



**COMPAGNIA TPO:
PANDA'S HOME**

Sunday, April 28, 2019, at 1pm and 3pm
Colwell Playhouse

PROGRAM



COMPAGNIA TPO: PANDA'S HOME

In co-production with Tong Production and Teatro Metastasio Stabile della Toscana

With dance steps, let's follow a Panda . . . his "house" is in a forest as large as all of China. In this imaginary journey, we will travel into China's stories, tradition, and culture. We will encounter bamboo forests, monsters, fireworks, kites. In a simple and intuitive way, we will come to understand how, in Chinese thought, the elements of nature exist in relationship to each other according to a circular movement. It is the theory of the "Five Elements" (Wu Xing) whereby each element is transformed and generates the next one: Wood—Fire—Earth—Metal—Water. Therefore, the Five Elements are a trace followed by the two dancers in order to involve the children in a journey through time and space, across China and its landscapes made of nature, ancient culture, traditions, and songs. On stage, the images and sounds envelop the young spectators in colorful and interactive settings and in pleasant games played in a group with the dancers, making this travel experience unique and immersive.

Compagnia TPO appears by arrangement with:
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TPO AND INTERACTIVE THEATER

Visual, emotional, and immersive theatre. Space is the protagonist in TPO's shows with its images, colors, and sounds. Thanks to the use of interactive technologies, every show is transformed into a sensitive environment where the thin border between art and play can be experienced. Dancers, performers, and the audience itself interact with each other, exploring new expressive forms that go beyond language and cultural barriers.

The work of TPO is a collaborative effort of a multitalented and close-knit team of authors from various disciplines of the visual and performing arts. The shows are characterized by the use of large-format projections, the creation of immersive theater environments, and the use of interactive technologies, some of which are specifically developed by the company for their shows.

The stage space is conceived as a dynamic and reactive environment that can involve the public in individual or group actions; in fact, it is set up with sensors (videocameras and microphones) that allow both the performer and the public to modulate sounds or interact with images through movement or voice. These technologies allow the creation of sensitive theatrical environments where children can explore the stage space, discovering that it responds to their actions in a certain way. Thus, an active relationship ensues between the young people and their environment, a kind of dialogue—with space, forms, and sounds—that becomes artistic experience.

In the TPO's shows, even the performers' roles are imbued with special meaning: the dancers "paint" and "play" on stage, using the body and movement thanks to the interactive effects, but especially, they invite the children to explore the space with a theatrical approach that emphasizes the use of the body and the gaze.

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Artistic Direction

Francesco Gandi and Davide Venturini

Based on an Idea by

Lizhu Ren

Choreography

Daniele Del Bandecca and Martina Gregori

Visual Design

Elsa Mersi

Sound Design

Spartaco Cortesi

Computer Engineering

Rossano Monti

Costumes

Chiara Lanzillotta

Props

Livia Cortesi

Dancers

Valerio Cassa

Valentina Sech

Executive Producer, United States Tour

ArKtype/Thomas O. Kriegsmann

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PROGRAM NOTES

PANDA'S HOME

A journey in China by dance steps/dance-stepping serves as a pretext for getting to know the centuries-old culture, traditions, and stories of the great China. Presenting these themes has allowed us to explore the complexity of traditional Chinese thought and to acquire a different way of thinking and of considering reality. We have seen that in traditional Chinese thought, nature's elements are closely tied to each other by a circular evolution, just as one of the fundamental theories of Chinese philosophy explains. This is the theory of the Five Elements—or better, movements.

The Five Movements or *Wu Xing* or Dynamic Elements play a role of fundamental importance; they are the keystone to understanding all Chinese philosophical thought.

The word *Wu Xing* is composed of the ideogram *Wu*, indicating the number five, and of *Xing*, indicating to move or to walk. Together, the *Wu Xing* means a dynamic and permanent transformation with the Five Elements that each indicate the mode in which these transformations are expressed. Wood generates Fire and through burning creates ashes that decompose into soil. Thus, Fire is the generative element of Earth. Metals are extracted from the Earth, which are dissolved into Water that nourishes plants and trees according to an eternal and unchanging universal law. This is the “sheng” or “creation” cycle, which in traditional Oriental medicine is called the “mother-son” relationship.

