

ARTS

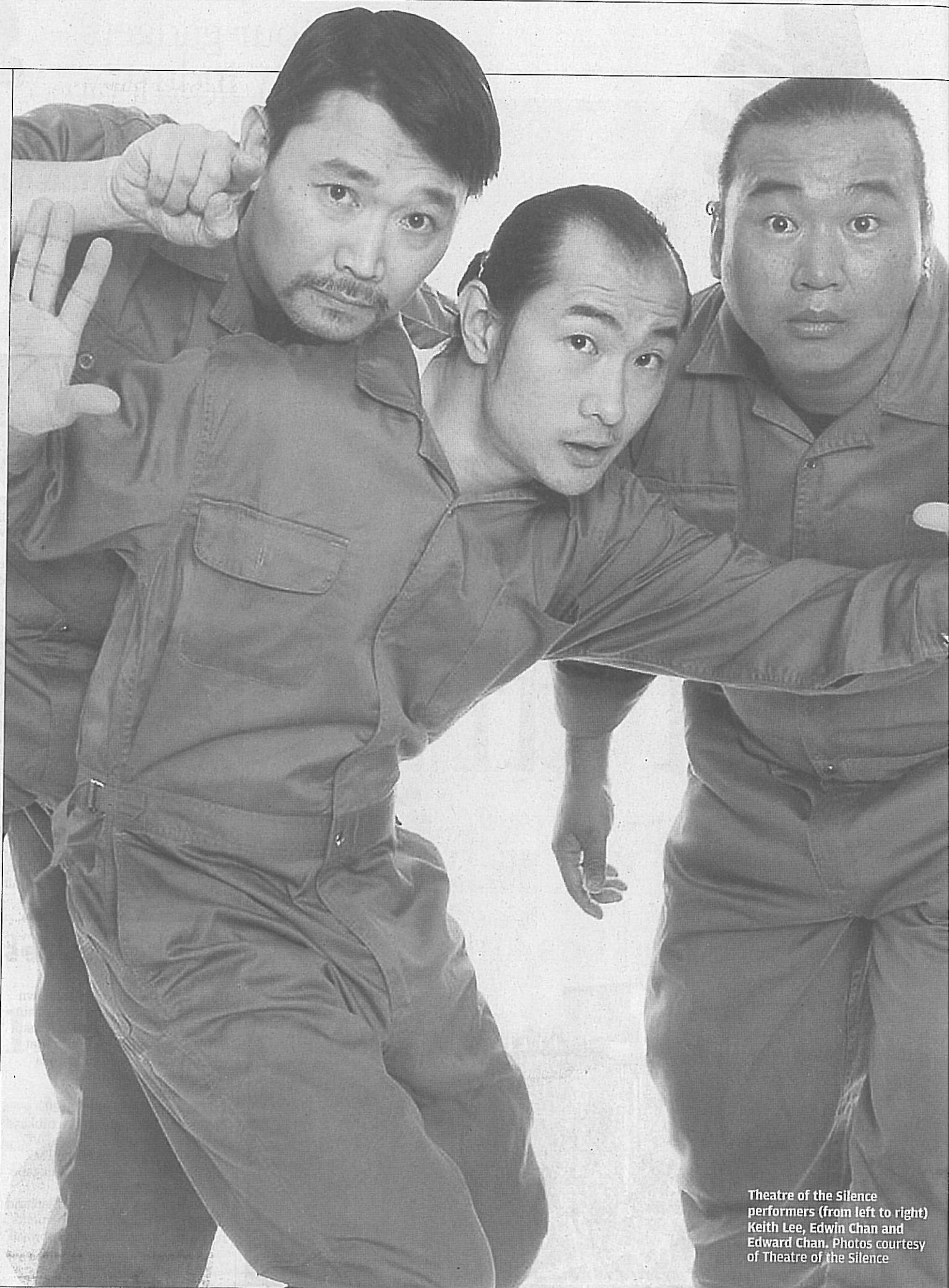
Edited by Kevin Kwong
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Mention physical theatre in the city and dance immediately springs to mind. But a new production called *Park and Art*, which opens next week, sets out to promote the cultural diversity of movement art through a fascinating fusion of styles.

Park and Art, produced by Arts with the Disabled Association Hong Kong and directed by stage veteran Desmond Tang Wai-kit, features a mixture of hip hop, mime, tai chi and yoga. It will be performed at Ngau Chi Wan Civic Centre from August 1 to 3 as part of this year's International Arts Carnival, and is also being held in honour of the forthcoming Beijing Olympic Games.

Tang says the production takes physical theatre in a new direction.

"Most Hongkongers associate physical theatre with dance. Even mime shows are few and far between. Overseas, the definition of this art form is a lot broader so we thought it'd be a good idea to have a mix of different theatre disciplines to be performed by local and foreign artists together," says Tang.



