

DANCE INTERVIEW

KNOWING without fully UNDERSTANDING

Choreographer Colleen Lanki makes fantasy lucid in *Ten Nights of Dream*. Courtney Chu interviews



Courtesy of Eugene Lin

Courtney Chu
Associate Staff Contributor

Ten Nights of Dream runs from May 21 to 23.

Colleen Lanki is a choreographer who is not afraid of adventure. This is evident in her latest work, *Ten Nights of Dream*, an adaptation of a series of short stories written and translated by Natsume Soseki, a wildly successful Japanese author. Through an interesting mix of dance, visual projections, and music Lanki explores the dreamlike state portrayed throughout the stories, choreographing and dancing each character herself. While this work is undoubtedly challenging, Lanki isn't daunted; she remains refreshingly honest and incredibly passionate throughout the process and even manages to give a quick interview with *The Peak* between rehearsals.

The Peak: So why *Ten Nights of Dream*? What about the short stories appealed to you?

Colleen Lanki: What I was mostly taken by is the uncanny-ness of them, that he (Natsume Soseki) has written them and done the translations for them. They're really amazing. They leave you with this feeling of dreaminess . . . you know when you wake up and it's not a nightmare, you're not freaking out necessarily, but there's just residue of what you've been dreaming. That's what you feel like when you read them. It really felt like I'd possibly dreamed these things, because of how they were written. I just thought there must be some way to embody this and put it on stage.

P: So it was really the dreamlike quality that drew you to translate these works to the stage?

CL: Yes. As far as the stories go some of them are pleasant, some are more nightmarish. They really just have this wonderful aura about them; they really have this uncanny-ness about them. That's the best way I can describe it, you feel like you know something, or you've thought something but you don't fully know what it means, knowing without fully understanding.

I know the dreams that I've had personally, where you think you've seen something before or experienced something before; those dreams live between our conscious and self-conscious and really affect the way we perceive things in our waking life.

P: Where did you first hear of *Ten Nights of Dream*?

CL: I lived in Japan for seven years. I picked this up in a second-hand store, almost by accident. I think I picked it up out of lark, I thought the title sounded interesting. I grabbed it and didn't read it for ages and then eventually picked it up off my shelf and started reading it. It was a bit of an accident.

P: Was it difficult to translate the short stories into dance? How did you go about this process?

CL: It's been challenging. Some of them, at least I think, have been translating quite well and came quite easily. Others were really a struggle. I think it depended on the pieces that connected well with me and with Alcvin Ramos, the musician. We actually connected on a few of them, and they have come quite quickly and easily — it was really quite amazing. It was work to polish them and get them all done, but there were a few that we immediately found a key for . . . There were so many great images but we were just asking, "How could we put this on the stage?"

P: What part was the most challenging and why?

CL: I guess most challenging for me has been the integration of all the pieces. Trying to integrate text and fully integrate projection, finding a balance in these elements and telling the story without letting one overpower the other or one being negated. We're still working on that and I think we will continue working on that until opening night and maybe even afterwards.

P: How do you portray the dreamlike quality of the stories through your choreography?

CL: Through the dance. I work with a form of Nihon Buyoh — well, I'm using the form of it. I'm playing with character because the stories have people in them and characters and images. This classical form of Japanese dance works with genders and characters. I'm also trying to play with time and the use of time, slowing things down and condensing things, or flipping back and forth in time. Alcvin Ramos plays electro acoustic soundscapes, it's not even music half the time, using



Colleen Lank dresses the part when working with Nihon Buyoh, a classical form of Japanese dance.

Courtesy of Eugene Lin

the same principles, sometimes you're not even sure what the sound is, you think you recognize it, and then you realize it's not what you thought. It's kind of playing with people's sensory perception.

P: You seem fairly interested in spirituality. What kind of effect do you think dreams and the subconscious have on our waking life?

CL: I think personally they are a way of processing stuff. Certain dream images really affect the way we perceive things in our lives, at least on a visceral level, if not on a logical level. I know the dreams that I've had personally, the ones that live with us, where you think you've seen something before or experienced something before; those dreams live between our conscious and self-conscious and really affect the way we perceive things in our waking life.

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P: So this is all put on by TomoeArts, a company that specializes in Nihon Buyoh. What sets Nihon Buyoh apart from other forms of classical dance?

CL: I get into character instantly. You can't dance Nihon Buyoh without a gender. In terms of posture, rather than a lot of curved and arched moves with the spine, the spine is kept straight and

the knees are bent. I work a lot around my axis. Rather than being expansive it tends to be a little contractive. It's hard to describe in words, but it's much more contained — I'm not throwing myself around so much. And the use of the eyes — the eyes become part of the character.

P: Where do you find fresh inspiration for your choreography?

CL: Reading, music, images. Sometimes other work, when I get to see really great shows elsewhere it inspires me to think in a different way, or think about a technique that I could incorporate. I'm really excited when there's good both theatre and dance work out there, and when I get to see new work that's invigorating and exciting. I love going to art galleries and reading, and even just walks outside, taking time to take things in.

P: What kind of work can we expect to see from you in the future?

CL: I'd like to do more of this kind of stuff. I'd like to see if I could set some of this work on other dancers. It would be challenging considering if I work with a form I would have to teach the form a little. It would be a big challenge. I'd like to continue in dance theatre, it's such a crossover in my own life. The next big project is doing some classical work — I'll be doing a full traditional Japanese dance concert at UBC in April of next year.

Free events attached to *Ten Nights of Dream*:

Friday at 7:00 p.m. Lecture on Natsume Soseki.

Saturday at 3:00 p.m. Concert/reading/artists talk.

Saturday from 12:00 to 6:00 p.m. Installation viewing.

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