

AROUND TOWN

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Internationally modern

BY DIANE BAKER
CONTRIBUTING REPORTER

The 2010 International Theater Festival that opens next Thursday at the Experimental Theater will certainly live up to the international part of title. There will be a Canadian-based American performing a piece about a character in a Spanish novel, a Taiwanese company performing a play by a Frenchman, a French company performing a Russian play and a Taiwanese American troupe performing a work based on a French novel.

Sylvia Chuang (莊靜如) of the National Theater and Concert Hall's program and marketing department says what the NTCH looks for when choosing participants for the biennial festival are "thought-provoking" (觸發感動) productions. This usually translates into companies that have built reputations for unconventional work, if not outright avant-garde productions.

The other connection is that each production was drawn from or inspired by classical literature or was written by a famous playwright.

First up, starting Thursday night, is Montreal-based Dulcinea Langfelder & Co, now in its 25th year, with *Dulcinea's Lament* (唐吉珂德的雙面繭思). Langfelder is a frequent visitor to Asia and was in Taipei in 1996 with her production of *Portrait of a Woman with Suitcase*. Her new show premiered in Tokyo two years ago.

The Brooklyn-born dancer, actor and singer uses her namesake from Cervantes' classic *Don Quixote*, Dulcinea del Toboso, for a very quixotic look at the history of world, religion and sex. [See story below for more details.]

The following week, the mood in the black box that is the Experimental Theater will be both more serious and bleak, as Taipei's own Mr Wing Theatre Company (人力飛行劇團) presents *Dans la Solitude des Champs de Cotton* (在棉花田的孤寂. In the Loneliness of the Cotton Fields) by the French director and playwright Bernard-Marie Koltes.

Koltes died in 1989, leaving behind 10 plays, all of which center on real life problems, loneliness and death. This will be the second straight festival to feature a play by Koltes; the Creative Society (創作社) performed its own adaptation of *Roberto Zucco* in 2008. Director Li Huan-hsiung (黎煥雄), who also works with Creative Society, helmed this new production, which focuses on two nameless characters, the Dealer and the Client, whose monologues and dialogues examine secret desires, race, gender and fears. Are they a drug dealer and a customer, a businessman and a client? What exactly is to be bought or sold is never revealed but the two characters are yin and yang, shadow and light, linked in ways they don't understand.

The third production, unfortunately for those who don't already have tickets, sold out two weeks ago. Perhaps it was the offer of food and vodka that spurred the ticket sales.

Oncle Vania (瓦尼亞舅舅), by the French troupe Le Collectif Les Possedes, was included in the festival as a way of paying tribute to 19th century Russian novelist and playwright Anton Pavlovich Chekhov, whose 150th birthday is being celebrated this year.

While drawing on the title of Chekhov's famed *Uncle Vanya*, this production is basically a retelling of an earlier version of that work, the 1888 *The Wood Demon*. This play is set

in the home of Voynitsky, who has saved his whole life only to find both his livelihood and his life under threat — a characteristically melancholy Russian look at the characters' hopes, failures and current miseries.

Le Collectif Les Possedes, formed in 2002 by a group of film actors, has gained fame for productions that seek an unusual degree of intimacy with their audiences. In *Oncle Vania*, a long buffet table is placed in the center of the theater, surrounded on three sides by seating. Vodka and appetizers are on offer, with the actors serving as waiters. The piece seeks to blur the boundaries between audience and performers — and not just with the vodka.

Boundaries will also be blurred in the festival's final production, Riverbed Theatre's (台灣河床劇團—波特萊爾) newest work, *Flowers of Evil* (惡之花), which premiered last month at the Centre Culturel Robert Desnos near Paris. Riverbed's productions combine painting, sculpture, puppetry, installation art and live theater.

The company developed its latest work during a two-week residency, and founder-director Craig Quintero said in an e-mail that he was told it was the first time a French theater had commissioned a Taiwanese company to develop an original performance in France.

Flowers of Evil was inspired by French poet Charles Baudelaire's poetry. Since anyone who has seen Riverbed's productions knows they are often difficult to describe, I asked Quintero to explain.

"When Baudelaire's collection of poems *Flowers of Evil* [Fleurs du Mal] was first published in 1857, Baudelaire and his publisher were charged

with 'insulting public decency' due to his graphic portrayal of sex, violence and death. Baudelaire's writings shocked and seduced readers of his time with his hallucinatory visions of decadence and desire, but for contemporary readers, his writings have lost much of their transgressive power," he wrote. "In our performance, we translate Baudelaire's work from the page to the stage and from 19th century France to 21st century Taiwan. Our image-based production takes the audience on a journey into the dark recesses of Baudelaire's poetry, searching for glimmers of light amidst the shadows."

