

**STATEMENT BY CHIEN WEN-PIN  
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NATIONAL KAOHSIUNG CENTER FOR THE ARTS (WEIWUYING), TAIWAN**

My appointment as director of Weiwuying (the National Kaohsiung Center for the Arts) has come at a time in my career when, I believe, I have the most to give to this amazing new complex – one of the most beautiful, iconic and best-equipped performing arts centres in the world.

Although the official opening does not take place until later this year, we have already had glimpses of what this remarkable building can offer. We have hosted performances, symposia and gatherings. These have involved international and emerging artists, and have garnered a huge amount of interest from the public. The creative industries are extraordinarily lively in Taiwan, and we have seen how, even now, Weiwuying is influencing their development. Once our doors are officially open, the energy here will be very exciting.

I trained as a musician, and have worked for a long time as a conductor, both in Taiwan and abroad. For the last 21 years, I have been Principal Conductor at the Deutsche Oper am Rhein in Düsseldorf, alongside roles as Music Director of the National Symphony Orchestra in Taiwan, and Resident Conductor at the Pacific Music Festival in Japan. All this experience has given me the privilege of growing within an environment of great international music making. Now, at the age of 50, I believe I have the depth and perspective to deliver the very best at Weiwuying.

I follow all the performing arts with great interest, at home and abroad, and there are so many strands available for us to draw on at Weiwuying. Classical and pop music, Chinese and international opera and theatre, dance of all kinds, circus, festivals and education events – world-class facilities await them all here, along with great opportunities. I have witnessed the enormous talent in my country and in the wider region, and look forward to offering a springboard from which that talent can soar.

As an active, practising artist – the first one to be given charge of a major cultural centre in Taiwan – I know from the inside how things can be done, and can give clear direction. Thanks to my continuing conducting career, I am able to experience the international arts scene first hand, talking to musicians and other artists, and uncovering new ideas for programming that reflect the very best in contemporary practice. Also, with this global perspective, I will make sure that we remain open to a

wide variety of approaches. Weiwuying, with its multiple state-of-the-art auditoria, gives us the opportunity to experiment – to be bold and innovative, and to try different things.

Today's performing arts are at an interesting crossroads. On the one hand, around the world, we are experimenting with more and more crossover. The lines between different disciplines are no longer so clear. On the other hand, I believe that traditional performance, focusing on a single discipline, is very beautiful and can take us deep into the work: it is not always necessary to add the excitement of a multi-disciplinary performance. We will maintain a balance.

Meanwhile, alongside its state-of-the-art concert hall, recital hall and theatre, Weiwuying includes the first dedicated national opera house to be built in Taiwan. That, alone, presents incredible possibilities, and my intention is to deliver, for the first time, a full-scale opera production platform and the possibility for a national opera company for Taiwan.

Drawing on my background in creating international co-productions, I will set up a flow of cultural exchange between Weiwuying and institutions, companies, orchestras and artists from across the world. This is particularly exciting for me. In 2006 I delivered, in Taipei, the first ever production of Wagner's Ring cycle generated in the Chinese-speaking world. Before then, Wagner productions from Europe were brought in wholesale, on the principle that Asian singers had neither the range nor the strength for these works. But, in 2004, we began work on a major Wagner co-production project, working with a German opera coach with whom I had previously collaborated in Taipei. Together we realised that we had enough singers in Taiwan who had the right potential qualities, if they received the right training. We spent more than two years training each singer, and by 2006 were able to present the whole of the Ring cycle in a concert hall production, with only six foreign singers out of a cast of more than twenty. This was an important milestone in classical music in Taiwan. We proved its quality, and its capability.

Today, we have wonderful professional singers in Taiwan. Now, with our opera house at Weiwuying, there will be scope for them to spread their wings. Moreover, through our co-productions, we will invite singers to come from overseas, to collaborate and to offer master classes to our singers, and we will send our young artists to Europe as part of those exchanges, giving them the opportunity to learn and be trained there. For our orchestral concert series, we will work both with orchestras in Taiwan and with leading orchestras who will visit from around the world. Weiwuying will be a showcase for the best of opera and orchestral music, nationally and internationally.

While classical music and, in particular, opera are my first loves, I am, as I have indicated, interested in many art forms, including theatre and dance. At Weiwuying I

am fortunate to be supported by the help of leading international specialists in those fields. Our offer will be wide-ranging and, across the board, of the highest quality. There will many opportunities for our young people to see the work of their peers from other countries and also to develop and demonstrate their performing skills – for example, through Taiwan Dance Platform, a biennale that showcases developments in dance across Asia, and through the newly established Asia Network for Dance.

Kaohsiung, in the southwest of Taiwan, is the country's third largest city and has, over the last decade, undergone enormous regeneration in the wake of its industrial past. From as far back as 2003, the government set out to improve the environment for arts and culture in Kaohsiung, and since then audiences have expanded greatly. Weiwuying will serve local and national audiences and will provide a new learning platform for the training of Taiwanese musicians and performers, both professionals and amateurs. But it will do even more: Weiwuying will be the second largest performing arts centre in the whole of Asia! This means that there, in Kaohsiung, we have the opportunity to show the whole world what Taiwan can do, in all the performing arts.

Something that overseas visitors to Weiwuying will encounter is the passion for theatre, dance, spectacle and music that is everywhere in Taiwan. Our audiences are extraordinarily enthusiastic and knowledgeable. Crazy about the performing arts, and classical music in particular, they range across all ages, and include a high proportion of young people. The origin for this may lie in music education, which is strong in Asia. In practically every household in Taiwan, children learn a western classical music instrument. Parents give their children opportunities to learn, and expect them to be ambitious. With this stimulus at an early age, music is instilled at a deep level, so that even if a child stops learning his or her instrument after a while, it re-emerges as an enthusiasm for concert-going later on. I hope visitors from around the globe will come to Weiwuying to experience the best of music, and be swept up in the atmosphere created by our marvellous Taiwanese audiences.

At the heart of our project is, of course, the astounding architecture provided for us by Mecanoo. Weiwuying is totally unlike any other performing arts venue in Taiwan, with the surrounding park and the building seeming to merge together, in a continuous line. The design demonstrates that the arts should be a seamless part of people's lives, to be accessed without borders. It is a fabulous place. So the building alone will, I believe, attract international visitors and, with its fantastic venues, we will be able to present the best in performing arts in the very best possible environment, serving local people and the whole of Taiwan, as well as audiences from around Asia and beyond.