

## AROUND TOWN

FRIDAY, MARCH 12, 2010

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## Go with the flow

Cloud Gate Dance Theatre's newest work was inspired by the years director Lin Hwai-min has spent living near the Tamsui River

BY DIANE BAKER  
STAFF REPORTER

Lin Hwai-min (林懷民) is really embarrassed by his latest work, *Listening to the River* (聽河), which will have its world premiere on Thursday night.

He's afraid he's made it too pretty. "The music is so beautiful, the images are so beautiful. Everyone liked the dress rehearsal but I didn't. I was so embarrassed. I intended to do something simple, not so romantically beautiful," the founder and artistic director of Cloud Gate Dance Theatre (雲門舞集) said in a telephone interview yesterday morning.

Lin has lived in Pali, near the Tamsui River, for almost two decades, so for years he has listened to the river and watched its many shifting faces and moods. But he never thought about it as an inspiration until after he returned from a retreat in India, where he had been fascinated by the wide array of daily life — and death — experiences that can be seen along the banks of the Ganges River in Varanasi.

The transitory nature of life, of illusions, has been a frequent topic of Lin's over the past decade.

"The river flows down like the passage of time, but the river is also a reflection," he said, citing not only the Tamsui and Ganges rivers as sources of inspiration, but also Confucius, the Chinese literary classic *Journey to the West*, Ghost Month ceremonies, Buddhism's *Diamond Sutra* and Typhoon Morakot.

Images of rivers and the dancers will be projected on a screen that takes up two-thirds of the stage. Frequently the flowing water and flowing dancers will merge, until at one point a dancer watches his body washed away in a raging current. Footage for the torrent was filmed on the second day after



PHOTOS COURTESY OF LIU CHEN-HSIANG

Morakot. The dancers were added in during long days of a studio shoot.

"There is another dancer ... she's facing the film [on stage], dancing with her image. She moves to the right when the film goes to the left, she's floating on the river at the end. There's a quote from *Journey to the West*, the monk Xuanzang (玄奘) saw his own body floating on the river," Lin said.

"The mood in the backdrop doesn't coincide with what is going on on-stage. The dancers are joyful when that's not what is on screen, and the opposite," he said.

"I made two huge mistakes with this production. One is that I got the footage — the minute you use those images everything becomes so beautiful," he said.

"The second mistake I made, I was hooked by Giya Kancheli [a Georgian composer now living in Belgium]. He's a familiar composer and I got hooked

on one piece, *Night Prayers* [a 1992 composition for string quartet]. Then I read his biography, this music is about the passage of time, life and death. What really got me was he's from Georgia. I'm a big fan of Georgia. I used Georgian folk songs in *Song of the Wanderers*.

"It's so exquisite I hate it. I was really sandwiched in between the music and the footage," he said, adding that he still hasn't decided whether to run the piece for the full 80 minutes or add an intermission.

"I will decide after the dress rehearsal. That's why we are calling it 'a work in progress,'" he said.

"Creating a work is like an adventure through the jungle ... you have to search, even if you don't know what you are looking for. It's also like having a baby. You have all kinds of guesses but when it comes out it's not what you imagined," he said.

Some parents have apparently been put off by the poster for the show, Lin said, but he has tried to reassure them.

"Someone asked about the naked butt on the poster: 'How can I bring my kids?' But the image is a metaphor, there's just a very quick glimpse of butt," Lin said.

*Listening to the River* is being staged as part of the 2010 Taiwan International Festival. There are still tickets available for next week's shows — a rare thing, given that in recent years most Cloud Gate appearances are sold out weeks ahead of time. The more expensive tickets for each show are gone, but there are still tickets in the NT\$400 to NT\$1,200 range.

The company will also take the production on tour down next month, visiting Tainan on April 10 and April 11 and Taichung the following weekend.

## PERFORMANCE NOTES:

**WHAT:** Cloud Gate Dance Theatre, *Listening to the River* (聽河)

**WHEN:** Thursday to March 20 at 7:45pm, March 20 and March 21 at 2:45pm

**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)

**ADMISSION:** NT\$400 to NT\$1,200, available through the NTCH box office, online at [www.artsticket.com](http://www.artsticket.com) or through Cloud Gate (Salina Yeh, (02) 2712-2102, [service@cloudgate.org.tw](mailto:service@cloudgate.org.tw))

**ADDITIONAL PERFORMANCES:** April 10 at 7:30pm and April 11 at 2:30pm at Tainan Municipal Cultural Center Performance Hall (台南市立文化中心演藝廳), 332, Zhonghua E Rd Sec 3, Tainan City (台南市中華東路三段332號). April 17 at 7:30pm and April 18 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)

**ADMISSION:** NT\$300 to NT\$1,500

## [ CLASSICAL MUSIC ]

## Rilling Bach with a passion

The 2010 Taipei Bach Festival culminates on Sunday with a performance of the 'St John Passion' conducted by Helmuth Rilling

BY BRADLEY WINTERTON  
CONTRIBUTING REPORTER

The most enjoyable concert I've been to in Taiwan was in 2008. It was the first ever performance here of Bach's *B Minor Mass*, one of the greatest masterpieces of world music. It was conducted by the German-born Bach expert Helmuth Rilling and performed by the youthful Evergreen Symphony Orchestra (長榮交響樂團) and the Taipei Philharmonic Chorus (台北愛樂合唱團), plus soloists. I thought I'd never hear anything as wonderful again. But the unbelievably good news is that Rilling is back, and due to lead the same forces in a performance, also a first here, of Bach's *St John Passion* this weekend.

