



Tjimur Dance Theatre

Xaiwan Utopia

2026.4.18 Sat. 14:30

2026.4.19 Sun. 14:30

Weiwuying Playhouse

Duration is 85 minutes without intermission.



National Kaohsiung
CENTER FOR THE ARTS

WEI WUYING

衛武營 國家藝術文化中心
國家表演藝術中心 National Performing Arts Center

Synopsis



When culture is no longer a static display and all the known rules are bent, we begin to dance traditional Paiwan dances to CHOPIN's music, mourning for those ignored sounds with "Funeral March" and bidding farewell to our lost souls with "Tristesse." This is going to be a contemporary fantasy of surrealistic dreams, where frameworks are removed and all the rules are broken. Audiences are thus invited to let go of their souls and have some fun playing with realities!

Program X aiwan Utopia

Part 1: Display Case: Living Beings Made Static

We're viewed as part of the past and objects of study—but we're clearly alive.

CHOPIN: Etude, Op. 10, No. 3 "Tristesse"

Part 2: Who Am I Echoing?

How do I recognize myself in a violent storm?

CHOPIN: Nocturne, Op. 9, No. 1
CHOPIN: Prelude, Op. 28, No. 12
Vurevure (Family Lullaby)

Part 3: Waltzing Lost Through the City?

Be happy to get lost in the modern, free world!
Your body will invariably lead you back home.

CHOPIN: Waltz, Op. 64, No. 1
naluwan (Song of Gathering)
CHOPIN: Waltz, Op. 64, No. 2

Part 4: Returning Home

It is both a burial and a summons.
The road home is not necessarily straight, but
you'll always remember it.

CHOPIN: Scherzo, Op. 31, No. 2
likiliki (The Gluttonous Father)
qemauqauqaw (The Boastful Little Boy)
CHOPIN: Nocturne, Op. 9, No. 2
curisi (Warrior's Song)
CHOPIN: Sonata, Op. 35 No. 2, III. Lento
"Funèbre"
Paiwan nose flute
Paiwan mouth flute
lja lja i (Wishing Song)
qinaljaina (Song of Gathering)
ljaqina ljaqiqaina (Song of Reminiscence)
qai qai (kavalanga) (Song of Lament)
Vurevure (Family Lullaby)
curisi (Warrior's Song)

Choreographer Baru MADILJIN

In early 2024, my older sister Ljuzem and I traveled to Montemor-o-Novo, Portugal for a two-week art residency. The theater didn't require us to put on a show—they just wanted us to take life easy, viewing that as a part of making art. I hadn't experienced such quiet in a long time.

I felt the difference upon returning to Taiwan. With the buzz of the media and the demure in my home community, I felt like everyone was looking at me as if I were some kind of animal, triggering inspiration: I wanted to bring my dancers to a realm with absolutely no rules or restrictions, where we could revel to our hearts' content and create our own utopia.

While creating the piece, I kept asking myself whether I could truly live unrestrained within existing social convention. In my home community, I respect the culture and learn from it to draw from the richness of our traditions. With that, I can really relax, be free, and continually think and produce in my art. After pondering it for a while, I realized that my utopia is not someplace where I'm isolated from the world; it's the rehearsal studio in my community.

When I leave my studio and community, I see other kinds of gazes. Those who don't know Indigenous people well enough still view us—and our contemporary dance troupe—with anachronistic stereotypes. After creating for 19 years with this troupe, standing atop the foundation provided by our community, I wanted to create a number that would prove those stereotypes wrong. I'm inherently naughty and playful, and I gave free rein to that in this piece.

Furthermore, over the past couple years, we've gone to numerous schools where the majority of students are non-Indigenous. While there, I can strongly sense the students' reception to an unfamiliar culture. I used to be frustrated by audiences not understanding my work. But with the kids, I realized I need to open myself up more, such as by making jokes and being humorous with them, which will give them an avenue of projection into my art. They won't be able to understand unless they're relaxed.

