

FOR IMMEDIATE
RELEASE

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**CAL PERFORMANCES PRESENTS THE IMAGISTIC EAST-WEST SYNTHESIS OF
SHEN WEI DANCE ARTS IN ITS BAY AREA DEBUT
SATURDAY & SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 25 & 26 IN ZELLERBACH HALL**

LECTURE: “Shen Wei on Shen Wei: The Artist Talks About His Inspirations and Multi-Faceted Work,” Thursday, September 23, 4:30-5:30 p.m., Geballe Room, Townsend Center for the Humanities

SIGHTLINES: Post-performance discussion with artistic director Shen Wei and members of the company, Saturday, September 25

BERKELEY, August 19, 2004 – The acclaimed modern dance company **Shen Wei Dance Arts** brings two pioneering works to Zellerbach Hall **Saturday, September 25 at 8:00 p.m.** and **Sunday, September 26 at 7:00 p.m.** Chinese-born choreographer and painter Shen Wei combines his love of dance, theater, Chinese opera, painting and sculpture in *The Rite of Spring* set to the music of Igor Stravinsky and *Folding* set to the music of John Tavener and Tibetan chanting. “I wasn’t taught the arts separately, so I don’t separate them in my work,” he explains. “I’m exploring the unknown. I’m looking for a new way to communicate.” The New York-based Shen Wei Dance Arts, founded in 2001, is dedicated to the creation of dance based on a hybrid of Western and Eastern cultures. At the premiere of *The Rite of Spring* (Part I) at the 2002 American Dance Festival, the striking images created by Shen and his ten-member company left the audience “momentarily stunned...silence was followed by a prolonged ovation,” wrote *The New York Times* dance critic Anna Kisselgoff. Critics hailed it as “sensational,” “wonderfully delicious” and “an instant classic.”

A free **lecture** at the Doreen B. Townsend Center for the Humanities featuring **Shen Wei** entitled: “Shen Wei on Shen Wei: The Artist Talks About His Inspirations and Multi-Faceted Work” will be held **Thursday, September 23 at 4:30 p.m.**, in the Geballe Room, Townsend Center for the Humanities, 220 Stephens Hall, University of California, Berkeley. A free **Sightlines** post-concert discussion with Shen Wei and members of the company will take place immediately following the performance, **Saturday, September 25.**

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PROGRAM

Shen Wei first heard Igor Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* in China in 1989 and was enthralled by the rich and evocative texture of the score. He became further inspired when he heard the two-piano version by Turkish-born Fazil Say, and began choreographing *The Rite of Spring* in fall 2001, debuting the first half of the work ten months later. The completed piece was presented at the American Dance Festival the following season. The company, costumed in grey-toned street clothes and chalk-like body paint, perform on a massive 42' by 46' abstract canvas, painted by Shen, beginning with small, slow ritualistic steps that give way to exuberant spinning, leaping and crawling on all fours. Like all of Shen's work, *The Rite of Spring* is epic in scale but egalitarian in nature; the choreographer usually employs all his dancers on stage at the same time, though he does pull a quartet, trio and soloist out from the group during the second half of the dance, joining in himself for one section. "It is hard to recall anyone else who has responded to the music with such striking, stripped-to-the-bone abstraction as Mr. Shen has" commented Anna Kisselgoff in *The New York Times*.

The second half of the program features *Folding*, inspired by the folding drapes of costumes, created in 2000 for the Guangdong Modern Dance company during a rare, return visit to China by Shen. Partially nude dancers with conically shaped headdresses and long flowing red and black skirts glide in front of a vast hand-painted backdrop based on an 18th-century Chinese water color painting by Ba Dan San Ren. Shen's attention to small inflections of hands, feet and eyes, and his own solo featuring highly controlled but fluid movements pay tribute to his many years of training in Chinese opera. Set to chants by Tibetan monks and "Last Sleep of the Virgin" by contemporary British composer John Tavener, Shen creates powerful images by using his dancers as a painter would: "I think of them as living sculpture and colors in my palette," Shen explains. *Folding*, like *The Rite of Spring*, is without heroes or plot and was greeted by critical acclaim. The costumes, make-up and sets for *The Rite of Spring* and *Folding* are designed by Shen.

