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Marvelous Strength and Poetic Expressiveness in Li Chiao-Ping's Fluid Measure

By Devin Settle ([by-author-400-1.html](http://shepherdexpress.com/by-author-400-1.html)) May. 23, 2016



Danceworks.org

This past weekend, Milwaukee's Danceworks hosted Li Chiao-Ping Dance, a Madison-based modern contemporary dance company, presenting *Fluid Measure*, an evening-length concert with professional and community dancers.

The first work of the night, "Mandala", was a re-set solo from 1999. Drums pounded with driving acceleration as dancer Emily Janik performed. As the music rose and fell in dynamics, Janik's performance remained relatively even and I couldn't help but feel that her energy did not quite match the intensity of the music. Towards the end, however, the risks she took with her balance became more apparent and I believed more in her commitment to the work's physicality.

"Cline" followed, incorporating the rest of the company. I appreciated the solos that were performed without ego, allowing attention rather

than demanding it. Dancers inverted, spiraled, darted and leapt as a unit with quiet confidence. Amelia Morris, a graduate of the dance department of UW-Milwaukee's Peck School of the Arts, shone as she moved geometrically, creating circular lines with her needle-like legs just as a compass would.

Next, "Chi", a dance from 1991, was performed with remarkable agility. Dancer Janelle Bentley shared a beautiful relationship with gravity, alternately working with and against it. Bentley was grounded, intensely focused, and brought razor-sharp precision to each move. This piece offered the strongest kinetic experience of the entire program. We were invited to observe a primal performance, as if Bentley were controlled by an outside force or by a deep-sleeping inner power she had recently discovered.

The fourth work, "Residues", debuted in 2000. Dancers Liz Sexe and Rachel Krinsky displayed marvelous strength and I began to realize that true of all the dancers in the company. Both women moved into and away from the floor with ease and buoyancy. Moments of counter-tension, bridging against one another for support, created trust during the dance. This piece took risks with the duo leaping over each other's bodies and carrying each other across stage. Each time I hesitantly thought, "Will this work?" it did.

"In medias res" from 2015 was a solo performed by artistic director and choreographer Li Chiao-Ping. Recorded music and words, spoken by Li, accompanied her as she partnered with a table. Li recited different ways to "be," -- be calm, believe, belittle. The choreography showcased Li's acrobatic athleticism and, although much of her choreography slashed and cut through the air aggressively, her gentle hand gestures were a light and pleasant contrast.

The final work of the night, "Fluid Measure", brought the entire company on stage again. At first, the dancers demonstrated an apathetic, non- emotive presence and I could not make a connection. As soon as I had that thought, however, an older generation of movers took the stage. Non-professional community dancers from Milwaukee joined Li and company, and I began to think about how other cultures celebrate and appreciate elders in a way that we don't here in our country. It was wonderful to watch each community dancer move with grace, confidently owning their moment on stage. I felt their pride and joy and I marveled at their poetic expressiveness as they offered the audience a chance to witness a very real human experience.

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