bubble-blowing, its video game elements and a toy piano version of Queen's "We are the Champions," but at times it is playful and engaging. The performers include seniors dancing alongside the company members, and the celebration of pure movement was fun to watch.



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