

# THE DOMINION POST

Jennifer Shennan | The Dominion Post | Friday, 29 February 2008

## Review: Shen Wei Dance Arts

If the Festival ran a poster competition, front-runner would surely be Shen Wei's dancers dramatically swathed in red from waist down, cream-naked from waist up, folding over and up into turban-bound heads.



Each dancer strives and writhes as though to escape the red trunk, suggesting a monarch butterfly that struggles to give birth to itself when emerging from its chrysalis.

I wrote that sentence before seeing the show, but I'm leaving it in because it proves not irrelevant to the choreographic concerns of Shen Wei. It transpires that his dancers are the vehicles through which he locates the invisible but nonetheless real forces of nature.

*Rite of Spring* took us underground into the dark, rich loam of worms and

compost and nitrogen and who-knows-what- else, where silent, urgent toil all through the winter gives way to fertile spring.

Striking, strong and serious dancers follow these compelling rhythms, not slavishly but with pauses and rests between the running that give us all the privileged chance to hear the music in its own right.

Stravinsky's celebrated score in the two-piano version was played and recorded in two layers by pianist Fazil Say.

Four hands, one pianist and what a pianist! The poetry of this interpretation was poignant beyond description and I will cherish the memory of it.

The second work on the programme, *Folding*, took us to a different yet equally strange place – let's say underwater this time. Deep down into the ocean, past fish painted on a backdrop, to the realm of slow shipwreck and mermaids and who-knows-what-else, where strong currents witness the funeral of a sea siren, and the folding of secrets into a time and place where no one speaks.

Tibetan chant and John Tavener's composition in combination give a meditative weightlessness to the dance, where a silver plumb-bob swings in the shadows, to be sure that the briny wallpaper will hang straight. The strangely turbaned dancers gave impeccably sustained performances against several of the laws of physics and gravity.

An evening of unusually exquisite performance.