

Rippling 'Moon Water' makes delicate artistic statement

By Sid Smith, Special to the Tribune

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Of all the admirable attributes of Cloud Gate Dance Theatre of Taiwan's beautiful "Moon Water," the most surprising is choreographer Lin Hwai-min's pinpoint, finely honed musicality.

Lin's career has been steeped in fusing Eastern and Western traditions, and "Moon Water" is no exception. His Eastern influences were on view aplenty when Cloud Gate played the Harris Theater on Friday and Saturday courtesy of the Dance Center of Columbia College. They include slow, methodic evocations of tai chi and exquisite scenic design so subtle it sneaks up on you, using giant, murky mirrors and a veneer of water that gradually covers the stage, creating a razor-thin pond and contributing to a final image that's a gorgeous, minimalist moonscape.

But most astonishing is a very Western art, Lin's utter love affair with his score, Bach's "Six Suites for Solo Cello." The music is slow and mournful, playing right into Lin's hands. But the dips, lunges, gestures and sudden shifts from right to left by the fine dancers, especially in their solos, caress the music and punctuate its rhythms with sharp timing and poetry.

As for Lin's movement, his focus is rarely on the feet. Silky limbs, fluttering hands and powerful legs that can enact arabesque-like swerves or sustain long spells of suspension are more key. Much of the dancing occurs while the dancer remains in place.

When Western ensemble design intrudes, it's artful. In one sequence, a large group in semicircle flow from one side of the stage to another, like a wave, picking up two dancers almost invisibly from the right wings, and then flowing all the way to the left, leaving the duo behind, like discarded droplets. Like much of "Moon Water," it is as delicately executed as Japanese origami.

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