

***“I’m not a professional”*: 77-year-old makes stage dancing debut beside his daughter: Tai Chi enthusiast explores Buddhist concepts of compassion and emptiness in new dance show**

Daughter-father duo Ziyian Kwan and Kwan Lee perform at the Firehall Arts Centre in their first ever collaboration. A Vancouver man is making his professional dancing debut — at age 77. The mantra “better late than never” is one that Kwan Lihuen will take to the stage when he accompanies his daughter, dancer and choreographer Ziyian Kwan, for a live dance and music show that explores the relationship between a father and daughter using concepts drawn from Buddhism.

The show is titled [The Mars Hotel & Kwan Yin](#) — partly named after the goddess of compassion. “I’m not a professional,” Lihuen told host [Sheryl MacKay](#) on CBC’s [North by Northwest](#). “But because of my daughter’s... affirmations, and encouragement, I have become not so afraid — the stage fright is gone.”

The show runs at Vancouver’s [Firehall Arts Centre](#) from Feb 22 to 25. Lihuen was recruited by his daughter for the program when she realised his deep-seated knowledge and interest in Kwan Yin could help her tell a story of love and compassion through dance.

“I’ve been wanting to make a piece that explores the idea of compassion, in particular because I’m not the most patient of people,” said Ziyian Kwan. “While I was in research at The Dance Centre, I invited my father in to help me with some information about Kwan Yin because he’s something of a scholar.”



Ziyian Kwan, Lihuen Kwan

While the two began to explore the history of the Kwan Yin, as well as the fundamental notion of emptiness that spans across the many doctrines of Buddhism, it became clear to Kwan that her father could only help to enrich the onstage performance.

Kwan will perform some of her dance moves, while Lihuen will tap into his Tai Chi skills. "He's also a very, very beautiful mover through years of practicing Tai Chi." Lihuen will showcase some of his Tai Chi moves onstage, as well as singing parts of the Heart Sutra, one of the most popular Buddhist scriptures that explores the nature of 'emptiness'.

"That Heart Sutra, in one sentence, is when you realise that everything is empty — no more suffering," said Kwan Lihuen.

"Kwan Yin, in deep meditation realises that everything is empty. Colour is not different from emptiness, and emptiness is not different from colour," he said. "Sight is empty. Sound is empty. Scent is empty. Taste is empty. Even feelings are also empty."

While it can be hard to make sense of what that emptiness actually means upon reading the Heart Sutra, some scholars interpret it as a deconstruction of the human belief system. The 'emptiness' acknowledges that our experiences aren't as tangible as we might think they are, and that realising this emptiness liberates us from them.

Lihuen still has his doubts about whether coming to the realisation of emptiness could end our perceptions of pain and suffering. Regardless, his daughter says it has definitely shaped the duo's bond.

"I don't think we would have arrived here without allowing some of that emptiness to permeate our relationship," she said.



Ziyian Kwan, Lihuen Kwan