SHEN WEI

Shen Wei's childhood was anything but usual. Raised by a father who wrote, directed and acted in a Xian-style opera company in the Hunan Province of China, Shen and his two brothers lived in the same building that housed the theater, often playing with costumes and watching actors

put on make-up. Shen first appeared on stage at age seven and by nine had begun a ten-year instruction in Chinese opera. He worked for the Hunan State Xian Opera Company from 1984 to 1989 during which time he saw his first modern dance performance. “I was shocked,” he said. “It was so creative. So much closer to my generation than anything we had [in China].” On his own, he studied Western painting and sculpture, discussing van Gogh, Gauguin and Duchamp with fellow artists. In 1989 he left the opera company, and, having been rejected by the Beijing Fine Arts Academy, decided to become a dancer. He was an original member of the Guangdong Modern Dance Company, the first modern dance company in China, as a choreographer and dancer. When the company made its United States debut at the American Dance Festival in 1991, the Chinese government did not allow Shen to attend; Shen was punished for befriending a couple of Taiwanese dancers visiting China, although he did not know at the time that such actions were forbidden by the government. In 1994 he was awarded first prize for both Choreography and Performance at the Inaugural National Modern Dance competition in China. Unwilling to censor himself in the way the government demanded, however, 26-year old Shen re-located to New York City after receiving a scholarship from the Nikolais/Louis Dance Lab in 1995.

Unlike many choreographers, Shen discusses a new dance with his company at length, often showing paintings and films, before beginning to choreograph. “Because I am a painter, I want to see how dance movement relates to music and also how music and dance relate to visual art, how the three elements combine,” remarks Shen Wei. In addition to choreography, Shen’s artistic pursuits include painting, design, sculpture and filmmaking, which have been exhibited in New York and Hong Kong. His exploration of Stravinsky’s *Rite of Spring* inspired a series of large-scale paintings, first exhibited as part of his company’s New York debut at the 2003 Lincoln Center Festival.

The work of Shen Wei has been commissioned by the American Dance Festival, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater II, Dances We Dance Company of Hawaii, the Guangdong Modern Dance Company of China, SUNY Purchase and Hollins University in the United States. Shen Wei’s work has been presented at the Lincoln Center Festival, Edinburgh Festival Theatre, Spoleto Festival, Brighton Arts Festival, The Kennedy Center, Germany Millennium Moves, Stockholm

Dance House, London's The Place, Asia Society in New York, National Theater of Taiwan and at festivals in Korea, China, Hong Kong, Singapore and India.

TICKET INFORMATION

Tickets for **Shen Wei Dance Arts, Saturday, September 25 at 8:00 p.m.**, and **Sunday, September 26 at 7:00 p.m.** in Zellerbach Hall are priced at **\$26.00, \$36.00, and \$48.00**. Performance tickets are available through the Cal Performances Ticket Office at Zellerbach Hall; at (510) 642-9988 to charge by phone; at www.calperfs.berkeley.edu; and at the door. Half-price tickets are available for purchase by UC Berkeley students. UC faculty and staff, senior citizens and other students receive a \$2 discount, and UC Alumni Association members receive a \$3 discount (Special Events excluded).

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The San Francisco Chronicle, *San Francisco* magazine, and Classical 102.1 KDFC are season sponsors of Cal Performances' 2004/05 performing arts season.

Cal Performances' programs are supported in part by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, The Wallace Foundation, and the Zellerbach Family Foundation.

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CALENDAR EDITORS, PLEASE NOTE:

CAL PERFORMANCES PRESENTS

Thursday, September 23 at 4:30 p.m.
Lecture at Doreen B. Townsend
Center for the Humanities

Geballe Room, 220 Stephens Hall,
UC Berkeley Campus
Bancroft Way at Bowditch, Berkeley

LECTURE

“Shen Wei on Shen Wei: The Artist Talks about His Inspirations and Multi-Faceted Work.” For further information call 510.642.0212. Admission is free; no tickets required.

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Saturday, September 25 at 8:00 p.m.
Sunday, September 26 at 7:00 p.m.

Zellerbach Hall, UC Berkeley Campus
Bancroft Way at Telegraph, Berkeley

Dance

Shen Wei Dance Arts
Shen Wei, choreographer and designer

Program:

Rite of Spring (2003): Music by Igor Stravinsky, choreography and design by Shen Wei
(Bay Area premiere)

Folding (2000): Music by John Tavener and Tibetan Buddhist Chant, choreography and design
by Shen Wei (Bay Area premiere)

Tickets: \$26.00, \$36.00 and \$48.00, available through the Cal Performances Ticket Office at Zellerbach Hall; at (510) 642-9988 to charge by phone; at www.calperfs.berkeley.edu; and at the door

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SIGHTLINES

Post-performance discussion with artistic director Shen Wei and company members, Saturday, September 25. *Sightlines* is a continuing program of pre- and post performance discussions with Cal Performances' guest artists and scholars, designed to enrich the audience's experience. These events are free to ticketholders.