

**If you go**

**What:** "The Tao of Bach: A Musical Tai Ji Dance Offering," featuring Chungliang Al Huang, dancer; Alexander Murray, flute; David Darling and Michael Fitzpatrick, cellists; and Ann Yeung, harp; and visuals created by the eDream Institute at the University of Illinois.

**When:** 7:30 p.m. Thursday.

**Where:** Tryon Festival Theatre, Krannert Center for the Performing Arts, 500 S. Goodwin Ave., U.

**Tickets:** \$32 for adults, \$27 for senior citizens, \$15 for students and \$10 for UI students and youths of high school age and younger.

**Information:** 333-6280 or [www.krannertcenter.com](http://www.krannertcenter.com).

**'THE TAO OF BACH'**

# Collaborative performance set for Thursday

By **MELISSA MERLI**  
[mmerli@news-gazette.com](mailto:mmerli@news-gazette.com)

URBANA — Internationally known tai ji master Chungliang Al Huang has always yearned for a visual enhancement that shows why tai ji is so fascinating.

He feels he's found it in the visuals created by Donna Cox's eDream (Emerging Digital Research and Education in Arts Media) Institute at the University of Illinois for the collaborative performance "The Tao of Bach: A Musical Tai Ji Dance Offering" at 7:30 p.m. Thursday at Krannert Center for the Performing Arts.

"To have eDream's support, to create this visual extension, is just so exciting," Huang said. "Donna and Bob (Patterson) have been personally doing tai ji. Their feeling of what's happening to themselves makes it more meaningful. Once we get started we inspire each other."

In the concert, expected to last 90 minutes or a little less, Huang will dance tai ji-based movements. There will be no intermission.

"I'm going to be dancing up a storm and really wow people that somebody 75 can dance like that," he said.

It will be the first time he's performed at Krannert since he and his wife, Suzanne Pierce, a dancer, were its first artists-in-residence in 1969.

Pierce won't dance but has helped with the concept of the show, Huang said.

While he moves on stage, the eDream's visuals of nature and the cosmos, which Cox said represent the flow of ji, or chi, will be projected behind the stage, and at times on both sides.

Also participating in the event will be four musicians performing selections of music by Johann Sebastian Bach. Some of them also will dance. Huang has created solo spots as well as duets and quartets for these musicians:

— Flutist Alexander Murray, who has collaborated with Huang before and who with his wife, Joan, opened the well-regarded Alexander Technique Center in Urbana in 1977.

— Ann Yeung, an internationally known harpist and member of the University of Illinois School of Music faculty.

— Cellist Michael Fitzpatrick, a recipient of the Prince Charles Award for Outstanding Musicianship who has shared the stage musically with the Dalai Lama and is an international adviser to the Dalai Lama Foundation.

The cellist has worked on movie soundtracks, among other things.

— David Darling, a composer/cellist who crosses musical genres and worked as a studio musician with the likes of Johnny Cash and toured with the Grammy Award-winning Paul Winter Consort as a soloist, composer and singer.

He has worked with artists as diverse as Glen Moore, John Clark, Spyro Gyra and Bobby McFerrin.

As if all that's not enough, large-format photographs by

Si Chi Ko, who received the highest national arts awards in Taiwan and China, are on display in the Krannert lobby in connection with "Tao of Bach."

His wife, Jessie Fan Ko, a dancer, also is here and is teaching master classes for the UI Dance Department and will dance at the end of a symposium on aging that will take place early this evening at Krannert Center.

Cox said the computer graphics program created by Alex Betts of eDream uses motion sensors that will capture Huang and other performers in real time while he is moving on the stage.

Also part of the visuals is high-resolution and time-lapse video that Cox and Robert Patterson shot on the West Coast, where Huang has his Living Tao Foundation. The video was integrated with special effects.

"We're doing audiovisual multimedia before the show, all the way through it and during the end and the post encore," Cox said.

"There will be a surprise at the ending. Audience members will be dancing out of the place," she predicted.

Huang is an author — his best-known book, "Embrace Tiger, Return to Mountain: The Essence of Tai Ji," was an international best-seller; calligrapher; tai ji teacher; and philosopher. He and Pierce live in Urbana and Oregon.

