

AROUND TOWN

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Fifteen months ago, U-Theatre (優劇場) celebrated its return to its Laoquanshan (老泉山) compound in Muzha after a two-year renovation project with a festival and a production called *Mountain Dawn* (入夜山嵐), inspired by its mountain-top home.

The five chapters in the show covered a day in the life of the mountain, beginning with the awakening of life at daybreak and closing with the mist that fills the air after nightfall. In between there were meditations on bamboo, rainfall and sunsets.

The show's focus was on the women in the troupe, and the gongs, as opposed to the men and the big drums. As company founder and director Liu Ruo-yu (劉若瑀) explained it, Laoquanshan has a very feminine energy, a softer, quieter kind of energy. The mountain is the troupe's "mother."

Sitting on a bench bundled up against the night chill watching the show in December 2007, it seemed that being outside amid the quiet rustling of the trees and the chirping of crickets was an integral part of the production. You could almost feel the vibrations from the gongs and drums in the breeze. The piece was tailor-made for the open air, for the intimacy of the small Laoquanshan seating area.

Hearing that the company was going to restage the production at the National Theater, I wondered how that could be done without losing the quietness of the piece. How do you bring a mountain inside?

You make the production bigger, for one thing, and you almost completely overhaul it. "There is new music and movements, but the concept is similar. The dawn and mist parts are nearly the same, but the rest are very different," Ken Kuo (郭耿甫), U-Theatre's manager, said in a telephone interview on Tuesday. "And there is one new piece to do with clouds."

Another difference is the costumes. *The Mountain Dawn's* are all new, by famed costume designer and artist Tim Yip (葉錦添), who has collaborated with the company for more than a decade.

"In the old show, the costumes came from *River Journey* [2006] and other shows because we didn't have time to make new ones," Kuo said. "We invited the designer to come see the rehearsals. He wanted to use the color of nature, of the dew; light blue and green, not so deep or rich. *River Journey* was pure black and white." "This time the only character who wears black is the narrator," he said.

Yip's design for the narrator, played by Liu, is not only black, it's long. He has given her a robe with a 3m-long cathedral train that trails behind her like a spreading stain.

"When they [the performers] move, the costumes show a story," Liu said. "In *River's Journey* the movement had to be very precise, very sharp, very clear. In *Mountain Dawn* the movements are softer. But because the material is different, you also move differently. Like the black one [I wear], you see something, you move toward it, but you have to walk slower because it drags."

"In this *Mountain Dawn*, the most important thing was how to give this ancient feeling of the mountain, how to catch the image. Like the way the old traditional Chinese paintings show the mountain... It's more abstract, not so detailed, more of a feeling, like the way Cloud Gate [Dance Theatre] uses calligraphy [as a starting point for the *Cursive* trilogy]," Liu said.

"It's almost a new piece; there was a lot of work. Adan [drumming director Huang Chih-chun (黃誌群)] had to change the melody to fit the new movements. In the old costumes, the movements were clearer, this one the movement is more natural, softer."

"We want to let the people go to the quietness of the mind. To be quiet, soft, female," Liu said. "We had to find a very soft way to tell the story."

She laughingly added that she has to keep telling her troupe to make it "softer, softer."

"The gong gives a universal sound. Like 'om,' you don't disturb the world when you say it," she said. "You really feel the quietness of the land; you don't want to disturb it."

After its four performances at the National Theater next weekend, U-Theatre will be taking its mountain on the road, with two performances in Kaohsiung, on April 10 and April 11, and two in Taichung, on May 15 and May 16.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF U-THEATRE



PERFORMANCE NOTES:

What: U-Theatre, *The Mountain Dawn* (入夜山嵐)**When:** March 20 and March 21 at 7:30pm, March 21 and March 22 at 2:30pm.**Where:** National Theater (國家戲院), 21-1, Zhongshan S Rd, Taipei City (台北市中山南路21-1號)**Tickets:** NT\$700 to NT\$2,500; available through NTCH ticketing, online at www.artsticket.com.tw or by calling (02) 3393-9888. NT\$700 seats for March 20 and NT\$2,000 seats for March 21 are sold out.

Additional performances: April 10 and April 11 at 7:30pm at the Kaohsiung Cultural Center's Chih-Teh Hall (高雄市立文化中心至德堂), 67 Wufu 1st Rd, Kaohsiung City (高雄

市五福一路67號) and May 15 and May 16 at 7:30pm at Chungshan Hall (台中市中山堂), 98 Hsuehshi Rd, Taichung City (台中市學士路98號). Tickets are NT\$400 to NT\$2,000.

Move that mountain

Revamped with a new score and costumes by Tim Yip, U-Theatre is taking its production of 'Mountain Dawn' to the National Theater

BY DIANE BAKER
STAFF REPORTER

Freakin' at the freakers ball

BY ALITA RICKARDS
CONTRIBUTING REPORTER

The lead singer's hips pound out the rhythm, his head thrashes droplets of sweat onto the screaming faces of girls bopping along madly to the music, and as the guitarist rips a riff out from between the legs of a showgirl, the crowd goes into a frenzy. It feels like a time warp back to Elvis' heyday. It makes you want to run away and join the circus.

The Deadly Vibes — lead singer and guitarist Jason Cops, and twin brothers JD and JT Long, on guitar and drums respectively — know how to put on a show. They want this weekend to have a "complete carnival feeling," said Cops. "We're trying to break down borders between bands and the audience."

They have been on a break since touring Japan in December, recording new material and getting ready for this weekend's second annual Rock 'n' Roll Circus, before retiring again to prepare for a tour of Europe at the end of next month.

"We can't just play shows every month [in Taiwan]; it's too small, there aren't enough venues," said JT Long, in an interview last week. The Deadly Vibes have toured in China and Korea, and are putting on the Rock 'n' Roll Circus in Taichung and Taipei tonight and tomorrow.

The Vibes have lined up bands, dancers, a burlesque show, and a dance contest for the audience.



JD Long of The Deadly Vibes plays with a burlesque performer at last year's Rock 'n' Roll Circus.

PHOTO COURTESY OF STEVE VIGAR

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What: The Rock 'n' Roll Circus**When and Where:** Tonight in Taichung at 89K, 21 Takuan Rd, Nantun Dist, Taichung City (台中市南屯區大觀路21號) with The Deadly Vibes, The Drexel, Fullhouse, and Rock in Hose Burlesque. From 10pm until late. Tomorrow at VU Live House, B1, 77, Wuchang St Sec 2, Taipei City (台北市武昌街二段77號B1) with the above acts and Chrome Relic. From 10:30pm until late.**Cover:** Each night is NT\$350, which includes one drink**On the Net:** www.myspace.com/thedeadvibes