



## Enchanted ecstasy

Ismene Brown reviews Moon Water at Sadler's Wells

By Ismene Brown

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Cloud Gate Dance Theatre's Moon Water is a dream of a show, one of the most ravishing things I've seen in a theatre, an experience of beauty that you really don't have to be a New Ager to appreciate (unlike one or two other oriental shows).

The company comes from Taiwan, but its director, Lin Hwai-min, is a fusion man, trained both in Chinese Opera and Martha Graham dance. His last show in London three years ago featured a solemn quest for spiritual truth through mountains of yellow rice, an effect too calculated by half.

On paper Moon Water also sounded unpromising. Its title refers to an impenetrable Buddhist saying about energy needing to flow like water while the spirit shines like the moon, and the thought of Bach cello suites being soldered into position as aural back-up for another East-West bonding experience was initially unattractive. But this is a piece of genuine dance theatre, exquisitely imagined, framed upon a riveting dance style, and builds poetically to a most beautiful climax, the flooding of the stage with

water. I was gripped at the start, then lulled into enchantment.

It begins with the phenomenal Wu Chun-hsien, a man in white trousers on a black stage, the floor encircled in white streaks, like mineral encrustations around a pool. Rough mirrors overhead and behind gradually enhance the illusion of some faraway grotto, where white-clad figures come to dance and bathe in an apotheosis of tranquil ecstasy.

They communicate in an extraordinary style of movement founded on t'ai chi, one of the most beautiful and concentrated of all martial disciplines. The Bach is played by the Russian Mischa Maisky, and is impeccably formed but fleshed out with a golden sound and romantic feeling that satisfyingly parallels what Lin Hwai-min has done with the dance.

Much of the time, the dancers look as if they are dancing under water, pushed gently from side to side by invisible currents, squatting weightlessly, arms seeming to drift, toes unfurling like ferns. They have such stringent, elastic control that they can suddenly blast upwards into high, light jumps that for a moment you fancy might not come down again. The grace of it is, in a way, balletic, but its evasion of the norms of gravity, its total fluidity, suggests that there is a new book of the human dancing body waiting to be written with t'ai chi training.

Apart from the jarring note struck by one melodramatic female soloist late on, the atmosphere is calm and unforced, and the climax, the flooding of the water, arrives naturally. As the figures rise and sink in it, their reflections in the back steel wall bring the whole picture together, the circular pool, the sweetness of the dark, Matissean bathers in luxe, calme et volupte.

- Until Sat. Tickets: 020 7863 8000

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