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DANCE FESTIVAL

present

PEONY DREAMS:
ON THE OTHER SIDE OF SLEEP

Concept, Visual & Direction by Yin Mei
Music by Sam Crawford
Choreography by Yin Mei
with Guanglei Hui and Huiwang Zhang

Ellen Stewart Theatre
66 East 4th Street, NYC, 10003
May 9 - 10, 2019
About the show:
Yin Mei Dance brings this inspired new take on The Peony Pavilion, one of the most revered plays in Chinese literature. A surreal and epic self-portrait set amidst the violence of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, Peony Dreams: On the Other Side of Sleep follows a young dancer who is compelled on a journey across time and space, fiction and reality, life and death. It is a boundary-defying new work of dance-theater that looks into the liminal space between reality of our personal histories and our memories of them.
Director’s note

“In my dreams I see what I cannot see and hear what I cannot hear . . .”

- Yu Erniang, Ming Dynasty Female Literary Critic

**Peony Dreams: On The Other Side Of Sleep** is an intercultural dance theater work inspired by China’s most revered work of literature, *The Peony Pavilion*, which tells of a young woman’s impossible – and impossibly romantic – dreams. Emerging from the narrative skeleton of this famed work, *Peony Dreams* tells the contemporary story of a young dancer growing up during the chaos of the Chinese Cultural Revolution – the story, in fact, of the choreographer herself.

In this work, Yin Mei – an artist of the Chinese diaspora who has been part of the New York contemporary dance scene since the 1990s – utilizes the hundreds of letters she wrote as a homesick young dancer during the Cultural Revolution (1966-76). Discovered only recently by her parents in China, these letters, written by her to faraway persons both real and imagined, form the raw material for a potent exploration of memory, history, culture and identity. Indeed, *Peony Dreams* can be seen as a closing of the circle on the themes set out in her earlier successful dance theater work, Empty Tradition/City of Peonies.

*Peony Dreams* gazes at three distinct women’s selves in three distinct time periods: the fictional self of The Peony Pavilion’s young heroine … Yin Mei’s child self growing up during the Cultural Revolution … and the choreographer’s adult self – an artist striving to create work in a fraught global environment. Three women, three time periods, three outliers – all dreaming of a world beyond the world. At a time in which nationalism and factionalism are once again on the rise, *Peony Dreams* ranges across time and space, fiction and reality, history and culture, life and death, to explore a world that lies on the other side of sleep.

A play that caused a country to dream, *The Peony Pavilion* tells the story of a sensitive young woman, Du Liniang, who falls asleep one afternoon in her parents’ peony garden pavilion and dreams of a lover she has yet to meet. Discovering on waking that her beloved does not in fact exist, the woman, unable to bear the news, expires from lovesickness after painting her own portrait. Before entering the world,
however, a miraculous series of events helps bring about her rescue. As it happens, a young scholar named Liu Mengmei – who is in fact her dreamed of lover – is passing by the girl’s house on his way to take a government exam. Seeing her portrait on the wall, the scholar declares: “This is the woman I saw in my dreams – this is the woman I will marry!” Informed that she had passed away three years ago, the scholar is despondent; but when her family members bring him to the coffin in which she lies, the girl suddenly wakes from death. The lovers immediately fall in love and live happily ever after. The effect of this work on Chinese history and culture almost cannot be overstated. Epitomizing a deep strain of romantic mysticism within Taoist philosophy, *The Peony Pavilion* states the case for life as an essential mystery.

As in Ming Dynasty China – the period of *The Peony Pavilion* – the prevailing mindset of the Cultural Revolution placed no value on the individual as such. While countless Chinese paid the price for this ideology with their lives, millions of them secretly harbored the belief that their dreams could somehow transform even the grimmest reality. Yin Mei, whose childhood letters form the framework for *Peony Dreams*, lived through this time. Reading and “dancing/singing” the letters onstage, the performers interrogate the hopes and dreams of a young woman whose interior life was overrun by an exterior world grown surreal.

*The Peony Pavilion* embodies the Buddhist concept that in dreams all boundaries melt, including the boundary between life and death. How dreams live inside us and how we embody them and how they transform us is the ultimate subject of China’s greatest literary work – and likewise forms the inspiration for *Peony Dreams*. Echoes . . . whispers . . . sensations of sight, sound, taste, smell; the distant yearnings of skin, of desire, the inner codes of the body; poetry, love, despair, joy; overlapping layers of time and space and void; repetitions of history, of narrative, of the past, of the present; an ascending and descending of the body as the tides of endless human dramas spin and spin and spin within – the language of dreams is a language in which all are fluent and none find absolute certainty.

