

# Soloists

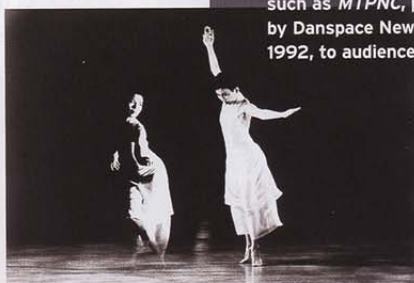
BY MUNA TSENG

“AS A CREATIVE ARTIST, I begin each work in the utter privacy of my studio. Each solo journey is a monologue, interrupted only by whatever one calls it: the creative spirit? the muse? the inspiration? Balanchine likened the next process to bricklaying: hours of drafting, crafting and finally delivering a finished work.

As a professional performing artist, my responsibilities and efforts are no longer private. I must engage in that intricate collaborative team dance of agents, producers, presenters, press, performers, crew and audience. Looking back over a career of 25 years of choreographing and performing solo and group dance-theater works and touring them in 15 countries around the world, I recall certain highlights. They are not about the sell-out houses, though that did happen a few times; instead, they are the moments when I know that my work has deeply reached someone, even one person.

These complete loops of artist-audience-artist contact are amazing. They give me the energy to get up and do it all over again. There was the shy adolescent boy-man whispering to me that I had given him “permission” to be his true self; the little bitsy 5-year-old girl with sparkling eyes and pigtails who said the show was “just like the magic that I will do one day.” I recall that snowy night of post-show vodka and sauna, when my cast and crew volunteered to give an additional show, foregoing their fees, to the enthusiastic audience who had spent a whole month’s salary to see our show night after night, in a country where art had been forbidden for decades.

In the so-called American Bible belt, some parents of the dancers I had cast during my company’s residency at the local college had protested to the college president about the “risqué sexual content” of our show. The morning after the show, the parents sought me out, with tears in their eyes, and told me that our show with its “sensual and poetic content” had been a turning point in their lives. In residencies in new immigrant communities, I witnessed teenagers frozen by new language and cultural differences find release in our workshops and made their first connec-



After the muse, Muna Tseng turns to presenting partners to bring works such as *MTPNC*, premiered by Danspace New York in 1992, to audiences.

tions to American teenagers.

My next work, *Stella’s Room* is about my late mother. It asks: What constitutes a life? Why do we repeat and morph family stories or hold onto childhood possessions? What is home? I shift constantly between storytelling and abstract, poetic dance. I question the complex and illusory nature of family, love, impermanence, authenticity, displacement, ownership in our cultural and personal history. My late mother’s dementia had mentally boxed her into a “room” beyond reach, after a rich life lived out in many “rooms” in Shanghai, Hong Kong, Vancouver, through wars, immigration and displacement. I am cocooned in a room of my own, and I cannot wait for the windows to open, to bathe in the light shed by the audience, that incredible glow of live dialogue of art and life, that incredible power of art and hu-

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