

AROUND TOWN

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 2009

13

U-Theatre's newest production shines the spotlight on the troupe's younger members

BY DIANE BAKER
STAFF REPORTER

Since U-Theatre (優劇場) returned to its rebuilt Laoquanshan (老泉山) home in Muzha (木柵) three years ago, the company resumed its tradition of a yearly mountain festival, where its fans could enjoy the same scenery and atmosphere that has long inspired the Zen-centric drumming troupe.

Next week, the company is opening up its mountain base for three performances of its latest work, *The Message* (喂!向前走). As is frequently the case with the troupe, the foundation of its new work sprang from the creative mind of drumming director Huang Chih-chun (A-dan, 黃誌群). This time, however, it was a particularly vivid dream, rather than his poetry, that inspired the production.

Company founder and artistic director Liu Ruo-yu (劉若瑀) said *The Message* is a three-part story, just as A-dan's dream had unfolded.

In part one, A-dan dreamed that someone was moving an old statue of the Buddha and he began shouting, "move him back to the center," she said. In the second part, A-dan was walking in a forest, where he encountered a sleeping lion tied to a tree by a rope, a wolf and a bear. He tried to climb a tree to escape the bear but a voice told him he didn't belong in the tree so he fell down. In part three, there was an elaborate funeral procession for a Tibetan rinpoche, but without the coffin, she said.

Huang said he couldn't believe how clear and precise the dream was and how easy it was to



PHOTOS COURTESY OF U-THEATRE

translate it into a stage production.

"This dream made him start thinking about death," Luo said. "I told him, 'Right now something is unstable in you, not dangerous yet, but there is something. I think this dream is telling him to find the way more clearly,'" she said.

"A-dan's only purpose in life is to be enlightened, but daily life keeps getting in the way — performing, the company, family — it's hard to find balance in life," she said of her husband. "You can feel satisfied in what you are doing but it's not the way you are supposed to be going."

The message may have come in a dream to A-dan, but Luo feels there is a message for everyone, hence the title. There are questions, she said, for life: Where do we go? What does the universe hold for us? What does this life mean for each of us?

Luo said she thought the forest segment of the dream would be especially interesting for children, so she wanted to get the troupe's youth group more involved in the production.

The youth training program, which was launched seven years ago, now has more than 50

youngsters, ranging from junior-high to high-school students, who learn drumming, martial arts, music and dance. However, only the older students will take part in next weekend's performances.

"One of the boys will be the wolf, he's very good at jumping, one boy is a monkey, a girl is a bird," Luo said. "Using the kids makes it more like a play. They give more possibilities for our performances."

The youngsters' teachers have also pitched in, contributing some of the choreography and staging, which was great for Luo, Huang and the rest of the company because the last few months have been very hectic ones for the perennially on-the-go troupe. They have been working on-and-off this year with American theater director Robert Wilson for next year's premiere of *1433* at the National Theater, they performed at the Deaflympics' opening and closing ceremonies in Taipei and they have been preparing for tonight's performance with the Changhua Prison Guwu Percussion Troupe at Changhua County Stadium.

This is also why there are only three parts in *The Message* for U-Theatre's adult members, the

rest of the time the focus is on the kids.

There will be just three nighttime performances of *The Message*, because of the need for more stage lighting than the troupe usually uses. Given the recent cool temperatures and the outdoor venue, audience members should go prepared for a chilly evening. Bundle up and don't forget to take flashlights (the path from the road up to the performance space is narrow and bumpy and dimly lit) and a flask of hot tea would not be amiss.

The U-Theatre compound is hard to find and parking on the road is limited, so the company has organized shuttle buses to and from two MRT stations — Qizhang and Muzha Zoo — and strongly urges audience members to take advantage of the service. There will be signs and U-Theatre staffers at both stations to guide people to the buses.

PERFORMANCE NOTES:

WHAT: U-Theatre (優劇場), *The Message* (喂!向前走)

WHEN: Dec. 4 to Dec. 6 at 7:30pm

WHERE: U-Theatre Mountain Theatre (優人劇場山上劇場), 30, Ln 26, Laoquan St, Taipei City (台北市老泉街26巷30號)

ADMISSION: Tickets are NT\$900, available through www.artstickets.com.tw or at the NTCH box office. Saturday is sold out. A few seats are left for Friday and Sunday

Get the message?