

# The Brown and White

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The Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company performs martial arts outside of Zoellner Arts Center, Lehigh University, on Thursday, September 9th, 2021. Performers include: Yuka Notsuka, Sonny Shiu, Evan Matthew Stewart, Cadance Jarvis. (Zhuocheng Wang/B&W Staff)

## Dragon Cipher dance showcase brings together different artistic cultures

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BY ELLA MORRISSEY — ; PUBLISHED SEPTEMBER 18, 2021, 9:00 AM ; **UPDATED SEPTEMBER 16, 2021, 11:23 AM** LIFESTYLE

The Dragon Cipher hip-hop showcase, hosted by Zoellner Arts Center in Tamerler Courtyard, brought together two dance troupes to explore the connection between hip-hop and traditional Chinese dance.

Members of the Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company and Full Circle Productions performed a piece that was eleven and a half minutes in duration, in front of the Lehigh and greater Bethlehem communities.

The showcase kicked off with three performances, combining contemporary dance and martial arts by dancers from the Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company.

Nai-Ni Chen, the founder of Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company, said one of the performances was choreographed to be danced with the colorful "In a State of Rejuvenescence" sculpture outside Zoellner.

Chen, who is from Taiwan, said she began dancing at 4 years old and had always planned to become a professional dancer.

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At 14, Chen said she choreographed her first dance competition for students. By the time she was 20, Chen was touring with companies and performing in over 17 countries.

"I have a very unique voice that is different than others because I embraced both Asian and American culture, so that unique voice is expressed through my choreography," Chen said.

Full Circle Productions was co-founded as a nonprofit organization in 1996 in New York City by husband and wife duo Ana Garcia and Gabriel Dionisio. Garcia and Dionisio both have stage names for their performances; Garcia is Rokafella and Dionisio is Kwikstep.

Garcia said she first became interested in hip-hop and breakdancing by watching movies and TV shows as a kid and began creating dances in middle school.

Full Circle was founded to embrace both the classic and new iterations of hip-hop.

"At this point, Full Circle helps to train young (breakdancers) in the technical and cultural aspects of (breakdancing) but also produces dance pieces that can be presented at schools, theaters and festivals," Garcia said.

Chen said global events over the past year, including the Black Lives Matter and Stop Asian Hate movements, gender issues, immigration and the pandemic, have affected her style of choreography.

During this time is when Chen's company began collaborating with Full Circle Productions to produce the Dragon Cipher performance, she said.

"It's really a collaborative effort that began last year dealing with these topics and how the Black and Brown community and the Asian community can work together," Chen said.

Terry-Ann Jones, Director of Africana studies and professor of political science, brought her Introduction to Africana Studies class to the performance.

"The result was a beautiful demonstration of the way in which solidarity can translate to a beautiful syncretic art form," Jones said.

Both Garcia and Chen said that Dragon Cipher is a work in progress, and they look forward to developing the piece even more.

"Black people and Asian people in this country have been exposed to oppression in different ways and have transcended it in different ways," Garcia said. "There is mutual respect and influence even if it is not always broadcasted or highlighted."

Mark Wilson, executive director of Zoellner Arts Center, said Zoellner is committed to keeping people safe while hosting performances and events this semester, which is why Dragon Cipher was held outdoors.

"All of our patrons are required to wear masks when they come into an event and we recommend that people be vaccinated," Wilson said. "We're also making sure that for those who are not comfortable and need more space that we are able to move people to have more distance when it comes to an event."

Jones said she felt safe while watching the performance because it was outdoors and people were able to physically distance themselves from each other.

Wilson said Zoellner is looking forward to having more in-person events and interactions with the Lehigh community this year.

"I think we all started looking forward to actually being together with other people and enjoying something that joins us together," Wilson said.