

[ ARTS AND CULTURE ]

## Tomorrow has arrived

*It looked like last year's triumphant Novel Hall Dance series would be difficult to top, but the lineup for this edition sets the bar even higher*

BY DIANE BAKER  
STAFF REPORTER

The Novel Hall Dance series is celebrating its 10th anniversary this year with an eclectic program that spans the world music and dance genres. It was always going to be hard to top last year's program — the astounding visit by the Paul Taylor Dance Company in October — but for sheer diversity, this series' line-up may excel. There is a pair of New York-based Japanese modern dancers working with a troupe of young Cambodian artists, an award-winning British choreographer's fast-moving dance troupe and a very young (13) flamenco prodigy.

“Mr Lin [Hwai-min (林懷民), founder and artistic director of Cloud Gate Dance Theatre and Novel Hall Dance] said the focus this year was on ‘young, new and tomorrow,’” said Elaine Huang (黃麗嫻), public relations manager of Novel Hall in a telephone interview. “So the Cambodian students with Eiko and Koma represent the young, Wayne McGregor represents the new and El Yiyu will certainly have many tomorrows.”

Huang also said it was appropriate to open this year's series with the renowned performance duo Eiko Otake and Takashi Koma Otake, since they had been in the series' inaugural program.

Eiko and Koma have been breaking barriers since they met as university students in Tokyo when they joined the Tatsumi Hijikata company in 1971 and left their law and political science studies behind.

They quickly formed an exclusive partnership and began performing in Tokyo before moving to Germany to study modern dance with Manja Chmiel. They used Amsterdam as a base to tour Europe for a few years before settling down in New York. Over their careers they have incorporated video, musicians, paintings and landscape into their works, and developed a reputation for outdoor performances, all in an effort to break through the confines of traditional theater and reach a wider audience.

They have collected numerous fellowships, performance awards and other honors and in 1996 they became the first partnership to be awarded one of the MacArthur Foundation “genius” fellowships.

In 2004, Eiko and Koma began what has become a very fruitful collaboration with students and graduates of the Reyum Institute of Arts and Culture in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, a nongovernmental organization. They had been invited to the school after one of its founders saw them perform in New York.

A month-long workshop at the school led to the creation of *Cambodian Stories: An Offering of Painting and Dance*, which premiered in 2006, and *Cambodian Stories Revisited* in 2007.

In *Cambodian Stories*, the pair perform with young Cambodian painters and dancers to a score by Cambodian-American musician Sam-Ang Sam that mixes Cambodian popular songs and instrumental music.

The piece opens with a bare stage covered in sand, decorated with panels of traditional Cambodian dancers and strung with blank canvases. The young dancer/artists create their own landscape as they tell a story about their lives, love and painting.

From Cambodia, the Novel Hall Dance series moves to contemporary British dance, with McGregor's Random Dance troupe performing *Entity* from May 22 to May 24, and finishes up with El Yiyu in *New Flamenco Generation* from June 5 to June 7.

### PERFORMANCE NOTES:

**WHAT:** Eiko and Koma, *Cambodian Stories*  
**WHEN:** Tonight and tomorrow at 8pm, Sunday at 3pm  
**WHERE:** Novel Hall (新舞臺), 3-1 Songshou Rd, Taipei City (台北市松壽路3-1號)  
**TICKETS:** NT\$500 to NT\$2,000, available through ERA ticketing or online at [www.ticket.com.tw](http://www.ticket.com.tw)



PHOTO COURTESY OF EIKO AND KOMA

### PERFORMANCE NOTES:

**WHAT:** Klaus Obermaier's *Apparition II*

**WHEN:** Tonight and tomorrow at 7:45pm, Sunday at 2:30pm

**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)

**TICKETS:** NT\$400 to NT\$2,500; available through NTCH ticketing or online at [www.artsticket.com.tw](http://www.artsticket.com.tw)

# Modern dance's brave new world

Austrian composer and multimedia artist Klaus Obermaier had National Concert Hall audiences enthralled in March when he joined forces with the National Symphony Orchestra and guest conductor Brad Lubman to present his *Le Sacre du Printemps* — *Interactive 3D Media Dance*.

