



Beyond Time

U THEATRE

TAIWAN

AUSTRALIAN PREMIERE

A solar eclipse, a shimmering full moon and a torrential downpour descend on His Majesty's Theatre in the stunning visual spectacle *Beyond Time*.

Step into another world, spun out of whirling bodies, projections of natural phenomena and live music that courses through you. Extraordinarily skilful performers who drum and dance rhythmically in step with hypnotic and frenetic percussion.

The work of Taiwan's U-Theatre is created out of meditation and the result is a poetic performance that expertly combines martial arts, dance and ritual to explore our relationship to the universe.

All five scenarios in *Beyond Time* - whether it's standing under a sudden, heavy downpour; pondering the reflection of the moon in a pool of water; swirling the body to enter into contemplation; having a dream about a funeral without a coffin; or listening to an extremely low-pitched, elemental "om" sound - take the onlooker out of their current dimension.

For Director Liu Ruo-yu and Music Director Huang Chih-chun of U – Theatre, the key to tranquillity is to go beyond time and to be free from the burdens that come with time.

Beyond Time is an unforgettable mix of traditional martial arts, contemporary choreography, energetic oriental percussion, tai chi, dance and mediation techniques. The dancers and musicians experience every performance as an intense physical and spiritual journey, somewhere between meditative concentration, intense self-control and explosive dynamism.

Sacred dance encodes the meaning of the movement of the planets in the solar system. It is as if the orbit is applied to man, who uses his consciousness to control his own body, like a specially installed machine which precisely follows the pre-set paths of the orbit in its revolution or movement. Such dance exhibits the pursuit of harmony by individuals from the great universe.

U-Theatre departs from the traditional styles of drum playing by having the performers carry the drums on their backs and using their bodies to convey the sounds, creating rhythm with physical tempo. Drumming with the sophisticated movement of sacred dance also shows the extraordinary stability of U-Performers in their training of physical and inner balance.

The whole performance uses imaging technology to construct a more distinct three-dimensional and multi-layered stage as well as a virtual 4D space through the use of projection and mirrored floors. Light is projected to create a contrast between "substance" and "void," bringing the audience and performers to enter together a "universe of time and space."

To comprehend the limits of life and break away from the shackles of time, Director Liu Ruo-yu and Music Director Huang Chih-chun lead U-Theatre to explore with you what lies "beyond time".

Mesmerising, mysterious and unforgettable, *Beyond Time* leads you on a breathtaking journey into a boundless magical space.

Concept

In 2008, members of U-Theatre embarked on "a walk" across Taiwan that lasted 50 days and covered 1,200 kilometres - about three-quarters of the island's total coastline.

They trekked seven to 10 hours a day and, after about a month, while strolling through the city of Taitung, they started to notice different sounds of nature: the chirping birds, the blowing wind, the ebb and flow of the tide.

"It was all about letting go and returning to the moment. When we walked, we paid full attention to our feet and toes," says Huang Chih-chun, Music Director of U-Theatre.

"When we focus ourselves and unite with the moment, we reach a state of inner calmness and emptiness, and time disappears ... There is no idea from the past, no projection to the future, and nothing to worry about in the present."

This epic excursion became a source of inspiration for the troupe's *Beyond Time*, a multi-arts programme billed as "a timeless journey in celebration of the awe-inspiring moments in life".

U THEATRE

The pronunciation of the letter "U" is similar to the word meaning "excellence" in the Chinese language. In ancient China, the same word also meant "performers".

The Zen masters in China over a thousand years ago had said that a true artist must combine "Tao" (self-improvement) with "skill" (the learning and maturity of art). The U-people believe that the combination of Tao and skill is the goal of their life and artistic creation.

U-Theatre was founded by Ms. Liu Ruo-yu, its present artistic director, in October 1988. A graduate of the theatre Masters program at New York University, Liu attended professional workshops led by the Polish master of "poor theatre" Jerzy Grotowski (1933–98). Deeply influenced and inspired by Grotowski's aesthetic perspective and performance training method in theatre, she returned to Taiwan and dedicated herself to the goal of shaping the "U-performers of today," guiding them in the exploration of the body and mind. Hence she established U-Theatre on Laochuan Mountain in the outskirts of Taipei, where each new production is created and rehearsed, and debuts are staged.

In 1993, Liu invited Huang Chih-Chun, a professional traditional Malaysian-Chinese percussionist with nearly 20 years of experience, to teach drumming to U-Theatre members. Huang's deeply held conviction that "to play the drum, one must first learn meditation" inspired the adoption of meditation, and later, Chinese martial arts, into the core of the U-Theatre training curriculum. Drumming and meditation, together with theatre, have since become essential elements of all U-Theatre performances and constitute its unique performing style. In its repertoire, the relationship of the individual to the whole community—and by extension, of the group to its audiences worldwide—is portrayed without explicit narrative or the creation of imagined characters. The result is a fascinating and unique mode of contemporary theatre that is process based, finely tuned, and performer-reliant.