Huang will participate in the "Sage-ing Gracefully: Spirit-Mind-Body Connections" from 5 to 7 tonight in the Krannert lobby. Krannert director Mike Ross will moderate the discussion, which also will feature Art Kramer, director of the Beckman Institute for Advanced Science & Technology and Swanlund chair and professor of psychology and neuroscience whose research includes cognitive and brain plasticity across the adult lifespan; and Doug Nelson, president and founder of BodyWork Associates who practices precision neuromuscular therapy and is founder of NMT MidWest.

They will discuss recent research in the areas of aging and brain function related to wellness and tai ji. Jessie Fan Ko will perform her Dun-Huang Dance at the end of the discussion, which is free and open to the public.

# '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 Per-



**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

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.

As it turned out, I found this concert to be a delight to all the senses, unconventional in its organization, and at the end, close to a refined communal outburst of dancing.

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, "Ta" 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).**



Darrell Hoemann/The News-Gazette

**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).**

and Black Power expression. Organized and moderated by Aaron Ammons. 333-1861.

**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).



## AVL and eDream work with Krannert Center for "Tao of Bach"

released 09.05.12

by Nicole Schiffer

Donna Cox, director of the Illinois Emerging Digital Research and Education in Arts Media Institute (eDream) and the Advanced Visualization Laboratory (AVL) at NCSA, stood center stage and thrust her right hand out from her shoulder a few times. "I'm still not getting the chi out of my hand," says Cox. "Hey Alex, can you turn up the chi?"

The eDream and AVL teams spent the morning of August 27 collaborating with staff at the Krannert Center for the Performing Arts and calibrating the visualization software to Krannert Center's projectors for "The Tao of Bach," a multimedia, dance, and music performance. The team was rehearsing the settings that control the visual flow of body motion produced on the screen.

Alex Betts, AVL 3D graphics visualization software designer, adjusted a few of the settings on a computer in the left wing of the stage and the chi flowed.

### Embracing Taoism

Tammey Kikta, Krannert Center's assistant director for artistic services, says that eDream has really embraced the spirit of Taoism for this project.

A pre-show movie sets the mood with computer-generated yin-yang galaxies that segue to calligraphy. Real-life nature shots near the Living Tao Foundation in Oregon subtly highlight eDream and AVL's attention to detail when the coastlines in adjacent shots fit together almost like puzzle pieces.

"We shot high-resolution time-lapse and digital cinema of nature to be used in the performance," says Bob Patterson, eDream associate director for production and AVL visualization research artist.

Jeff Carpenter, a multimedia specialist with eDream, designed and edited most of the video and calligraphy segments for the performance. He and Patterson worked together to create the mesmerizing, digitally affected movies that will be projected on multiple screens before and throughout the performance.

Once the main attraction begins, eDream and AVL staff will play an active role in the show. A Kinect camera captures performers who are within "the cone," the term used for the wedge-shaped viewing area of the camera. Microsoft originally manufactured the Kinect camera to allow users to play Xbox 360 and Windows PC video games using body movements and voice commands. A wire strung across the front of the stage carries the image to two off-stage computers.

Betts will sit at the computers during the show and run a program he developed called CHI-vision that transmutes the image and projects what looks like a silhouette in brightly colored fluid on the screen upstage. The fluid represents chi, or life energy. A multitude of numerical settings in a simple graphical user interface control the qualities of the on-screen aura.

"This work has called upon the breadth of talent in the AVL group," says Cox, from astrophysical visualization and Patterson's digital cinema that make up the pre-show to animated calligraphy and CHI-vision, which will be run interactively in real time during the performance.

### Merging art and technology

Chungliang Ai Huang, Tai Ji master and founder of the Living Tao Foundation, is the dance star of the show. He and his wife, Suzanne Pierce, were the first artists-in-residence at Krannert Center in 1969. Krannert Center's director, Mike Ross, started talking to Huang about a collaborative project three years ago, says Kikta.

"What I want to see is a marriage between visual and music," says Huang.

Four world-renown musicians—cellists David Darling and Michael Fitzpatrick, harpist Ann Yeung, and flutist Alexander Murray—will join forces for a single performance at Huang's invitation. Huang refers to himself and the musicians as a quintet.

"It's a once in a lifetime chance," he says.

eDream joined in about a year ago, says Cox, and solidified plans last spring. NCSA and Krannert Center have collaborated on sundry projects for nearly two decades.

"We have a good working relationship with Krannert [Center] and visiting artists," says Carpenter.

Cox took a particular interest in the project after a Memorial Day workshop with Huang. The healing aspect of Tai Ji helped her recover from a recent surgery, says Cox.



