

FEATURES

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SATURDAY, APRIL 4, 2009

Cloud Gate 2 at 10

The young choreographers and dancers of Cloud Gate's sister company are gearing up for a big spring tour

BY DIANE BAKER
STAFF REPORTER

Cloud Gate Dance Theatre's (雲門舞集) second company, Cloud Gate 2, turns 10 this year, and it is clearly working hard to establish a reputation as strong as that of its big sister. Just how well it is doing will be on display in its Spring Riot tour, which begins next Friday at Taipei's Novel Hall.

The starring role in production has been given to Cloud Gate 2's resident guest choreographer Cheng Tsung-lung (鄭宗龍) new work, *The Wall* (牆).

The 32-year-old Cheng has held the post for three years, and his works for the company have become progressively more challenging.

The 21-minute *The Wall*, set to Michael Gordon's *Weather One*, is fast-paced, circles within circles. Cheng's dancers often appear isolated, emotionless; there is little, if any, eye contact between the dancers, or with the audience.

"This music has so much emotion, but still it's minimal. I keep telling them, 'No emotion in the face, the emotion is in every movement and the music. You put it together [and it] creates the emotion. You don't need to do angry, don't need to do sad,'" Cheng said after a press rehearsal in Jingmei on March 22.

"I like a big distance. Maybe it's inside [of me], maybe I'm scared, maybe I don't want to say too much. I like the wall; I feel safe," he said.

The Wall is so fast, one has to wonder if Cheng is trying to kill the dancers.

"I hope so," Cheng said with a laugh. "When I'm the choreographer I'm always confused and crazy. I don't know why [or] what can I do. Maybe the bar [my standard] is too high."

TOUGH ACT TO FOLLOW

His bar maybe high, but it's paying off. Cheng was off two



days later for New York City with the other members of Horse Dance Theater (馬舞劇場) to perform *Bones* this week at the Joyce Theater as part of Eliot Feld's Mandance Project. From New York he heads to Hong Kong, where the arts school will be doing his piece *White Tape*, before coming back for Spring Riot.

Another member of Horse is dancer/choreographer Huang Yi (黃翊), whose *Body, Sound* (身音) was such a hit for Cloud Gate 2 last year. Huang may be only 25 but he has been making waves on the dance scene for several years.

His new work is *Flow* (流魚), set to Greek avant-garde composer Iannis Xenakis' *Shaar*, which has a very horror movie feel to it. Huang said Feld turned him on to Xenakis.

"Two years ago Horse went to New York to do *Velocity* at the Joyce. After the show Eliot Feld invited us to his house for a party. He played some music that he really loved and that's when I first heard Xenakis, it really touched me," Huang said. "I've already used this music two times before. It's like people screaming, like people going crazy. I hope the audience can see the dancers panicking. It's like the people in Taiwan now, they're very unsure."