So I invite everyone to *Xaiwan Utopia*. It's a winding path that can show you parts of the world and parts of yourself that you've never seen before.

Artistic director Ljuzem MADILJIN

Before the main idea behind *X aiwan Utopia* was clear, whenever Baru came to talk with me about it, I always asked things like, "Why do you want to do this?" or "Is this something just for the audience to enjoy, or do you really want to do it?" I didn't doubt him; I was just trying to help him become clear on his motives, because I knew he was on the lonely yet necessary path of figuring out how to deconstruct himself.

As his sister and the artistic director of the troupe, I want him to stay pure in his artistic creation, unlike me, who, as the one running things, has to make practical compromises and hold back my feelings sometimes. The final time he approached me with it, the first slide of his presentation had an image of an elephant head. He said, "Don't you think we're just like animals? We're always being gazed at." I simply answered, "OK."

I not only related to the idea but could see he was genuinely confronting his situation.

Then, putting on my hat as a performer, I continued to ask him why he wanted to do this. Every aspect has an emotional element, but it has to make logical sense too. So, for instance, why are we going to have a swing on the stage? Only the Paiwan nobility are allowed to use that. Why are we only going to wear half of our traditional garments? It seems incomplete to me. What's my role on the stage? To that question, Baru answered that I'm the spirit of the troupe.

The spirit? Yeah, for the troupe and for Baru, I'm an invisible yet necessary component. But what did he mean by that? However, as I screamed and laughed without inhibition on stage while rehearsing, I realized how much I love to laugh. He purposely orchestrated my part in this so that I could make a return to my true self.

X aiwan Utopia is completely genuine...to the point that I even feel a bit insecure. Which is where its value lies. This adventure is not us turning our backs on our culture; it's an expression of how much we cherish it. That is, we want to engage in dialogue with the outside world precisely because we love our culture so much. The piece is not about giving an answer but exploring possibilities.

For 19 years, Tjimur Dance Theatre has steadily progressed in initiating dialogue with more and more people. You may not know us yet, but if you step closer and take a look, you'll see that we're on the same side as you.

Creative journey

Tjimur Dance Theatre was founded 20 years ago and has since put on over 150 performances at venues around the world. At this moment, they are pursuing a huge goal: eliminating the stereotype-infused viewing of their art.

The courage to rebel

Founded in the Paiwan community of Timur in Sandimen Township, Pingtung County, Tjimur Dance Theatre's members live side by side with the locals, who have witnessed the troupe's transformation. The line between art and tradition is quite taut and sometimes even tense.

"We frequently get lectured. Experts, scholars, and community elders tell us what we're doing isn't traditional enough," Ljuzem explains. It's a lot for the troupe to bear. Discretion and respect are the foundation of their interaction with the community, but the people they're trying to reach and converse with are often not familiar with Paiwan traditions. The community is their root, but as a contemporary dance troupe, don't they have the right to decide what kind of fruits they will bear?

Baru's pretty bold when it comes to this issue. The members of the troupe are staunch community participants. They sing the loudest when it comes to traditional songs and put the most effort into teaching traditional dance to the younger generation. He says, "We grow in the soil of the community. Its sustenance is what gives us courage."

Traditional culture doesn't restrict the troupe. Instead, it's a steady source of inspiration, and the more related their art is to tradition, the stronger their spirit becomes and the more boldly they assert themselves in their "rebellious" manner. Baru's *Xaiwan Utopia* is a perfect example.

What animal are you?

"Let's do it again!"

Before going to an art residency in Portugal, Baru had already developed most of the animal elements for the piece. What he hadn't expected was to deconstruct himself again immediately upon returning to Taiwan.

