

## About the Program

### Defining Modern Dance

Modern dance was developed in America nearly 100 years ago as a reaction against the rigid rules and structure of classical ballet. Dancers and choreographers began to express their inner feelings through new, freer ways of dance. Sometimes a modern dance tells a story, but often they are more abstract, simply exploring an idea or emotion through loose, fluid movements. Modern dance has spread all over the world developing new dance styles and techniques.

### More Than a Choreographer

Shen Wei (pronounced Shen Way) is a choreographer, dancer, painter, and designer who was born in Hunan (HOO-nahn) Province in the south central part of China. From a young age, he studied Chinese opera, calligraphy, and painting. In the early 1990s, he was a founding member of the Guangdong (Gwahng-dong) Modern Dance Company, China's first modern dance company, where he worked as both a dancer and a choreographer. In 1995, he received a scholarship to study modern dance in New York City, where he still lives today.

Shen Wei not only choreographs his dances, he also designs their sets, make-up, and costumes. He says, "I wasn't taught the arts separately, so I don't separate them in my work. I want to see how dance movement relates to music and also how music and dance relate to visual art, to see how the three elements combine."

### The Company

In 2000, Shen Wei established his own company called Shen Wei Dance Arts that unites dance, theater, Chinese opera, painting, and sculpture. Based in New York City, the company has performed throughout the United States and internationally. The company has received numerous awards and fellowships and, most recently, it has been invited to participate in a five-year partnership with the Kennedy Center.



# China: Shen Wei Dance Arts

Wednesday, May 16, 2007  
11 a.m. – 12 p.m. ET  
Grades 7-12

### Connect Transfer

About *Connect Transfer* Shen Wei says, "With this new work, I have been driven by connections: how the body is connected, how the body connects with other bodies, how dance and other arts are connected, how performers and audiences connect." Critics have called *Connect Transfer* a "modern masterpiece" in its unique fusion of dance, painting, and sculpture.

The first section uses the idea of "three points." The dancers use three points of their bodies to touch the floor and another dancer, creating unusual sculptural shapes. The second section plays with gravity, pulling the dancers off balance. In the third section, the dancers jump, rotating at different joints, exploring ways that the body can move.

One of the most important components of *Connect Transfer* is the gray canvas on the floor. During the piece, dancers throw themselves onto the canvas with movements such as spirals and rolls. By the end of the dance, they have filled the canvas with different color "scribbles, streaks, lines and loops" from paint on their backs, feet, and mittens. When the dance is over, the painting remains like an "energy memory" as Shen Wei calls it, to remind us of what just happened.

During this demonstration, segments of *Connect Transfer* will be performed as well as a discussion of how the company blends Eastern and Western cultures with various art forms.

When viewing *China: Shen Wei Dance Arts* and participating in this guide's suggested activities, the following National Standards for Dance will be addressed: 3, 5, 7.

## Instructional Activities

### Twister...Shen Wei Style

In *Connect Transfer*, the dancers stay connected to the floor or to each other at three points. They take turns moving each other by pushing or pulling on those three points. Choose a partner and identify Dancer "A" and Dancer "B." For example, Dancer A's hand touches Dancer B's knee, Dancer A's head touches Dancer B's shoulder, and Dancer A's foot touches Dancer B's hip. First, Dancer A will lead, pushing or pulling Dancer B into different directions using each of the three points where they are connected.

Then, Dancer B will be the leader. Keep changing leaders, but be sure you stay connected at three points.

### What is Chinese Opera?

Chinese opera is one of the oldest dramatic art forms in the world. It is a form of theater performed with dialogue, specialized music and singing, and martial arts—all depicting dramatic stories of Chinese folklore and history while using colorful costumes and minimal sets. Research the different styles of Chinese opera. How do the costumes, singing styles, movements, and stories differ? What kinds of characters do each of the different face-paint patterns represent?

## Resources

### Internet

shenweidancearts.org  
Modern Dance: americandancefestival.org  
Guangdong Modern Dance Company:  
gdmdc.com/e\_index.html  
China's Hunan Province:  
travelchinaguide.com/cityguides/hunan/  
index.htm  
Traditional Chinese painting and performance:  
asia.si.edu  
artsedge.kennedy-center.org/chinafestival

### Print:

Kefen, Wang. *The History of Chinese Dance* (Traditional Chinese Arts and Culture). San Francisco, CA: China Books & Periodicals Inc., 1985.  
Yao-T'ing, Wang. *Looking at Chinese Painting: A Comprehensive Guide to the Philosophy, Technique, and History of Chinese Painting*. Tokyo: Nigensha Publishing Co., Ltd, 1995.