The play was co-directed by Quintero and French actor-director Guy Magen and the creative team included such Riverbed regulars as Joyce Ho (何柔柔), Carl Johnson, photographer/video artist Dennis Lan (藍元宏) and Craig's mom, Cheryl Quintero (who composed music for *The Man who became a Cloud* and *The Life and Times of Robert Wilson*). The eight-person cast is equally multinational — Taiwanese, American and French.

The company will perform this piece at the Avignon Off Theatre Festival this summer and then starting in October, the Juming Museum (朱銘美術館) will exhibit the set from *Flowers of Evil*, along with the work of the Bread and Puppet Theater Company from Vermont.



Mr Wing Theatre Company, left, presents *Dans la Solitude des Champs de Cotton* by the French director and playwright Bernard-Marie Koltes as part of the 2010 International Theater Festival. PHOTOS COURTESY OF NTCH

FESTIVAL NOTES

WHAT: *Dulcinea's Lament*, Dulcinea Langfelder & Co, Thursday to Saturday at

7:30pm, Saturday and Sunday at 2:30pm. The Saturday night and Sunday matinee performances are sold out.

Dans la Solitude des Champs de Cotton, Mr Wing Theatre Company, June 11 to June 13 at 7:30pm, June 12 and June 13 at 2:30pm. The June 11 and June 12 evening performances are sold out.

Oncle Vania, Le Collectif Les Possedes, June 18 to June 20 performances are sold out.

Les Fleurs du mal, Riverbed Theater, June 25 and June 26 at 7:30pm, June 26 and June 27 at 2:30pm

WHERE: Experimental Theater (國家戲劇院實驗劇場), 21-1, Zhongshan S Rd, Taipei City (台北市中山南路21-1號)

ADMISSION: NT\$800 for Dulcinea Langfelder & Co, NT\$500 for all other performances, available at the NTCH box office or online through www.artsticket.com.tw



[THEATER]

A female side to Cervantes?

'Dulcinea's Lament' examines history, philosophy and feminism through the fictional character of Dulcinea from Cervantes' famous novel 'Don Quixote'

BY NOAH BUCHAN
STAFF REPORTER

The National Theater Concert Hall opens this year's International Theater Festival in satirical style with *Dulcinea's Lament*, a multimedia performance by Montreal-based theater group Dulcinea Langfelder & Co. It begins Thursday at 7:30pm.

Dulcinea Langfelder, the show's principle actor and writer, said in an e-mail exchange that the work is based on the female character who is referred to but never appears in Cervantes' novel *Don Quixote*.

"I haven't come across many Dulcineas in my life, and most of them have been pet dogs," wrote Langfelder, whose last Taipei performance, the 1996 *Portrait of a Woman with Suitcase*, received rave reviews. She added that the name Dulcinea is "charged with romantic and grandiose connotations" — nuances that she examines through wordplay, much like Cervantes' novel.

"The show is based on associations one can make with this famous (and famously misunderstood) name," she said. Dulcinea is often portrayed as a prostitute.

And the lament?

"Since Dulcinea del Toboso never speaks in Cervantes' novel, I wanted to give her a voice. And since she is Don Quixote's 'raison d'être' — his reason for attempting to save the world — she laments his failure to do so. Today's 'Post 9-11' world is woefully reminiscent of the time of the crusades. The discovery of a 'New World,' with all its hope for something better, has led to yet another superpower ... yet more war, after war, after war," she said.

Audiences shouldn't be put off by the seriousness of the themes — which she uses to examine the roles of men and women throughout history — as Langfelder handles them with considerable doses of satire.

Mythology, philosophy and literature are all touched upon through music, dance, monologue and video images

projected on to several moveable screens. The action never wavers thanks to the snappy rhythm of the movement and the spoken lines, which one reviewer said, "border on stand-up comedy."

But much of the narrative explores feminism and the feminine.

"I believe that Cervantes imagined Dulcinea to represent the feminine side of human spirituality," she said. "The word, 'devil,' comes from 'devi': the Sanskrit word for 'Goddess.' Dulcinea is the Feminine: a damsel in distress worth fighting for."

Langfelder also examines another timeless theme in the performance: physical intimacy and its taboos.

"How did sex become such a 'bad', forbidden thing? Why do we have pornography? Why did we pervert sex from an essential, natural thing to something so threatening? Dulcinea represents (among other things) 'good' sex!," she said.



Dulcinea's Lament explores feminism and the feminine.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF NTCH