

AROUND TOWN

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Paradise lost

Cloud Gate Theater celebrates its 35th anniversary with 'Whisper of Flowers,' a dark examination of the end of youth

BY DIANE BAKER
STAFF REPORTER



PHOTOS: CNA AND COURTESY OF LIU CHEN-HSIANG

PERFORMANCE NOTES:

WHAT: Cloud Gate Dance Theater, *Whisper of Flowers*

WHEN: Oct. 3 to Oct. 11 at 7:45pm, Sunday matinees on Oct. 5 and Oct. 12 at 2:45pm; Oct. 17 and Oct. 18 at 7:30pm (Taichung); and Oct. 24 and Oct. 25 at 7:30pm (Tainan)

WHERE: National Theater (國家戲劇院), 21-1, Zhongshan S Rd, Taipei City (台北市中山南路21-1號); Taichung Chungshan Hall (台中市中山堂), 98 Hsuehshi Rd, Taichung City (台中市學士路98號); Tainan Municipal Cultural Center (台南市立文化中心), 332, Chunghua E Rd, Sec 3, Tainan City (台南市中華東路三段332號)

TICKETS: NT\$400 to NT\$2,000 for the Taipei performances, NT\$300 to NT\$1,200 for Taichung and Tainan; available through NTCH ticketing at www.artsticket.com.tw

Birthdays and anniversaries are a time to reflect on past glories and look to the future. Cloud Gate Dance Theater (雲門舞集) founder and artistic director Lin Hwai-min (林懷民) has done just that by presenting a revival of his acclaimed 1998 production *Moon Water* (水月) and creating a new work, *Whisper of Flowers* (花語), to mark his troupe's 35th anniversary.

All five performances of *Moon Water* at the National Theater were gone by early August. There are still tickets left in almost all price ranges for *Whispers*, however, though by the time the Taipei run opens in two weeks, most of the shows are likely to be sold out.

It's understandable that *Moon Water* tickets went so fast. The piece was an immediate hit when it premiered in Taipei, and has been in demand by international festival programmers ever since.

Set to Russian cellist Mischa Maisky's recordings of Johann Sebastian Bach's *Six Suites for Solo Cello*, *Moon Water* is the apotheosis of Lin's incorporation of taichi movements into his choreographic vocabulary. It is both a meditation on taichi and a meditation itself, with the dancers' slow movements requiring intense effort while giving the illusion of being effortless.

The set by Austin Wang (王孟超) and lighting design by Chang Tsan-tao (張贊樞) were equally stunning, resulting in a stage that is transformed into a moonlit pond (and one that requires a huge network of hoses to send water rippling over the stage, warmed so that the dancers don't catch a chill).

As a birthday bonus, Maisky will be performing live on stage on Sept. 29 and Sept. 30, something Lin said took years to arrange.

"Several festivals tried over the years to get us together but our schedules conflicted. I sent a [*Moon Water*] DVD to Maisky and he loved it. He came last year [to Taipei], so we met, talked about working together

and then he went home and pushed his schedule, changed things," Lin said. "He was supposed to go on a cruise with his family; he cut his vacation short to do this before he goes to Tokyo."

"The dancers are excited, but at the same time you can't ask musicians to do everything exactly the same; it [Maisky's performances] makes it very exciting ... the breathing is going to be beautiful. CDs don't breathe," Lin said.

"Mischa is going to play downstage right in a spotlight ... he's going to be a visual counterpoint" to the dancers, who always travel left to right in *Moon Water*, Lin said.

As excited as Lin is about the collaboration with Maisky, he admitted he has mixed feelings about *Moon Water*, which the company took on tour to the UK, Italy and Spain this spring, and will perform in Greece in late November.

"I really want to retire it but it's scheduled through 2011; it's going to be in the Vancouver Winter Olympics. This year is the year of *Moon Water*, we're performing it throughout Europe and UK, whether I like it or not," he said.

Whisper of Flowers, Lin said, could be seen as a prequel to *Moon Water*, and not just because he returned to the Bach suites for the score.

"When I finished *Moon Water* I thought there was so much beautiful music I didn't use," he said.

However, he didn't set out to create a bookend to *Moon Water*. He dropped two ideas for a new piece, even though they had gotten to the point of working on sets. Then the idea for *Whisper* came to him when Cloud Gate was in Portugal to perform at the Sintra Festival in June last year.

"We went to a park, there were red camellia trees, huge, three stories high. We went there after a rain, the petals were all on the ground like a carpet, shinning on the green. I decided to drop everything and concentrate on this," he said.

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