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**CAL PERFORMANCES PRESENTS THE MULTIFACETED SHEN WEI DANCE ARTS
IN ITS RETURN TO THE BAY AREA FRIDAY AND SATURDAY,
MARCH 23 AND 24 AT ZELLERBACH HALL**

**SIGHTLINES: POST-PERFORMANCE DISCUSSION WITH ARTISTIC DIRECTOR SHEN WEI AND
MEMBERS OF THE COMPANY WILL BE HELD FRIDAY, MARCH 23**

BERKELEY, February 14, 2007—**Shen Wei Dance Arts** has captivated audiences throughout the world with its original approach to modern dance as visual art, a unique blend of painterly and sculptural elements with highly stylized movements and patterning, as well as traditional aspects reminiscent of Chinese opera. Following its first appearance at Cal Performances in 2004, the 12-member **Shen Wei Dance Arts** returns to **Zellerbach Hall Friday and Saturday, March 23 and 24 at 8 p.m.** The New York-based company, led by choreographer and painter **Shen Wei**, will perform *Near the Terrace* (Part I) (2000), set to the music of **Arvo Pärt**; and *Rite of Spring* (2003) set to the music of **Igor Stravinsky**. “Chinese opera training may be at the root of Shen Wei’s vocabulary, but this Chinese-born choreographer’s abstract treatments of Stravinsky and other Western composers are startlingly innovative” (*The New York Times*).

Founded in 2001, Shen Wei Dance Arts offers multi-dimensional performances rich with design elements—costumes, lighting, and scenery—based on the aesthetics of both Western and Eastern traditions. Shen Wei’s choreography, often described as surreal and idiosyncratic, draws liberally from his training in Hunan Opera with its deliberate, flowing moves typical of Asian performance. Shen, however, eschews any effort to label his art. “My work isn’t about real life or being Western or Eastern. I’m exploring the unknown. I’m looking for a new way to communicate.”

A free *Sightlines* post-performance discussion with Shen Wei and members of the company will take place immediately following the performance **Friday, March 23**.

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PROGRAM

Shen Wei Dance Arts Zellerbach Hall program features *Near the Terrace* (Part I), inspired by the paintings of Belgian surrealist painter Paul Delvaux. Shen describes the genesis of the work: “*Near the Terrace* (Part I) was created in 2000 during a period when I was questioning everyday movements and exploring their connection to different sensibilities of dance technique and performance.” Some of this exploration led to the creation of *Folding*, performed by the company in its 2004 Cal Performances appearance. Shen continued these explorations in *Near the Terrace*, “on many levels I feel his (Delvaux’s) paintings connect to the sensibilities I was in search of in my art during this period.” *Backstage East* critic Phyllis Goldman described the dancers in *Near the Terrace* as “powdered down, spirit-like figures moving in slow motion, pattering soundlessly through Wei’s patterns...languid and serene.” *Near the Terrace* is set to the contemplative music of Arvo Pärt for piano and percussion, and is performed on and in front of a vast staircase stretching the entire width of the stage. The set, costumes and make-up are designed by Shen. *Near the Terrace* contains partial nudity; mature audiences advised.

Also on the program is an eclectic conversation between movement, music and visual images, Shen’s *Rite of Spring*, set to the four-hand piano version of Stravinsky’s score by Fazil Say. Performed in Berkeley in 2004, a massive and seamless stretch of blacks, whites and grays painted by Shen Wei extends across the depth and width of the stage like a painter’s canvas, making full use of the visual space. The piece begins with small, slow ritualistic steps that give way to exuberant spinning, leaping and crawling on all fours. Shen makes visible the energy behind each choreographic structure, as Picasso might leave trails of paint as evidence of the power of the movement used to create the image. At the premiere of *Rite of Spring* at the 2003 American Dance Festival, the striking visuals created by Shen Wei and his company left the audience “momentarily stunned...silence was followed by a prolonged ovation,” wrote *The New York Times* dance critic Anna Kisselgoff.

Shen first heard Igor Stravinsky’s *The Rite of Spring* in China in 1989 and was enthralled. He explored the texture of the score for the next 12 years and became further inspired when he heard the two-piano version by Turkish-born Fazil Say. Finally, in the fall of 2001, he brought

his company into the studio to begin choreographing his epic *Rite of Spring*, premiering the first half of the work ten months later. The completed piece was presented at the American Dance Festival the following season. “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,” wrote *The New York Times*’ Kisselgoff of this performance.

SHEN WEI

Shen Wei has said his past seems mysterious to him, as if lived by someone else. By his mid-30s, Shen believed, “I have lived three different lives,” beginning with a childhood in Hunan Province where his parents were Chinese opera artists in the provincial city of Xian Ying. Shen made his stage debut at age seven, going on to play young, athletic male roles requiring acrobatic feats and martial arts. Raised by a father who wrote, directed and acted in opera, 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. At age nine, he began a ten-year instruction in Chinese opera and worked for the Hunan State Xian Opera Company from 1984 to 1989. When he saw his first modern dance performance he was shocked, “it was so creative. So much closer to my generation than anything we had [in China].”

On his own, Shen 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. 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, the 26-year old Shen re-located to New York City after receiving a scholarship from the Nikolais/Louis Dance Lab in 1995. Shen Wei was awarded the Nijinsky Award for Emerging Choreographers in 2004.

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 *The 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 and the Guangdong Modern Dance Company of China. His work has been presented at the Lincoln Center Festival, Edinburgh Festival Theatre, Spoleto Festival, Brighten 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, Singapore and India.

TICKET INFORMATION

Tickets for **Shen Wei Dance Arts** for **Friday, March 23** and **Saturday, March 24**, both at **8:00 p.m.** in Zellerbach Hall, are priced at **\$26.00**, **\$36.00**, and **\$46.00**. Tickets are available through the Cal Performances Ticket Office at Zellerbach Hall; at (510) 642-9988 to charge by phone; at www.calperformances.net; 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). For more information, call Cal Performances at (510) 642-9988, or visit the Cal Performances web site at www.calperformances.net.

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CALENDAR EDITORS, PLEASE NOTE:

CAL PERFORMANCES PRESENTS

Friday, March 23 at 8:00 p.m.
Saturday, March 24 at 8:00 p.m.

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

Dance

Shen Wei Dance Arts

Shen Wei, choreographer and designer

Program:

Near the Terrace (Part I) (2000): Music of Arvo Pärt (This piece contains partial nudity.)

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

Tickets: \$26.00, \$36.00 and \$46.00, available through the Cal Performances Ticket Office at Zellerbach Hall; at (510) 642-9988 to charge by phone; at www.calperformances.net; and at the door.

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Friday, March 23
SIGHTLINES

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

Post performance discussion with artistic director Shen Wei and company members. *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.
