



# SHEN WEI DANCE ARTS

By Celia Ipiotis  
December 11, 2011

Strongly influenced by visual design, Shen Wei's choreography unspools dramatically kinetic shapes, and lines in space. Performing in the majestic 67th Street Park Avenue Armory, one of the city's most exciting new performance spaces-- Shen Wei demonstrates his painterly style. Two of the pieces are presented in a traditional relationship to the audience, but the last one dissolves the divisions, encouraging audience members to remove their shoes and mingle around the dancers.

The evening opens on Shen Wei's abstract interpretation of Stravinsky's "The Rite of Spring." The stripped down dance is performed to a pre-recorded score of Fazil Say playing piano. A white marlay floor covers an enormous rectangle flanked on three sides by 600 audience members seated in bleachers. Standing silently in space, each dancer faces a slightly different direction like a human weathervanes waiting for the artistic climate to change.

Gravity draws the dancers to the floor. They move economically, scooting around like multiples of Wyeth's famous "Christina" painting. Jagged moves pull bodies into unison groupings and individual explorations. This abstracted version pulls its form directly from the music's jagged edges and mysterious energy. The final image draws the dancers into four lines of bodies curving in and out until they uncoil into a circle that spits everyone back out into the original formation.

Ritualistic chants (music by John Tavener and Tibetan Buddhist chants), filter the air in "Folding" as dancers scoot around in quick movements suggesting an image of bodies floating in air. A woman arrives, standing three times her height, then slowly sinks down, until a man's bald head appears from between her legs (an overt reference to Pilobolus' famous dance "Untitled"). More couples filter in, connected like Siamese twins with one active body transporting a weightless form. Oh yes, they were wearing elongated hats resembling the "Coneheads" in the famed Saturday Night Live skit. All that aside, throughout the first and second piece, Jennifer Tipton's lighting elevates the interest factor.

Red and black forms the palette of the second piece "Folding" to music by John Tavener and Tibetan Buddhist chants. Before the final piece begins "Undivided Divided" commissioned by Park Avenue Armory, the audience is asked to evacuate the premises. When everyone returns, dancers on spread out on squares dotted with a dollop of colored-paint, all the girls are bare breasted and so are the boys. If you walk through the maze of bodies, plexiglass cubes and other structures rise in the back. Looking down on the action, audience members cover the dancers as they become as interesting as the dancers who are doing repetitive twisting motions in primarily stationary positions.

But the most touching part of the dance came when two slim men from the audience suddenly saw each other, and were clearly overjoyed to cross paths. They embraced, kissed, and chatted, their faces full of smiles. Arms crossed around waists, then they held hands in a prayerful grasp, and walked away. Again, Tipton's lighting added a whole other dimension to the picture.