

## **13 Tongues : A Wild, Colorful Ritual of the Common People**

By Meng-Hsuan WU (PAREVIEWS Project Critic)

Performances: Cloud Gate 2 / Date : 2016/03/12 19:30 / Venue : National Theater, Taipei

There is no better way to review *13 Tongues* than to drink a bowl of snake soup at the Huaxi Street night market, the so-called "Snake Alley." Only such a rich, wild and dominating flavor can trigger gourmets to exclaim -- "YES! That is THE taste!" And only those who have tasted such a flavor can learn the unique, indescribable Taiwanese amazement.

*13 Tongues* is ultra-Taiwanese, mesmerizing, wild and awesome!

In *13 Tongues*, every single element, from choreography to dancers, music to voice, art to costume, lighting to projection image, is exerted to the extreme. Squeezing their whimsical ideas, these delirious artists--choreographer CHENG Tsung-lung, music design LIM Giong, art design HE Jia-sing, lighting design SHEN Po-hung, projection design Ethan Wang, costume design LIN Bing-hao, voice coach TSAI Pao-chang, together with Cloud Gate 2 dancers, distilled the glitz of the Snake Alley, visualizing the hustle and bustle of city life in Bangka district on stage, and created a vivid picture that depicts the wildness and pulsations of the commoner's life.

*13 Tongues* emits a sense of animality, so strong a quality that everyone, not necessary a good dancer or a regular dance performance go-er, could feel; and so full of energy, like a thundering baby cry, that makes you flush unconsciously. This energy flow comes from the bodies that make continuous circles--be them horizontal, perpendicular, diagonal, or figured 8; in single, duet or group; from feet to torso, head to wrist, hip to heel, floor to chest. These circles create a strong rhythm that flows in the bodies of the dancers, and hence accumulate the energy in their abdomens. Occasionally, dancers stride like Taiwanese deities, stepping high with wide-legged side-to-side gait, swinging arms loosely in the air, and walking in a figure-8-path to link the energy flow; occasionally, like firecrackers, their arms swing sporadically with spot-like blasts in the space in one moment and come to rest in the next; and occasionally, like shamans, dancers shake their arms and legs, retracting the tension into their slightly curved spines as well as the bending knees, and finally dance to the rhythm in unison.

This energy flow comes from the music that makes people fall into a trance. "Trance" refers to the state of mind when divine possession takes place on a shaman. It also refers to the repeating melodic phrases in techno music. By mixing sounds and rhythms of suona horn, *nakashi* music, piano and electronics, LIM Giong created a mysterious and psychedelic

soundscape just like a huge black hole that sucks you in, seeps through you, and unwittingly takes over your consciousness. Deep in this black hole, dancers bind one another connecting the slightly shaky will from exhaustion, by howling from the core of their bodies and calling out of the wildness within, like wild beasts, with old Manchurian tunes, old Taiwanese folksongs, and Taoist mantras. Their willpower is like an uptight string on the edge of being broken. Yet, the music and voices continues, leading the exhausted dancers and mesmerized audience to surpass the limit of physical fatigue, and come to share the experience of the abdication of consciousness. They have finally reached a complete vacuum; only the repeated running of the flesh, sound and rhythm remain on stage. In here, drawn on by the strength of senses, we are no longer “us,” but have become other beings.

Overflowing energy [on the stage] makes up a powerful aura, summoning tens of thousands of spirits wandering in the “Snake Alley” to drift amid the glaringly colorful costumes, to shift in and out of the mesmerizing kaleidoscopic projection imagery, and eventually turned into a carefree colorful *koi* swimming-off slowly like a fantasy. *13 Tongues* is a work of the commoners. It is, however, unlike Cloud Gate’s *Legacy* that stresses the perseverance of an ascetic monk on pilgrimage. Neither is it like *Mirrors de Vie* of Legend Lin Dance Theatre in which the Mother Earth reveals the wisdom of life. *13 Tongues* is simply being Taiwanese, earthly Taiwanese. It does not renounce the recitation of sutras, but on the contrary embraces the mundane--to be tainted from within by the strong odors of common people and to sniff the air of rascals.

As such, in the work, you would see the Taiwanese *gatao*, the rogues, rather than the Italian mafia. You would find the gossipy Taiwanese *obasan*, the old maids, rather than the French Madame. You would hear the noises of marketplace, rather than the music of J. S. Bach. *13 Tongues*, without doubt, leaves a distinct Mark of the Era for the rising pro-Taiwan identification. Different from the masterpieces of the dance antecessors, *13 Tongues*’s Taiwan does not intend to construct any discourse by symbolism, but simply, against the energy flow of senses, sets free the luminous colors, the rhythm of the commoners in the Snake Alley, the overlapping sounds of traditional and techno music, and the wild howls of beasts. All together in the stage space, they bound, change and flee, miraculously morphing into an ultra-Taiwanese, mesmerizing, wild and awesome ritual of the common people. In that instant when the consciousness abdicates, Cloud Gate 2 also transforms into a fresh new Cloud Gate 2, not the refreshing and refined Cloud Gate, nor the beautiful and vivacious Cloud Gate 2 from the past. It is a Cloud Gate 2 that grew up in, and from Taiwan, and a Cloud Gate 2 that grew up so Taiwanese.