Theatre of the Silence performers (from left to right) Keith Lee, Edwin Chan and Edward Chan. Photos courtesy of Theatre of the Silence

Taking part in the snow will be hearing impaired artists Keith Lee, Edward Chan Yue-tak and Edwin Chan Yu-fat from Theatre of the Silence. They will perform the Beijing Olympics theme song *We Are Ready* using sign language, facial expressions and mime, to demonstrate the versatility of this type of theatre.

Unlike the Olympic theme, sung in Cantonese, they hope their version will be able to transcend linguistic and cultural barriers, thus reflecting the Olympic spirit of "One World One Dream".

Joining the mime duo on stage will be dancers Fred Michael Beam, Tara Joan Downing and Ronnie Alex Bradley from US hip hop group Wild Zappers, as well as local actor Chiu Kin-tong and members from the local dance outfit, Youth Outreach.

Park and Art focuses on three tribes – the tai chi, hip hop and yoga gangs – competing with each other in a public park, each gang showing off its distinctive moves and talents. The narrative highlights the importance of cultural diversity and freedom of expression. The performance also includes shadow play and Charlie Chaplin-style slapstick that will appeal to audiences of all ages, Tang says.

Lasting more than an hour, the performance is an extension of a 30-minute show first presented at the International Festival of Inclusive Arts held in Hong Kong in 2006. The 11-day event was the city's first large-scale arts and cultural event to promote integration among people with and without disabilities. Theatre of the Silence, named "best Asian theatre with a difference" by *Time* magazine in 2005, was one of the participants.

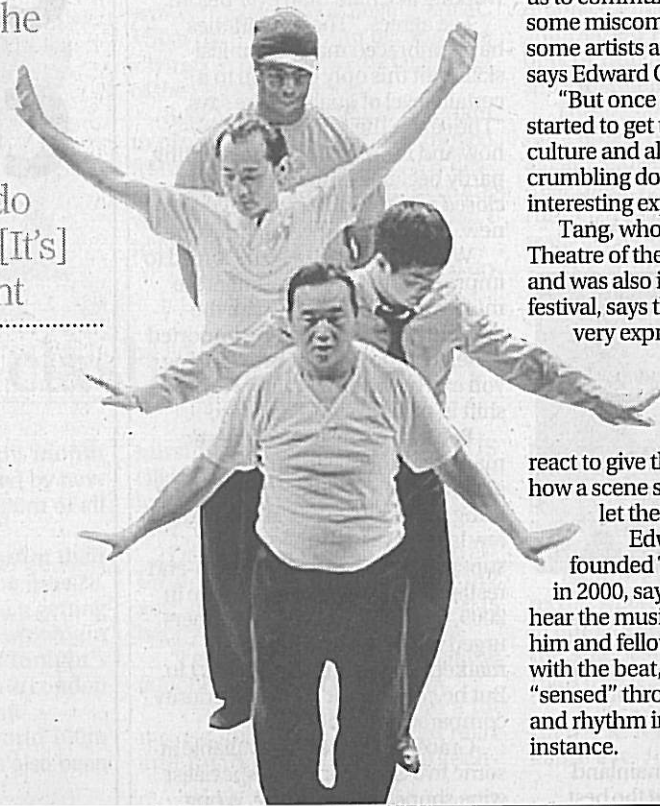
"In the last run, we had artists from India and the US. Because of cultural differences and different performing domains, it was hard for

A fusion of disciplines by a hearing-impaired troupe takes physical theatre in a new direction, writes **Lee Wing-sze**

Body language

People think if the deaf can't hear, they can't dance. Dance has nothing to do with hearing ... [It's] about movement

.....
Fred Beam, hearing-impaired artist, Wild Zappers



us to communicate and there were some miscommunications among some artists at the very beginning," says Edward Chan.

"But once the ice was broken, we started to get to know each other's culture and all sorts of barriers came crumbling down. It was an interesting experience for all."

Tang, who has collaborated with Theatre of the Silence many times and was also involved in the 2006 festival, says that special artists are very expressive: "They have very good sense of rhythm. I'd explain what I want and how the characters should react to give the artists an idea of how a scene should be. Then I just let them improvise."

Edward Chan, who co-founded Theatre of the Silence in 2000, says not being able to hear the music has never stopped him and fellow artists from moving with the beat, which can be "sensed" through a change of pace and rhythm in the lighting, for instance.

There are other cues hearing-impaired artists can take in dance performances, says Beam from Wild Zappers.

"In order to perfect our craft, we depend on visual aids and a heavy bass. We usually count to the beat. We deaf people usually say that the only problem is our deafness – other than that we are fine. Co-ordinating and creating movement with rhythm takes practice, just like any hearing person," he says.

The hip hop dancer and many fellow performers depend on their "inner rhythm" – something that not all hearing people possess – and their acute visual observation of physical movements.

"The truth is, people think if the deaf can't hear, they can't dance," says Beam. "Dance has nothing to do with hearing. Dancing is about movement."

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Park and Art, August 1, 2 (7.30pm) and 3 (3pm), Ngau Chi Wan Civic Centre Theatre, Kowloon. Tickets at HK\$150 and HK\$90 are available at Urbtix outlets. Inquiries: 2370 1044

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