

A Surprise from Berlin – Duo Dong-West

The Big Finale for 2009 NCKU Environment and Art Festival

Chi Wang

Professor, Department of History, National Cheng Kung University

NCKU Art Center held the 10th Art Festival from the summer of 2009. Inaugurated with the installation of Master Ju Ming's sculpture “*Jumping*,” more artworks created by celebrated foreign and domestic artists and sculptors were installed on NCKU campus. This art festival, themed on “*Dialogues between Generations*,” is a successor of the “*Dawn of the Century*” Campus Sculpture Exhibition held a decade ago at NCKU. In addition, artistic color paintings were added onto the dull walls of many old buildings, and converted NCKU into a beautiful art village.



Professor Chi Wang of
Department of History



Master Ju Ming's sculpture “Jumping”



Color Painting “The Secret Garden”

During the art festival, in addition to artwork exhibitions, there were also performances such as musical theater, concert, Chinese comic dialogue, Sci-Fi circus and jazz dance, Iranian documentary film festival and outdoor musical film carnival in the Banyan Garden. The whole NCKU campus was bathed in an artistic aura. Before Christmas Eve, a Christmas Concert featuring Handel's *Messiah* and other church and Christmas songs was performed by the Tainan National University of the Arts Orchestra, NCKU Choir, and other choirs, glorified the Campus with the holy Christmas light. On that night, in the Banyan Garden, all attending guests, faculty and students were soothed with this wonderful and peaceful Christmas aura.



Handel's Messiah

The aforementioned fascinating events were not the end of the 2009 NCKU Art Festival. On December 29th, a concert not much publicized was held in the Chengshin Hall in College of Medicine. The brilliant performance, surprisingly, awed the audience, creating a big finale for the 2009 NCKU Environment and Art Festival.

The concert was recommended to the Art Center by the German Center of NCKU. About Duo Dong-West, we just knew that the two musicians are Vivien Lee and Volker Greve. Originated in Berlin, they are esteemed in Europe. Since NCKU

Art Center has always strived to introduce quality performance groups to NCKU, we included the Duo Dong-West in NCKU Art Festival programs.

On the day of the concert, Dr. Hilmar Kaht, former Director General of German Institute Taipei, introduced the features of Duo Dong-West's performance. He especially mentioned that the singer, Vivien Lee, has a bright and acoustic voice, and the instrumental artist, Volker Greve, has a gift of meticulously combining piano and various percussion instruments to produce vibrant and sweet melodies. Their fusion has won them recognition in Berlin, and their fans even organized a club!

Vivien Lee was born in Hongkong, and had vocal study in classical music at the Chinese University of Hongkong. She then went on for further study in Church- and Baroque Music at the Royal Academy of Music in Manchester, U.K., and later on continued for further study in German Lieder and 20th century music at the Hochschule der Künste, Berlin. Currently she lectures in the Faculty of Music Theatre at the Universität der Künste, Berlin. She has opera-engagements all through Europe, such as Lübeck, Kassel, Amsterdam, Brüssel, and has music directorship in various music-, dance-and theatre projects. Vivien writes and performs her own theatre- and music pieces. Meanwhile she is writing a book about how to expand the vocal technique, how to understand Art and furthermore the feeling of making it, as well as how to enlarge the capability of the body in order to increase the joy of singing. It is said that practicing Chi-Gong is one of her such techniques.



The diverse instruments employed by Volker Greve of the Duo Dong-West: Piano, Vibraphone, Percussion, etc.

Her partner musician, Volker Greve, has done Percussion Study at the Musikhochschule Düsseldorf and Jazz-composition and vibraphone / piano study at the Musikhochschule Cologne. He was winner of the first prize in the German federal musical competition for young musicians in 1980, and then toured around Europe and America to give concerts. Currently Greve is a colleague of Vivien and teaches at the JIB (Jazz Institute Berlin) of both Universität der Künste and Hochschule für Musik. Both musicians are passionate about contrasts and fusions between diverse cultures and artistic forms, and hence they experiment on music for fusion of East and West cultures. For example, they fuse Chinese folk songs with various Western music, inducing an unconventional and adventurous sound journey for the

audience, enticing their curiosity and appreciation for other cultures. To fulfill that mission, the two musicians position themselves as two “good-will ambassadors from the East and the West.” In fact, the “Dong” in the name of Duo Dong-West is the sound of the Chinese character “東,” meaning “East.”

The NCKU Art Festival concert is the debut in their first Asia tour. On that day, Volker Greve first appeared on the stage. Following his movement to the piano, the audience saw drum, bell, Kalimba, Anklung, various hand percussions such as the Brazilian Caxixi, African foot percussion and various invented percussions to accompany Eastern or African music. Hard to name the percussions, but the audience was intrigued by those fancy creations.

Vivien Lee then went on the stage. She is tiny, but has a surprisingly broad and chameleon like voice. The voice, sometimes primitive and wild, sometimes soft and tender as dew, bathed the audience in an extraordinary but beautiful melody. I recalled that before the first song, she charmed the audience with an extremely high, broad, and colorful singing accompanied by the piano and percussions. When the audience later heard the familiar folk song “*In That Far*



Away Place,” (The singer did not perform according to the program list of the first song “This & That.”) the audience was further amazed. The folk song was innovatively performed and accompanied. Vivien adapted it into what they call “Chinese folk Jazz variation” and they performed it in a both familiar and strange style. Vivien then sang some of her English and German songs inspired by her feelings of life. In addition, Vivien also performed Chinese folk songs and Taiwanese popular songs such as *The Little Lamb Wants to Go Home, The Blue High Mountain, Lamenting on My Unworthy Life, and Love's Lone Flower, etc.* The originally familiar songs, under the adaptation, singing and accompanied by the two magical musicians from the East and the West, evolved out a totally different rhythm and flavor, turning the humble folk songs into glorious masterpieces meeting international performing art standards.



Duo Dong-West: Vivien Lee (right) and Volker Greve (left)

After Vivien's last song, the enthusiastic applauds and encores drew them back to the stage, and they gave two encore songs. The second encore song was Johannes Brahms's *Sandmännchen*, which had been performed by the legendary German soprano Elisabeth Schwarzkopf. Vivien wrote Chinese lyrics for half of the song, and sang it with a soft and beautiful voice. The audience lauded with lasting applauds. In response to the audience's enthusiasm, Vivien said that though Chinese is an elegant language, it is not much heard in the international music arena. She invited people to support their initiative to bring Chinese onto the international music stage. While I am not an emotional person, her words summoned tears out of my eyes during the applauds.

Design & Layout : Ivan Tarn

Translation : Helen Chang, The Banyan Editorial Office

Copyright 2010 National Cheng Kung University