

Press Release (7 May 2018)

Willy Tsao attends UNESCO International Dance Day 2018 celebrations
in Cuba as Message Author for Asia Pacific

City Contemporary Dance Company (CCDC) is thrilled to announce that Dr Willy Tsao, Founder and Artistic Director of CCDC, was invited to be the Message Author representing the Asia Pacific region for International Dance Day 2018. Dr Tsao attended the main celebration event on 29 April at the Gran Teatro Alicia Alons in Havana, Cuba.

Since 1982, the Dance Committee of International Theatre Institute (ITI) celebrated International Dance Day every year on 29 April. This year, to celebrate the 70th Anniversary of ITI and underline the cross-cultural and international aspect of dance, five Message Authors were invited from each UNESCO regions for the first time. These outstanding choreographers and dancers had each written a message to circulate in the world. The Message Authors were:

1. Salia SANOU (Africa)
2. Georgette GEBARA (Arab Countries)
3. Ohad NAHARIN (Europe)
4. Marianeia BOAN (The Americas)
5. Willy TSAO (Asia Pacific)

Dr Tsao said, “In the pursuit of excellence in contemporary dance, we value individual expressions; therefore, we learn to respect different opinions and diversity. We value the search of innovative ideas; therefore, we accept changes and are willing to adapt to new ways of living. We value the need for understanding current happenings and issues as a way to study human existence; therefore, we become more tolerant and understanding while we are face-to-face with each other regardless of any differences.”

Tsao read the message in the celebration ceremony at Cuba together with the other Message Authors, sharing valuable insights and inspirations on the state of global dance and inspiring.

Previous ethnic Chinese Message Authors for International Dance Day included Ms DAI Ailian (ballerina, in 1994) and Mr LIN Hwai-min (Founder of Cloud Gate Dance Theatre, in 2013).

World Dance Day 2018

Five Messages Authors <https://www.international-dance-day.org/messageauthor.html>

Main Event <https://www.international-dance-day.org/mainevent.html>

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Message for 2018 World Dance Day (Asia Pacific)

Willy Tsao (Hong Kong)

Dear friends of the international dance community,

The world seems to be in constant dissidence and troubles. We have witnessed, especially in recent years, incessant conflicts between countries, races and cultures. As a dance practitioner, I can't help but wonder if art may somehow become an antidote to prevent or counteract some of the disorders that are threatening world peace and harmony. I have been promoting the art of dance in China since late 1980s, trying to convince the general public that dance, especially contemporary dance, is important for a country's development. I believe that the three essential aspects that characterize contemporary dance - individual expressions, innovative ideas and study of human conditions, serve as the fundamental building blocks of a value system upon which modern China will continue to grow and flourish.

In the pursuit of excellence in contemporary dance, we value individual expressions; therefore, we learn to respect different opinions and diversity. We value the search of innovative ideas; therefore, we accept changes and are willing to adapt to new ways of living. We value the need for understanding current happenings and issues as a way to study human existence; therefore, we become more tolerant and understanding while we are face-to-face with each other regardless of any differences. China, similar to most of the countries in the Asia-Pacific region, enjoys a rich cultural heritage. However, the country had been sealed off from the rest of the world for decades and has only opened up through its reformation and open policy in 1978, exactly 40 years ago. Indeed, there is still a long way to go before the general public in China can comprehend and appreciate in greater depth the value of contemporary dance. On the other hand, I am seeing the emergence of a phenomenon which suggests that young people in China are interested in the

contemporary dance art form and are using it as a medium of self-expression. Hence, with a growing connection with international communities and stronger mutual contemporary dance exchanges, I am confident that China will accelerate to become a significant force for advocating individual viewpoints, championing innovative changes, and fostering tolerance and understanding among nations in this troubled world.

Thank you.

About Willy TSAO, CCDC Founder and Artistic Director

Founder/Artistic Director, CCDC

Artistic Director, BeijingDance/LDTX

Council Member, China's Chinese Dancers Association

Vice Chairman, Guangdong Provincial Dancers Association

Willy Tsao is an influential figure in China's contemporary dance development as a choreographer, educator, curator, manager and director. Born and educated in Hong Kong, Tsao received his contemporary dance training in the US and an MBA degree from the University of Hong Kong. He was named an Honorary Fellow by the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts in 2000 and received an Honorary Doctorate in 2015.

As a contemporary dance pioneer in Mainland China and Hong Kong, Tsao founded the first and only professional contemporary dance company CCDC in Hong Kong in 1979 and has held the role of artistic director since 1989. In Mainland China, Tsao was a teacher and advisor to the Modern Dance Programme at the Guangdong Dance School from 1987 to 1992 and was named artistic director of China's first professional contemporary dance company, Guangdong Modern Dance Company, when it was founded by the Guangdong Provincial Government in 1992. He departed the group in 1998 and was invited by the Guangdong Cultural Bureau in 2004 to resume his position until 2016. In Beijing, Tsao had served the Beijing Modern Dance Company as artistic director from 1999 to 2005. In 2005, Tsao established China's first independent professional contemporary dance company, BeijingDance/LDTX.

Committed to nurturing and developing Chinese contemporary dance groups, Tsao established two contemporary dance exchange platforms, Guangdong Modern Dance Festival and Beijing Dance Festival. Beijing Dance Festival was set up in 2008 with Tsao as artistic director. A popular annual festival, it attracts hundreds of dance artists performing to nearly 10,000 audience members, and is well received by industry practitioners local and abroad.

Tsao also holds several public posts in Mainland China. In 2015, he was appointed as a council member of the China's Chinese Dancers Association. In 2016, he became the vice chairman of the Guangdong Provincial Dancers Association. Tsao also gives lectures and workshops frequently for universities and dance groups in major Chinese cities, including Beijing, Changsha, Daqing, Fuzhou, Guangzhou, Guiyang, Hefei, Hohhot, Kunming, Nanchang, Nanning, Shanghai, Taiyuan, Urumqi, Wuhan and Xiamen.

Tsao's contribution to dance has been widely recognised. He has also received numerous awards and honours including, Dancer of the Year Award from the Hong Kong Artists' Guild in 1988, Ten Outstanding Young Persons Award in 1990, Badge of Honour from HRH Queen Elizabeth II in 1993, Louis Cartier Award of Excellence – Outstanding Choreographer in 1998. In 1999, he was awarded the Bronze Bauhinia Star by the Hong Kong SAR Government. He received Distinguished Achievement Award in the 2014 Hong Kong Dance Awards for his immense and invaluable achievement and contribution to Hong Kong dance.

Since the 1980s, Tsao has created more than 60 works for the dance stage, including *Bird Songs*, *Kunlun*, *China Wind-China Fire*, *365 Ways of Doing and Undoing Orientalism*, *Wandering in the Cosmos*, *One Table N Chairs*, *Sexing Three Millennia*, *Dao: Extraordinaire*, *Conqueror*, *Warrior Lanling* and *In Search of the Grand View Garden*. His choreography has been staged in Canada, France, Germany, Israel, Japan, Korea, the US as well as Beijing, Guangzhou, Shanghai and Taipei.