

Tracking Dance

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 29 Nov 1997

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Alice Turner — 29 Nov 1997, 13:35

This was a private message to mantis, but he's away for the holiday, and I thought it might be of some possible interest to one or two of you so I'm posting--just skip if not your cuppa.

Last night I went to see an avant-garde music-dance company do a version of episodes from what they call "The Monkey King"--it's best known as "The Journey to the West," by Wu Cheng-en, and decades ago Arthur Waley translated is as "Monkey" (when I came home I searched for the old Grove edition that I imagined I once had, but maybe I never did).

Anyway, the story, as interpreted here, is about how the mild-mannered monk, Tang Seng (playing the Dorothy role) is joined by a motley group of companions including the amoral Monkey, the lustful and greedy Pig and the angry and violent Ogre, who each, after much spectacularly choreographed martial-arts battling, is subdued by the goddess Kuan Yin (played quite wonderfully as a triple goddess) and told to protect the monk on his journey to the West (India, Buddha's birthplace) to achieve enlightenment. The work is in progress, there is no ending yet, and a really lovely soprano sings some of the interpretation (in Chinese) as we meet the sinuously sexy spider vampires (Pig falls madly in love, poor thing) and others.

Anyway, as you can see, I liked this, and later in the evening it came to me that our old pal "Tracking Song" would be a seriously good candidate for a dance interpretation. (I might be influenced, too, by the fact that the de-cutized "The Lion King" is a megahit here, with seats sold out till the turn of the millennium.) Think about it. There's no dialogue that couldn't easily be sung in Chinese (or explained in the theater program). It would be thrilling to see a vigorous modern ensemble play the wolves, the wild boars, the vampire bats and the Min, with a lot of martial arts stuff built in. One of the oddities of the tale is that all these creatures look human to Cutthroat--the company should play them with no, or minimal, costumes or masks, just with dance and acting. I don't think you'd need a set either (though the palace of trash would be fun), and just one prop, the Great Sleigh itself, which could be done with a silhouette. I wouldn't bother with the wind-sleighs etc.; walking would work better. The piece falls easily into acts. There is a good female prima role, and both thrills and poignancy, which dance can be marvelous at. Don't think 19th century ballet here, think tough stuff and inspired mime.

So whattya think? Fun to imagine, no?

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