In preparing this show, we tried to follow this theory as rigorously as possible; it became a true guideline for our construction of visual framings and sets, choreographies, images, and sound landscapes. By following this trace, the show took on the form of five main parts, each corresponding to one of the elements. Within each part, we created the context to tell a legend or belief from the child's imagination in the Chinese cultural tradition.

A prelude introduces the theme of the journey before the parts—Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal, and Water—are presented. The introduction is devoted to the panda, China's animal symbol and our character guide. During the course of the journey, the small panda will undergo transformation in a playful way to become a means of transport, first as an automobile, then as a ship, train, plane, and finally, a bicycle. He will take us all the way to China, right to the Great Wall. This is where the movement via the five elements begins.

1. WOOD

On stage, Wood is represented by bamboo green, which propagates via its roots to grow slender and flexible.

In synchronic time with the bamboo's sprouting, the stage is also "propagating." From emptiness to fullness. From one element to many elements. Other geometrical stage elements, circular and rectangular, appear on the backdrop, which functions as a projection screen. We watch as first the bamboo starts to sprout and then grows into a forest.

The green and the bamboo represent springtime. Every element also has a correspondent cardinal point, which for the element of Wood is East.

The resulting choreography recalls bamboo's characteristic "flexuous" quality.

2. FIRE

Wood mutates into Fire. The color here is red, the corresponding season is summer, and the cardinal point is South.

Tradition tells us that bamboo canes can be used to make firecrackers and fireworks. These, together with red lanterns and drums, traditionally serve to drive away the arrival of the terrible sea monster Nian who came out of the depths once a year to eat a human being. This is the origin of the red lantern duet and the solo with sticks that is beaten to the ancient rhythm of traditional drums.

3. EARTH

Fire evolves into Earth. This element's corresponding color is yellow.

The Earth in a graph rendering is located at the center of and equidistant from the other elements. Indeed, the Earth contains all the other elements within itself: Wood with the trees' roots, Fire with its incandescent magma, Metal kept in the underground depths, and Water ready to pour forth from the subterranean sources.

In this part, the woman dancer—with the aid of a neutral object, a hoop of cloth that can take on various forms and become a surface for projections—develops a choreography that represents the variations among the four seasons. Her dance gives form to a landscape that we could term "the garden of the four seasons" or of "the four cardinal points."

This section's images contain references to the colors, flowers, and birds that are characteristic of each season.

This landscape introduces us to the representation of a well-known legend that attributes the discovery of silk thread to the princess Lei-Tzu, wife of the Yellow Emperor.

The story goes that while the princess was sipping some warm tea under a shady tree, a cocoon fell into her cup. Intrigued by the thin thread that was strong and shiny as she unwound the cocoon, she was so fascinated that she decided to use it to weave a fabric.

Thanks to its light weight and resistance to wind, silk cloth in ancient times was employed—among other uses—to build kites. Another meaningful element of Chinese culture, kites symbolize the union of earth and sky. They are a recurring presence in some traditional festivals, and here they become a stage object that will accompany us along our walk towards the Great Wall.

The final part of this scene is the onset of nighttime and of the full moon.

Here, we refer to two aspects of Chinese tradition. The first is the festival of the moon or of mid-autumn; in this period, when the moon is perfectly round, families come together and go outside to appreciate the moon's brilliant light and to eat "moon sweets."

The second aspect is the belief that a rabbit lives on the moon—the Jade Rabbit. It is said that it lives under a magic cassia tree making pills of immortality, also known as the elixir of jade.

On stage in this nocturnal setting, we are called upon to play with the moon and the rabbits who live there.

4. METAL

The Earth generates Metal whose color is white and season is autumn. The animal corresponding to Metal is the white tiger.

On stage, the full, round moon is transformed into a gong. When it sounds, leaves fall and the earth is covered by a blanket of autumn leaves. In this space, a choreography inspired by the *Taji Sword* is executed; as the dancer moves, the leaves shift allowing glimpses of the white tiger's coat.

Only at the end of the movement does the dancer reveal the ideogram, which represents Metal. The ideogram is transformed into a bell. First it swings and sounds, then it takes the form of the street game known as "the bell game" on which the children can jump and also play sound. (This game, known as hopscotch in English, is played in many countries around the world, including China.)

The scene ends with another reference to the repertory of traditional songs for children, 小白船 ("Little White Boat"). Here, it appears in a short film format that concludes the episode devoted to Metal and opens the section about Water. We watch as the moon is transformed into a boat, carrying the rabbit and his cassia tree.