**YIN MEI DANCE** is a transdisciplinary contemporary dance company based in New York City with strong ties to China. The company has toured across the USA, Asia, and Europe in notable venues from
Jacob’s Pillow, Yerba Buena, Lincoln Center, The City Center, DTW, La MaMa, Movement Research at Judson Church, Theatre du Chartelet Paris, National Theater of Beijing and Nanjing, and many others. Before coming to the United States to study modern dance on a grant from the Asian Cultural Council, Yin Mei was a professional dancer with the Henan Song and Dance Troupe and later the principal dancer with the Hong Kong Dance Company. She is now a professor and the director of dance at Queens College, CUNY. Yin Mei Dance was formed in 1995 and presents a unique dance style employing Chinese energy, direction, and spatial principles as a means of creating new dance works within the rubric of contemporary dance theater. The work explores themes of artistic and spiritual significance arising at the intersection between Asian traditional performance and Western contemporary dance.

Yin Mei is a category-defying director/choreographer/performance artist known for creating contemporary dance theater works that fearlessly bridge geographic, technological, artistic and cultural divides to conjure a unique brand of theatrical magic. Yin Mei’s recent works include physical theater Antigone (2017) and Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove, a commision for the Hong Kong Dance Company that premiered in 2012. Widely seen as breaking new ground in combining traditional and contemporary dance styles, the work featured innovative “live cinema” staging by noted theater director Jay Scheib (World of Wires, Bellona The Destroyer). In April 2012, Yin Mei was the choreographer for a production of the opera Nixon In China the Theatre du Chatelet in Paris under the direction of Chen Shi-Zheng (Peony Pavilion). Other notable work includes the contemporary ballet A Scent of Time for the Beijing Dance Academy’s 36 Ballet Company; City Of Paper, a dance theater work created in collaboration with visual designer Tennessee Rice Dixon; Nomad: The River, a multi-media dance theater work; /Asunder, created in collaboration with installation artist Cai Guo-Qiang and composer Robert Een; and Empty Tradition/ City of Peonies, conceived, choreographed and directed by Yin Mei, in collaboration with Indonesian composer Tony Prabowo and MacArthur Award winning Chinese visual artist Xu Bing.

Yin Mei was awarded a Fulbright Scholarship in 2012 and a Guggenheim Fellowship in Choreography in 2005. She was twice a Choreography Fellow of the New York Foundation for the Arts in 2004 and was twice nominated for a Cal-Arts Alpert Award in
Choreography. Her work has been supported by grants from virtually all of the leading dance/arts funding organizations, including Rockefeller MAP, New England Foundation/National Dance Project, Creative Capital and the NEA, among others.

Yin Mei grew up in China and was a principal dancer with the Hong Kong Dance Company before coming to New York on a grant from the Asian Cultural Council. She has been a Professor of Dance at Queens College (CUNY) since 1992. In 2018, Yin Mei established a Four-Year BFA Undergraduate Program in Dance and Theater at Jackie Chan Film and Media Academy in Wuhan.

George Tsypin graduated from the Moscow School of Architecture in 1977. The same year he got the Second Prize for the International Competition «New and Spontaneous Ideas for the Theater for Future Generations.» In 1984, he graduated from the New York University (Department of Design for Stage and Film). He worked for many years with renowned directors such as Julie Taymor, Peter Sellars, Pierre Audi, Francesca Zambello, Jürgen Flimm and Andrey Konchalovsky and has a special creative relationship with the conductor Valery Gergiev. He worked with the Metropolitan Opera in New York (Prokofiev’s *Gambler* and *War and Peace*, Berlioz’s *Benvenuto Cellini*, Mozart’s *Die Zauberflöte*, Tchaikovsky’s *Mazepa*), Opéra Bastille in Paris, La Scala in Milan, Royal Opera House in Covent Garden in London, Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow (Puccini’s *Turandot* and Prokofiev’s *Flaming Angel*), Mariinsky Theatre in St Petersburg (Shostakovich’s *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, Prokofiev’s *Gambler* and *War and Peace*, Mussorgsky’s *Boris Godunov* and Wagner’s *Ring Cycle*) among others as well as at the Salzburg Festival. He designed *The Little Mermaid* and *Spider-Man: Turn off the Dark* (Tony Award Nomination) on Broadway. In 1999, he created the Planet Earth Gallery, one of the Millennium Projects in England: a major installation of moving architectural elements, videos and 200 sculptures. In 2002, he exhibited his works at the Venice Biennale. He is a recipient of numerous awards and author of the book *George Tsypin Opera Factory: Building in the Black Void* (2005, Golden Pen Award). He was artistic director, production designer and coauthor of the script for the Opening Ceremony of the Olympic Games in Sochi in 2014 and was nominated for an Emmy Award. In 2014, together with Jürgen Flimm worked on the production of Puccini’s *Manon Lescaut* at the Mikhailovsky Theatre.
Sam Crawford completed degrees in English and Audio Technology at Indiana University in 2003. Crawford's recent compositions and sound designs have included works for the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Company (Venice Biennale, 2010), Kyle Abraham (Pavement, 2012), Camille A. Brown and Dancers (BLACK GIRL: Linguistic Play, 2016), and David Dorfman Dance (Aroundtown, 2017). La Medea, Crawford's live multi-media collaboration with director Yara Travieso, premiered at PS122's Coil Festival in January of 2017.

