



victoria theater
lizzie & jonathan tisch stage

Thursday, February 8, 2024

Friday, February 9, 2024

10AM & 12:30PM

An NJPAC SchoolTime Performance

Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company

Year of the Green Wood Dragon

Artistic Director
Greta Campo

Director of Creative
& Contemporary Dance
PeiJu Chien-Pott 簡珮如

Director of Traditional Dance
& Preservation
Ying Shi

Lighting Design/Stage Manager
Jennifer Fok

Dancers

**Greta Campo, Candace Jarvis, Rio Kikuchi,
Alexzander Larson, Caleb Baker, Yao-Zhong Zhang, Yuchin Tseng, Ke'ala
O'Connell, Esteban Santamaria, Sarah Botero**

Guest Artists
Aloe Ao Liu

Guest Choreographer
Lawrence Jin

M&T Bank
dance series

MARS
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Made possible by funds from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts,
a partner agency of the National Endowment for the Arts.

**As a courtesy to the performers and fellow audience members, please be sure to silence all mobile devices.
The use of recording equipment and the taking of photographs are strictly prohibited.**

program

Lion in the City

Directed by **PeiJu Chien-Pott**

Choreography by **PeiJu Chien-Pott** and hip hop dance legends **DJ Kwikstep** and **Rokafella**

Assistant Choreographer: **Yvonne H. Chow**

Lion Dance Master: **Henry Lee**

Costume Concept by **Kelly Yang**

Music Composition by **DJ Kwikstep**

Traditional Drumming by **Henry Lee**

Costumes by **PeiJu Chien-Pott, Rokafella, Javier Valencia** of SoHarlem

Performed by

Alexzander Larson, Esteban Santamaria, Sarah Botero

One of the most popular dances performed in the Chinese New Year Celebration, The Lion Dance is a prayer for peace on Earth as a child is able to play with a ferocious beast in harmony. There are many styles of The Lion Dance in China, and this year the Company is celebrating the 50th anniversary of hip hop and memorializing the pioneering spirit of Nai-Ni Chen, who began working with Rokafella and Kwikstep in 2017, developing a dialogue between her contemporary/Chinese movement style and hip hop. This dance was originally commissioned by the New Jersey Performing Arts Center in 2023.

Spear Dance

Choreography, Music and Costumes by **The Chinese Peking Opera**

Performed by

Yao-Zhong Zhang

This dance is taken from The Chinese Peking Opera, which has over 300 years of history and is considered the most well-preserved Chinese performing arts in China. The dancer in this performance portrays a warrior who is preparing to go into the battlefield. His strength is shown through acrobatic movements and dramatic poses.

Mongolian Festival (Premiere)

Choreography by **Lawrence Jin**

Costume Design by **Ying Shi**

Music: Traditional

Performed by

Alexzander Larson, Caleb Baker, Esteban Santamaria, Sarah Botero,

This new work was commissioned by the New Jersey Performing Arts Center in 2024 for the year of the dragon. The Mongolian Dance is renowned for its powerful steps and expressive upper-body movements, capturing the essence of the nomadic way of life.

Mr. Jin grew up in inner Mongolia, China. In this dance, he focuses on the generous spirit of the Mongolian people, the powerful Mongolian warriors and the respect they have for the essential great prairie. The dance portrays aspects of Mongol herders' daily activities, including milking cows, cooking, hunting, household labor, celebrations and traditions.

Mongolian Festival is inspired by the Naadam Festival, which is the most popular festival celebrated once a year in Mongolia and inner Mongolia. During the festival, Mongolian people come together to praise God, to thank Mother Earth and the spirit of fire through songs and dances. Mongolian people believe that the number of stars in the sky reflects how many beautiful songs and dances there are on Earth.

program

Audience Interaction

Mirage (Excerpt)

Choreography by Nai-Ni Chen

Composition by Glen Velez

Musicians: Lori Cotler (Voice), Shane Shanahan (Percussion),

Mark Katsounis (Percussion), Glen Velez (Frame Drums)

Costumes by Jon Can Coskunes

Performed by

Rio Kikuchi, Sarah Botero, Ke'ala O'Connell, Yuchin Tseng,

Caleb Baker, Esteban Santamaria, Alexzander Larson

Inspired by the unique rhythms and dance movement of the Uyghur people of Xinjiang, Ms. Chen created a new movement vocabulary for this dance. Its tranquility and passion evoke the images of the desert area and the people who lived in oasis towns.

The music for this dance was commissioned by the American Music Center which has been renamed New Music/USA.

