

Li Chiao-Ping Dance's "Riot of Spring" is a startling tribute to Stravinsky's shocking "Rite of Spring"

by **KATIE REISER**
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Li Chiao-Ping not only chairs the UW Madison Dance Department but has helmed **her own company** since 1990. The troupe's new production, *Riot of Spring*, opened last night at Overture Center's Promenade Hall, where it runs through May 5.

Riot of Spring is an evening of old, new and reworked pieces that all underscore how smart Li is. The first half contains three solos. "Fin de Siècle" is Li's twitchy, quirky and demanding solo from 1996, now performed by Liz Sexe. In a captivating costume of striped sleeves, a stiff silver apron and little fabric helmet, Sexe performs abrupt head movements while a low-budget sci-fi film is projected behind her. There are images of gears, clocks and workers as David Byrne's mechanical-sounding score plays. In the past, I've commented about Sexe's grace and delicacy, but here she is tough and strong. I've enjoyed Li's own playful performance of this work, but it's fun to see her share the wealth with another dancer.

Next comes "daughter," a new film collaboration from Li and filmmakers Jason Bahling and Michael Eckblad. It is based on her moving stage work "RE: joyce." We see her on a wooden raft in water, steadying herself as she performs a sequence of movements. We also see her dancing indoors as she describes her mother's journey by boat from China to America and her subsequent work at a laundry facility. There's close-up footage of Li's mother doing a series of fascinating exercises. If I hadn't seen the original work on stage, I might have been totally satisfied with the film. Instead it reminded me just how excellent the original is.

"L'Altra Notte," a solo choreographed by Sally Silvers, shows that Li still astounds as a performer. Dressed in black pants with only a narrow nude tube of stretchy fabric covering her breasts, she reveals the strong muscles in her arms, core and back as two arias play. At first she stands in the spotlight, her arms moving in and out stiffly, and later she rolls out of the light. The goal of some dancing is to imply effortless ease, but with this solo, we're supposed to see the work. Li scoots herself around on her bottom, using one foot and leg like an oar. Then she pops up into handstands, and we see get a glimpse of her true athleticism.

Li notes that the 100th anniversary of the riot-inducing Paris premiere of Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du Printemps* ("The Rite of Spring"), will happen at the end of May. In 1913, this dissonant and groundbreaking piece of music was accompanied by Vaslav

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Nijinsky's choreography for Diaghilev's influential Ballet Russes. Carol Carlson, Sean Kleve and Maxfield Wollam-Fisher perform the music in Li's production, and all deserve kudos. "Riot of Spring" is the longest work I've seen from Li and contains many of her signature ingredients, like using community dancers alongside professional dancers, and incorporating challenging floor work and surprising stage elements. Li highlights riot and rebellion while asking us to nurture kindness and hope.

At first, a white parachute covers the stage. The dancers' bodies huddle underneath it. A woman emerges from the center, making the parachute look like a giant skirt. The cast reveal themselves and form alliances. Using inspiration from the original *Rite of Spring*, the movements often seem ritualistic and tribal. Over and over, a lone dancer is set apart from the "tribe" before being engulfed by it.

Li plays with costuming and colors throughout the piece. At first, everyone is in white. Then darker costumes appear, with some dancers in a mix of hues. Then there's a splash of red, and soon everyone is in red, except for a perplexing section where cast members in white suits and mesh headpieces appear, looking like beekeepers from outer space. The work contains snippets of children's games like duck-duck-goose, red rover and blind man's bluff, but they almost seem menacing in this context.

Dancer **Christina Briggs Winslow** is a revelation in this work. She arrives with red tulle spilling down from the top of her head. It tangles around her as she performs a punishing solo. Bouquets of red flowers are tossed from the wings. (Here, as in other works, Li perches on the thin line between "good idea" and "too much going on.") In the original *Rite of Spring*, a sacrificial young maiden dances herself to death. In "Riot," Briggs Winslow dances with sexy abandon, especially as the piece ends. Another standout is the intense Tori Iannuzzi, who leads the others in stomping out a complex rhythm with her legs, her arms swinging back and forth close to her body. Rachel Krinsky, Petra Weith, Shoshana Moyer and Liz Sexe all dance with clarity and focus as well.

This work, like spring itself, can startle and confound, but I welcome its arrival.



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