Baru had the dancers think about what animals they were. They said meerkats, eagles, silkworms, etc., and despite how obscure the animal might be, Baru was able to explain each one. For example, as the meerkat prefers the safety of the group yet frequently leaves to have a look around, Baru responded to that dancer, "I understand. You might be a bit insecure." To the person who chose the eagle, he said, "Eagles aren't just really cool-looking. They have this need to be looked at, so they're actually quite lonely."

And as for Baru, "I think I'm a microbe. I get into the bodies of animals to help them thrive." He always likes to be close to the other dancers and help them figure out how to better express themselves while performing. With Baru's microbial attention to detail, the dancers' interpretations of the animals have struck a chord deep inside themselves.

In this way, a silkworm reveals the torment of being bullied, a tiger presents itself as a leader who actually feels isolated and unsupported, and an eagle that wants attention is shown to be lost and exhausted. The dancers don't imitate their animals. They use the animals as a means of expressing what is going on inside of them. It also prompts the audience to consider: Who's the one in the cage, the one on display or the viewer? Who's the hunter? Is everyone an object of display?

How things look after making a turn

The character "wan" ("turn") in the word "Paiwan" (排灣) in the Mandarin title of the piece is purposely written without the water radical on the left (氵). Baru said that as soon as he posted the name of the piece, people started calling, some saying with urgency, "You've used the wrong character!" while others praised, "That's really cool."

There are other such aspects too. People forget about other possibilities when things have been a certain way for a long time. Baru says, "When you've become accustomed to how words, sculpture, painting, and fairy tales are supposed to be, how do you feel when they're changed?" Is it provoking or conflict-inducing, or are you glad to see it?

In the choreography and music, Baru has by no means been held back by convention. "I chose CHOPIN, but deconstructed it. Just when the audience feels like everything is flowing, I tweak it." The audio and visual aspects complement and converse with each other, though not necessarily in accord. A splendid waltz conceals sarcasm, and a funeral march hints at new life. In the blend of traditional Paiwan singing and CHOPIN, everything is both familiar and unfamiliar at the same time.

“When you think the answer lies just ahead, I take a turn.” It’s pretty hard. Figuring out how to smoothly lead the audience to a utopia that has never existed is mentally taxing.

He says that making the turn implies using the imagination. “There are more possibilities in this world, right?” he asks. When your imagination is confronted by the daily grind, your ideals get buried away. Baru’s hope is for people to tap into their imagination to re-awaken their utopian ideals.

X aiwan Utopia is an inquiry into identity, viewing and being viewed, and freedom. Everyone has what it takes to come up with an answer.

Baru MADILJIN

Choreographer and Dance Director

Baru MADILJIN graduated from the School of Dance of Taipei National University of the Arts and has lived in Taipei for 12 years. In 2009, Baru MADILJIN returned to his hometown, Sandimen in Pingtung, to join his sister in the work of passing on the indigenous culture and arts. He became the Choreographer and Dance Director of Tjimur Dance Theatre

Looking back at his fifteen years since returning to the tribe, seeking harmony between modern dance training and tribal culture, Baru practiced opening his ears, humbly receiving the songs and languages of the elderly, and truly returned home.

Baru attempts to reconstruct the public's impression of dance forms and music aesthetics. His works fully showcase his creative energy and innovations through integrating and interweaving various art forms; he also interprets indigenous arts with different perspectives and diverse concepts.

TJIMUR DANCE THEATRE

Tjimur Dance Theatre is Taiwan's first professional dance troupe that focuses on the contemporary Paiwan people. Founded by artistic director Ljuzem MADILJIN in 2006 with Baru MADILJIN as the dance director and choreographer, the troupe is devoted to interpreting contemporary experiences through ancient ballads. The troupe integrates song with dance and uses song as a guide for dance moves to display the exceptional bodily expressions of Paiwan culture, exhibiting a unique style among the contemporary dance troupes of Taiwan.

