

CULTURE

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[THE WEEKENDER]

Noisy riot for Cloud Gate 2

BY DIANE BAKER
STAFF REPORTER



Cloud Gate 2's annual Spring Riot show travels to Chiayi for two final performances next weekend.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CLOUD GATE

I caught up with Cloud Gate 2 (雲門 2) at Chih-Teh Hall (高雄市文化中心至德堂) in Kaohsiung on Saturday night, their first appearance in that city in three years. That prolonged absence may have explained the less-than-packed hall for their Spring Riot 2010 show, which is too bad because the company delivered the kind of high-energy performance its fans have come to expect.

The evening began with Ku Ming-shen's (古名伸) *Endless Shore* (碎浪海岸), inspired by the interaction of the ocean and the shore along the southeast coast. The ebb and flow of the tide was replicated by the dancers running and sliding onto the stage floor, the crashing of the waves upon rocks by the lifts that cartwheeled the women (and sometimes a man) up and over their partner's shoulders — and the tidal pools, it appeared, by moments of when the dancer stood, circled, in absolute stillness.

The 14 dancers frequently hurled across the stage, with the outstretched hands of another catching their head, or arm or ankle with flawless timing. There were lots and lots of lifts, and a particularly fast-pace segment was echoed in the finale, but at a slower pace.

With just a short few minutes for a costume change, the entire company was back for Huang Yi's (黃翊) *Floating Domain* (浮動的房間), set to set to Johann Sebastian Bach's *Concerto in D Minor*. It proved to be the highlight of the evening, with a sophisticated wit that belies the 26-year-old Huang's youth.

It began slowly, with the dancers moving almost in a fugue-state as a solitary light bulb, which had been lowered almost to the floor, began to rise. One group formed a three-sided room, each member responding to the touch of the inhabitant's hand on an arm, a shoulder, a leg, raising each limb and dropping in turn, the pace gradually picking up as the woman careened off the walls. The dancers frequently formed a Rockette-like line on the diagonal before breaking apart.

The highlight of *Floating Domain* were the two duets, the first by Yang Ling-kai (楊凌凱) and Wang Yeu-Kwn (王宇光) and the second, which finished the piece, by Wu Jui-ying (吳睿穎) and Hou Yi-ling (侯怡伶).

Floating Domain was filled with quirky little one-offs, not the least of which was the old-fashioned black telephone and line that sat almost stage center for the entire piece. The dancers danced over and around it up until the very end — when Hou picked up the receiver, placed it on the floor for about five seconds and then replaced it — at that was it.

Yang is the troupe's veteran and its prima dancer and she showed the full scope of her talents both in Huang's piece and then in Cheng Tsung-lung's (鄭宗龍) *Crack* (裂), which closed the program. She is at her peak and in both pieces was just a whirlwind of energy. Wang did a masterful job of keeping pace with her in Huang's work.

Crack was a strange piece, with the nine dancers clad in black-upon-black costumes reminding me of a cross between something Tim Burton would like to use for his gothic movies and ninjas (minus the face masks). I don't know why ninjas kept coming to mind during the piece, which centered on isolationist-style movements made popular by break-dancers years ago, but they did.

The curtain opened on a man doing a headstand and ended with Hou spinning and spinning. As much as I like have liked Cheng's other works, *Crack* proved as empty as the splits in the pavements or the fractures in relationships it was meant to represent.

Though uneven, Spring Riot 2010 was well-worth seeing, with one caveat — the sound levels for much of Ku and Cheng's works, both of which had long portions of industrial-tech soundscapes. The volume often reached painful proportions — and that was with just my one good ear. It must have been much harder on those with better hearing and was an unnecessary distraction.

Fans still have two more chances to see the company perform, next weekend at the Chiayi Performing Arts Center (嘉義縣表演藝術中心演藝廳).



The massive flop of 'Enron' on Broadway

In the UK, the financial satire 'Enron' is a critical and commercial smash. On Broadway, it closed within two weeks

BY MICHAEL BILLINGTON
THE GUARDIAN, LONDON

"Satire," in the words of Broadway showman George S Kaufman, "is what closes on Saturday night." But at least Lucy Prebble's *Enron*, with its satiric view of American capitalism, made it through to yesterday, when it closed prematurely at New York's Broadhurst Theater. The news may be shocking, but it's not that surprising, given three factors. One is theater critic Ben Brantley's obtuse and hostile review in the *New York Times*. Another is the aesthetic conservatism of a theater culture that likes plays to be rooted in the realist tradition. I suspect there is also a lingering suspicion of a young British dramatist's right (Prebble is in her 20s) to tackle a profoundly American subject.

