



## BWW Reviews: SHEN WEI Leaves Audience Breathless

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by Jessica Abejar



Shen Wei Dance Arts' New York season at the Judson Memorial Church, running April 29th to May 4th, is a dynamic display of the versatility and ingenuity of a master choreographer. With a reworking of his 2005 piece "Map" and the world premiere of his solo work "Variations," Shen Wei leaves no room to doubt that he *is* one of the greatest artists of our time.

As the audience enters the church, they are greeted with giant balloons floating in the center of a massive space. The balloons, marked with lines, circles, and squiggles, were specifically designed by Shen Wei himself to allow

audiences to enjoy the performance from all four sides of the space. This installation leaves the audience curious as to what role they will play in "Map." However, as selections from Steve Reich's *The Desert Music* start, the balloons begin to float to the ceiling, making way for the dancers.

Our attention is brought back to the floor- all the way down to the floor, where dancers begin performing sequences of intricate floorwork, exploring circular shapes and rotations, themes found throughout the entire piece. The delicate mix of athleticism, anatomic wonder, and fluidity along with the perfectly synced and executed movements of the ensemble is mesmerizing. Reminiscent of his famed calligraphy piece from the Opening Ceremony of the 2008 Beijing Olympics, Shen Wei uses his dancers' strength as tools to craft a whimsical visual display.

His innovative choreographic style is a delight for the audience's eyes, but the patterns, the sequencing, the formations, the musicality, the intensity, the mastery, and yes, even the balloons floating high above elevate the piece's brilliance. With a theater in the round, no corner is left untouched, and while the entire audience is in full view of everything, the angle at which one is seated can create an almost entirely different experience for each. For on one end may be a large group in a full-force, hip-hinging sequence. At another, a duet sprawls across the floor; all while a soloist runs and falls along a path from one corner to another. The dancing moves rapidly, non-stop; one look away, and something may be missed.