

Dance, dance revolution

Xing Liang is crafting a new language in dance, writes
Clare Morin

When Xing Liang walks into a room, it's hard not to stare. The tall Beijinger has the air of an elegant punk as he glides into a lounge at the City Contemporary Dance Company's (CCDC) Wong Tai Sin headquarters. His subtle Mohawk, earrings and baggy black pants, lend him an edgy look that is in keeping with his tendency to push contemporary dance in bold new directions.

"For me, if I go to the theatre to see a dance performance I'm more interested in the dancer's body movements," says Xing, as he settles into a sofa and begins the tale of where his inspiration came from for his new show *Out of the Box*. "This was the idea with this new

"I am using this piece to answer my own questions about dance"

work, how the body can develop and move in truly unexpected ways."

Following in the footsteps of his heroes, renowned choreographers Pina Bausch and William Forsythe, Xing wants to bring dance back to its purist form. This is Xing's sixth year as the Resident Choreographer at CCDC, Hong Kong's leading contemporary dance company. His first original work with the company, *Najinsky*, met with critical acclaim in 2006. It told the story of legendary dancer Vaslav Nijinsky and his gradual descent into schizophrenia. However, Xing says that despite the good reception he wasn't satisfied by the work. "When I finished *Najinsky* there was something wrong," he muses. "So I went back. This time I wanted to go back to the basics of how the dancers moved."

The native Beijinger, who trained in traditional classical dance at the Beijing Dance Academy, says he only truly awoke to the thrill of dance when CCDC founder, and one of China's most important modern dance pioneers, Willy Tsao visited Beijing. Tsao was staging a re-run of his original work *Bird Song* with students of the Beijing Dance Academy's Youth Dance Company. It was here that he spotted Xing and, impressed by the



Pushing the limits Xing Liang takes dance to its purist form in *Out of the Box*

dancer's distinctive persona, created a solo especially for him. It was the beginning of a mentor-protégé relationship. "I finally felt really comfortable," remembers Xing. "In traditional Chinese dance I always felt uncomfortable because the history of China is contained within it, in the elements of ballet and Peking Opera. I always had to perform a role. But suddenly I felt really free. I thought okay, modern dance is for me."

The idea for *Out of the Box* was born soon after this point, just after Xing joined the Guangdong Modern Dance Company in 1993 at the invitation of Tsao, then the artistic director of the Guangzhou-based company. One day, Xing read *Point and Line to Plane* by 20th century artist and art theorist Wassily Kandinsky. The Russian painter was one of the first to create a modern abstract painting, and his seminal book stripped the essence of art back to its fundamental, geometric principals. "His writing enlightened me and gave me a lot of inspiration on how to develop my body as a dancer." There are similarities, he reasons, between the ways a painter fills a canvas, and the way a human moves through space.

He leaps up (as he often does in

interviews) to dance what he is trying to say. Drawing an imaginary canvas in the air, he points to the top left corner, "imagine there is a dot here" and then points to the bottom right "and another dot here, there will be a route from one point to another and the dancer needs to find the route." He then plunges his body forward, throwing his chest through a rapid fire of new angles and shapes – creating a strange new language of dance in the process of moving from A to B.

In *Out of the Box*, the cast of CCDC dancers will perform Xing's choreography on a minimalist stage to an electronic, almost industrial soundtrack. Every dancer's movements has been created according to their physical form – as they snap, hurl and contort their bodies in a language of movement that is utterly Xing. "I made this piece for myself," admits the choreographer. "I am using this piece to answer my own questions about dance." It may sound self-indulgent, but as Willy Tsao spotted all those years ago, Xing was born with an inherent, explosive talent – that is now beginning to fully ripen. *Out of the Box, Fri 27 & Sat 28, 8pm, Kwai Tsing Theatre, 2734 9009, \$250-\$140.*

Preview

The Pillowman

McAulay Studio
Tue 24-Sat 28



Dark humour Paul Sheehan

If you missed *The Pillowman* in March, because you were either at the *Vagina Monologues* or the Rugby Sevens, then count your lucky stars that director Eric Ng of Looking Glass Productions has decided that the play must go on again, for five more shows at the Arts Centre.

"*The Pillowman* had to be done in Hong Kong," explains Ng of his passion to bring the play to the city, "because it's one of the few places in the world where all the themes come together."

Written by Irish Academy Award winner Martin McDonagh, whose recent film debut *In Bruges* has received critical acclaim from critics for its dark humour and unpredictable plot, *The Pillowman* is an earlier work from the playwright in much the same vein.

Set in an unnamed totalitarian state, the plot revolves around the interrogation of Katurian, the author of some truly gory novels, who is now suspected as being responsible for a series of shocking child murders. As his creative legacy is threatened, Katurian is faced with dire decisions in all directions.

The power of *The Pillowman* lies in the show's gentle pathos, leaving the audience questioning more than just the characters on stage. "The show puts you in a position where you have to examine yourself as much as you evaluate the people on stage," says leading man Paul Sheehan.

With *The Pillowman*'s bold tagline of "you can take my life, but you can't take my stories," Looking Glass Productions is a budding company to watch out for, bringing stimulating, and thought-provoking, theatre to Hong Kong. *Bourree Lam*
See listings for ticketing details.