

January 18 - March 31, 2026

Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company Announces "Red Firecracker" Season: A Spectacular Lunar New Year Celebration for Families

Company: Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company
Venue: Various Locations
Location: Various, NA

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The Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company is thrilled to announce the 2026 season of its acclaimed production, Red Firecracker: The Legend of the Lunar New Year. As the world prepares to welcome the Year of the Horse, this spectacular, family-friendly production will tour performing arts centers across New Jersey and Pennsylvania, bringing the rich history and vibrant traditions of the Chinese Lunar New Year to life.

Red Firecracker tells the ancient story of the Nian, a terrifying monster that once descended upon villagers annually, and the ingenious invention—red firecrackers—that the community created to repel it. Choreographed by the late Nai-Ni Chen, this production is a feast for the senses, featuring dazzling props, colorful costumes, mesmerizing music, and the fantastic acrobatics of top-notch performers.

A Deeper Cultural Meaning

The story of the Nian carries a profound double meaning; in Chinese, "Nian" is also the word for "year" or "age." Thus, the legend is not merely about a mythical beast, but an allegory for the universal human fear of aging and loneliness. The production explores how these fears are overcome not in isolation, but through community, shared joy, and the vibrant celebration of life.

"The production serves as an insightful exploration of the historical roots of Chinese Lunar New Year customs," said the company in a statement. "It underscores the significance of coming together to face challenges—whether they be monsters or the passage of time itself—and celebrates the spirit of community."

In ancient times, before the Lunar New Year celebration existed, villagers lived in fear of the Nian monster. Red Firecracker narrates how their prayers were answered and how they used the color red and loud noises to ward off the beast. Today, these traditions continue as people greet each other with "Gung Xi, Gung Xi" (Congratulations) and celebrate the passing of the old year.

Audiences will be transported to a faraway village in ancient China through a series of dynamic dances, including the Coinstick Dance, Long Spear Dance, Ribbon Dance, and the Festival dance, where colorful ribbons symbolize prosperity. The show highlights the intrinsic values of courage, ingenuity, and harmony, making it a perfect educational and entertaining experience for children and adults alike.

2026 Red Firecracker Tour Schedule

The Red Firecracker tour will visit the following venues during the 2026 Lunar New Year season:

January 18, 2026 at 4:00 PM

Jersey City Theater Center at White Eagle Hall, 337 Newark Ave, Jersey City, NJ

February 4–5, 2026

Jay and Linda Grunin Center for the Arts (Ocean County College), Toms River, NJ

February 25, 2026 at 10:00 AM & 12:30 PM

Zoellner Arts Center, Lehigh University, Bethlehem, PA

March 31, 2026, 10:00AM

Arizona State University at Gammage, Tempe, Arizona

About Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company:

"Chen's phrases, part exoskeletal rigidity, part boneless grace, embodied an epic dignity."

- Village Voice

Choreographer/Dancer, Nai-Ni Chen, was a unique artist whose work crosses cultural boundaries. Each of her dances reflect her personal vision as an immigrant and an American female artist with deep roots in Asian culture. From this very personal perspective, she created new works that reflect current issues with global influences. Some of her works were developed in collaboration with renowned artists such as the Ahn Trio, Glen Velez, Joan La Barbara, and the members of the New Asia Chamber Music Society.

Bridging the grace of Asian elegance and American dynamism, the Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company is a premier provider of innovative cultural experiences that reflect the inspiring hope and energy of the immigrant's journey. The company's ground-breaking works have focused on themes from ancient legends that reflect issues of the present time to purely abstract, contemporary dances influenced by a mix of cultures Nai-Ni Chen experienced in New York. An Asian American company that celebrates cross-cultural experience, the Company's productions naturally bring forth issues of identity, authenticity, and equality.

The Company has presented at some of the most prestigious concert halls such as the Joyce Theater, Lincoln Center in New York, and the Tampa Bay Performing Arts Center in Florida. The Company appears annually at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center, Queens College, the College of Staten Island and on Ellis Island. Internationally, the Company has presented at international festivals including Open Look Festival in Russia, the Silesian International Contemporary Dance Festival, the Konfrontations International Festival in Poland, the Chang Mu International Dance Festival in Korea, the Meet in Beijing International Arts Festival in China, and the Tamaulipas International Arts Festival in Mexico.

The Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company has received more than 20 awards from the National Endowment for the Arts and numerous Citations of Excellence and grants from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts. Advancing Dance Education, the Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company is currently in residence in New Jersey City University pioneering a program with the University's A Harry Moore Laboratory School teaching dance to urban children with disabilities. For additional Company information, visit their website, www.nainichen.org; write to Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company, P.O. Box 1121, Fort Lee, NJ 07024; or call (800) 650- 0246.

Programs of the Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company are made possible by the generous support of our Board members, the National Endowment for the Arts, the New Jersey State Council on the Arts/Department of State, a Partner Agency of the National Endowment for the Arts, The Mid-Atlantic Arts Foundation (MAAF), the New Jersey Cultural Trust, the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Kathy Hochul and the New York State Legislature, The New Jersey Arts and Culture Recovery Fund administered by the Princeton Area Community Foundation, the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, the Hyde and Watson Foundation, E.J. Grassman Trust, The Horizon Foundation for New Jersey, New Music USA, the Blanche & Irving Laurie Foundation, Dance/NYC Dance Advancement Fund, the Rapid Response Program of American Dance Abroad, the Association of Performing Arts Presenters' Cultural Exchange Fund, supported by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, PSEG, Proskauer, WAC Lighting, and the Glow Foundation and the Dragon and Phoenix Foundation.

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<https://www.nainichen.org/events>

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