

Shen Wei Dance Arts returns to Syracuse for performances at Landmark Theatre

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Alex Pines

Choreographer Shen Wei returns to Syracuse this week to reveal the efforts of his inaugural three-week residency with his company in March.

Wei and Shen Wei Dance Arts, based in New York City, worked on his triptych dance, "Re- (I, II, III), during the stay in Syracuse. He refined the second part and delved into concepts for the last piece from a makeshift studio on the top floor of the former Cathedral School across from the John H. Mulroy Civic Center.

Dance enthusiasts will see the finished "Re-" in performances Thursday and Friday at Landmark Theatre. Each dance reflects Wei's insights as a traveler to Tibet, Cambodia's Angkor Wat and on the old Silk Road in China. It will be performed out of order (I, III, II) and with some topless nudity in the last piece.

The dance should be understood in the context of Wei's journeys, which were a spiritual and psychological visitation to a geographic region familiar to Wei, who left China for New York City in 1995, says Brett Egan, executive director of the dance company. The choreographer came to the United States as a 26-year-old who knew only three words of English, and had \$500 and no contacts. In a short time, he experienced artistic success with the founding of his company in 2000.

Egan says Wei's travels only later inspired the "Re-" series. "They weren't journeys made strategically as research trips. So what you see is the kind of spiritual and psychological coming home of an artist that never had to look back but chose to."

He explains that the dance's cryptic, enigmatic title "Re-" is a prefix "meaning to invoke concepts such as restoration, rethink and renew, restore. It's an artist going back to the well and in a sense also a love letter to these rather mysterious, powerfully resonant cultures."

Just as travels to Asia deeply affected Wei, Egan says the dance company's Syracuse stay earlier this year was unusual and productive.

It enabled a "total psychological dedication to the creation of a work," he says. Several ideas germinated in Syracuse appear in parts two and three of "Re-."

Egan was impressed with the depth of involvement of the city and Syracuse University communities, from the workshops and classes with private dance and public school students to lectures, demonstrations and company rehearsals. "It was such a thorough-going, multi-faceted, porous experience," he says.