

ALONZO KING'S LINES BALLET

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Alonzo King's LINES Ballet Announces World Premiere Collaboration with the Shaolin Monks Spring 2007 Home Season

I. LINES Ballet's World Premiere Collaboration with the Shaolin Monks

With utter calm and fierce precision, the dancers of LINES Ballet and the Shaolin monks of China create an unprecedented synthesis of Eastern and Western classical forms, as if ascending together from the stage to the heavens through pure, gorgeous intensity of movement. The collaboration between Alonzo King and the Shaolin monks integrates two distinct classical traditions of movement—ballet and martial arts—by fusing their unique elements at a very deep level.

This project is unique in the history of the Company: although LINES Ballet has always invested in artistic interchanges through music and culture on a global level, this is the first time that the Company has embarked on a collaboration that truly integrates Alonzo King's choreography with a different classical movement form. "At its heart, this project is an inter-cultural exploration between artists," says Mr. King. The premiere will be set to an original score of traditional Chinese and contemporary music, performed live.

The Shaolin monks practice a form of martial arts developed in the 6th century CE, when an Indian monk named Bodhidharma came to their temple on Songshan Mountain, in Henan Province. Blending the indigenous Chinese form of self-defense (called wushu) with a series of movements based on yoga, Bodhidharma taught the Shaolin monks to breathe strength into their bodies; they learned to soar into leaps as if they were cranes spreading their wings, and to land as silently as tigers prowling in the mountains. This multi-generational group of Shaolin monks—ranging in age from a set of 10-year old triplets to a 70-year-old monk—is the only one to have received the blessing of the original Shaolin temple to practice their art form outside of China.

Alonzo King's visionary choreography is renowned for its ability to connect audiences to a profound sense of shared humanity—of vulnerability and tenderness, but also of furious abandon and exhilarating freedom—and for its unique capacity to imbue classical ballet with new expressive potential. The project between Alonzo King's LINES Ballet and the Shaolin monks, like Bodhidharma's integration of yoga and wushu, represents both a blending of very different cultural traditions—Western classical ballet and Chinese martial arts—and, at the same time, a recognition that these arts of movement are convergent and intertwined.



II. Ticket and Performance Information:

Alonzo King's LINES Ballet
World Premiere with the Shaolin Monks
Spring 2007 Home Season
April 13-15, 18-22.
Performances at 8 pm
(except Sunday April 15 at 7 pm, Sunday April 22 at 3 pm)
Yerba Buena Center for the Arts Theater
700 Howard St. at 3rd St.
Box Office: 415.978.2787, 11am-5pm
Online: www.linesballet.org
Tickets \$20 - \$65

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High Resolution Images Available: Please contact Mona Baroudi or Selby Schwartz at mona.baroudi@sbcglobal.net or selby@linesballet.org for the link and password.

III. About this Collaboration: A Dance of Deep Histories

As classical arts of movement, ballet and Chinese martial arts share both their form—a precise, deliberate series of movements—and the concept that the shape of bodies in motion can be meaningful, even spiritual. The history of classical ballet sometimes glides over this dimension of dance, just as popular kung fu movies depict martial arts as showy, violent stunts. One of the extraordinary corollaries between the Shaolin monks' kung fu practice and Alonzo King's choreography is their mutual dedication to clarity of vision, and to renewing the forms of movement whose profound meanings have sometimes been forgotten over time.

In the studio, Mr. King works with the dancers of LINES Ballet to explore the opportunities for

expression and connection through movement. He encourages them to be fearless, and to connect to a deeply-rooted reason for dancing, instead of “assuming” a “position.” Alonzo King’s teaching style embodies his belief that each dancer can find an authentic, expressive voice; with this voice, a dancer can transcend the separation between stage and audience, and between individual and universal. For example, Mr. King often expands traditional ballet vocabulary to relate to principles of energy and alignment. “What is tendu? It’s a non-stop line addressing eternity,” he said during a talk in Philadelphia in 2003. This commitment to the dancers’ potential and to the idea that dance can be understood as a form of truth, rather than as a set of correct or incorrect poses, is inspirational for audiences as well as for the professional dancers and young students Mr. King teaches.

