

2008.8.7-9.14

臺北藝術節十年鉅獻

藝旅未盡

2008·10<sup>TH</sup>

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TAIPEI ARTS FESTIVAL



## The Life and Times of Louis I. Kahn

September 5-6, 2008

Guangfu Auditorium, Zhongshan Hall

Produced by

Zuni Icosahedron

Creative and Production Team

Text

Louis I. Kahn

Director/ Designer

Mathias Woo

Special Appearance

Kam Kwok Leung

Composer / Live Music Performance

Jason Choi @PMPS

Digital Images / Interactive Programming

Tobias Gremmler

Digital Images / Live Mixing

Lawrence Choi

Technical Director

Fong Hiu Tan

Production Manager

Billy Chan

Lighting Designer

Lawrence Lee

Sound Designer

Tennison Siu

Production Coordinator / Stage Manager

Frankie Hung

Deputy Stage Manager

Chow Chun Yin

Makeup

Carmen Cheng

Wardrobe Assistant

Lam Alex Workshop

Chan Wai Yee

Company Manager (Administration and Programme)

Doris Kan

Company Manager (Finance)

Jacky Chan

Creative Coordinator

Chan Ho Fung

Creative Assistant / Subtitle Operator

Pamela Tsui

Publicity and Media Coordinator

Luka Wong

Programme Coordinator

Bowie Chow



## The Art of Multi-Media

## Zuni Icosahedron (Hong Kong)

Zuni Icosahedron, with a history of 26 years, is the premiere of Hong Kong's avant-garde and experimental theatre. It has always stayed on the cutting edge of media technology in presenting the interactive relationship between multi-media and theatre, as well as in probing the possibilities of form and content in 'theatre space' through experimentation and exploration. Zuni has been most inspiring in developing the aesthetics of theatre in Chinese society, with its experimental and subversive nature, and this could be seen in the interactive experiments in the narrative (or rather non-narrative), form and space in their early works. The same spirit could be found in the multi-media design in lights, images, sounds and spaces as in the attempts in the area of cross-media performances, to cross-boundary political and civil area, and to cross-region international cultural exchanges. The topics covered stretch from popular culture to social taboos, from the traditional to the contemporary.

Mathias Woo, the director of the performance, pushes the limits and boundaries of multi-media to the ultimate in his experimentation of 'theatre space', with his magical manoeuvrings over texts, images, spaces and modern technologies in his theatre works. He has worked with top-notch Chinese dramatists, such as Stanley Lai (Taiwan), Meng Jinghui (China), and Edward Lam (Hong Kong), shedding his influence on the creativity of multi-media theatre in Chinese society.

In 2004, Mathias Woo was invited by the National Theatre Company of China to stage *18 Springs*, a drama adapted from the novel of the same title by Eileen Chang. It was presented with an original concept in theatre time and space; and with a minimal employment of the multi-media in sound, image and installation. The outstanding and immaculate performance of the actors brought out the spirit and essence of the book to the utmost. In 2005, another of Mathias Woo's works, an interpretation of *Fragments d'un Discours Amoureux* by Roland Barthes was invited to Taipei. The confusing entanglement and the various manifestations of lovers under the influence of popular culture and symbols of love were expressed powerfully and successfully through the use of music, experiments in form and content. This was all made possible through the special design of space, transforming the auditorium of Novel Hall into magical theatre space. In 2008, Taipei Arts Festival has brought the audience

into the multi-media theatre space of Mathias Woo and Zuni, exploring the various spaces created by the multi-media enchantments of the two performances, the spiritual space of *Hua-yen Sūtra* and the architectural space of *The Life and Times of Louis I. Kahn*.



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## Music Title

- 1 Piano Sonata K.281
- 2 The making of a room is nothing short of a miracle
- 3 Just beauty
- 4 Order is...
- 5 Joy is the keyword

**Piano Sonata in B flat, K.281 by W.A. Mozart**

**Extracted voice-over spoken by Louis I. Kahn**

**Composed and arranged by Jason Choi @PMPS**



## Director's Note

### Mathias Woo

#### 1. Louis I. Kahn

Louis I. Kahn was a poet architect, a philosopher architect.

In Kahn's architecture, the form and the design are one. To Kahn, architecture was a religion, and not a business. An architect was like a religious worker, guarding the noble spirituality of architecture. This was the basis of Kahn's philosophy in architecture. In the 60's, when Europe and the U.S. were governed by idealism, the idea and spirit of Louis Kahn created a great influence on architects and students of architecture of that time. His profound concern for humanistic values and his foundational classical inclinations in architecture brought about many constructive and up-lifting influences to the cold, machine-age and rational functionalism in modernism.