It's being billed as the 2010 Taipei Bach Festival (2010台北巴赫音樂節), but is in reality a nine-day immersion in the glories of the 1724 work, known in German as the Johannes-Passion. Rilling is holding four master classes in the art of conducting Baroque music, each dedicated to one of the *Passion's* four sections. Aspiring young conductors will have the chance of rehearsing with the participants, and then Rilling will conduct a performance of the whole thing in the National Concert Hall on Sunday.

The preliminary rehearsal concerts, which are open to the public and likely to be of exceptional interest, have already started. The third takes place today at 7:30pm in the Recital Hall of the Chang Yung-fa Foundation Building, Evergreen's center of operations and the former Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) headquarters. The last will be at 1:30pm tomorrow at the same place. The concluding concert is in Taipei's National Concert Hall on Sunday at 7:30pm.

It's assumed Bach wrote four Passions, one based on each of the four evangelists, but only two survive — Matthew and John. They were written to be performed on Good Friday in St Thomas' Lutheran church, Leipzig, where Bach was music director. The *St Matthew Passion* is generally regarded as the greater of the two, but the John work has exceptional interest, and is, though shorter, more dramatic than the Matthew.

John has always been seen as the odd man out among the four gospel writers. Matthew, Mark and Luke tell more or less the same story, but John sets out to describe things the others don't include. He refers to himself as "the disciple Jesus loved," and there are unusual elements as well.

Bach's depiction of the story of Jesus' capture, trial, crucifixion and burial (but not his resurrection, which was a story for Easter Sunday) is as vivid as John's narration of it. John was present at the key events, notably when, after Jesus' arrest, he went with Simon Peter to the palace of the High Priest (with whom he had some special contact) and Peter was stopped at the door and asked if he wasn't one of Jesus' disciples, leading to his denying Jesus three times before the cock crowed. Other details are very precise, too, such as the police and servants making a charcoal fire in the High Priest's courtyard because it was so cold, and Peter's earlier cutting off the right ear of the High Priest's servant Malchus. John is also the disciple who took responsibility for the care of Mary, Jesus' mother, after his death. He often refers to this special relationship, usually with a kind of modest understatement.

Bach's setting features soloists taking the parts of the Evangelist (John), Jesus, Pilate and Peter,

plus others who don't represent any particular character, and a chorus that sometimes stands in for the crowd baying for Christ's blood, and is sometimes a group of anonymous commentators singing the non-Biblical hymns and meditations that punctuate the narration. (One, comparing Christ's back after his flagellation to the red sky at sunset, is sometimes cut as indelicate, but if Bach saw fit to set it to music we should surely give it the benefit of the doubt).

As the work is in German, and surtitles are unlikely, it's a good idea to familiarize yourself with it beforehand. A DVD is preferable to a CD because it will have subtitles, and Nikolaus Harnoncourt's version with the Tolzer Knabenchor is riveting. It copies the conditions of Bach's day — no women performers, and only a small orchestra using period instruments (Johannes-Passion, DGM 073-4291, reviewed in the *Taipei Times* on Aug. 27, 2008).

Among this weekend's soloists, Taiwan's Tsai Wen-hao (蔡文浩) (*Figaro* in the NSO's 2006 *The Marriage of Figaro*) will sing Jesus, South Korean-born David Dong-Guen Kim will be Pilate, and Lee Pei-ying (李佩穎) (who also sang in the *B Minor Mass*) will take the soprano roles. The key tenor role of the Evangelist will be taken by Lothar Ordinius.

Rilling himself is very eminent, and for Taiwan to get him a second time can only be a tribute to the quality of the performers he found when he worked here two years ago.

This is a series of events that's not to be missed, and certainly won't be by anyone who was present at that never-to-be-forgotten 2008 *B Minor Mass* concert.



A wax figure of Johann Sebastian Bach rests its hand on sheet music at Madame Tussauds in Berlin. PHOTO: BLOOMBERG

## FESTIVAL NOTES:

**WHAT:** 2010 Taipei Bach Festival (2010台北巴赫音樂節)

**WHEN:** Today at 7:30pm and tomorrow at 1:30pm (lecture concerts) and Sunday at 7:30pm (full concert)

**WHERE:** Lecture concerts at the International Convention Center of the Chang Yung-fa Foundation Building (財團法人張榮發基金會國際會議中心), 11 Zhongshan S Rd, Taipei City (台北市中山南路11號). The full concert is at the National Concert Hall, Taipei City

**ADMISSION:** Tickets for lecture concerts are NT\$400. For the full concert, 48 tickets remained as of press time, ranging from NT\$400 to NT\$2,000, available through NTCH ticketing or online at [www.artsticket.com.tw](http://www.artsticket.com.tw)

**ON THE NET:** [www.tpf.org.tw](http://www.tpf.org.tw)