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Li Chiao-Ping Dance

Posted on [May 21, 2009](#) by [Susan Kepecs](#)

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Li Chiao-Ping Dance

Wisconsin Union Theater

Madison, WI

May 9, 2009



Li Chiao-Ping in Elizabeth Streb's Board. Photo by John Maniaci.

Li Chiao-Ping's "Women Dancing" consisted of seven solos made for her by a who's who of postmodern choreographers. These were smart, edgy works, and Li's dancing looked peak. She's got unexpected ballon in her sturdy style.

Li's a potent soloist, and she shares sundry sensibilities with the invited dancemakers, her close cohort. She finessed the surprises of choreographic sisterhood, wearing the diverse works like second skin, interpreting them with characteristic intensity and smidgens of madness.

Two pure dances tapped the twin veins of Li's signature vocabulary—a muscular, pedestrian-based flow and an obliquely classical countercurrent. Molissa Fenley's physically demanding, dancey *Camber* upended the normal lines of human movement through heavy emphasis on the lateral plane. Li's limbs swung in unison on one side, then the next.

In June Watanabe's old-school *Mendelssohn Piece*, Li, totally self-possessed, simply danced in a brown dress. She ran in curves, sank into bent knees, sprang into kicky leaps. The music stopped suddenly, bringing her to a halt. In place of her customary concentration face she blinked at the audience over her shoulder as if to say "Who, me?"

Heidi Latsky's *Processing* set exposed-nerve urban angst to an electronic mashup of sparse but significant words and radio static. Soundtracks of this ilk are last-century leftovers, but Li raced into its auricular insanity with wild spidery gallops, hands flailing, flinging her hair.

A second over-the-edge ode, *Equipoise Elegy*, by Bay Area performance artist Cynthia Adams, exposed a funnier side of anxiety. Li, in stripey tights, balanced precariously in demi-relevé, juggling ping pong balls to Itzhak

Perlman's mournful violin accompaniment. The hollow orbs fell like popcorn, with increasing intensity. Mouth agape like Edvard Munch's screamer, Li scooped some up and flung them back.

Elizabeth Streb's X-treme choreography looks less like Li's than the rest. *Board*, a game of chicken with a spinning 2x4, proved that the edge on slam-action works dulls with familiarity. Li, setting the speed of the low-flying pine propeller with her hands and feet, dove over and under it, belly-flopping sonorously on the gray landing mat beneath. But the risk of getting smacked that lit *Board's* fall '08 premiere was ameliorated this time by Li's consummate confidence.

Like *Board*, Bebe Miller's *Watching Watching* is a game. Li danced downstage, watching a video loop of herself doing the same sequence. Behind her, the video projected on screen. Was it simulcast? I watched for clues—nearly imperceptible lags, out-of-synch steps. Sometimes just one of the bodies froze, but the setup tests your powers of perception. I wasn't completely convinced till the screen went dark and Li kept dancing.

Victoria Marks and Li, who share activist tendencies, co-choreographed a spoken-word work, *A Dance Should Have Trees In It*. From upside-down shoulder stands and with repetitive little steps that came to symbolize "soldier," "action hero" and "prayer," Li channeled a soldier's story of the Iraq invasion. Though that war's fading as another ratchets up, the piece still packed emotional punch.

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Li Chiao-Ping Dance

Posted on [November 20, 2008](#) by [Susan Kepecs](#)



Li Chiao-Ping Dance

Margaret H'Doubler Performance Space

Madison, Wisconsin

March 4-6, 2004

Reviewed by Susan Kepecs

Painkillers, an intensely edgy multimedia collaboration by choreographer Li Chiao-Ping and visual artist/director Douglas Rosenberg, premiered in the cushy new hall of the University of Wisconsin-Madison's long-lived Dance Program, the duo's academic home. Li's six dancers (herself included), Rosenberg, and composers Daniel Feiler, Ryan Smith and Stephen Vitiello have bonded through time and practice. In Painkillers, this tie paid off.

This full-length work blurred the personal/universal frontier. In January 1999, Li was severely injured in a car

accident. She's moved on, with a new Bach project and other pleasant works, but agony is not so easily exorcized. Painkillers springs from shock. What does it look like to roll in a crash of glass and steel? Can you unmask the gestalt of trauma units and barbiturate states onstage? How do you dance to emotional pain? The company explored these questions and more, relentlessly, for 75 minutes.

At the core of the piece was a string of solos. The Hitchcock-esque "Amnesia" featured Li carving up space with angular, convulsive moves, casting shadows on video screens filled with flying crows. In "Black and Blue," Robin Baartman crashed through sequential nightmares while subliminal messages like "I was scared," and "Percoset, " "lit the screens." Kim Blanchard's wild X-ray dance, "Grafting," evoked organ transplant discotheques. Collette Stewart licked the edges of sexual rejection in "Avoidance/Attraction."

One segment flowed into the next in an anxious river of free-floating transitions. Dances were replaced by close-up video clips of the dancers, telling the camera their own tales of pain. All six women were onstage, aching in unison. Alone, Li, in an otherworldly state, told stories "about a woman, she's not me."

Painkillers could have been corny, but instead was utterly convincing. These strong, well-trained dancers were wholly willing to inhabit the nuanced essences of suffering. The words, the accident-like ambience, flashing lights, live lap-top sounds of the spheres amplified the effect, commanding both remembrance of pain and its experience on the spot.

Bits of Painkillers have emerged before in Li's work. They've been interesting, but without much punch. The full-length piece was a visceral, kinesthetic tour-de-force. It's this whammy that punts Li Chiao-Ping's multimedia company up to a higher level in the world of dance performance.

Upcoming performances: Dance Place, Washington, D.C., July 24-25 See www.lichiaopingdance.org

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