Enron, as theatergoers who have seen it at Chichester, the Royal Court or in London's West End will know, is a hugely ambitious play. Spanning a period from 1992 to 2001, it shows how the Texan energy giant moved from a model of the future to a bankrupt disaster with debts of US\$38 billion. That was largely because its CEO, Jeffrey Skilling, was a Marlovian over-reacher, more interested in trading energy than supplying it. As profits tumbled, Skilling turned to his sidekick, Andy Pastow, to create shadow companies to camouflage mounting debts. In Rupert Goold's brilliant production (he directed both versions), this complex maneuver is illustrated through a series of Chinese boxes, illuminated by a flickering red light symbolizing the minimal basic



investment: capitalism, in short, as con-trick. The play opened in New York on April 27, and there were plenty of positive reviews from US critics. "Whip-smart, edge-of-your-seat," wrote the *New York Post's* critic; "surprising, remarkable, utterly thrilling," thought the *New York Observer's*. But *Enron's* fate was sealed the moment Brantley's review appeared, the day after opening. His first sentence described Prebble's play as "a flashy but labored economics lesson," and you could imagine potential theatergoers deciding to save their dollars and settle for a night at the movies. And while, as a fellow critic, I respect Brantley's right to his opinion, what is dismaying is his failure to see what Prebble and Goold were up to. Far from being a flashy distraction, the play's vaudevillian style is a visual embodiment of the dreamlike illusion to which the Texan energy giant, and similar corporations, surrendered.

But no serious play on Broadway can survive a withering attack from the *New York Times*, which carries the force of a papal indictment. It is also a situation that is rarely challenged. One of the few people to take up the cudgels was David Hare when his play, *The Secret Rapture*, got a similarly dusty reception from the then *New York Times* critic, Frank Rich, in 1989. This led to an acrimonious public dispute that prompted the memorable headline in *Variety*: "Ruffled Hare aims Rich bitch." But what I recall most is a letter Hare addressed to Rich, saying: "Frank, you are lord of all you survey. What a pity it turns out to be ashes."

Brantley was not alone in his dislike of *Enron*. "Heavy on sizzle, light on steak," said the *Daily News*. "If you've seen the news ... the play won't offer up much in the way of insight or illumination." *New York* magazine deemed the play "good, dumb fun — though little more than that." One reason for the attacks is the entrenched American view that visual pyrotechnics and razzle-dazzle are the province of the musical. Plays, on the other hand, are judged by their fidelity to what a critic once called "the visible and audible surfaces of everyday life." It's permissible for *Wicked* or *Legally Blonde* to deploy expressionist techniques but, on Broadway at least, plays are expected to

conform to the realist rules.

With the exception of Tony Kushner's *Angels in America*, I can think of no play that has successfully violated that tradition. It is notable that when writers such as Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams and Edward Albee grew more experimental with age, they were quickly kicked into touch. What hope had *Enron* with its demon-eyed raptors, Jedi knights and Siamese twins?

But Brantley does make one valid point when he says that the public memory of the Enron scandal "grows fainter with each succeeding account of large-scale financial misconduct." With America currently gripped by the story of alleged misdeeds at Goldman Sachs, it may be that the Enron story seems like old news. Yet this could also work the other way. What with the collapse of Lehman Brothers and the Bernie Madoff scandal, you would have thought New Yorkers might have been willing to give house room to a play that points out our complicity in financial bubbles, and which argues that lessons have still to be learned. But I suspect there's more than a touch of chauvinism in the rejection of Prebble's play. After all, if the Royal Court presented a US play about the collapse of Northern Rock, how would we react?

Other factors may explain *Enron's* swift demise. Bombs around Times Square can't have helped. *Enron's* failure to be nominated for any of the major Tony awards, Broadway's annual school prizegiving, was also the kiss of death (it was shortlisted in the sound, lighting and original score categories). I also can't help wondering if the production would have fared better with its original London cast. Norbert Leo Butz, who played Skilling, is, to judge from his performance in *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels*, a figure of dynamic comic energy; I doubt, however, he has the Shakespearean gravitas Sam West brings to the role in London.