Throughout the 20 years since its establishment, Tjimur Dance Theatre has continued to organize annual residencies, guided tours of their community, performances at schools, and theater performances, exploring the different ways of promoting art in Taiwan. The troupe also puts on the Tjimur Arts Festival, an initiative to introduce international artists to the Indigenous community in Taiwan. For Tjimur, the performing arts are not limited to the stage but also exist in Indigenous communities and everyday life. Tjimur Dance Theatre aims to be a gateway to Paiwan culture.

Composer: HUI Tak-cheung

HUI Tak-cheung has a diverse portfolio that spans orchestral to multi-disciplinary pieces, and sound installations. His collaborative approach often involves working with artists and scholars from various disciplines.

He has been recognized with numerous international prizes, and his compositions have been showcased at various International music festivals. including the Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival, Gaudeamus Muziekweek, ManiFeste Festival, ISCM Taipei New Music Festival, EstOvest Festival, and Goethe Institut Asian Composers' Showcase.

Lighting Designer: LEE I-shun

LEE I-Shun trained at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, University of London, with a Master's degree in Scenography. She also had solid training as a stage lighting designer at Taipei National University of the Arts. She has done various lighting design projects across different countries and cities such as the UK, Taiwan, China, Japan, Prague, Spain, and Denmark. Some of her lighting works had been selected and exhibited in the international scenographic events, such as PQ 2011 in Prague and World Stage Design 2013 in Cardiff, UK.

Video Director: WANG Hung-chun

Video Director/ Photographer/ Visual Coordinator

WANG Hung-chun graduated from London College of Fashion with a Master's degree in Fashion Photography and mainly works on fashion and commercial production. His video work *The Seven Voices in Amber* was shortlisted at the Aesthetica Short Film Festival and the London Short Film Festival. His work 'Obsession Extracting Practice' was screened in 'Design Shanghai' in 2017 as well as participated in the Qingdao International Art Biennial in 2021. His photographic works were exhibited at Victoria House and Print House Gallery in the UK.

Costume Designer & Maker: PROJECTbyH.

PROJECTbyH. was founded in 2013 in New York by designers Henry LEE and Naomi ZHAO. Its core philosophy—"mindful discernment and in-depth inquiry of its intrinsic nature"—challenges preconceived notions of age, gender, and race. It pursues and creates a range of fully recyclable techniques and craftsmanship. By reflecting on the relationship between clothing and people, it explores the connection between humanity and life.

Creative and Production Team

Artistic Director & Performer | Ljuzem MADILJIN

Choreography Director & Choreographer | Baru MADILJIN

Directors & Performers | YANG Ching-hao, Ljaucu TAPURAKAC

Performers | CHIANG Sheng-hsiang, MENG Tzu-en, Zepulj KAZANGILAN

Lighting Designer | LEE I-shun

Composer | HUI Tak-cheung

Video Director | WANG Hung-chun

Costume Designer & Maker | PROJECTbyH.

Costume Accessories Design and Construction | ShaTao Lazurite Art

Main Visual Designer | 58kg

Main Visual Photographer | BA Sa-xi

Technical Coordinator & Stage Manager | LU Hsiu-i

Audio-Visual Technical Coordinator | HUANG Wei-yu

Dramaturgical Support and International Liaison | Gwen Hsin-yi CHANG

Sign Language Interpreter | HUNG Hsiao-han

Playbill Managing Editor | LIAO Yun-jing

Company Manager | CHIU Shu-ting

Residency Support | O Espaço do Tempo

Special Thanks | Tjimur Village, LIU Ting, YANG Hsiu-ying

Commissioned by National Theater and Concert Hall (NTCH)

Pre-talk Guest & Post-talk Host | YEH Jih-wen

Production Team of Weiwuying

Program Coordinator | CHENG Yu-shu

Technical Coordinator | Sue YANG

Marketing Coordinator | HUANG Chao-hsueh, JEN Li-yu

With All the Staff of National Kaohsiung Center for the Arts (Weiwuying)

Presenter



Cultural Development Partner



Weiwuying Online Questionnaire