The mix of Igor Stravinsky's score, Austrian ballerina Julia Mach's lithe body, the technology created by Ars Electronica Futurelab in Austria and Obermaier's fertile brain was mind-blowing and left audiences hungry for more.

Luckily, New Aspect had already booked Obermaier into the National Theater this month with another of his multi-media productions, *Apparitions II*, created in 2006.

The hourlong show combines live performance — by dancers Desiree Kongerod and Matthew Smith — with real-time video projections, motion-capture technology and a soundscape by Obermaier. It expands on *Apparition*, which was created in 2004 with Smith as the sole performer.

In *Apparition II*, Smith and Kongerod not only interact with each other and the projections created by Obermaier, they also serve as the canvas for the electronic imagery. The motion tracking system feeds the dancers' outlines to a computer, which then calculates the speed, direction and intensity needed for the visual projections, as well as the volume of the music. Smith and Kongerod not only influence what the other is doing, but the music and visuals as well.

During his visit to Taipei in March, I asked Obermaier about his creative process and *Apparition II*.

**Taipei Times:** You are described as a musician, artist, director and choreographer. How do you define your role?

**Obermaier:** I studied music and visual arts at the same time. When I was 14 years old I decided to become a painter, but there was always the music. It came together by going into performing arts.

I was always thinking about how to present yourself, even when I was just beginning to learn the guitar. So it was natural to work with dancers. I see stage design as a visual art form. Working with



*Austrian multi-media maestro Klaus Obermaier left audiences clamoring for more in March. He returns this weekend with 'Apparition II'*

BY DIANE BAKER  
STAFF REPORTER

performers I became more and more interested in choreography.

I don't feel these are different jobs, for me it's perfectly natural. It's an integrated process that I enjoy very much. I don't have to wait on others.

I even do some programming, not the hard-core, like C++, but the video, just because I'm interested in it. All these things are equally important. A choreographer who wants to add something first does the choreography, then adds the new technology. For classical music, the music is the most important thing and then they add something else. But for me, it is different. It's not adding an extra. When I'm doing this, everything is completely

integrated, completely equal. That's what interests me. This is a totally different view, but you have to do it this way, it's perfectly natural.

### TT: How do you choose your projects?

**Obermaier:** Usually I have some idea that I work on, and then someone comes along and asks me to do something. I had the staging for *Sacre* and then the director of the Bruckner Festival asked me to do something with *Sacre*. I am always surprised by this. Someone always asks me. I enjoy working by myself and then someone comes along and says, “we have to stage this.” I'm not interested if someone asks me to do a video for them. I'm lucky enough I can do it this way, I must say.

### TT: What inspires you?

**Obermaier:** Usually the content of the project, the story. I don't do narrative projects, but there is a narrative. *D\*V\*E\** was about new technology and bodies. That was interesting on one person, but would not have been with five people. *Vivisector* was a totally different thing — how virtual stories [videogames] are changing how we behave, how we look, the speed. This was a kind of experiment so it made sense to have more people. *Apparition* is about interaction. The immediate idea was to have a man and a woman and an interactive system. *Sacre* is about the sacrifice of a woman, it's one dancer and the audience are the masses. So the choice is quite simple, the idea is very clear from the beginning.

### TT: How long does it take you to develop a project?

**Obermaier:** It took one year to develop this production [*Apparition II*]. It's very similar to when two persons are dancing on stage; they don't always see each other. If you have a digital system, it's a real performing partner. Sometimes dancers, one jumps or when one is holding you, you have to trust them. This digital system, you know it, you trust it, so there is not much difference with this digital system and a human partner.

It is also an interesting thing with *Apparition II* is that it doesn't tell a story, it's about interaction. I created different situations and then had to work with these contexts. It's about communication, interactivity by itself.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF NEW ASPECT