After World War II, the opportunities and pressures for reconstruction brought architects endless possibilities which were quite unheard of until then. But under the demands for functional buildings by the bureaucrats under the political culture of that time, a lot of simple-minded, machine-made modern architecture was produced, and thus created a bad name for modernism. In form, the minimalism in Kahn seemed to be part of the architecture language of modernism, but his method and constructional process behind actually stemmed from a series of questions and philosophical explorations. What is a school? What is the relationship of a school, a teacher and students? What is the relationship of form and space? What are the characteristics of a building made of bricks? What are the basic character and attributes of architecture? This dialectical concept of Kahn's differed greatly from the uniformed architecture of modernism. In Kahn's architectural spaces, there exists a sense of religion, with spaces playing the leading role while natural light is the material. In the hands of Louis Kahn, concrete becomes a material with life and historical weight, like a lot of masonry buildings in Europe in medieval times, a space with a sense of time. Louis Kahn was searching for timelessness in architecture, which, in a way, was taking architecture as a religion.

Louis Kahn's architecture and his theories on architecture altered the aesthetics of international architecture in the 80's and the 90's. The reintroduction of classical elements in post-modernism, the strife for breakthroughs in High-Tech architecture and the reinvention and reinterpretation of concrete in modernism – they all reflected a remarkable variety of influences by Louis Kahn. He

exercised a profound and prevalent weight of influence on latter 20<sup>th</sup> century world architecture and his influence can be seen in the works of Tadao Ando, Norman Foster and Michael Graves. Tadao Ando's pursuit of a building aesthetics that makes use of concrete is a kind of perfection of Kahn's architecture aesthetics, a marriage of Japanese tradition of minimalist aesthetics and craftsmanship.

The mysticism, greatness and innovation of Louis Kahn could be traced in his best works located in India and Bangladesh, produced in the last 20 years of his life. They maintain a high sympathy for the site with environmentally friendly designs, allowing abundance of natural ventilation and natural light. Most of these works were completed when Louis Kahn was in his seventies. They are monumental buildings with the true spirit of modern architecture, while at the same time, soaked in the magnificence of indigenous culture. Kahn did not create much before he was 50, and he built his reputation through teaching and lecturing. When he taught, it was like a priest giving a sermon. He lectured on the philosophy of architecture with passion and emotions. He talked about the way and the logic of architecture, as well as the people and their feelings relating to architecture. The audience was moved by his every word. Louis Kahn's writings on architecture are like hymns and poetry; not a long rendering of philosophy, but every sentence is compact with meticulous thoughts, just like his architecture, inspiring us with a profound concern for life, architecture and humanistic values.

*"The reason for living is to express... to express hate... to express love... to express integrity and ability... all intangible things. The mind is the soul, and the bring is the instrument from which we derive our singularity, and from which we gather attitude. Nature does not choose... it simply unravels its laws, and everything is designed by the circumstantial interplay where man chooses. Art involves choice, and everything that man does, he does in art. "*

## 2. Kahn's Emotional Life with Architecture

When I was in my first year of studying architecture, I went to a talk by Anne Tyng, a long time co-worker of Louis Kahn's. It was only afterwards that I came to know that she had a relationship with Kahn. Her talk was very simple, explaining her working relationship with Kahn and the process, and introducing to us Kahn's theories. She had this smile and, at the same time, a slight sense of sadness on her face, showing us she was missing him. The things were there, but Kahn was no longer with us though his architecture still "lives" among us. His writings, his manuscripts keep on being published. Kahn is not here, but he is still extending his influence on us. Kahn's emotional





life constituted partly to his legendary existence. All women sharing his love life, like Anne Tyng, played an important role in his architecture life. So, we could see that architecture was the pivotal core of Kahn's love life, and architecture was the true love of his life.

Nathaniel Kahn, Louis Kahn's illegitimate son, made a biographical documentary film, *"My Architect"* in 2003. The film is a personal quest of a son in search of his father. His family was singing praises of him out of love. The film gives glimpses of a workaholic who buried himself at work while obscuring everything else. I guess Kahn was working 24-7. The focus of the film is on the tours of Kahn's buildings, and not on the bright side or dark side of Kahn as a person. A workaholic like Kahn would bring both joy and pain to the people around him, and the way he threw himself into his work would definitely hurt his loved ones to some extent.

