



# Cultural freedom explored

*heroine* is about breaking free of social constraints revolving around just one performer.

By Melissa Quek

IT'S been six years since it first appeared on stage, but *heroine* still appeals for the issues of freedom that it addresses. The concept of freedom here isn't the political kind but more the social kind. It's about breaking free of constraints that society places on people, regardless of which country they live in.

"We're always framed by structures be they rules, money, numbers," says Brussels-based German choreographer Arco Renz. "They differ from country to coun-

try, but everybody has to negotiate them to feel free within the constraints that surround us."

Renz's work doesn't deal with specific cultures nor does he attempt any cross-cultural fusion – rather he focuses on the universal concept of freedom as manifested through his choreography.

Renz's muse for this solo piece is Taiwanese dancer Wen-Ci Su, whom he met, incidentally, 10 years ago in Singapore. Both were here for the Arts Festival, Renz with Robert Wilson and Su for the Taipei

Dance Circle. Renz was so impressed with her performance that after the festival he invited her to join his company Kobalt Works.

After working with Su on several of his pieces and feeling that she possessed the qualities he needed for the work that he had in mind, he approached her with his idea for *heroine*. He wanted to work with someone who had an "intense power of concentration and a rich presence". As *heroine* is an investigation into the question of cultural freedom, Su's background as an Asian was also ideal.

## ASIAN HEROINE

Taiwanese dancer Wen-Ci Su (left) is the muse for German choreographer Arco Renz

For instance, Su's notions of time and space were more cyclical and less linear than Renz's, lending itself to the idea of focusing the dance on one point to create a meditative state and space.

To translate these concrete questions into abstract physical terms, Renz invented and developed a set of principles and improvisation exercises that affect the work. For example, the notion of containment, accumulation and release of energy is explored through spiralling shapes and breathing regulated in different dynamic ways. (Renz will introduce some of these working methods in a workshop at Victoria Theatre on June 12).

*heroine* is an important milestone in Renz's journey – and it continues to remain fresh, as this interplay between the performer and the surrounding music, light and choreography. In his continuing research of freedom is examined in a concentrated and pure manner, as he reduces the whole game of light, music and dance to its essential form, in one person.

What's the most obvious change? "After choreographing *heroine*, I began to use light and music in a different way," he concludes.

**Arco Renz/Kobalt Works (Germany/Belgium) will be performed tonight and tomorrow night at Drama Centre Theatre, 8pm nightly. The workshop on June 12, 2-4pm, at Victoria Theatre, is recommended for professional or semi-professionals in dance and theatre. Please register with [nac\\_artsfestcommune@nac.gov.sg](mailto:nac_artsfestcommune@nac.gov.sg)**