Huiwang Zhang danced with China Opera and Dance Drama Company and Paper Tiger Theater Studio in Beijing. He joined the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Company in 2017 after the completion of his Master study in Dance and Choreography from the U.S and Germany under great mentorships of Stephen Koester, Sharee Lane, Ellen Bromberg and Katharina Christl. He has also performed with Pearsonwidrig dance theater and Yin Mei Dance. Huiwang’s movement research and teaching are inspired by his traditional training in Chinese Classical Dance, Martial Arts and all teachers like Jennifer Nugent, Sarah Pearson, Leah Cox, Patrik Widrig, Tao Ye, Eric Handman, and Janet Wong. His choreography, often through a sociocultural lens, gives voices to communities at risk of social exclusion and people whose stories are lost in the official narratives, carefully structuring an alternative history from the personal and private stories of individual. His work has been exposed internationally in China, U.S and Germany. Huiwang voluntarily edits a dance e-journal “upsidedown” in China where he writes and translates perspectives in contemporary dance making into Chinese language.

Guanglei Hui, originally from China, is an independent artist, choreographer, dancer and teacher. He studied at The Russian National Ballet Dance Academy from 2001-2003 and earned a major in Choreography/Classical Ballet Performance with Education. While studying in Russia, he took second place in the Russian International Dance Competition. In 2005, Guanglei joined the first modern dance company in China, Guangdong Modern Dance Company. In 2008,
he was invited to perform with GMDC in the anniversary celebration of the Pina Bausch Dance Company. He was invited as a young choreographer for Yokohama Dance Collection in 2011; and in 2012, he was invited to participate in the International Choreographers Residency Program (ICR) at the American Dance Festival. In 2013, Guanglei joined White Wave Young Soon Kim Dance Company. He began working with Shen Wei Dance Arts in 2014; and in 2016, he was invited to Taipei Dance Round Table Project to work on a new original piece. He has worked with renowned international artists including Sang Jijia (from William Forsythe Dance Company), Yin Mei (YMDC Artistic Director), Margaret Jenkins (MJDC Artistic Director), Shen Wei (Shen Wei Dance Arts Artistic Director), Hou Ying (HYDT Artistic Director), Jodi Melnick, Cheng-Chieh Yu (UCLA Dance Professor), Young Soon Kim (WHITE WAVE Dance Company Artistic Director), Lane Gifford (LaneCoArts Artistic Director). He has toured to international arts festivals in more than twenty countries.

**Lijun Zhou** is a dancer and a national first-class actress in China. She graduated from Beijing Dance Academy majoring in Classical Dance and completed her Master study in Choreography at Capital Normal University. She is currently enrolled in Queens college, CUNY as a visiting scholar. She was the lead at the Song and Dance Troupe of the China’s Liberation Army and now she is a lecturer of Capital Normal University. Lijun took the leading actress of many dance theater works in China including *Song of an Everlasting Regret*, adapted by a well-known Chinese epic in Tang Dynasty. She won the first prize in the 10th Beijing Dance Competition. In 2014, Lijun attended the Chinese *So You Think You Can Dance* and was rated as a highly popular dancer.

**Huilian Wen** is Associate Professor of East China University Of Technology and the Director of the Art Exhibition Center. She is now a Visiting Scholar at Queens College, City University of New York.

**Li Fu** is Associate Professor of the School of Music at Gannan Normal University. She is currently enrolled in Queens College, CUNY as a visiting scholar.
Kaita Saito has a degree in architectural studies with a minor in visual arts from Boston University. There he studied under Daniel Abramson, Sophie Hochausl, Won Ju Lim, and more, learning architectural theory and space making in a fine arts context. He is now working on his masters degree in architecture at the Southern California Institute of Architecture. He has also interned with Anmahian Winton Architects and Toshio Homma and Associates. He has most recently been published in Offtopic, a student publication at SCI_Arc, selected for the Spring Show there, and assisted in the preparing a gallery for the opening of Possible Mediums with Kristy Balliet.

Huirong Ye has a B.A. in History of Art & Architecture as well as a B.S. in Journalism from Boston University. There, she studied under Fred Kleiner, Gregory Williams, and Greg Marinovich. Her main interests are in twentieth century and contemporary art and architecture. She currently works at Yin Mei Dance and The Noguchi Museum. She has interned at Zhejiang University Press as an academic assistant and Pheonix TV as an art journalist.

- Funding Credits
Peony Dreams: On the Other Side of Sleep has received the National Dance Project Production Award by National Dance Project New England Foundation for the Arts in 2017.

- Residencies credits
The Hermitage Artists Retreat, Flushing Town Hall

- Thank you notes
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Yin Mei wants to express her deep gratitude to her dancers and collaborators. Her special Thanks To: Robin Radin, Georgia Court, Steven High, Ethan Cohen, Rachel Cooper and Ralph Samuelson. Finally, Yin Mei wants to express her deep gratitute to La MaMa Moves Festival Mia Yoo, and curator Nicky Paraiso.
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