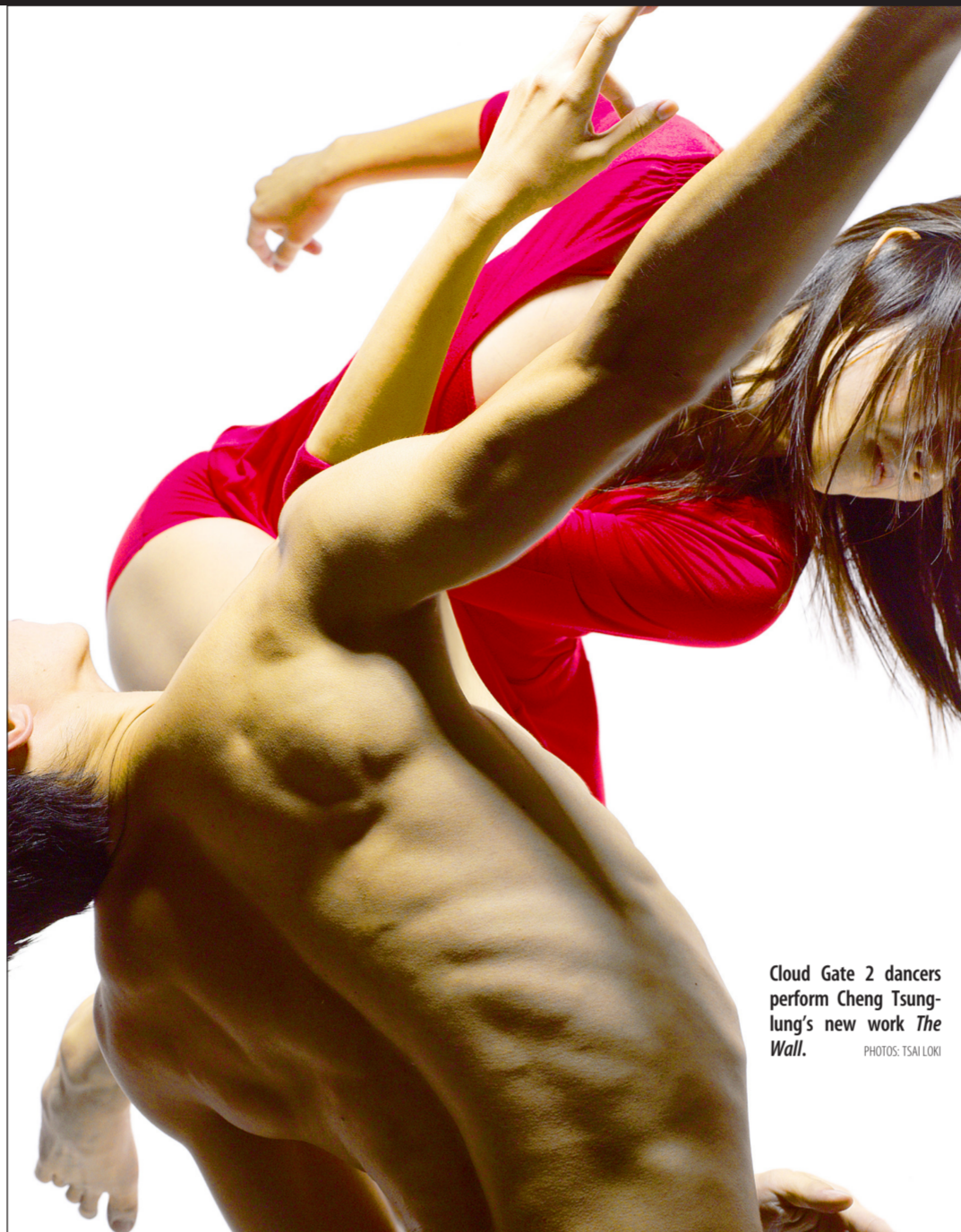
"He [Xenakis] was also an architect so his music was very harsh. His sketches are very clear and sharp. Each of the sketches is a different concept of music. He gave me a lot of ideas ... helped me think of the organic structure to movement," Huang said.

In *Flow*, dancers gather in small groups, and then quickly scatter. The Chinese title for Huang's piece is "Flowing Fish." "It's like throwing a stone into a group of fish; they scatter but then return," he said.

Huang credits Feld with helping him define what it means to be a choreographer. "I'm very thankful I could talk with Eliot Feld. He reminded my why I want to dance. I love the movement. I hope I can make a language from the movement, that it will pay off," he said.

'PURE DANCE'

Flow is a departure from Huang's earlier work, in which technology played a key role. Cloud Gate founder Lin Hwai-



Cloud Gate 2 dancers perform Cheng Tsung-lung's new work *The Wall*. PHOTOS: TSAI LORU

min (林懷民) said last year that he wanted Huang to leave the toys alone and get back to basics. This year Huang has.

"This piece is my first physical dance. This time for the first time it's pure dance," Huang said.

Also on the Spring Riot program are works by Lin, Cloud Gate 2's late artistic director Lo Man-fei (羅曼非) and Ku Ming-shen (古名伸).

Lin's piece *Spring Breeze* (聖春風) is set to a popular Taiwanese love song. It's a very beautiful song, he said, about yearning and about Taipei's bright young things, the kind who hang around Taipei 101. But the dance subverts the song's lyrics.

"Young ladies, urban babies — they are so cool, but do they still have that tender spot?" Lin said in a phone interview.

"It's about youth, confusion, yearning but you don't know what [you're yearning] for," he said. "It's played by Stephen Hough. He's a beautiful pianist from London. When he was at the National Concert Hall last year he played this song as an encore."

Lin described Lo's 2005 *All About Love* (愛情), which is set to the music of Georges Bizet and Rachel Portman, as "tango-ish."

"It's about youth, long legs, flirting. Of course they are not going to do the tango, but it has that flavor. It's very bright and fast, very lively," he said.

Lin has long been a fan of choreographer and Contact

Improvisation proponent Ku. Her piece, *Isthmus* (鹹墨之島), set to extracts from four Anton Vivaldi concertos, was first performed by Ku and John Mead at the Experimental Theater in 1993. Lin quickly picked it up for Cloud Gate Dance Theater, which performed it less than a year later on the main stage at the National Theater. Now he has added it to Cloud Gate 2's repertoire.

