

BALLET SAN JOSE

S I L I C O N V A L L E Y

PRESS RELEASE

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World Premiere Chinese dance featured in Ballet San Jose Silicon Valley's season closing program, April 20-23, 2006

Ballet San Jose Silicon Valley presents LES SYLPHIDES and SLAVONIC & HUNGARIAN DANCES with the World Premiere of MOON REFLECTION ON CRYSTAL SPRING and a Special Guest Performance of STRANGE FRUIT by Oscar Hawkins.

April 20-23, 2006
(Final Main-Stage Program of the Season)

Location: San Jose Center for the Performing Arts
255 Almaden Boulevard in downtown San Jose

Tickets: \$22 to \$74
Discounts available for students, seniors and groups

Box Office: (408) 288-2800 or buy online at www.balletsanjose.org
Also available through TicketMaster.

The Program:

MOON REFLECTION ON CRYSTAL SPRING
A World Premiere
Choreography by Yong Yao
Music by Ah Bing

LES SYLPHIDES
Choreography by Michel Fokine
Music by Frédéric Chopin
Sets and Costumes by David Guthrie

SLAVONIC & HUNGARIAN DANCES
Choreography by Dennis Nahat
Music by Antonin Dvorák and Johannes Brahms
Sets and Costumes by David Guthrie

STRANGE FRUIT
Danced by guest artist Oscar Hawkins
Choreography by Oscar Hawkins
Music: "Strange Fruit", Lewis Allen, 1938; sung by Billie Holiday

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More detail:

MOON REFLECTION ON CRYSTAL SPRING is a world premiere dance choreographed by Yong Yao (co-choreographer of last year's MIDDLE KINGDOM-ANCIENT CHINA.) The new work tells the story of Chinese folk composer Ah Bing. Ah Bing's music will be performed live on-stage by Yong-Ping Tian on 'er-hu', a two-stringed Chinese fiddle, and integrated into a recording by the Shanghai Orchestra.

"MOON REFLECTION" is a dance for one lead couple and eight women, danced on pointe. It is inspired by the life story of "Ah Bing the Blind" and his beautiful music. It is said that Ah Bing had a playmate during his boyhood. Choreographer Yong Yao dramatizes the story by making the playmate and Ah Bing's wife the same person (named Xiao Hua or "Little Flower.")

The Story:

Ah Bing, born Yan-Jun Hua in 1897 in the city of Wuxi (about 150 miles from Shanghai) was the illegitimate son of the Head Taoist Priest of Leizun Temple. Regarded as a shame of her clan, his mother was forced to commit suicide when Ah Bing was four years old. He was sent back to live with his father, whom he called "Master" all of his life. He learned music from his father, an accomplished instrumentalist, and was able to play various musical instruments in hundreds of pieces of Taoist music. Ah Bing was a gifted boy and very hard working. He was called "Little Master" by his fellow musicians when he was just 16. His father died when Ah Bing was 26. He took over his father's position as Head Priest until he became blind by disease. At age 33 (and completely blind) he was forced to leave the Temple and became homeless.

Ah Bing was provided shelter by a widow named Cui-Di Dong. She became his wife. Everyday, she led him to the marketplace where he performed his music and songs. He carried all sorts of musical instruments around his neck and shoulders, ready to play any request. From then on, he was known as "Ah Bing the Blind." Besides the pieces learned from his father and other masters, he often made up songs based on news and stories of the day. His music always touched the people's hearts. But he was very poor... among the poorest and lowest social status. He wore the same old repeatedly-mended garments for many years with Cui Di constantly by his side. She never complained and seemed to accept that her only purpose in life was to care for this crippled genius.

In 1950, music educators across the country were asked by the government to collect works from folk artists to preserve their music. A college music student introduced Ah Bing to his professors. They were especially touched by a beautiful er-hu piece from Ah Bing's own works. When they asked him the name of it, he replied, "There is no name." When pressed for a title, he hesitated for a while and said, "Moon Reflection on Second Spring." When the professors played back his music from the tape recorder, Ah Bing was shaken; his hand reaching out to touch the machine.

Very soon, Ah Bing's story was being widely told. At a local convention of dentists, Ah Bing was invited to perform his er-hu masterpiece. That was the first time that he sat down to perform in front of a formal audience. At the last note, a thundering applause exploded. Three days later, Ah Bing died; twenty-five days after that, Cui-Di passed away.

Yan-Jun Hua is considered one of the greatest folk musicians in contemporary times. "Moon Reflection on Second Spring" is regarded in China as the most beautiful er-hu piece ever written. Originally an er-hu solo, it has been rearranged into many different forms and has been performed around the world. The music for this ballet performance has been recorded by Shanghai Orchestra and integrated with a live performance by er-hu virtuoso Yong-Ping Tian.

(With thanks to Ann Woo of Chinese Performing Artists of America)

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OTHER PIECES ON THE PROGRAM:

Rarely presented to solo piano, Ballet SJSV's staging of Michel Fokine's classic LES SYLPHIDES will be accompanied by Roy Bogas playing the original Chopin. Bogas will be joined by pianist Marja Mutru playing four hands in selections of Antonin Dvorák and Johannes Brahms for Dennis Nahat's SLAVONIC AND HUNGARIAN DANCES.

STRANGE FRUIT is a solo dance performed by its choreographer Oscar Hawkins (a former Company dancer who also performed with Cirque du Soleil.) It is danced to Billie Holiday's original recording of Lewis Allen's haunting song about lynchings in the deep South.

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