Ribbon Demo and Audience Participation

Festival/Dragon Dance

Choreography by Nai-Ni Chen

Music: Chinese Traditional

Costumes by Hilary Blumenthal

Performed by

Esteban Santamaria, Caleb Baker, Alexzander Larson, Candace Jarvis,

Rio Kikuchi, Yuchin Tseng, Sarah Botero, Ke'ala O'Connell

This is the most spectacular folk dance performed in the Chinese New Year celebration.

The dragon carries auspicious powers and nature's grace. It is a spiritual and cultural symbol that represents prosperity and good luck, as well as a water deity that nurtures harmony. It controls rainfall, rivers and oceans. The dragon favors pearls and usually chases after them. In this dance, the choreographer first creates a big festival with numerous colorful props and fanciful dance steps. The dragon then descends from heaven and blesses the Earth.

Blue flags symbolize water and the blessing of bountiful rainfall for the coming year.

Colorful ribbons are displayed as a prayer for the prosperity of the community.

For those fortunate to see this dance in the Chinese New Year, their coming year will be filled with peace, harmony and good fortune.

meet the artists

Greta Campo, *Artistic Director*, began dance training in her native Milan at the Carcano Theater, where she was first introduced to Martha Graham's work. At age 19, she began the Professional Training Program at the Martha Graham School in NYC and eventually joined Graham II, performing in both ensemble and solo roles. Campo performed with the Martha Graham Dance Company both nationally and internationally as a member of the corps and completed the Teacher Training Program at the school. She joined the Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company in 2012 and received the Rising Star Award from Fini Dance Festival in 2016. Aside from dancing with the company, she teaches classes that serve several communities, including children with disabilities, public school students, college students and masterclasses. Since 2020, Campo has been teaching the company style, Kinetic Spiral, via Zoom. She joined in on different projects with Buglisi Dance Theater in 2019.

PeiJu Chien-Pott, *Director of Creative & Contemporary Dance*, is an internationally acclaimed contemporary dance artist from Taiwan. She is described as "one of the greatest living modern dancers," celebrated particularly for her work as principal dancer with the Martha Graham Dance Company and her performances in the iconic roles of the Graham repertory. On the theater stage, PeiJu was a principal actress in the latest Kung Fu musical *Dragon Spring Phoenix Rise*, commissioned by The Shed and choreographed by Akram Khan. She holds a BFA in dance from the prestigious Taipei National University of the Arts where she's honored with an Outstanding Alumni Award. Her accolades include a Bessie for Outstanding Performance, Positano Premia La Danza Leonide Massine for Best Female Contemporary Dancer, Capri International Dance Awards and numerous other awards in her native Taiwan. PeiJu currently serves as a faculty member at The Ailey School and her commercial work is represented by MMG New York.

Shi Ying, *Choreographer/Director of Traditional Dance & Preservation*, is from Beijing, China. Ying received her bachelor's degree in Chinese dance from the Beijing Dance Academy and her master's degree from the School of Arts at Peking University. Her extensive experience teaching Chinese classical dance includes the Ailian Chan Dance School (Beijing), the Beijing Dance Academy and the Tsinghua University Dance Troupe. As a young dancer, she was a member of

the Nanchang Song & Dance Troupe in the Jiangxi Province. She joined the Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company in 2013 and established her own school in 2019. She was the gold medal award winner of the Overseas TaoLi Cup Professional division in 2019.

Jennifer Fok, *Lighting Designer and Stage Manager*, is a Chinese-American lighting designer based in New York City. Her design collaborations center around reimagining classics, exploring new work and collaborating with interdisciplinary arts in movement, dance and music. She is interested in telling stories that explore and question the vulnerability of the human condition and pushes us to examine the unconformable aspects of our shared humanity. She received her BFA in theater production and design from Ithaca College. Select designs have been seen at Long Wharf Theatre, Lincoln Center Education, Flint Repertory Theatre, Detroit Public Theatre, The Know Theater of Cincinnati, Gibney Dance, HERE Arts Center, Portland Stage, The New School for Drama, Bates Dance Festival, NCPA Beijing, Flynn Space, Ars Nova, Luna Stage, Theatre at Monmouth, Ensemble Studio Theatre, and Company One Boston, among others.

