

# Carolinas Best Blog

A continuing update on events in the Carolinas: festivals, music, art, sports and more

MONDAY, JUNE 22, 2009

## Mark Dendy Company at new DPAC

Mark Dendy's dance company presented this site specific work at Durham's new Performing Arts Center on June 20.



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SUNDAY, JUNE 21, 2009

## Shen Wei debuts newest work in Durham, NC



Shen Wei, fresh from his triumph as choreographer of the opening ceremonies of the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics (reviews ranged from "Amazing!" through "Breathtaking! and it was all that), finds himself the hottest face on the international dance scene.

The son of Chinese Opera dancers, he grew up in Communist China, somehow found modern dance, and began adapting it to express his country's ancient culture, in the process creating a unique multi-cultural dance idiom.

In 1995, he moved to NYC, and brought his talent to the American Dance Festival at Duke University that first year. In 2000, his new company Shen Wei Dance Arts debuted at ADF, presenting *Near the Terrace*, commissioned by the festival, and it has returned every year since.

The connection isn't much of a surprise. The dance festival mounted its first big outreach program to China, sending top modern choreographers and teachers to the Guangdong Dance Academy in Guangzhou, China, beginning in 1987. In 1990, the Guangdong Modern Dance Company emerged with Shen Wei among its founders.

When Shen Wei returns to Durham and the American Dance Festival, he is in a very real way returning to his creative roots.

Audiences at ADF embraced Shen Wei from the beginning. I first encountered - and was mesmerized by - his 2004 commissioned piece *Connect Transfer*, in which dancers dipped in paint created swirling abstract images on a white paper stage. Praised for combining dance, music, and art, I also felt a connection with literature. The graceful images traced on the floor reminded me of the flowing arabesques of Chinese ideograms.

It is this work that inspired Shen Wei's work in Beijing. In one particularly dramatic moment of the opening program, dancers used their bodies to paint an Oriental landscape, almost magically making it appear bit by bit on their giant canvas.

The new ADF commissioned piece *RE - (Part III)*, which enjoyed its World Premiere in Durham's new Performing Arts Center this week, itself was inspired, the choreographer says, by his experiences in Beijing, as well as his travels across China. The Durham performance was in fact the first full exhibition of Shen Wei's triptych, *RE - (Parts I, II, and III)*, which he's been working on since 2006. *Part I* premiered as a commissioned work at that year's ADF. *Part II* was set on Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montréal in 2007; it makes its US debut at ADF.

*Part III*, commissioned for this year's ADF, completes the Triptych. From Durham, the production moves on to Lincoln Center where it will be the first dance production in the new Alice Tully Hall on July 9th. A world tour to three continents is in the works.

The Saturday night performance (June 20, 2009) presented Part I first, followed by Part III, concluding with Part II.

*RE - (Part I)*, sublime as always, hypnotizes with its soundtrack of Tibetan chants, and indeed Tibetan imagery pervades the piece. A giant mandala created from paper confetti is slowly erased by the dancers, like Tibetan monks destroying a mandala made of sand. The confetti (cherry blossoms? snow?) swirls around the dancers as they move across a treeless plain backed only by an angry sky.

*RE - (Part III)* is inspired, Shen Wei says, by his trip along the Silk Road, then his residency in Beijing, where his dancers numbered 2,000 of the 14,000 participants in the opening ceremonies. (Of the 14,000, 9,000 were recruited from the Chinese army.) There's a good deal of marching in formation in the work; we hear marching boots before the dancers enter. But amid the marching there is creativity - one dancer swirls in his own dance, caught up in the music. It's a competition of control vs. surrender to the music, and slowly the infection spreads, until creativity wins out over sameness.



*photo by Lois Greenfield*

After the final intermission, *RE - (Part II)*, a work of tremendous power and beauty, concluded the Triptych. Set to natural sounds recorded by Shen Wei while exploring the ancient temples of Cambodia at Angkor Wat, the dance takes place against the intricate carvings on a temple wall, as well as the tangled roots of banyan trees. Powdery makeup and strategic lighting transform Shen Wei's partially clad dancers into marble statues that pant for breath. Intricate swirls bring the company together, forming a cursive script with their intertwined bodies that you can - almost - read.

To see more videos visit:

[SHEN WEI DANCE ARTS](#)

For more on ADF performances, visit:

[American Dance Festival](#)

Labels: [shen wei world premiere](#) [american dance festival](#) [adf durham nc](#) [lincoln center](#)

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