"Ku is really a contemporary master," Lin said. "Ku's piece is about a couple and table. But the table could be a house, a bed, anything."

BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

Lin founded Cloud Gate 2 to foster young choreographers and develop an outreach program to promote dance nationwide. The troupe performs on stage as well as at school gymnasiums, playgrounds and hospital lobbies. It gives dozens of workshops a year.

Cloud Gate 2 has become a proving ground for young dancers. The Jingmei press rehearsal on March 22 doubled as a birthday party, with former members invited back to celebrate. Looking at everyone lining up for a group photo, I was struck by the number of ex-members who have gone on to careers with companies both at home and abroad.

"It's been 10 years. This is one of the few companies [in Taiwan] where you work every

day," Lin said. "I'm very happy they have done so much, that the artistic level [of the group] is lifted."

"I'm building up a company, I'm not babysitting," he said.

PERFORMANCE NOTES:

WHAT: Cloud Gate 2, Spring Riot 2009

WHEN: April 10 and April 11 at 7:30pm; April 12 at 2:30pm; April 15 to April 18 at 7:30pm; April 19 at 2:30pm

WHERE: Novel Hall (新舞台), 3-1 Songshou Rd, Taipei City (台北市松壽路3-1號)

ADDITIONAL

PERFORMANCES:

April 24 at 7:30pm and April 25, 2:30pm at the Performance Hall of the Cultural Affairs Bureau of Hsinchu County (新竹縣文化局演藝廳), 146 Siancheng 9th Rd, Jhubei, Hsinchu County (新竹縣竹北市縣政九路146號).

May 1 at 7:30pm and May 2 at 2:30pm at Taichung Chungshan Hall (台中市中山堂), 98 Syuehsi Rd, Taichung City (台中市學士路98號); May 8 at 7:30pm and May 9 at 2:30pm at the Chih-teh Hall, Kaohsiung Cultural Center (高雄市文化中心至德堂), 67 Wufu 1st Rd, Kaohsiung City (高雄市五福一路67號)

ADMISSION: NT\$300 to NT\$1,200, available through NTCH ticketing or online at www.artsticket.com, www.cloudgate.org, tw/cg/ticket

[PERFORMANCE]

'Journey' charts new territory in Chinese music

BY IAN BARTHOLOMEW
STAFF REPORTER

The Chai Found Music Workshop (采風樂坊) has spent years pushing the boundaries of traditional Chinese music. It is not alone in this, but it is unusual among local groups in emphasizing the academic rather than folk music aspects of this endeavor. Its most recent work, *The Journey of the Monkey King* (西遊記), combines an original new score by composer Huang Cheng-ming (黃正銘) with drama and action created by director Li Shao-ping (李小平) to tell the classic Chinese story of the monkey king's journey with Tripitaka to India to obtain sacred Buddhist texts.

Huang, who is also the artistic director of Chai Found Music Workshop, has been actively seeking new ways to create opportunities for the presentation of contemporary Chinese music compositions. In 2005, the group achieved considerable acclaim for its production of *Ambush! — An Instrumental Musical* (四面埋伏), which presented stories from the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (三國演義) using a traditional string and woodwind ensemble, augmented by drums, dance and multimedia.

The Journey of the Monkey King takes this a step further, striving to a higher degree of integration between the music and action. This is achieved by having musicians suddenly standing forward to represent characters in the story, and by the use of unconventional instruments such as bamboo staves used for percussion. The staff is the monkey king's signature weapon, and while it was necessary to have it feature as a prop, Li said he didn't want to have performers simply swirling a staff as part of a dance sequence. "In traditional Chinese opera performances, such staff twirling is an acrobatic feat in itself. We would simply not be up to scratch," Li said. The performers on stage are primarily musicians, not trained dancers, and Li acknowledged that in choreographing the movements on stage, he had to take account of this. "The performers may not be as agile as trained opera performers, but they have an intimate understanding of the music, and as long as they can feel the movement of the music as they move, they will not be any less graceful," Li said.

DANCING MUSICIANS

Most of the action on stage is not as physically demanding as one might expect from professional dancers, but the producers have achieved a remarkable job in creating seamless transitions between music and movement. Speaking about choreographing the work, Li, who has worked extensively in opera, said that it was simply a case of knowing what was possible.

