

Li Chiao-Ping Dance presents layered pieces in "Take 2" -- perhaps too layered

by **KATIE REISER**
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Li sometimes dilutes the beauty of her work.

The new **Li Chiao-Ping Dance** program *Take 2: Multimedia Dance Performances and Screen Dance* opens strongly with Li's tribute to her mother, "RE: Joyce." This is Li at her best, deftly blending dance, theater and moving images.

She approaches a projector and unspools a pile of white fabric, then covers herself with it. At first, a small image of her mother performing a series of exercises is projected on Li's fabric-shrouded chest. At one point she looks like a ghost, arms out. Then she folds inwards, almost caressing the image of her mother projected on her body. As she steps back, the image grows until Li drapes the fabric over a clothesline suspended across the stage, creating a larger screen. Li begins to move, sometimes echoing the intriguing movements of her mother.

Both are fascinating women, and Friday night in **Overture Center's Promenade Hall**, it was hard for me to choose where to look -- at Li, live on stage, or at her mother, captured on video in a living room. Li hangs articles of white clothing on the clothesline and tells the story of her mother's harrowing journey by ship from China to the U.S., and of her work in the family's laundry. Li folds her arms, briskly, repeatedly, as she describes her mother and aunt folding endless clean sheets ("hot and flat"). Having put herself into the clothing, she winds up the fabric while speaking in Chinese and says "it is my hope that your life is not as hard."

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There is a lot going on in this show, which includes two films. I wished the evening's layered pieces had been stripped a bit barer. By trying to do so much, Li sometimes dilutes the beauty of her own work.

"Lessons in Flying," with dancers from UW-Madison, is a little uneven, and some of the young dancers seem a bit tentative in their performances. A few who have words to speak sometimes sound stilted. Still, Li is never lacking for ideas. Sometimes the piece makes me think, "clever": the dancers push around child-sized wooden chairs, or play spirited games inspired by Red Rover and Ghosts in the Graveyard. Occasionally the piece makes me think, "everything but the kitchen sink": ukulele, martial-arts guest star, pajama costumes.

Rachel Krinsky performs the solo "Grafting," which Li originally created for herself after a car accident left her with a serious ankle injury. Krinsky is boxed in by four long tubes of harsh fluorescent lights. She wears a plain black costume, which surprised me with its sexy back view. She begins by swinging her arms, pushing them through space while her feet are firmly planted. She then steps out, one hand fluttering like a propeller. She does a series of plies and plays with gravity, the tension in her body making this most basic movement fresh as she quickly pulls herself up, then settles back down. Krinsky is a cool customer here, determined and authoritative. When the piece closes, her face is frozen in a howling grimace.

I have seen and enjoyed Li's piece "Shifting Ground" before. Incorporating stories from survivors of California's 1989 Loma Pietro earthquake, Li makes a collage of art forms, using dance, spoken word, seismic video images from Daniel Feiler, and compelling original music from Tim Russell. The trio of dancers (Robin Baartman, Emily Miller and Liz Sexe) are all in white. They circle the stage, running both frontwards and backwards, sometimes at a casual gait, sometimes at a frenzied pace. They explore shifts in weight and balance, and all are proficient at Li's demanding floor work and quicksilver changes in direction. My favorite moments come when words are projected onto the floor and the dancers roll back and forth across them. When their bodies rise up, the words are projected onto their white costumes, and they struggle to regain their firm footing on earth.

The premiere of "Hado," inspired by the book *The Secret Life of Water*, brings together dancers from Li's company with community dancers of various ages and experience, to celebrate and explore water. Matthew Antaky's lovely lighting gives the stage a shimmery, undulating quality. Li comes up with some wonderful movement here for herself and her company members. When they danced to Francois Couperin's music, I was enthralled and satisfied.

Miller and Krinsky are teamed, and they share a direct, unaffected approach to movement that is contrasted by Sexe's delicacy. In finding movement for everyone to share, though, Li creates something of the feel of a maypole dance, as the performers wind themselves around each other, then form concentric circles. The piece closes with the cast forming two long lines. Dancers pass water to each other by pouring it (sometimes pink, sometimes clear) into glasses.

Two films punctuate the evening. First, "Circling," from Douglas Rosenberg, has the camera swirling above Sally Gross, prone on a wood floor or sitting between two musicians. She strides through the snow with determined steps, and we see her in the woods in warmer weather, delicately bringing a hand up to her collar bone, then walking toward one of the cellists.

Later, "Water's Edge," from Li, intercuts footage of dancers underwater, clouds of gauzy fabric coiling around them, with figures in a clearing in the woods, dancing in the melting snow. The image of Susan Lee is reflected upside down on a pond,



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