

Summer Dance Continues ARC Tradition, Showcases Variety

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Edwaard Liang, one choreographer for ARC Dance Company. • **Courtesy Photo**

The Seattle Center has long made a home for ballet, with Pacific Northwest Ballet in residence at McCaw Hall. Now, they will be joined by contemporary ballet, presented by [ARC Dance Company](#), who will present their Summer Dance program in the Leo Kreielsheimer space at the Bagley Wright Theatre.

ARC Dance was founded in 1999 by dancer and choreographer Marie Chong to expand Seattle's ballet scene. "In 1999 there were not many opportunities for dancers to perform contemporary ballet in settings with professional production values with the exception of Pacific Northwest Ballet and Spectrum Dance Theater," Chong said. "I wanted to create a forum for the many talented dancers in the Seattle area who did not necessarily fit into the solely modern dance scene."

Chong believes contemporary ballet allows it to be more accessible to today's audiences. "Contemporary ballet uses classically-trained dancers who also have the ability, often, with years of experience, to dance in ways which are outside of the strict confines of the purely classical form," she said. "It is a union of the ballet foundation used as the point of departure for exploration in to all kinds of other dance movement."

Chong's work seems to have inspired others, while challenging her own company

to grow. “As more opportunities emerged among a growing number of other small groups, ARC has focused on increasing the quality of its performances by hiring stronger, better-trained dancers and more accomplished choreographers,” she said. “To do this required increasing our budget so we could attract them. So the biggest challenges have had to do with raising more money offering them travel and higher pay to come to Seattle to work with ARC.”

In this Summer Dance program, Chong hopes to showcase a wide variety of contemporary ballet. “ARC is known for presenting a selection of very different dance works on the same program so that audiences don’t get bored by too much repetition from too many dances being too similar in the show,” Chong said.

To achieve that goal, Chong is presenting favorites from the ARC Dance repertory as well as several new works choreographed by guest artists. “I commissioned new works from Ilana Goldman, Travis Guerin, and Edwaard Liang because they are ‘very current’ dance makers and each one has a unique dance background and creative approach,” she said. “I wanted to bring these artists’ work to Seattle in the ‘ARC format’—a small, strong, well-trained, and versatile group of dancers performing in the accessible and intimate setting of the Leo K. Theatre.”

Chong receives a lot of support from her choreographers. “I wanted to come and choreograph for ARC Dance because I believe in Marie’s vision and what she wants to bring to Seattle with this program,” said choreographer Edwaard Liang.

Liang is looking forward to experimenting. “I want to challenge myself and do something more contemporary and use music that I ordinarily wouldn’t use,” he said.

As a fellow dancer and artistic director himself, Liang also supports Chong’s wider work. “As a dancer, I always faced an internal struggle of trying to fit in and figuring out my artistic voice through my body,” he said. “As a choreographer, it’s completely different.”

Liang describes the process of choreography as a search for equilibrium. “It’s balancing out the external and internal, learning how to bring out the most in dancers and learning how to use this medium of dance to express emotions, stories, and the intangible.”

The role of the artistic director then functions as part of a tripod, together with dance and choreography. “Learning how to manage people and learning to be okay with people not always liking you or your choices, you learn to become a steward for the organization and company,” he said.

As Chong continues to steward ARC Dance toward its 20th anniversary in a few years, all of this work supports Chong's initial impetus for pursuing dance. What excites her is the "ability to capture visceral emotion that transcends language and impact the audience through the immediacy of live performance." Chong expects to continue working in the ARC tradition. "I am always seeking new repertoire for ARC," she said. "It is also very important to foster the creation of new work in the art form in general."

She adds: "The dancers and choreographers both benefit from the creative process, and we hope the results also spark audiences' imaginations and emotions."

Summer Dance at the Center runs from July 16 to 25, at Leo Kreielsheimer Theatre, 155 Mercer Street, Seattle. For more information, visit <http://www.arcdance.org/shows-events/arc-dance-company-in-summer-dance-at-the-center/>.