Since its inception in 1988, U-Theatre has been based at Laochuan Mountain near Taipei, where they create and introduce their productions (they operate an open theatre there). For five days a week, around 20 disciplined members/performers come to the hillside residence to practise tai chi, martial arts and percussion, as well as meditate and rehearse.

Under Huang's lead, U-Theatre developed a basic three-pronged regimen of meditation, martial arts, and drumming. Having once meditated under a Bodhi tree in India for half a year, Huang believes the most important is meditation since one must calm one's heart in order to see their true self. Practicing martial arts also supplements the notion, as Huang says that the essence of Wushu (Chinese Martial Arts) is not to defeat the external enemy, but the enemy within. Through meditation and Wushu, the performers learn to completely control their body at all times.

Martial arts elements are outstanding in U-Theatre's works, such as the use of Taiji in "Beyond Time." Huang believes that martial arts is more than just a source of inspiration – it's like a form of music. From the beginning to completion of each movement to the performer's sense of speed, Wushu can be integrated seamlessly with drumming, further embodying U-Theatre's unwavering belief of treating spirituality and the arts as one.

Uniting the East and West, the ancient and the modern, the spiritual and the physical, U-Theatre has graced world stages and festivals including Barbican Center (UK), Avignon Festival, Biennale de la Danse (France), December Dance Festival (Belgium), OzAsia Festival (Australia), Bergen Festival (Norway), Singapore Arts Festival, Hong Kong Arts Festival, and the Next Wave Festival at BAM.

In addition to its stage performance, U-Theatre won the 2014 President Prize for Innovation in Taiwan with its efforts in bringing art into the society by collaborating with prisons, high schools, and corporate companies on its curriculum of drumming and meditation to help reformed prisoners and teenagers find hope and strength in life.

In 2014 U-Theatre made its signature Trekking Taiwan project by completing 450 kilometres in 38 days, from south to north on the west coast of Taiwan. A unique physical training method invented by U-Theatre, the "Feet in the Clouds" trekking project aims to increase one's self-awareness through trekking by day and drumming by night.

Since 1994 this practice has afforded U-Theatre opportunities to step away from the confines of the theatre to reach out to world communities, as far as Tibet and Paris.

Liu Ruo- Yu biography

Founder and Artistic Director of U-Theatre.

A leading theatrical performer in the early 1980s and a native of Taiwan, Ms. Liu earned her M.A. in Theatre Arts from New York University, and was selected for a year-long master class under Polish director Jerzy Grotowski. In 1988, Ms. Liu founded U-Theatre and introduced – together with Mr. Huang Chih-Chun since 1993 – novel facets of drumming meditation and martial arts to create a series of original works integrated with a wide range of elements drawn from music, literature, drama, dance and ritual. These aesthetic syntheses have not only added another dimension to the Taiwanese expression in modern art, they have also earned U-Theatre much acclaim and many invitations to perform internationally. In 2008, Ms. Liu was awarded Best Performer at the 12th Annual Taiwan National Award for the Arts.

Mr. Huang Chih-Chun biography

Music Director of U-Theatre.

Born in Malaysia, Mr. Huang has been a drumming and martial arts practitioner for over 30 years, and is known for his mastery in synthesizing these two disciplines into a new form of performing arts. After a number of spiritual journeys to India and Tibet, where he discovered an inner sanctuary through meditation and realized the wisdom of living in the present, he started to direct his strengths inward. His keen observations of everyday sounds and ability to transform them have enriched each performance with musical articulation that is both multi-dimensional and imbued with the energy of life. Mr. Huang joined U-

Theatre in 1993 as Drumming Master. His unconventional training regime of “meditation before drumming” has both elevated the disposition of the troupe and laid down a solid foundation for a contemporary artistic expression uniquely characteristic of U-Theatre. Prior to joining U-Theatre, Mr. Huang performed with Taipei Folk Dance Theater and Cloud Gate Dance Theatre.

Website: <http://www.utheatre.org.tw/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/utheatre1988/>

Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/user/utheatre8188>

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Perth International Arts Festival

Founded in 1953 by The University of Western Australia, the Perth International Arts Festival is the longest running international arts festival in Australia and Western Australia's premier cultural event. The Festival has developed a worldwide reputation for excellence in its international program, the presentation of new works and the highest quality artistic experiences for its audience. For 65 years the Festival has welcomed to Perth some of the world's greatest living artists and now connects with over 700,000 people each year.

Wendy Martin is the Artistic Director 2016 – 19.

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