“In all cultures, there’s one instrument that we share in common in dance: the body,” Mr. King explained during a lecture in Los Angeles in 1996. Specifically, he helps dancers and audiences re-define ballet as a meaningful form of dance by reminding them, “Ballet is really a science, and it’s a science that is rooted in universal principles, the same principles that informed Copernicus, the relationship of the sun to the earth, the moon, how they revolve around each other, the galaxies, the circle, the straight line. Now those universal truths, they’re the same ones that you’ll find in other cultures... they’ll be expressed in different ways, but they’re the same ones.” Using the example of the tendu to illustrate this in concrete terms, he concludes, “The idea of tendu - people think, well, I’m trying to get my hip placed over my foot, getting turned out, but the presentation of a tendu, really, in its conception, is a ray, coming from a being of light.” LINES Ballet also takes its name from this radiant geometric form.

The Shaolin monks practice kung fu in order to refine their concentration and breath, to prepare for long seated meditations. Martial arts help the monks to channel mental and spiritual energy through a physical process of focusing the body. It is this same energy which is dedicated to pursuing enlightenment—to “seeing through” worldly illusions, and to understanding a universal essence. From Buddhism, Shaolin philosophy takes its guiding principle of enlightenment through meditation and self-examination; the Shaolin emphasis on a dynamic balance of energies comes from Taoism. As in Indian yogic practices, the preparation for meditation is movement, and the basis of movement is ch’i, translated as “life-force” or “breath.”

The dragon style of Shaolin kung fu, for example, is strongly oriented towards ch’i, and is close to Taoist concepts of consciously moving energy around, by deflecting or re-directing it. In the dragon style, a monk moves as if “riding the wind,” not as if he has decided to reach out his foot and kick a wall, or is planning to clench his muscles to block a strike. This also explains how Shaolin martial arts fit into the Cha’an Buddhist system: Shaolin monks do not “attack” or engage their opponents with hostility. If they are attacked, they simply “refuse” the harmful energy intended for them, and return its violence to the perpetrator.

The role of animals like the dragon, crane, tiger, and praying mantis in Shaolin philosophy demonstrates a connection with the natural world, and a sensitivity to the manifestations of its different qualities. If the dragon style draws primarily on ch’i for inner strength and concentration, for example, the snake—who is the guardian of the dragon—uses the ch’i to move the body in sinuous, undulating ways. The snake’s spirituality is defined by its physical ability to flow, to coil, to glide effortlessly; its body relates it to earthly qualities. In this sense, animals in the Shaolin martial arts are both powerfully imagistic and expressive of internal qualities.

This awareness of energetic potential, a vision of harmonic and meaningful movement, and a vigorous new investment in classical forms: these are three of the specific qualities that Alonzo King’s LINES Ballet shares with the Shaolin monks. Their current collaboration is, simultaneously, an expression of these mutual ideas and values, and an exploration of emerging forms of interconnection and reinvention. By working

together in the studio—in the universal language of movement, each bringing a “dialect” of their own—the monks, the dancers, and Alonzo King are creating a kind of evolving conversation in motion. This project evokes its deep classical roots in both Eastern and Western traditions, and also points forward to a shared language of new forms.

Alonzo King’s LINES Ballet, an international dance company based in San Francisco, performs contemporary ballet to critical acclaim in the US and abroad. Collaborating with noted composers, musicians, and visual artists, Alonzo King creates original works that stretch and renew the traditions of western dance. Both Alonzo King and the LINES dancers have been recognized for their extraordinary vision; Mr. King was recently honored with the US Artists Fellowship, given to the 50 finest artists from all disciplines currently creating work in America. The San Francisco Dance Center has been offering a broad range of inspiring classes to dancers since 1989; five years ago, the LINES Ballet School was established, in order to develop the potential of young dancers. In 2006, LINES Ballet and the Dominican University of California jointly launched the West Coast’s first BFA program in Dance. Looking forward to celebrating its 25th Anniversary next fall, LINES Ballet is expanding this year’s touring schedule as international demand for the Company continues to grow.

LINES Ballet 25th Anniversary Season

Opening Night Gala: Nov 2, 2007

Fall Home Season: Nov 2-11, 2007 at YBCA