

AROUND TOWN

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The 11th Taipei Arts Festival (第11屆台北藝術節) gets off to a flying start Wednesday with its already sold-out production of *Macbeth — Who Is That Bloodied Man?* by Poland's Teatr Biuro Podrozy at the Outdoor Theater (戶外劇場) behind Huashan Culture Park (華山創意文化園區). The theater piece, which played sold-out shows at the 2007 Edinburgh Fringe and won rave reviews in the UK, epitomizes much of what the Taipei Arts Festival is about.

In an interview with the *Taipei Times*, Victoria Wang (王文儀), executive director of Taipei Culture Foundation (台北市文化基金會), the festival's organizer, said that one area in which the Taipei Arts Festival distinguishes itself from the many other similar events to which the capital city plays host was the wide range of venues it uses.

Teatr Biuro Podrozy's *Macbeth*, which employs stilts and motorbikes, among other props, is an open-air show, and the under-utilized Outdoor Theater, at 5 Beiping E Rd, Taipei City (台北市北平東路5號), is well-suited to this type of performance.

Wang lamented the lack of medium sized venues in Taipei, with big-ticket acts invariably opting for the National Theater, the country's premier venue. The festival's preference for more intimate venues has led to its staging LAFAs' *Ode to Joy* (快樂頌) in the relatively small Taipei Cultural Center, Wenshan Branch (台北市立社會教育館文山分館) auditorium, a situation that Wang said had pleased lead dancer Sheu Fang-yi (許芳宜), but also led to tickets selling out soon after going on sale.

Another unconventional choice of venue by festival organizers has been the use of the Taipei Zhongshan Hall Guangfu Auditorium (台北中山堂光復廳) for concerts by singer/songwriters Summer Lei (雷光夏) and Chen Chien-chi (陳建騏). Both performers have solid music track records: Lei composed the score for Hou Hsiao-hsien's (侯孝賢) *Goodbye South, Goodbye* (南國再見南國) and *Shanghai Flowers* (上海花) and picked up the Golden Melody for Best Lyricist in 2000, while Chen has numerous credits as a producer, with nominations for the Golden Horse Best Original Music, Golden Melody Best Music Arrangement and Golden Bell Best Sound Design categories. As performers, neither is a major marquee name ... yet. According to Wang, the festival is providing them with an opportunity to showcase their more personal work in a medium sized venue, which combines a degree of intimacy with wider exposure to audiences outside the live-house circuit. Both artists will be performing works inspired to a greater or lesser degree by the sonnets and plays of Shakespeare.

In addition to *Macbeth*, the festival program includes two other dramatic works that directly reference the Bard, though both are also rather unconventional. Next Friday, International Visual Theater of France will present *K. Lear*, a production that combines both spoken words and sign language. Playing the role of Cordelia is Enmanuelle Laborit, who though born deaf, has become a highly accomplished actress. "The fact that she cannot speak enriches the role, for Cordelia's tragedy is that she fails to make herself understood to those she loves," Wang said.

European House — Hamlet's Prologue Without Words by Spain's Teatre lliure discards language altogether and presents a prologue to the story of *Hamlet* in a voyeuristic manner, allowing the audience to watch what is taking place in each room of the "European House" as performers fail to or avoid speaking with one another.

Wang said the number of Shakespeare-related performances was not intentional, but grew out of the principles of selection.

Avant-garde

Bard

The Taipei Arts Festival showcases the darker side of life with a program partially built around modern reworkings of Shakespeare's plays

BY IAN BARTHOLOMEW
STAFF REPORTER



Tickets for the 11th Taipei Arts Festival are selling fast. PHOTOS COURTESY OF TAIPEI CULTURE FOUNDATION

"We wanted a modern perspective and new ways of presentation, but we also wanted something that had classical artistic values. We didn't want shows that were so avant-garde that they ceased to be accessible to a mainstream audience. ... Accessibility is something that was important in the selection of the festival program. ... Shakespeare is an artistic bedrock with which contemporary artists continue to work with and reinterpret," Wang said.

Two local dramatic productions have been incorporated into the program. The first, opening Thursday, is a revival of Greenray Theater's *Neckties and High-Heeled Shoes — A Musical* (領帶與高跟鞋), which premiered in 1994. For Wang, this marked a high point in the Taiwanese musical, with its natural balance of drama and song. "The [Taiwanese] musical these days over-emphasizes big dance numbers, and there is less attention to characterization.

This is a great pity ... In selecting *Neckties*, I wanted to remind people what a good musical was like," Wang said.

Another local production is *Der Hassliche* (醜男子), a localized production by artist Hung Hung (鴻鴻) of a work by Marius von Mayenburg. Hung Hung and his Dark Eyes Performance Lab (黑眼睛跨劇團) aim to present contemporary international theater to Taiwan's theater audiences, and Von Mayenburg's fantasy about cosmetic surgery seemed a particularly appropriate topic for body enhancement-crazy Taiwan.

There is much more, including a free public exhibition entitled *Slow Dancing*, which features short video images of 50 famous performance artists. The work, by David Michalek, presents these images in extreme slow motion — a five-second clip is prolonged to about 10 minutes — allowing audiences to appreciate every subtle nuance of the performer's body. Dancer Sheu Fang-yi and Contemporary Legend founder and Beijing opera innovator Wu Hsing-kuo (吳興國) are among the 50 international artists portrayed in this exhibition.

Some shows have already sold out (see festival notes below), and tickets for others are selling fast.

Festival notes:

- Wednesday to Aug. 15 *Macbeth — Who Is That Bloodied Man?* (sold out)
- Wednesday to Aug. 16 *Neckties and High-Heeled Shoes* at Taipei's Zhongshan Hall (tickets: NT\$500 to NT\$2,000)
- Thursday to Aug. 16 *K. Lear* at Metropolitan Hall, Taipei City (tickets: NT\$450 to NT\$1,500)
- Aug. 21 to Aug. 23 *European House — Hamlet's Prologue Without Words* at Taipei's Zhongshan Hall (tickets NT\$400 to NT\$1,200)
- Aug. 21 to Aug. 23 *What a TONE!* at Novel Hall for Performing Arts (tickets: NT\$300 to NT\$1,200)
- Aug. 21 to Aug. 22 *Summer Haruki* at Taipei Cultural Center, Wenshan Branch (tickets: NT\$600)
- Aug. 28 to Aug. 30 *Warum Warum — A Theater Research* by Peter Brook (sold out)
- Aug. 28 to Aug. 30 *Concert of Summer Lei — Sonnets of Light and City* (sold out)
- Aug. 28 to Aug. 29 *Heroine* at Taipei Cultural Center, Wenshan Branch (tickets: NT\$600)
- Sept. 4 to Sept. 6 *Concert of Chen Chien-chi — Love Scenes of Flowers and Farewell* at Taipei's Zhongshan Hall (tickets: NT\$600)
- Sept. 4 to Sept. 6 *LAFAs Ode to Joy* (sold out)
- Aug. 21 to Sept. 3 *Slow Dancing* at Taipei's Zhongshan Hall Plaza (free)

On the Net: www.taipeifestival.org

