



Dance

# CanAsian festival serves up a soulful dance travelogue

PAULA CITRON

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Good art should satisfy on every level – emotional, spiritual, aesthetic. The two programs of the CanAsian International Dance Festival fulfilled that mandate.

The festival celebrated its 10th anniversary with a broad sweep of diverse artists, both the traditional and the contemporary. Taken together, the two programs were a terpsichorean travelogue, from Turkey to India, Cambodia, Japan and Korea. Kudos to artistic director Denise Fujiwara and her board for the clever programming.

What is fascinating about Asian dance arts is that each style affects an audience in very different ways. Some are visual feasts for the eyes, while others are breathtaking in their physical demands. But they all touch the soul.

## **Peter Chin (Contemporary/South-East Asian)**

For the last decade, Chin has been fascinated by the cultures of Indo-China and Indonesia. He presented two dances, a solo for himself, and a provocative work for five dancers from Cambodia.

The intriguing quintet *Olden New Golden Blue* was performed by five Cambodian dancers, two women and three men. Chin collaborated on the music, which included songs by Sin Sisamuth, the Frank Sinatra of Cambodia in the 1950s.

The most important aspect of this piece, which included a lot of conversation between the dancers (subtitled in English), was their dilemma at being caught between contemporary and traditional dance.

The sad truth is that the savage Pol Pot regime almost eradicated the ancient Khmer tradition. Only a bare fraction of the country's artists were left alive after the overthrow. Thus, resurrecting and preserving the ancient art forms is paramount. On the other hand, these dancers are young people of today, with contemporary interests.

The delight of this piece was the fusion of both worlds, a happy melding of traditional physicality with a contemporary twist. For example, a pose from an ancient temple wall would dissolve into something evoking a hip-hop move.

The throughline metaphor was the White Monkey, an important symbol in Khmer mythology. At one point, all the dancers portrayed the monkey as they battled with the ancient conflict between the old and the new. As such, the piece was a capsule of the present time.

## **CanAsian International Dance Festival**

- At Fleck Dance Theatre
- In Toronto on Wednesday and Thursday Feb. 23 and 24

*CanAsian Program B with Vaze and Chin repeats Saturday night.*

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