The film does not record this kind of damage, nor does it give any moralistic judgment about Kahn. Images were passing away frame by frame as I watched this two-hour documentary. While I was watching Kahn's works, I recalled some moments of happiness and pain when I was studying architecture. We were living in times when architecture was a commercial commodity, where there were only building area and square footage price. They were times without spaces and time without life. Kahn's theories on architecture are really getting farther and farther away from us. Nowadays, it is quite impossible for architects to practice Kahn's theories. The ideals of socialism in modernism architecture could only be realized in some places in Europe. What our celebrity architects are looking for today is not the harmony of architecture and society, but creating strange and bizarre works for brand names of our world of capitalism. Diversity no longer exists. Celebrity architects will not behave like Kahn or other masters of modernism, and go to some far away underdeveloped corners of the world without the attention of the mass media, to realize their dreams in architecture. The significance of Kahn is to remind us of the past glory of idealism. As the world is inclining more and more to be economy based, the power of architecture is diminishing everyday, and architecture which could enrich our life is disappearing. The positive response for Kahn's documentary in Japan, Europe and the U.S. may be signs of reflections on our present day architecture culture. Some think that Louis Kahn is being mythologized in this documentary film. True, we have not lived with or worked with Kahn, and it is quite impossible to get to really know him, and his true character, through his works. Actually, it is not really important if Kahn is being treated as a myth. What is important is that Kahn had left us a legacy of persistence in architecture ideals, and ideals are exactly what we need today. What we should do is to realize our dreams. Without dreams, without the ability and determination to materialize our dreams and ideals, our world would not become better, and the life of our next generation would not be enriched further. The last part of the documentary is on the



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National Assembly Building in Dhaka, Bangladesh. We could see those spaces still maintain a great sense of vigour after a few decades of completion. This is exactly what Kahn was looking for in architecture – timelessness, without air conditioning, without modern day consumerism. This building acts as a reminder for our architects of a sense of social responsibility which we have forgotten.

*(Translated by Vicky Leong)*

7

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## Louis I. Kahn

Louis I. Kahn (1901-1974) was one of the most inspiring American architects. He was born in Estonia and immigrated to the US in his childhood, graduated from University of Pennsylvania in 1924. Like his contemporary, he was influenced by the early-century modernism "International Style", yet Kahn expressed through his architecture the poetic quality of light and space in his personal sensibility.

He had realized relatively few buildings in his lifetime, however, his Jona Salk Institute, Kimbell Art Museum and National Assembly Building in Dhaka was considered some of the most important architecture of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Renowned sculptor Isamu Noguchi called him "a philosopher among architects". Kahn was also a great teacher, and he had taught at Yale University and later at University of Pennsylvania. He believed that the duty of an architect/designer is not to invent a "design", but to understand what the *order* is, for example what a brick wants to be, and answer it through the act of design.

## *The Life and Times of Louis I. Kahn (Taipei) Creative Team*

### Mathias Woo

### Director and Designer

Mathias Woo was born in Hong Kong, and studied architecture in Hong Kong and London. He participates actively in multi-media theatre works, criticism on cultural policies, arts education, architectural design and scriptwriting. He joined Zuni in 1988 and being the Executive Director of the organization. He has produced, designed and directed more than 50 theatre works, and his works have been invited to places like Tokyo, Beijing, Nanjing, Taipei, Singapore, Berlin and Krakow.

His recent theatre productions include *Hua-yen Sutra*, multimedia architecture music theatre *The Life and Times of Louis I. Kahn*, his adaptation of Ray Huang's famous book *1587, A Year of No Significance*, *The East Wing West Wing Social Theatre Series*, *Hong Kong Style* adapted from his own writing, and collaboration with Edward Lam, *18 Springs*. In 2008, Mathias Woo collaborated with Jiangsu Kunqu Opera House to put on a new production of Kunqu opera, *Tang Xianzu's Dream on Dreams*. His screenplay work *Happy Birthday*, co-written with Sylvia Chang, was nominated for the Best Screenplay in the 26<sup>th</sup> Hong Kong Film Awards. Mathias is also active in publishing. He was editor for the cultural journal "E+E" in Hong Kong. Other publications include the series of *Hong Kong Style* and *Hong Kong Odyssey* both of which explore the aesthetics of architecture and urban planning in Hong Kong.



