

Lou Reed: A highly celebrated Tai Chi practitioner and promoter

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Lou Reed is practicing Hidden Hand Punch (Yan Shou Hung Quan)

Master Ren Guangyi

I was recently able to interview the world-renowned rock star [Lou Reed](#) and the famed Tai Chi Master [Ren Guangyi](#) in West Village, New York City.

In the late 1960s, [Lou Reed](#) started his career as a guitarist, vocalist and lead songwriter for the legendary [Andy Warhol](#)-sponsored band, [The Velvet Underground](#) (inducted into the [Rock and Roll Hall of Fame](#) in 1996). After that, this avant-garde musician's career took off, and he has been influencing rock music for four decades and continues to reinvent himself. Many music critics consider him as the founding father of punk rock even though he repudiates any affiliation with punk music. He has performed for Pope John Paul II as well as U.S. presidents. This year Lou and his musician wife and performing artist [Laurie Anderson](#) took over [Vivid Sydney/Vivid Live at Sydney Opera House](#) and ran the largest annual festival of music, light and sound (May 27 - June 21) with great success in Australia.

Most of Lou's fans know that he is multi-talented. Outside of his music career as a singer, songwriter, and music radio host ([NY Shuffle](#) on Sirius), he appeared in a few movies either as himself or a fictional character. He is well accomplished in photography ([Emotions in Action](#), [Lou Reed's New York](#), and [Romanticism](#)), poem writing (i.e., his version of *The Raven* and [Laurie Sadly Listening](#)), movie production ([Red Shirley](#)), [martial arts](#) and others.

Lou has been studying martial arts since the 1980s. First he was studying [Eagle Claw](#) and [Wu/Hao Style Tai Chi](#) with [Sifu Leung Shum](#). In 2002, after Sifu Leung retired, through word of mouth, he found Master Ren Guangyi, who is a grand champion and most prominent disciple of Grandmaster [Chen Xiaowang](#), the 19th generation of Chen Family and a lineage holder of [Chen Style Tai Chi](#). Chen Style is the origin of all modern Tai Chi styles. It is the most revered and complete of all Tai Chi styles. Tai Chi's philosophical and medical roots dated back over 2,000 years and it was created by legendary Chen Wangting (1600 – 1680) about 400 years ago in Chen Village (Chenjiagou), Hernan, China. It encompasses spiritual enrichment, body nurturing and martial arts applications. It is a healing art as well as a powerful combat/self-defense martial art. Lou fell in love with it when he saw Master Ren demonstrate it and has devoted himself to it since.

According to Master Ren, Lou grasped complex Tai Chi theory very quickly. He is diligently taking private lessons daily and even practicing on the road. He has learned [Old Frame \(Lao Jia\)](#) Routine One (*Yi Lu*) and Two (*Er Lu*), [New Frame \(Xing Jia\)](#) Routine One and Two, [Chen Style 19 Form](#) (created by Grandmaster Chen Xiaowang), [Chen Style 21 Form](#) (created by Master Ren), [Push-Hands](#), [Chin Na \(Joint Lock\)](#), straight sword, broad sword and many other weapons including the challenging *Guan Dao*. *Guan Dao* is a long staff with a broad sword at one end and a spear at the other end. It is extremely difficult to practice and requires a high-level internal energy Qi, powerful muscle strength and a strong core. And it happens that *Guan Dao* is Lou's favorite. Chen Tai Chi practitioners know that "Punching Toward the Ground" (*Ji Di Chui*) is punching the right fist downwards to the left knee height; some advanced students can punch all the way down to the floor. But Lou touches the ground with his elbow. That's totally awesome (see the slide show)! To any talented Tai Chi practitioner, learning so many forms in eight years is remarkable and is an outstanding accomplishment.

But Lou's Tai Chi accomplishments are beyond the form study. His understanding and interpretation of Tai Chi enables him to compose songs for it. In April 2007, he completed [Hudson River Wind Meditations](#), his first record of [ambient](#) music for Tai Chi and meditation. When I first listened to it, it seemed different and a bit odd. Once I settled down and focused on my practice, it has an amazing calming effect and is very spiritual. In July 2010, Reed, Master Ren, guitarist [Sarth Calhoun](#) and director/producer Scott Richman released [Power and Serenity: The Art of Master Ren GuangYi](#) - a 70-minute Chen Style Tai Chi instructional DVD featuring six new music tracks composed and performed by Reed and Calhoun.

After eight years of study with Master Ren, Lou Reed's health shines. Now he is energetic and healthy.

His eyes radiate with brilliance. At age 68, he is busier than ever with shows and exhibitions around the world nonstop. He thinks that **every hospital and clinic should offer Tai Chi classes to fundamentally change people's health.**

According to him, Tai Chi has benefits in every conceivable way. He thinks that is the best thing “you can do for yourself.” Why? Tai Chi can cultivate and nourish the vital energy Qi which is essential for life. To raise the awareness of Tai Chi, he has been passionately promoting Tai Chi and Master Ren tirelessly since 2003. He has invited Master Ren to perform on stage with his band. He even made personal introduction to Master Ren and Tai Chi. They have been touring together on more than 150 shows including a [Hal Willner](#) produced Halloween performance-art extravaganza devoted to [Edgar Allan Poe](#) (Los Angeles), the 2006 Winter Olympic Games Opening (Torino, Italy), the David Letterman Show, Carnegie Hall (New York), and Vivid Live. He also narrated Master Ren's teaching video [Chen Taijiquan \(Tai Chi\) Lao Jia Yi Lu & Straight Sword](#).

“Unfortunately, young people (in this country) do not understand Tai Chi,” Lou lamented. Chen Style Tai Chi is dynamic and has so much explosive power. To prove a point he showed me a clip of Grandmaster Chen's Fa Jing video (click [here](#)) from YouTube on iPad. Watching Grandmaster Chen unleash his internal power and throwing strikes with his fist, elbow, or shoulder, or kick, Lou repeatedly expressed his enthusiasm at the incredible nature of Tai Chi.

SUGGESTED LINKS

- **It was hard!!!**
- **Are you practicing Taichi Chuan or Taichi Cao?**



Violet Li

Tai Chi Examiner