meet the guest artist

Aloe Ao Liu is a performance artist, dancer and choreographer. She is currently the performance director with CAAM Chinese Dance Theater in St. Paul. Aloe has performed extensively throughout China, Asia and Europe, including the Shanghai World Expo and the Beijing Olympics. She was a principal and soloist with China's renowned dancer/director Liping Yang, known as the "Peacock Princess," for eight years. During this period, Aloe Liu was a principal in world-famous Chinese dance productions, including *Dynamic Yunnan*, *A Shangri-La Spectacular*, and *The Beautiful South*. A graduate of the Yunnan Arts Institute, her contemporary performances have been showcased in Kunming, Macau, and the Walker Arts Center in Minneapolis, MN.

meet the dancers

Candace Jarvis, originally from Brampton, Ontario, started her professional training at Bold Dance Company under the direction of Emilio and Stephanie Macri. She continued her training at The Ailey School as a Certificate Student. She has performed works by many choreographers including Amy Hall, Tracy Inman, Carlos Dos Santos and Norbert De La Cruz III. In 2013, Jarvis performed in Alvin Ailey's Revelations cast of 50 at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center and took part in Robert Battle's New Directions Choreographers Lab at The Ailey School. She was a former member of Awaken Dance Theater under the direction of Rebekka Nodhturft. In 2015, she earned her Certificate of Honors from The Ailey School Certificate Program and joined the Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company.

Rio Kikuchi was born in Tokyo, Japan. At the age of three, Rio began ballet training at Studio Benus in Japan and later she was introduced to tap and jazz. She took the summer intensive at Kirov Academy of Ballet of Washington D.C. in 2015. She also studied ballet technique and pointe work privately with Luis Villanueva. In 2017, Rio moved to New York and was offered a scholarship to study at The Ailey School. In addition, she received a scholarship at Alonzo King Lines Ballet summer program in 2019. She has worked with Ronni Favors and Darshan Singh Bhuller, and performed Memora with Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater at New York City Center in 2018.

Esteban Santamaria is from Colón, Panamá. He graduated summa cum laude with a BFA in dance from the Universidad de Panamá and from The Ailey School. Esteban is a former company member of the Ballet Nacional de Panamá and Graham 2. Esteban also performed with the Martha Graham Dance Company in Europe.

Sarah Botero is from North Bergen, NJ. Sarah earned her BFA from SUNY Purchase College, Conservatory of Dance. She subsequently continued her training in The Ailey School Scholarship Program. Sarah has had the opportunity to perform in works by Hope Boykin, Manuel Vignoulle, Rena Butler, Brice Mousset, Bradley Shelver and Earl Mosley. She is currently an apprentice with Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company. Sarah also has a passion for teaching and hopes to pursue being a dance educator.

Yao-Zhong Zhang is from Shanghai, China, where he graduated from the Shanghai Kuan Opera School with a major in the male warrior role. Mr. Zhang performed with the Shanghai Kuan Opera Theater for 10 years before moving to New York, where he also performed with the Tong-Ching Chinese Opera Company. He has been a member of the Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company since 2000.

Yuchin Tseng was born and raised in Yilan, Taiwan. She received a full tuition scholarship to train at the Harid Conservatory in Florida for two years where she received vigorous training in classical ballet technique, upon which she enrolled in SUNY Purchase College in New York. In 2021 she graduated summa cum laude with a BFA in dance performance and a BA in arts management, and she was the recipient of the 2021 Outstanding Senior Award for Dance at SUNY Purchase for highest level achievement of artistry, academic and citizenship. In the fall of 2021 Yuchin became a member of Graham II where she had the privilege to perform many historical works by Martha Graham. Yuchin has performed professionally with Buglisi Dance Theatre and Mason Lee Dance Theater and she is excited for her first season with Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company.

Caleb Baker came from a hip hop background and began his technical dance journey at the age of 19. He trained at the Academy of Ballet Arts Studio, studying Vaganova ballet technique and Russian character. He later joined the Hillsborough Community College dance program as a dance major and earned his associate's degree in dance emphasis. Caleb has traveled and studied at multiple summer programs including the Alonzo King Lines Ballet and the American Dance Festival summer pre-professional programs. Since graduation, Caleb has performed professionally as a member of REVolutions Dance Company and danced professionally with Busch Gardens, Yahweh in Motion Ministries Inc., and in commercial works such as BET's *First Wives Club*. Caleb is looking forward to working with Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company in the upcoming season.

meet the dancers

Alexzander Larson is originally from Portland, Oregon. He holds a BFA in dance from The Hartt School under the direction of Stephen Pier. Alex has had the privilege of performing works by Gabrielle Lamb, Lar Lubovitch, Jaclyn Buglisi, Jose Limón, Sir Richard Alston, Cindy Brandle and Merce Cunningham to name a few. He is also one of the Merce Cunningham Trust's Barbara Ensley Award Winners for 2022. His recent dance credits include Sonia Plumb Dance Company, Des Moines Metropolitan Opera and Suzanne Ponomarenko Dance. He is very excited for his first season with Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company.

