Four Walls
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Thursday, 13 March 2014, 7.30 pm at Sir Mutha Venkata Subba Rao Concert Hall
AICTHICE CHNCNCHIE

Wednesday 12 March 2014

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ON A NOTE OF HOPE

Korean choreographer and dancer Sincha Hong discusses the psychological depths to her performance, Four Walls. Her husband, Werner Sasse, is a calligrapher in whose presentation, From Darkness to Light, writing and painting merge

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who has now retired from regular teaching, now concentrates on translating classical Korean literature while pursuing his love for painting and calligraphy. His calligraphic presentation is called From Darkness to Light - what will it be about? "Generally speaking, calligraphy in the narrow sense has to do either with writing in a beautiful style that’s pleasing to the eye or with a special style, reflecting the contents of what is written. This can be aggressive, lyrical, and so on, or (as in Zen calligraphy) as reflecting the spiritual movement in a meditation, in a broader sense, in calligraphy and especially in Zen calligraphy, the border between writing and painting is transgressed: writing as if painting and painting as if writing," Werner explains.

He talks of the meditation behind the idea, "The work of overcoming darkness (materialism, existential feelings, superstition and reaching the light, the enlightenment, is one of the basic themes not only in Indian philosophies and religions, but one of the basic subjects in any spiritual movement in the world."

I was inspired by the moon when I translated a Haiku written by the 12th century Korean King Jeongong. The moon is a symbol for a ritual about Buddha’s life. It is called The Moon Reflected in a Thousand Rivers.

Werner is dedicated at the reception to Korean culture in Chennai. "It seems to have a bright future ahead, because it looks as if it is really just in the beginning stage. The work of the Indo-Korea Center has made great progress in facilitating cultural exchange between the two cultures, and thereby the ground-work has been laid. But how much do the people know of the cultural exchange? 1600 years ago, when an Indian princess became a queen in Japan, or how much are they aware of the applications of old Indian philosophy, which helped create the Korean Hangul?"

Werner goes on, "And why is Chennai especially important for this (because Chennai is known worldwide as a city of art and culture). Also due to Indo-Korean studies, there is the newly established Indo-Korea Cultural Center and with the presence of many Koreans in the city, it is predicted to be a leader in the Indo-Korea cultural exchange," he concludes.

Gautam sundar
Deccan Chronicle

As far as artistic couples go, it would be hard to find one more gifted. The husband-wife team of Werner Sasse and Sincha Hong are in Chennai to present their respective performances — and it promises to be an extremely vibrant spectacle. Invited by Kirthi Kajet, Director, of the Indo-Korea Cultural Center in association with the Korea Foundation and the Consulate General of the Republic of Korea in Chennai, the duo’s unique talents should fail to impress more.

Choreographer, dancer, vocalist and writer Sincha Hong will present a meditative performance Four Walls, which was developed in association with her artistic collaborator and friend, the legendary composer, John Cage. The performance is both a tribute to John Cage’s mastery as a musician and a testimony to Sincha Hong’s resilience as a dancer.

"Everybody can once in a while experience a psychological situation where one does not know which direction to go... a feeling as if being blocked in a room with bare walls and somehow no door to escape. John Cage in 1941 was in such a situation. He did not know whether to stop composing music and become a Zen monk in Japan, or whether he should continue as a musician. This situation of being blocked in the main theme is reflected in this music, but just as John Cage found a way out of this block and continued to compose music, the music of Four Walls in the end finishes with an expression of hope," says Sincha.

On performing here, she quips, "India is my spiritual home since I was a spiritual seeker visiting India for years in the late 1970s. I always live with the realisation of impermanence, sometimes between sorrow and joy. I will always return to India to reconnect with my spiritual homeland. Chennai is famous for having a long history as a city of dance, music and the arts, and also today is a leading city of culture in India. I therefore hope and expect that the audience is ready to appreciate my dance, which is avant-garde, based on and further developing the avant-garde dance scene of New York."

Sincha adds, "Four Walls is neither contemporary, it is a leap into the future. People should see the performance without any preconception based on their experience when seeing dance on stage. They should empty their brains and look at it with their heart, just like children willing to get to know the unknown."

