

2011.04.18

TAIPEI TIMES 台北時報

Death, disease and redemption

Cloud Gate 2 performed a mixed bill of four very different works in Taichung on Saturday



Cloud Gate 2 dancers rehearse Cheng Tsung-lung's The Wall.

Photo courtesy of Liu Chen-hsiang

The program for Cloud Gate 2's (雲門 2) annual Spring Riot tour this year was titled "The Playground," but it's a mystery how they came up with that idea since there wasn't much that was playful in the show. One work was about death, another about mental impairment and another a dispassionate mix of technology and the body. The saving grace was the closing work, Cheng Tsung-lung's (鄭宗龍) The Wall (牆).

Despite the sober content, the troupe was in fine form on Saturday night at the Taichung Chungshan Hall in Greater Taichung, led by their always wonderful-to-watch leading lady Yang Ling-kai (楊凌凱).

The Wall, by resident guest choreographer Cheng, was first created for the company's 2009 Spring Riot tour, set to Michael Golden's Weather One. I missed that show, but Cheng and other company members said he completely overhauled the piece for this year's tour.

It's a wonderful work for 12 dancers, which include the company's nine members and three of its apprentices, in which Cheng explores patterns, shapes and space, often at a frenetic pace.

The Wall begins with the dancers, all clad in matching black pants and black tops (worn backwards), marching out in single file across the back of the stage to form a square around the white dance floor. That architectural precision, a hallmark of Cheng's work, sets the style for the first half of the piece, which is all sharp angles and diagonals, both in the floorwork and in the lines of the dancers' arms and legs. After a rather neat bit of on-stage costume change for Yang, into an oversized T-shirt dress, the mood and movement begins to shift, until almost all the dancers have changed into casual gray jersey tops and leggings and the shapes become softer, rounder and a lot more loose, with lots of hip rolls.

One standout in The Wall was Yeh Wen-pang (葉文榜), which made me wonder where he has been hiding all the years he's been with the company. Small and compact, he's a terrific dancer. Perhaps he was so noticeable in Cheng's piece because so much of him was on display in the previous work, Sun Shang-chi's (孫尚綺) 40-minute Genus (屬輩).

Being clad only in a pair of white dancer's briefs (in Genus) does make you stand out, but it was Yeh's mature assurance that made him so watchable. You have to have confidence to balance — arms and legs stretched out parallel to the floor — across the bent back of Kek Siou-kee (郭少麒) as he stands on a small square wooden platform, and then flip your body over so your back is resting on his.

Maybe it just took the right choreographers to see Yeh's strengths and fully utilize them, but hopefully he'll be just as noticeable in future works.

Tics and quirks

Sun's piece is a study in tics and quirks, as the three women and two men play off one another, sometimes resembling a collection of exotic birds and other creatures, at others more like the inmates of a mental asylum, while guitarist-singer Joe Shieh (謝華洲) roams the stage.

Bulareyaung Pagarlava's (布拉瑞揚) Passage (出遊), created in 2000, is set to deeply emotional and equally evocative segments of Lambarena: Bach to Africa (An Homage

to Albert Schweitzer). It begins lightheartedly, with Yang being dressed, redressed and moved around like a rag doll by four dancers, as a man, clad only in briefs and white body paint and holding a large black umbrella, moves on and off the stage, sometimes rolling a large black suitcase. Yang appears caught in purgatory, an image reinforced toward the end when the quartet stands over her prone, white sheet-covered body and hurls handfuls of chalk dust into the air like pyrotechnics before collapsing into convulsions that resemble the torments of hell.

The only real disappointment was Huang Yi's (黃翊) Violin — Symphony Project I (機械提琴—交響樂計畫之一), perhaps because his previous work has blown me away, or perhaps it was because this piece is just the first installment of a much longer work. Two cellos and two violins are rigged so they can play themselves — thanks to Wang Chung-kun (王仲堃) and Lee Bo-ting (李伯廷) — and the four dancers dance around them. A green laser beamed from over the audience to the stage allows the dancers to create the music by breaking the beam with a hand, leg or body.

Huang said he wanted to expand on the first dance he created for the troupe back in 2008, Body, Sound (身音), when the dancers' costumes either included musical instruments or produced sound through the dancers' movements. Body, Sound was a joyous, exuberant piece. Violin — Symphony Project I is a clinically detached scientific experiment.