



CULTURE IN TAIWAN

Taiwan's cultural landscape is as unique and varied as the island itself. Just as the topography of the islands ranges from steep mountain slopes to coastal plains, sandy beaches and coral reefs, with high alpine areas to subtropic zones, Taiwan's art and culture encompasses a wide variety of fields from Beijing and Taiwanese opera troupes, Aboriginal singers and dancers, orchestras for Chinese and Western music, Mando-pop stars and Western-trained opera singers to hand puppet companies, contemporary dance and theater companies, filmmakers, painters, calligraphers, multi-media artists and authors.

Taiwan's creative community is a reflection of the island's people – the more than 16 Indigenous communities, Hakka and Han Chinese -- and the outside factors that have influenced its history, from early Dutch and Spanish colonists to 50 years of Japanese rule, and the Taiwanese ability to absorb and fuse diverse elements together.

Over the past 30 years, Taiwanese artists and performers have begun to make their mark on the world stage, with a new generation building and expanding upon the success of their predecessors. This outward expansion developed alongside, and in some ways been supported by, the Taiwan government's investment in arts-focused universities and theatre and cultural centers around the island.

The opening of the National Kaohsiung Center for the Arts (Weiwuying) in Kaohsiung in October 2018 will complete the three-prong base of the National Performing Arts Center, which was established in April 2014 to form a coalition of three great cultural complexes in the north, centre and south of Taiwan: the National Theater and Concert Hall Center (NTCH) in Taipei, opened in 1987, the National Taichung Theater (NTT), opened in November 2016, and finally Weiwuying.

The NTCH, NTT and Weiwuying were all designed to provide venues for local artists and companies as well as international troupes, but under the National Performing Arts Center umbrella have also been tasked with creating platforms to promote Taiwanese artists, encourage cross-cultural exchanges and collaborations and foster arts education.

Dance and film are two areas where Taiwanese have long won critical acclaim internationally, but Taiwanese at home and abroad are making names in a wide variety of fields.

Dance

Cloud Gate Dance Theater and founder Lin Hwai-min are often the first names that come to mind when dance in Taiwan is mentioned. Not only was Cloud Gate the first Taiwanese company to achieve an international reputation, but over the past 45 years Lin has built a troupe on a par with other world-class names and nurtured generations of future dancers and choreographers.

More than a dozen smaller troupes now make regular appearances abroad, including the Legend Lin Dance Theatre, Taipei Dance Forum, Tjimur Dance Theatre and Huang Yi Studio, while Taiwanese dancers or choreographers can be found in companies as varied as Landestheater Linz Ballet, Company Wayne McGregor, Tanztheater Wuppertal Pina Bausch, Hofesh Shechter Company, Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Company, Batsheva Dance Company, the Akram Khan Company and the Martha Graham Dance Company. Among the new generation of choreographers winning awards on the international festival circuit are Huang Yi, Benson (Po-chen) Tsai, Lai Hung-chung and Liu Kuan-hsiang.

Film

While the films of Hou Hsiao-hsien, Tsai Ming-liang and Oscar winner Ang Lee have scooped up numerous Golden Horse awards in Taiwan and Golden Lions at the Venice Film Festival, among others, they also served to inspire a new generation of directors such as Wei Te-sheng, Zero Chou, Huang Hui-che, David Lim and Chi Po-chou, whose work is proving popular at festival around Asia and Europe.

Fine Arts

Taiwan has been participating in the Venice Biennale since 1995, with works as varied as Chen Chieh-jen's "computer paintings" in 1997, Chang Chien-chi's photographs in 2001, Hsu Chia-hui in 2013 and documentation of New York City-based performance artist Hsieh The-ching's creations last year.

Theatre

The Performance Workshop, founded in 1985, has become one of the most influential theater groups in the Chinese-speaking world, while founder and playwright Stan Lai has been hailed as Asia's top theater director.

Not far behind are other troupes such as Shakespeare's Wild Sisters Group, led by director and playwright Wang Chia-ming, the Godot Theater Company, Riverbed Theater, Dark Eyes Performance Lab, Tainaner Ensemble and EX-Theatre Asia, which draw packed houses around Taiwan, in the region and on the international festival circuit.

In Chinese opera, troupes such as Ming Hwa Yuan Taiwanese Opera Company keep the traditional repertoire alive while Contemporary Legend Theater has built its reputation by adapting Western classics to traditional Chinese drama.

Music

In the world of music, Chien Wen-Pin first made a name for himself as a conductor with the Deutsche Oper am Rhein as well as Taiwan's National Symphony Orchestra, while the NSO's current conductor Lu Shao-chia is known both at home and abroad, along with pianist Pi-hsien Chen, Meng-chieh Liu, Gwhyneth Chen and violinists Hu Nai-yuan and Tseng Yu-chien.

Literature

Modern Taiwanese writers popular at home and overseas include Lung Ying-tai, Kenneth Pai Hsien-yung, Huang Chung-ming, Yang Mu, Jimmy Liao and Wu Ming-yi, whose "The Stolen Bicycle" was longlisted for the 2018 Man Booker International Prize.

Fashion and Costume Design

Fashion designers, including several who received advanced training abroad, such as Johan Ku, Apu Jen and Jim Chen Hsiang-hu, have created their own companies and lines as well as creating costumes for dance and theater productions.