A remarkable polymath, Werner Sasse, who is originally from Germany, is a distinguished scholar of Korean art, history, language and culture and is credited with having single-handedly established two centres for Korean Studies in the Universities of Bochum and Ham bury in Germany. Werner, writing and painting is transgressed: writing as if painting and painting as if writing," Werner explains.

For Sincha, who claims to be a spiritual seeker, India is her spiritual home and she will always return here.
Sincha Hong, choreographer, dancer, vocalist and writer, one of the foremost avant-garde dancers from Korea, is considered to be one of the most influential artists of the 20th century. **Four Walls** was developed by Sincha Hong in association with her artistic collaborator and friend, the legendary composer, John Cage. The performance is both a tribute to John Cage’s mastery as a musician and a testimony to Sincha Hong’s resilience as a dancer. Masami Tada on piano and Masau Soga’s lighting design, complements Sincha Hong’s meditative performance.

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at **Sir Mutha Venkata Subba Rao Concert Hall**

Shenstone Park, 13/1 Harrington Road, Chepivic, Chennai 600 031.

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**Dancer/Choreographer: Sincha Hon (Korea)**

After winning critical acclaim with her debut performance *Mangl* in New York, Sincha Hong founded the Laughing Stone Dance theater company and worked with legendary artists like John Cage, Yoji Takahashi, Margaret Leng Tan and Nam June Paik. On her return to Korea in 1993, Sincha Hong founded the Laughing Stone Dance Group Inc., which presents several public performances and meditation workshops. From 1993 to date, she organizes the Jukisan International Arts Festival which is renowned for its presentation of avant-garde art.

Sin Cha Hong met John Cage (1912-1992) in the early 1980’s and was inspired to create a dance drama with his music. **Four Walls**, was first performed by Merci Cunningham in 1944. Sin Cha Hong’s version was first performed in 1984 in New York and was presented at the John Cage Festival at Wesleyan University in 1985 and later in the Pacific Ring Festival at San Diego. This was followed by a tour to Germany, Japan, and Korea. In 2012, 28 years after the first performance, **Four Walls Encore** was presented in Seoul to commemorate the 100th birth anniversary of the legendary musician, John Cage.

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**Composer: John Cage (USA)**

John Milton Cage Jr. (Sept. 5, 1912 - Aug. 12, 1992) was an American composer, music theorist, writer and artist. He is known as a pioneer of indeterminacy in music, electroacoustic music and non-standard use of musical instruments. Cage was one of the leading figures of the post-war avant-garde movement. Critics have lauded him as one of the most influential American composers of the 20th century. John Cage was also instrumental in the development of modern dance, mostly through his association with choreographer Merce Cunningham. He worked extensively with the acclaimed video artist Nam June Paik and choreographer Sin Cha Hong to create powerful works that fluidly combine music, video art and dance.

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**Four Walls composed by John Cage**

Written at a time when Cage was considering the serious move of ceasing to write music in order to devote time to being psychoanalyzed, the title is both deeply poignant and personal. Cage resolved to keep his tryst with music, which resulted in highly influential work, post-1950's.

**Four Walls** written originally as music for a theater piece, a "dance play" about a family, was conceived by the dancer Merce Cunningham. The piece is mostly solo piano played in the diatonic scale (white keys only) with a short vocal phrase in the middle. It is a work of direct, evocative, mesmerizing musical gestures, set off by silences of varying length or by insistent rhythm with simple variations.

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**Piano: Masami Tada (Japan)**

Masami Tada studied composition in the Showa Academy of Music in Japan. He learned to play the piano under the tutelage of Takehisa Kosugi. His teacher, Takehisa Kosugi, was the artistic partner of John Cage at the Merce Cunningham Dance Company.

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**Lighting Design: Masau Soga (Japan)**

Masau Soga studied composition under his father and grandfather who were jazz and traditional musicians in Japan. He studied philosophy at Waseda University. In the 70’s, Masau Soga studied philosophy and composition under John Cage in New York and also studied theatrical techniques at theatre schools in London, New York, Sydney and Tokyo. He is now Director of Office SOGA in Japan.