

What One Can Expect from Modern Dance

-- A Review of Li Chiao-Ping Concert

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I have been to several modern dance concerts so far. To me, each concert seems like a puzzle. I always tried to figure out what information a choreographer tries to hint to through a piece of dance. Especially, I am interested in the various ways choreographers manipulate all kinds of elements, for example, background settings, light effect, customs, music, and the most important, the dancers' movements and etc..

Li Chiao-Ping Dance concert (September 27-30) was very impressive. There were seven pieces, where three of them are from Chiao-Ping, two from Janet Lilly, one from Emily Stein and another one from Michelle Kraniche. A common characteristic among these pieces is the exploration of (new) elements. Here I would like to discuss four aspects that most impressed me during this concert.

First at all, sound (of the dancers) was intensively explored throughout this concert. Emily used chorus in *Niagara Mind*, which brought the audience right into the atmosphere of remoteness. Janet screamed, laughed, and moaned in *Glacial milk*, which helped to express the theme – how a child felt. Chiao-Ping pushed the experiment one step further in her *Extreme Close-Up*. In this piece, there was not only plenty of monologue, but the dancers even talked directly to the audience. Unlike drama, traditional dance is only a body language. By using spoken language as well in the dance, a dancer gains more expressing power. As Yun-Chen (dancer) put it, "...It (speaking up) strengthened my movement because I was speaking out exactly what I wanted to express by my movement at the same time..." Furthermore, as Chiao-Ping said, this new element (sound) makes a dance more interesting.

Secondly, choreographers tried to put different threads in the same piece, which was well illustrated by *Extreme Close-up*. In this piece, each character had her own thread. There was no explicit interleave between those characters -- There was one girl telling how she felt when she saw a dried snake in her yard when she was young; There was a professor giving a lecture about biology experiment; And there was a snake that was growing naturally in the wild. She was worried about a mosquito bite on her body. It seemed like different characters have just been casually pulled together onto the same stage. Yet meanwhile, you could sense that they are somehow related. Such un-structure challenged the audiences' ability to catch the richer information given at the same time. Through this post-modern piece, Chiao-Ping tried to give a hint: Although many things happening in the world seem unrelated, yet they exist in a harmony, which is exact the tie among them and make them extremely close-up to each other.

Thirdly, Chiao-Ping also experimented to let a dance work against the audiences' expectations, which especially impacted the audience. *Go* is a good example. This piece brought the effect of out-of-expectation in several ways. The costumes were extremely mis-matched -- a black tight sports top, a white ballet tutu, and a pair of black boots(!!!) The whole outfit simply gave you a shock of disharmony. Then came the weird music: for a while, it was soft, and another while, it was like march music. In addition, the whole sets of strange movements -- strange in a sense of ugly. It was an extreme experiment of the degree of freedom of a dance. It evoked in me abstract style paintings.

Finally, about movements. I have taken modern dance technique, modern Jazz, Ballet and Chinese dance. While each style of dance has its own characteristic movements, modern dance is the most flexible one. One can find the trace of different kinds of dance elements in modern dance. Also, modern dance is more exposed to the exploration of all kinds of movements if ever possible. This was evidenced by all the dance pieces throughout the concert. I was especially impressed by Janet's technique. I could feel the beauty of well-controlled un-control and isolation in her movements, which fitted the classical music she chosen very well.