

Norman Dance Company imagines colourful cavalcade for Town Square opening



In just a few weeks, the Norman Dance Company will have the distinction of being the opening act for the brand-new Aurora Town Square complex.

‘No sweat on that, right?’ says Tia Liu, Artistic Director of the Norman Dance Company with a chuckle, as she took a look at the newly-completed amenities at Aurora Town Square on Monday morning.

As she toured the new community hub, which is set to open Saturday, September 21, with members of her company, Liu said they are preparing a completely performance showcase to not only set Aurora Town Square in the right direction but kick off the Town’s Multicultural Festival, which will be a cornerstone of the opening weekend festivities.

‘The Norman Dance Company has more than a five-year relationship with the Town, and meeting with Tia, with her ability to curate, choreograph a brand-new piece for this brand-new location just makes it extra special,’ says Shelley Ware, Special Events Coordinator for the Town of Aurora. ‘We pride Town Square in presenting new and unique experiences to the community. This is a brand-new production, so those who come [to the grand opening] will literally see it for the first time in its entirety and that’s what Town Square is about – making these opportunities and possibilities.’

First approached to be a part of the Grand Opening about three years ago, Liu says she knew nearly right off the bat the kind of show she wanted to produce for the occasion.

The theme for their show is *The Four Gentlemen of Flowers*, which she says is ‘very deeply embedded in Chinese culture.’

‘The Four Gentlemen of Flowers in the Chinese literary and art culture is something that has been commonly used by historical poets, painters, artists in general, because, as part of Chinese culture, they believe everything from the elements to materialistic items all complement each other in a full cycle and that includes seasons, colours, and it includes human virtues. These Four Gentlemen of Flowers are seen as the four highest virtues of humanity, ranging from the orchids, the chrysanthemum, the bamboo, which a lot of people probably don’t know bloom flowers, and ume blossoms – these four are kind of the iconic seasonal flowers that have been used throughout the history of China.

‘You’ll see them in a lot of murals, paintings, poets have based their famous works on these particular flowers, and I have also really enjoyed studying these virtues and connecting them to the presence and essence of Chinese classical dance. You find a lot of

similarities and ways to connect the verbal art to the physical art. This is a fun experience and a very fulfilling experience for me to dive in to these two realms of production.?

Liu has been with the Norman Dance Company since 2008.

She was tapped by founder Chan Man-Bun to lead the company after his retirement and, in this role, she has been able to further their efforts to showcase traditional Chinese culture through movement. For her, exploring her creative side through her culture was a way to get closer to her family's history and heritage.

?I am a first generation Canadian-born Chinese and my mom found it really important,? Liu recalls. ?She was very adamant with us learning the language, learning the history. It wasn't very easy to do that back in the 90s and early millennium, wanting to integrate another culture?it's easier said than done ? I want to learn my language, I want to learn my culture's history, but to perform that in real life is definitely not as busy but one of the things that kept me going is I really fell in love with the artistic side of my heritage and culture, which I guess helped me build the confidence and being able to pass that on to the next generations and not shy away from just having to blend in with the current or culture that is surrounding you.?

As she looks ahead to the grand opening performance, she says hopes audiences leave with a better understanding of the virtues represented in The Four Gentlemen of Flowers.

For a full roster of the grand opening festivities for Aurora Town Square, which runs September 21 through October 13, visit boxoffice.auroratownsquare.ca.

By Brock Weir