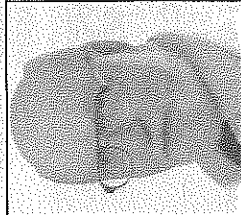


# 'Tao of Bach' a delight for all the senses

I must confess that the title of the concert last week in the Tryon Festival Theatre at Krannert Center for the Performing Arts gave me pause: "The Tao of Bach: A Musical Tai Ji Dance Offering." As one who knows much more about Bach than about "Tao" or "Tai Ji," I did not know what to expect.



**JOHN FRAYNE**

— IN THE CONCERT HALL

Indeed, a far cry from the usual chamber music concert: four serious adults, more or less in business suits, playing string quartets.

The core of this event was the "Tai Ji" dancing of Chungliang Al Huang to the accompaniment of short pieces by Johann Sebastian Bach, played by a group of instrumentalists. A reference source

tells me that tai ji is "a type of internal Chinese martial art practiced for both its defense training and its health benefits." Further clarification suggests that this training is "practiced at what most people categorize as slow movement." From what one saw at this concert, it would seem that tai ji was less a martial art than a popular Chinese form of exercise, both physical and spiritual.

For much of the music, Huang made hand, arm and dance movement to express his feelings about the Bach pieces. At times, Huang went from mime into elaborate dance movements, in which I was dazzled by the virtuosity of his balletic footwork.

In the program for the concert, "Tai Ji" was defined as "the eternal principle of the universe that transcends reality and is the source of being, non-being, change, and transformation in the eternal now."

After recovering from a momentary dizzy spell while reading this, let me say that the concert as a whole, especially in its visual display, somewhat achieved a realization of this sweeping definition.

As one entered the hall, beautiful scenes of nature, especially mountains and seashores, were shown on a large screen, and some of these scenes were

repeated later, during the dance episodes.

Among the instrumentalists, flutist Alexander Murray made a dramatic entrance playing a movement from Bach's Solo Flute Partita in A Minor, and his sometimes comic interactions with Huang mirrored their decades-long friendship.

Movements of Bach's Solo Cello Suites were played vigorously and with deep feeling by Michael Fitzpatrick. Another cellist, David Darling, made a strong impression singing as well as playing his own "Vocalise."

Harpist Ann Yeung played the harp beautifully in some of the Bach pieces. All the instrumentalists began the concert with the famous "Air in the G-String" from Bach's Orchestral Suite No. 3 in D Major, and it was played at the end as well. Aside from the Bach pieces, compositions by Fitzpatrick and R. Murray Schafer were performed.

Amid a profusion of visual delights, let me mention a sword dance, one sequence performed in silhouette, and a final cosmic image of shooting stars, from the stage screen out onto the wall of the Tryon.

Perhaps the visual climax was reached when Huang made gestures with his

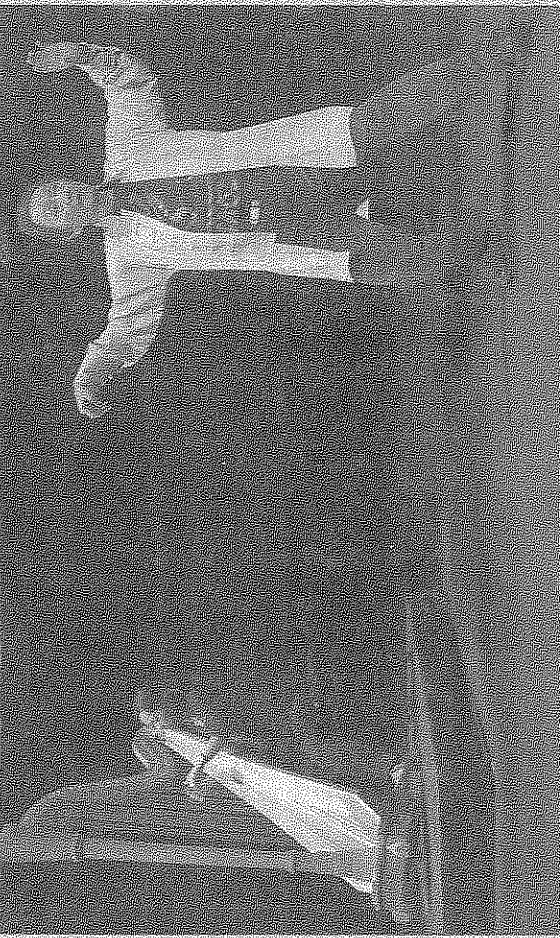
brush that produced giant Chinese symbols on the big screen. The production staff of eDream Institute deserves the highest praise for a splendid evening of visual delights. Among the 10 names in the program let me single out lighting designer Michael Williams and sound designer Rory Murphy.

Huang has many friends in our twin cities. He was in 1969 the first artist-in-residence during the opening season of Krannert.

At concert's end, Huang waved with encouragement to the audience, and about 25 persons, young and old, danced up to the stage, doing tai ji movements, as the rest of us clapped in rhythm. It was a wondrous sight. Out in the lobby as I left, David Fitzgerald, at the bandstand, was giving his all to a Bach Cello Suite before a group of enthralled listeners.

It all reminded me of the beginning of a poem by William Butler Yeats, "The Fiddler of Dooney": "When I play on my fiddle in Dooney/Folk dance like a wave of the sea..."

**John Frayne hosts "Classics of the Phonograph" on Saturdays at WILL-FM and, in retirement, teaches at the University of Illinois. He can be reached at [frayne@illinois.edu](mailto:frayne@illinois.edu).**



Harpist Ann Yeung, left, and tai ji dancer Chungliang Al Huang rehearse "The Tao of Bach," a Musical Tai Ji Dance Offering for tonight's performance in the Tryon Festival Theatre at Krannert Center for Performing Arts in Urbana (see calendar item below).

**The Tao of Bach: A Musical Tai Ji Dance Offering.** 7:30 p.m. Sept. 13, Krannert Center, Urbana. Chungliang Al Huang improvises movements based on tai ji to music by J.S. Bach performed live by a quartet. Collaborators from the eDream Institute, Advanced Visualization Laboratory and National Center for Supercomputing Applications provide animations mirroring his choreography. Featuring Chungliang Al Huang, Alexander Murray, David Darling, Michael Fitzpatrick and Ann Yeung. Tickets \$10-\$32. 333-6280, [www.krannertcenter.com](http://www.krannertcenter.com).



Barrett Rosenbly/The News-Gazette