

THE LIST

Mesmerising epic journey of dance

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Even as we file into the auditorium, the mesmerising spectacle has begun. The dancers sit holding golden bowls, calmly anointing the final touches on a huge mandala - a geometric Buddhist symbol - made from blue and white confetti covering the whole stage. Minutes later there is a low drone and five white circles made by the confetti blaze alight like mirrors pointed at the sun. As the dance progresses, the carefully crafted shape is transformed into a tranquil haze of paper petals by the dancers' rolling, spiralling or falling bodies.



Re- I was inspired by choreographer Shen Wei's travels in Tibet, and the soundtrack shifts between Buddhist nun Ani Choying Dolma's elemental chanting to passages where the only noise is the rustle of the shifting mandala. There is a hypnotic weightlessness to the movement as limbs lift one by one. But it's not fragility – on the contrary, the performers look as if the energy is smoothly cascading through their torsos and limbs, as if they have no bones at all and are being blown peacefully by the wind.

The calls and chirps of the jungle open the triptych's second part, created after Shen Wei's visits to Cambodia. A chain of dancers dressed in deep vermilion form a kind of human calligraphy, different shapes and angles projecting from their ever-shifting line. There is a joyful power, both in the music which strikes up - Shen Wei's recording of Cambodian musicians disfigured by bombs who transcend their disabilities through their playing - and the quick bends and curves of the dance, an intoxicating moving puzzle. This is soon balanced by *Re-II*'s hauntingly beautiful final section, where naked dancers stretch and gnarl to John Tavener's electrifying *Tears of the Angels*, their raw bodies mirroring a backdrop of a sprawling tree root.

Shen Wei's whole creation breathes with the colours and shapes of nature, and the patterns he creates through clutches of performers often have a slightly random, asymmetrical feel to them, like wondrous imperfections in the natural world. In *Re- III*, pale earthy greens give way to a chaos of grey-clad dancers as the digital landscape behind them shifts from mountains to skyscrapers. David Lang's twinkling electronic score has a distinctly urban feel to it, but even in the final moments there is still a lone dancer left in green, her gentle motion an echo of what has come before.

Shen Wei has honoured his travels beautifully with this epic journey through vividly evoked countries, saturated with a deep spirituality and exquisitely executed. This is abstract beauty in its purest form.

Edinburgh Playhouse, 473 2000, until 3 Sep, 7.30pm, £10–£30.