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U.S. Premiere for "Pilgrimage" by Sin-cha Hong and her Laughing Stone Dance Theater of Korea

WHERE AND WHEN:

Monday, November 6 to Wednesday, November 8, 2006; all at 7:30 pm
La MaMa E.T.C. (Annex Theater), 74A East Fourth Street
Presented by La MaMa E.T.C.
Admission is FREE.
Info: (212) 475-7710; www.lamama.org
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NEW YORK, October 31 -- **Sin-cha Hong** and her **Laughing Stone Dance Theater of Korea** return to La MaMa **November 6 to 8, 2006** to perform the U.S. premiere of one of her most enduring classics, "**Pilgrimage.**" The still, minimalist dance, performed by a company of eight dancers, is a disquisition on enlightenment. Admission is free.

The piece premiered in 1988 at Seoul Arts Center as its Tenth Anniversary Invitation Performance. It was performed subsequently in 1998 in the Tiger's Year Korean Festival in Germany (Berlin, Munich, Weimar). One German critic dubbed Sin-cha Hong "the Pina Bausch of Korea" (OTZ Newspaper, Weimar). The Berliner Morgen Post claimed the performance "intensely carved the existence of Korean avant-garde art onto the sensibility of German visitors" and praised the level of Korean avant-garde dance as wonderful. Subsequent performances were in 2000 in the Portugal Arts Festival; in 2003 in Peru, Chile, Brazil, Argentina; in 2004 in Costa Rica and El Salvador; and in 2005 in Venezuela, Guatemala and Cuba.

DESCRIPTION

The piece is quite abstract and meditative in style. Walking on 50 centimeter wooden shoes and wearing long gowns hung from their shoulders, the dancers cannot move freely. With hands stretched over bamboo sticks on their back and shoulders, they look like they are walking on a tight rope or that they are prisoners with their hands chained and their body tied to a wooden frame. Their hands and shoulders tremble in delicate movement.

With awkward movements and without significant gestures, the dancers walk into center of the stage where, with a slight movement of their hands, they march in the shape of a wave. It indicates a symbolic pilgrimage in the endless voyage of life. The dancers remove their outer layers and bamboo sticks. There are rowing motions in dynamic rhythms, but the dancers do not hurry. Rather, their movements are static and minimalist. There is a clash between the dynamic audio effects and tranquil visual images, creating a mystical aura.

To Sin-cha Hong, the Word "pilgrimage" means a religious journey towards enlightenment. She explains that the costumes and movement in the first section of "Pilgrimage" not only express strength, but also uniformity. It is we, human beings, in our daily lives.

The first section ends in erratic movement. The chaos reaches a peak and then dissipates as the dancers are reborn. They remove their outer layers like an insect coming out of its cocoon (or like us, emerging from womb). Sin-cha Hong explains, we are reborn young, innocent, naive and full of wonder about our surroundings. Uncertain of our new environment, we find comfort in each other and decide to "stand" once again. Our journey into this new world is characterized by a sense of awe and newness.

The sporadic falling and standing up again in the piece represents the difficulties we meet along our journey, she explains. We fall, but must pick ourselves up and begin again. The boat represents the means by which we travel toward our enlightenment. It is not made of metal nor wood but of ourselves; it is our strength as human beings. The ending of

"Pilgrimage" is quirky like life itself. When we reach our journey's end, we realize that our quest for enlightenment was within us from the beginning. We are peace with this knowledge and our journey has ended.

Sin-cha Hong solos in the piece.

Choreography and Dance are by Sin-cha Hong. Lighting is by David Moody. Management is by Jeung-ja Kang. Costume design is by Kyung-in Kim. Music is edited by Masaru Soga and Myong-woo Na. There is a company of eight Korean dancers plus Sin-cha Hong.

ABOUT SIN-CHA HONG

Sin-cha Hong was born and educated in Korea and earned a Master degree in Dance from Columbia University in 1966. In the early 1970s, she began to create a stir in the dance community with her bold new choreography. She returned to Seoul in 1975, where she shocked and inspired audiences with her audacity. Following this and other initial successes in dance and music, she embarked on a private spiritual journey, studying with religious masters in India and traveling extensively to holy places in Israel, Tibet, South America and East Asia.

When Sin-cha Hong was living in New York during 1970-80s, she presented new dance-theater works nearly every year. Her La MaMa productions included "*Laughing Stone Dance Theater*" (1980), "Mouth to Tail" (1981), "Isle" (1986), "Matter of Fact" (1987), and "Pluto" (1992, 1994). As a soloist and with her *Laughing Stone Dance Theater*, she has performed throughout the United States, Europe and Asia.

Sin-cha Hong has lived in Korea since 1993, during which time her main works have been "Pilgrimage," "In to the Time" and "Out of Time" with her *Laughing Stone Dance Theater*. She performs in her main works, "The woman Laughing" and "Voice performance." She hosted the Tenth Anniversary Annual Jukusan International Arts Festival in Korea 2004.

In this "History of World Dance," Jian Ping Ou, China's leading authority on dance, cites Sin-cha Hong as one of the world's 18 most Important dancers, along with Isadora Duncan and Nijinsky. In America, Hong has received numerous prestigious awards, including four NEA Choreography fellowships, grants from NYSCA, NYFA, Hawaii State Foundation on Culture and the Arts, the Asian Culture Council, and a visiting scholar grant from the Fullbright Commission. In 1989, her troupe gave the first paying public performances in the People's Republic of China. Two years later, the Beijing dance Academy invited Hong to give China's first national dance workshop. Currently, she serves as Distinguished Visiting Professor at the Central Dance Academy in Beijing and at the Korean National University of Arts.

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