**Kam Kwok-Leung Special Appearance**

Kam Kwok-Leung is one of the very few names worthy of the hall of fame of Hong Kong mass media. He is a mass media veteran and has been working in the business for over 30 years, excelling himself in television, radio, film and writing. A lot of his works have become classics as well as household names, and he has won himself thousands of loyal followers because of his bold and unique style. Kam is so full of fun and dynamic that everything with his involvement would be quickened to become delightful surprises. Kam has been very active in many creative projects lately, including the release of a concept album in 2006, the launching of a personal website: [www.masterminds.com.hk](http://www.masterminds.com.hk) sponsored by Samsung, and the publication of the book *I Ask People Ask Me*, in Mid 2007.

**Jason Choi Composer / Live Music Performance**

Jason Choi started his collaboration with Zuni in 1990 and has been involved in producing music for many of the group's productions, including *The Legend of Hong Kong - Women In and Out of Love* (1990), *Anthony Wong Sings People Mountain People Sea* (Hong Kong Arts Festival, 1997), *2001: A Hong Kong Odyssey* (2001), *The Life and Times of Louis I. Kahn* (2001) and *A Lover's Discourse* (Hong Kong Arts Festival, 2003). Jason formed People Mountain People Sea with Anthony Wong and other members in 1999, and began his music career as a composer. Since then he has been active in the local pop music scene, collaborating with many artists, including Miriam Yeung, Anita Mui, Sammi Cheng, etc. Jason and Square Fruit, the former guitar-player of AMK, formed their own group, Pop Pop, featuring guitar and electronic music in 2000.

**Tobias Gremmler Digital Images and Interactive Programming**

Tobias has been engaged in multi-media creations for both commercial and arts sectors. As a member of Art Directors Club of Germany, he lectures and conducts workshops extensively in Europe, U.S.A and Asia. His latest works includes an international publication called "Grids for the Dynamic Image". Tobias also participated in *2001: A Hong Kong Odyssey* (2001), *Looking for Mies* (2002) and *Corbu* (2005).

**Lawrence Choi Digital Images and Live Mixing**

Lawrence Choi, graduated from the School of Creative Media of City University of Hong Kong in 2005, majoring in digital video and interactive installation, loving cinema and theatre. He has participated in the video design for "Hua-Yen Sutra 2.0(HK)", "Princess Chang Ping", "Faust auf dem Klosett", "L'empereur du Chant", "1587 A Year of No Significance", "Lady K Live - Kary Ng", "Joey Yung. Jue Yao, Moravian Philharmonic Concert", "HKPO vs Anthony Wong Live" and "Pong Nan in Concert: The Individualism Experience".

**Multi-media Architecture Music Theatre Series**

Mathias Woo, who has been outstanding in the integration of technology with theatre installation, created the MAMT (multi-media architecture music theatre) series in 2001. It is a series of multi-media stage productions that drew inspiration from some greatest 20<sup>th</sup> century architects. Integrating digital arts, sound, music and installation to generate a new form of theatre experience.

## Production History

03. 2001 **The Life and Times of Louis I. Kahn**  
– Shouson Theatre, Hong Kong Art Center, Hong Kong
07. 2001 **The Life and Times of Louis I. Kahn** (Re-run)  
– Shouson Theatre, Hong Kong Art Center, Hong Kong
03. 2002 **The Life and Times of Louis I. Kahn**  
(Invitation by Kraków Alternative Theatre festival)  
– Kraków, Poland
08. 2002 **Looking for Mies**  
– Kwai Tsing Theatre, Hong Kong
06. 2005 **Corbu**  
– Sheung Wan Civic Center, Hong Kong
04. 2007 **The Life and Times of Louis I. Kahn 2007**  
– Kwai Tsing Theatre, Hong Kong
04. 2007 **The Life and Times of Louis I. Kahn 2008**  
(Invitation by the 10<sup>th</sup> Taipei Arts Festival)  
– Guangfu Auditorium, Zhongshan Hall, Taipei

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## Zuni Icosahedron

Zuni Icosahedron, founded in 1982, is a Hong Kong Based non-profit charity arts organization in Hong Kong. Being an international experimental theatre company, Zuni has produced more than 150 original productions of alternative theatre and multi-media performances, and has been active in video, sound experimentation and installation arts, as well as in the area of arts education, arts criticism, arts policy and international cultural exchange. Over the years, Zuni has been invited to over 30 cities in Europe, Asia, and America for exchange and performances. Zuni was given a 3-year grant by Hong Kong Arts Development Council to facilitate its creative operation since 1999, and now is financially supported by the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.



Zuni Icosahedron is financially supported by the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region

Artistic Director: Danny Yung

[www.zuni.org.hk](http://www.zuni.org.hk)

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11

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