Chungliang Ai Huang practices his performance for the show "The Tao of Bach."

(photo by Bob Patterson)

Huang is a great collaborator, she says, and provides a lot of creative input and inspiration. She says she has been more involved in this project than usual, especially with design and providing feedback.

### Go with the flow

After the pre-show film, the performance starts cool and calm with Bach's "Air on the G String" and heats up as the fervor builds toward a portion called "Tai Ji Boogie."

"This is really the most fun because we're improvising like mad," Huang says.

The mood ebbs and flows from serene to spirited and back. The musicians reprise "Air on the G String" to bring the concert to a circular close.

Cox promises a surprise at the end of the performance.

"There are so many ingredients that make this a unique event. Not to be missed, as they say." Huang says with a chuckle.

"Hopefully the audience will dance out into the lobby and dance home."

"The Tao of Bach" comes to Tryon Festival Theatre at the Krannert Center for the Performing Arts on September 13 at 7:30 p.m.

Huang also is hosting an interactive panel conversation called "Sage-ing Gracefully" that ties the science of aging and brain function to eastern and western perspectives on wellness. "Sage-ing Gracefully" is scheduled for 5 p.m. September 12.

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Images from a rehearsal of Tao of Bach, which will be performed in the Tyron Festival Theater on Thursday, Sept. 13, 2012



### **Tao of Bach rehearsal**

Photographer: Darrell Hoemann

From left: Ann Yeung, harpist, David Darling, cellist, Al. C Huang, Ta Ji dancer , Alex Murray, flautist, and Michael Fitzpatrick, cellist during a rehearsal of The Tao of Back: A Musical Tai Ji Dance Offering in the Tryon Festival Theater at Krannert Center for Performing Arts on Tuesday, September 11, 2012 for a Thursday night performance.

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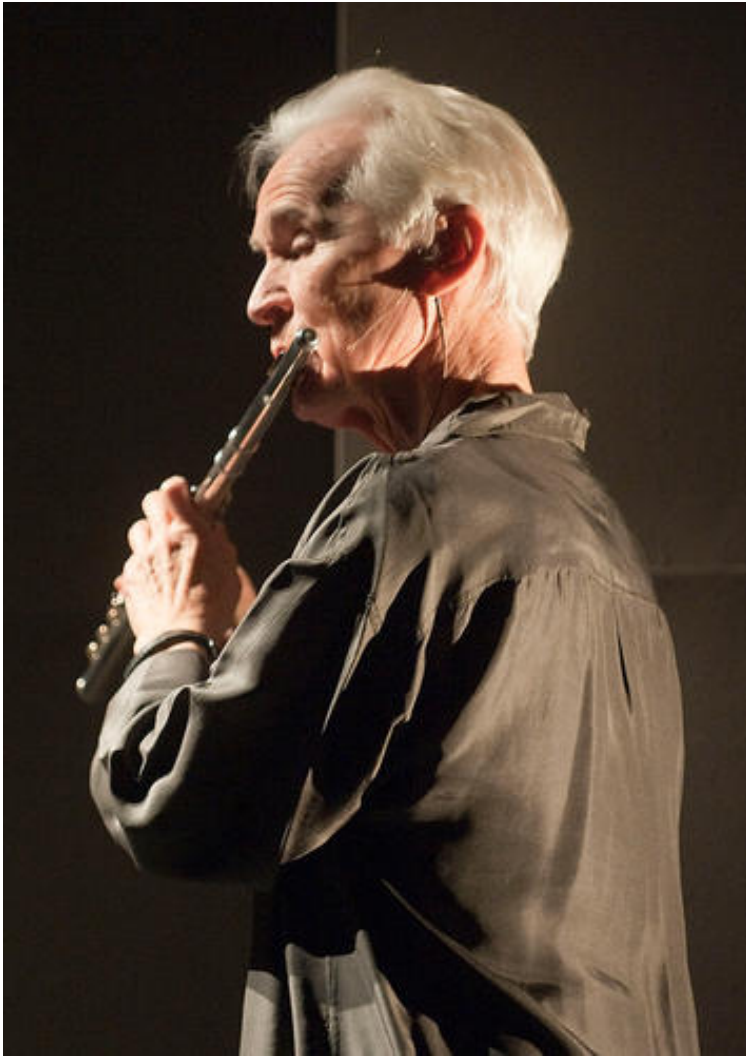
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