If *Enron's* melancholy saga proves anything, it is Broadway's irrelevance to serious theater. Musicals, as the success of the Menier Chocolate Factory's *La Cage aux Folles* and *A Little Night Music* at this week's Tonys proves, are its stock in trade. There might be room for one decent, straight new play, as shown by the current popularity of John Logan's *Red*, which originated at the Donmar and is also nominated for the big awards. But at heart Broadway is a big, gaudy commercial shop-window, where fortunes are won and lost.

I've long said the beating heart of US theater is in Chicago, from which two terrific new plays, Tracy Letts's *August: Osage County* and Lynn Nottage's *Ruined*, recently emerged. In fact, next time an ambitious producer thinks of taking a London hit play to Broadway, I'd suggest they ask the question that used to adorn posters in wartime: is your journey really necessary?

Enron uses musical routines, slapstick and realism to chart the progress of the notorious US corporation's fraud and corruption scandal.

PHOTOS: BLOOMBERG

TOP FIVE MANDARIN ALBUMS

APRIL 30 TO MAY 6



1 Jaycee Chan (房祖名) and Luan (亂) with **41.26%** of sales

2 AK and WOW!! with **9.7%**

3 Rene Liu (劉若英) and Together (在一起) with **5.23%**

4 Cheer Chen (陳綺貞) and Immortal Tour (大鬧: 巡迴演唱會影音記錄) with **4.99%**

5 S.H.E and SHERO with **4.16%**

ALBUM CHART COMPILED FROM G-MUSIC (WWW.G-MUSIC.COM.TW), BASED ON RETAIL SALES

PLANET POP

and help to deliver food. I want to visit orphanages and schools there and try to do my part in helping."

After uniting Jackie Chan (成龍) and Jet Li (李連杰) in *The Forbidden Kingdom*, *The Lion King* director Rob Minkoff is planning another fantasy epic set in China.

Publicists said in a statement last week that Minkoff will direct the 3-D English-language action adventure Chinese Odyssey with financial backing from two Chinese studios, including the state-owned China Film Group.

Minkoff was quoted in the statement as describing the movie as a "supernatural high-seas adventure that pits our hero against an onslaught of deadly foes." The cast of the US\$75 million to US\$100 million production hasn't been decided.

The Forbidden Kingdom, about an American teenager who tries to free the mythical Monkey King with fellow fighters, brought together Chan and Li for their first on-screen collaboration.

The Venice Film Festival says Quentin Tarantino will head the jury that will award the coveted Golden Lion at this year's festival.

The festival called the director "one of the major creative figures in contemporary cinema" in an announcement of his appointment on Thursday. It runs from Sept. 1 to Sept. 10.

The festival cited Tarantino's highly original filmmaking style, work as a character actor in such movies as *Sukiyaki Western Django*, films that have launched and relaunched acting careers and his dedication to young filmmakers in his work as a producer.

Tarantino has directed such films as *Inglourious Basterds*, *Pulp Fiction* and *Kill Bill*. The festival says Tarantino is "perhaps the only American auteur to be adored worldwide like a rock star." A judge last week heard that R 'n' B singer Chris Brown has made progress on his sentence for assaulting his then-girlfriend Rihanna last year on the eve of the Grammy awards.

An attorney for Brown told Los Angeles Superior Court Judge Patricia Schnegg the singer had completed more than 290 hours of hard labor and attended all but one of his mandatory 52 counseling sessions for domestic violence.

Schnegg said it appeared Brown was making progress and she set a future

status hearing for Aug. 26.

Brown, 21, whose hits include *Run It!* and *Kiss Kiss*, was sentenced in August last year to five years probation, ordered to perform 180 days of community service and attend domestic abuse counseling.

He attacked pop star Rihanna in the early morning hours of Feb. 8, 2009, after the couple left a music industry party in Los Angeles.

The assault left Rihanna bloody and bruised and caused both a firestorm of media coverage.

— AGENCIES

Christina Aguilera has joined the UN's fight over hunger. PHOTO: AFP

