

## In the Name of Dance *Artus's séance Noah Trilogy*

Written by Wei-Yun Lin and published in Voice Over, Hong Kong, Spring issue 2002

*(Please note: this article was originally written in Chinese and contains many words relate to Chinese culture; there will be explanation in endnotes)*

I attended a séance; it was disguised as a theatrical performance, and at first I was convinced. In order to deceive the public, it claimed that it was a combination of dance, theatre, live music, video, sound/image installation, exhibition...and party. The name of the séance was *Artus*, and the password was *Noah Trilogy*. I booked a seat from a mysterious organization: *New Territories*, and the place was called *Tramway* (just beside a train station). And oh yes, it was a *Hungarian séance*.

I stood by the door with all the excitement, expecting another 'theatrical evening'. Gábor Goda, an exorcist who disguised as the director, warmly welcomed us: 'We need your name, voice and photo as part of the performance. Please come in one by one...write down your name and say it, take a picture, and then you can take a seat.' So I followed the instruction. I found that the stage was rather small, and black curtains hanging on each side. A big screen was in the middle; in front of it were four music stands. On one side stood three strange-looking chairs, and other objects I couldn't name. When the 'performance' started, I knew instantly that I was deceived. Because as soon as I entered the room, I was dead. My last portrait was displayed on the screen (and it was moving) along with others'; the musicians started playing the funeral march (because it was in *Hungarian style*, suo-na, yüeh-ch'in, mouth reed organ <sup>1</sup>...etc. were replaced by violin, cello, bassoon and clarinet), I felt as if I was attending a group memorial service; I regretted that I hadn't died gracefully (others' portraits looked much better than mine). But what I can do? We could only die once.

Three mediums entered the room. They were very talented mediums; not only did they make glasses move automatically on the table, but also they danced, told a story, made us laugh, walked on stilts...despite this, it still looked very much like a séance; because the exorcist who sat aside kept ringing a little bell to call the ghosts<sup>2</sup>. One medium couldn't stand it anymore and decided to hang himself. The exorcist told us that it was time for the interval; we could chat, have a drink, and admire the supernatural photos they brought from Hungary.

They were not real supernatural photos, because I had already seen its 'making process'. There was one on stage; the paint was not dry yet. I heard that they would find different artists to paint each of their meetings. I saw the painter's hands on the screen; why did they show us the process if they wanted us to believe that these supernatural photos were real? God created the world in a week; artist only needed an hour.

The medium was dead, so that we had to bring him back from hell. It was forbidden to look back, or

we would be turned into salt poles. The exorcist gave each of us a phosphorescence (although in modern term it's called 'torch'); we entered the dark, horrifying hell. Look, the assistant of the Lord of Hell is adding names on the dead-list<sup>3</sup>, our souls were little white balls manipulated by devils. I saw words being pulled out from a mouth, the balls flying around and the devils dancing under a mill<sup>4</sup>...the medium, now named 'wanderer', was sitting on the mill and singing Hungarian song. The guard of The Gate of the Pseudonyms asked him: 'What is your name?' Oops, none of us had a name. When we passed the gate, when we *died*, we lost our names. 'My name is wanderer. My child, my love, son of a bitch. I don't know.' 'My name is Me, my name weaves its life form me, because I am who I am.' The white ball was swinging like a pendulum; it wouldn't stop, like our existence. The wanderer told us a story and lit a candle; light filled the entire room.

We came out from the hell. After the second interval, we arrived at our destination-the Heaven. There used to be nine bridges to reach the Heaven, but eight of them had already been demolished because people had done too many bad things. And here was the ninth bridge...it was all silent now, except the band. The exorcist and three mediums had to move very precisely not to break the last bridge. A little wooden man whose life was manipulated by others was climbing the bridge; they weighted his deeds on a scale, he climbed a step...they build a tower by using the eight bridges, he climbed another step...the séance was over, but he hadn't reach the point.

In the end I couldn't tell what it was anymore. Was it a dance, theatre or séance? I didn't want to know. I stood up and clapped loudly; I thought: 'I could die tonight.' Having had the most wonderful experience in my life, I could have died with no regret. Unfortunately, I was pushed out into the mundane world again, and I drank Mon-Po's soup<sup>5</sup> by mistake (someone lied to me saying it was Hungarian wine), and now I remember nothing about my pre-existence.

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<sup>1</sup> Chinese musical instruments played in funerals. There are diverse funeral customs in Chinese culture, depending on different religions and areas. I attended my grandmother's funeral in Taiwan; it was a mixture of Taoism and Buddhism. There were a band playing funeral march and monks chanting sutras; family members had to kneel on the floor and bend down to offer hearty thanks when guests bowed to the dead. Some people's funeral are more complicated than others, as I know, some would hire professional mourners to hail for the dead, and some would invite politicians to attend the funeral. In some area people would hire strip-teasers and bands to parade on funeral procession (but it's less popular now).

<sup>2</sup> When communicating with ghosts, a Taoist would ring a little bell to call them in; the bell also protects the Taoist from the evil. In Chinese legends there is a kind of monster (a bit like vampire) who sleeps in the coffin during the day and comes out to attack people in the night. They jump to chase people, and they kill people by seizing their throat. A Taoist would ring the bell to defeat the monster and kills it by a special sword made by peach wood. If you meet this monster, the best way is to stop breathing, and then it won't discover you.

<sup>3</sup> In Chinese legends, there are ten underworld courts, and in each court there is a judge and his assistant (or secretary). These assistants hold books contain people's personal details (their names, fate, how long will they live...etc.); it is said that one's fate has already been written down even before he/she was born. But some people want to live longer, so they would bribe these assistants to make a little change (although it's illegal). When people die and report to the underworld; there is a mirror to tell his/her deeds. Depending on their deeds, they'll go to heaven or different hells (the worst people go to the lowest level B18). And there are police with bulls' or horses' heads.

<sup>4</sup> In the ninth hell, people who wasted food while alive would be milled into dust.

<sup>5</sup> When people have paid the price of their crime (have suffered for a hundred years or so), they would go to Mon-Po's place. Mon-Po is an old lady who makes a kind of soup that would help the drinker to forget about his or her pre-existence, and everyone is clean and innocent to go to reincarnation.