5. WATER

From the element of Metal, the action moves on to Water. Its corresponding color is black, its season is winter, and its cardinal point is North.

In a classical source book, *Yue Ling* or *Treatise on the Calendar*, it is written:

. . . The first month of Winter . . . water begins to turn to ice, the earth starts to freeze, the rainbow hides from the people's sight . . . In this month, winter begins once more. This period's supreme virtue is seen in the Water Movement.

The new-fallen snow covers and hides everything. The ice and cold freeze the stage and the dance. Then, slowly and one step at a time, the elements reawaken in a magic thaw.

From under the snow emerge the color and water with its trickles, bringing with them a new life cycle. The bamboo starts to sprout again. The verses of the Chinese poet Du Fu are projected onto the screen:

好雨知时节 当春乃发生
Rain has come just in time,
in spring as if it is wise

These words conclude a full cycle of the five elements and a new one begins. The journey is over, and the playful reappearance of the panda brings the show to its close.

PROFILES

COMPAGNIA TPO was founded in Prato, Italy, in 1981 as a children's theatre company devoted to creating works that are highly visual and multidisciplinary in the use of music, dance, art, sculpture, digital media, computer technology, lighting, and sound. TPO is an award-winning, internationally recognized company that believes in creating dance/theatre works for children that are visual and conceptualized moving paintings, which use movement, artistic objects, mechanical and digital devices, and the interplay of lighting, all geared to a child's eye.

In 1999, Davide Venturini and Francesco Gandi became the artistic directors of TPO. With the emerging technology that has evolved, TPO has grown more and more on the use of digital technology, graphics, and video and how to combine these elements with the more traditional art forms of dance, theatre, and music.

TPO has created new methods of interaction between performers, the audience, and stage spaces by applying computer sensors and triggers to images and sound, and they have found new ways to collaborate with a variety of artists—dancers, actors, directors, musicians, engineers, designers, writers, and illustrators—to create new works. These concepts have created fame and a reputation for TPO throughout Europe, Australia, the United States, South America, and Canada.

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DAVIDE VENTURINI (director) studied sociology at Cesare Alferi University in Florence, Italy. He has been with TPO since 1983. Within it, he has directed productions with an eye to the pedagogical aspects of art, and in particular, the processes of visual communication, emphasizing the value of images and the use in theatre of hi-tech devices. He currently holds the post of TPO author and artistic director.

FRANCESCO GANDI (director) studied at the DAMS Academy in Bologna, Italy. Since 1987, he has conducted his research activity with the TPO in the roles of author, director, and actor. His works typically make prevalent use of images, props, figures, and in his latest productions, technology. He currently holds the post of president of the TPO Cultural Association.

ARKTYPE/THOMAS O. KRIEGSMANN (executive producer, United States tour) is an industry-leading management and production company, specializing in new work development and touring worldwide. His past work includes projects with Mikhail Baryshnikov, Peter Brook, Daniel Fish, Victoria Thi r e-Chaplin, Yael Farber, Anna Deavere Smith, Annie-B Parson and Paul Lazar, Lisa Peterson, Peter Sellars, Julie Taymor, John Cameron Mitchell, and Tony Taccone. He recently served as director of programs at New York Live Arts. Recent premieres include Bryce Dessner's *Triptych (Eyes Of One On Another)* w/Roomful of Teeth, John Cameron Mitchell's *The Origin Of Love Tour*, Kaneza Schaal and Christopher Myers' *Cartography*, Sam Green and Kronos Quartet's *A Thousand Thoughts*, Big Dance Theater/Mikhail Baryshnikov's *Man In A Case*, Nora Chipaumire's *#Punk100%Pop*Nigga*, Nalaga'at Deaf-Blind Theater's *Not By Bread Alone*, The Freedom Theatre of Palestine's *The Siege*, and Byron Au Yong and Aaron Jafferis' *Trigger* based in communities nationwide in recognition of the 10th anniversary of the Virginia Tech massacre. Ongoing collaborations include *600 Highwaymen*, Daniel Fish, Noche Flamenca, Rude Mechs, Adrien M. & Clare B., and Compagnia TPO. Upcoming premieres include Nona Hendryx and Niegel Smith's *Refrigerated Dreams* and Nora Chipaumire's *Nehanda*. You can find more information at arktype.org.