The new production starts off with an interpretation of the main characters in the novel *Journey to the West* (西遊記), a development from the narrative presentation seen in *Ambush*. "This was part of the appeal of *Journey to the West*," Huang said. "For *Ambush*, there was an historical element that restricted what we could do, but with *Monkey King*, which is basically a fantasy, the potential for innovation was greater."

In an early movement in which the monkey king is introduced, a juggler working with a glass ball accompanies the music, presenting in a visual form the infinite mutations of the monkey king's mind, following on from a movement in which performers move about the stage in monkey-like fashion, adding a sense of playfulness to the musical portrait of the monkey king.

The music itself, which is a contemporary take on traditional Chinese orchestral music, draws on the ensemble's strong command of traditional instruments such as the *guzheng* (古箏), a kind of zither, the *pipa* (琵琶), a kind of lute, *erhu* (二胡), flute and *yangqi* (揚琴), a kind of dulcimer. Drums, cymbals and other traditional percussion instruments also play a part. Given that Chai Found Music Workshop is as much at home with contemporary music as with traditional music, having participated in events such as the Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival and Berlin's MaerzMusik Festival, the music is difficult to categorize, drifting from traditional folk melodies into complex atonal forms and at moments of high action, creating a wall of noise that any rock group would be proud of.

The Journey of the Monkey King looks set to repeat the success of *Ambush* and offers an original reworking of the material from a famous tale. It should appeal to a wide audience through its combination of the visual and musical, and will also show off the enormous potential of Chinese orchestral music.

PERFORMANCE NOTES:

WHAT: The Journey of the Monkey King by Chai Found Music Workshop

WHEN: Today and tomorrow at 7:30pm and tomorrow at 2:30pm

WHERE: National Theater, Taipei City

TICKETS: NT\$300 to NT\$2,000, available through NTCH ticketing or online at www.artsticket.com

[ENVIRONMENT]

Cleaning up our act

Conservationist Peter Raven will give a lecture today on the importance of maintaining the planet's biodiversity

BY NOAH BUCHAN
STAFF REPORTER

Leaders from the world's most powerful countries met in London this week to address the global economic meltdown. Much like solving the financial crisis, business and political leaders must unite to reverse the rapid extinction of the planet's biodiversity. That's the point botanist and conservationist Peter H. Raven made at a symposium in Washington earlier this year and it's also the topic he will address today in a lecture titled *Are We Saving Them or Ourselves? Global Action on the Rescue of Endangered Biodiversity*. The talk will be held at the National Central Library as part of the Lung Ying-tai Cultural Foundation's (龍應台文化基金會) MediaTek lectures and will be conducted in English with simultaneous interpretation in Mandarin.



Botanist and conservationist Peter Raven has been feted by *Time* magazine as a "Hero for the Planet." PHOTO COURTESY OF LUNG YING-TAI CULTURAL FOUNDATION

"The economy is a wholly owned subsidiary of the environment. We can't ... rebuild the economy and then hope to turn to environmental problems later," Raven said.

Raven, who has visited Taiwan on several occasions and has worked with the Academia Sinica's Biodiversity Research Center, says the nation has to protect its flora and fauna.

"Microchips will not sustain the economy of [Taiwan] over the long run, but biodiversity might, and certainly will continue to be an important element," he wrote in an e-mail.

Hailed by *Time* magazine as a "Hero for the Planet" for his conservation work, Raven is at the forefront of research on preserving endangered plants and animals. He is president of the Missouri Botanical Garden, was home secretary of the US National Academy of Sciences for 12 years and was recently appointed to the National Geographic Society's board of trustees. He obtained a doctorate in botany from the University of California, Los Angeles in 1960 and holds honorary degrees from a number of universities around the world.

The lecture will be moderated by Li Chia-wei (李家維), editor-in-

chief of the Taiwanese edition of *Scientific American* (科學人) and professor at National Tsinghua University.

LECTURE NOTES:

WHO: Peter H. Raven

WHAT: MediaTek Lectures: Are We Saving Them or Ourselves? Global Action on the Rescue of Endangered Biodiversity

WHERE: National Central Library Conference Hall (國家圖書館國際會議廳), 20 Zhongshan 5 Rd, Taipei City (台北市中山南路20號)

WHEN: Today from 2pm to 4pm

TICKETS: Free, but those attending must register in advance by calling (02) 3322-4907 online at www.civictaipei.org. The lecture is conducted in English with simultaneous interpretation in Mandarin



Chai Found Music Workshop's *Journey of the Monkey King* is an original reworking of the classic Chinese tale. PHOTO COURTESY OF CHAI FOUND MUSIC WORKSHOP