Ke'ala O'Connell is from Kailua, Hawai'i where she began her dance training at Mid-Pacific School of the Arts. She graduated from Southern Methodist University with a BFA in dance performance and minors in arts management and communications. Ke'ala has performed the works of Robert Battle, Ohad Naharin, Take Ueyama, Spenser Theberge and Courtney Mazeika among others. In 2022, she debuted in Diamond Head Theatre's production of *A Chorus Line* as Lois/Kristine. Currently based in New York City, Ke'ala is thrilled to be dancing with Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company for her first season.

about nai-ni chen

Nai-Ni Chen (1959 – 2021), *Founding Artistic Director/Choreographer*, created dances professionally for over 30 years in the U.S. She built a diverse repertory of over 90 original works and toured to major venues in the U.S. and international festivals in 12 countries around the world. A cross-cultural choreographer who aims to bring audience across the cultural boundaries, she developed her unique movement and choreographic styles that reflect the grace and splendor of the Chinese cultural traditions she studied in Taiwan since youth and the dynamic spirit of modern dance that she acquired in New York from luminaries such as Mary Anthony, Bertram Ross, Doris Rudko and Patricia Rowe.

Nai-Ni Chen received multiple Choreographer Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts and the New Jersey State Council on the Arts. She was a principal affiliate of the New Jersey Performing Arts Center and a resident artist of the Harlem School of the Arts. Commissioned dances include *Peach Flower Landscape* for the Lincoln Center Institute, *Qian Kun* for the Joyce Theater Foundation, *Unfolding for Dancing in the Streets*, *The Three Riddles of Turandot* for New Jersey Ballet, *Unconquered Warriors* for

Dancing Wheels, *Water and Tiger Lily* for BalletMet, *The Way of Five – Fire* for Towson University and *Dragons on the Wall*, a collaboration with Nobel Literature nominee Bei Dao and internationally acclaimed composer Joan La Barbara for the Alternate Roots Festival curated by Baraka Sele of New Jersey Performing Arts Center. She set her choreography at Case Western Reserve University, Alvin Ailey School professional development program and Long Island City University. In New York, she taught at Mary Anthony Dance Studio, Peridance and NYU, where she received her MA in dance and dance education. On television, Ms. Chen was an often-featured artist on PBS/NJN's GRAMMY® Award-winning *State of the Arts* series as well as serving as a dance competition judge for Sinovision USA, a Chinese language TV channel in the community. For her contribution to Chinese American culture, she received awards from the New Jersey International Institute, the Organization of Chinese Americans and Chinese American Chamber of Commerce. She also served on dance related-panels for the National Endowment for the Arts.

about the company

Bridging the grace of Asian elegance and American dynamism, the **Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company** is a premier provider of innovative cultural experiences that reflect the inspiring hope and energy of the immigrant's journey. The company's groundbreaking works have focused on themes from ancient Chinese legends that reflect issues of the present time to purely abstract, contemporary dances inspired by the art of Chinese calligraphy. An Asian American company that celebrates cross-cultural experience, the Company's productions naturally bring forth issues of identity, authenticity and equality.

The Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company has been presented at some of the most prestigious concert halls such as the Joyce Theater, Lincoln Center in New York, Cerritos Center for the Performing Arts in California, the Raymond F. Kravis Center and Tampa Bay Performing Arts Center in Florida. The Company appears annually at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center, Queens College, the College of Staten Island and on Ellis Island. Internationally, the Company has been presented by

about the company

international festivals including Open Look Festival in Russia, the Silesian International Contemporary Dance Festival and the Konfrontations International Festival in Poland, the Chang Mu International Dance Festival in Korea, the Meet in Beijing International Arts Festival in China, and the Tamaulipas International Arts Festival in Mexico.

The Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company has received more than 20 awards from the National Endowment for the Arts and numerous Citations of Excellence and grants from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts. The Company is currently in residence at New Jersey City University pioneering a program with the university's A. Harry Moore Laboratory School to teach dance to urban children with multiple disabilities.

For additional Company information,

Website: nainichen.org

Write: P.O. Box 1121, Fort Lee, NJ 07024

Call: 800.650.0246.

The Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company is represented by **Red Shell Management**
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credits

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