

FOR IMMEDIATE
RELEASE

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**CAL PERFORMANCES PRESENTS THE WEST COAST PREMIERE OF TAIWAN'S
U THEATRE, *THE SOUND OF OCEAN*
SEPTEMBER 26 & 27 IN ZELLERBACH HALL**

BERKELEY, August 22, 2003 – Cal Performances welcomes the 14 performers of the **U Theatre** from Taiwan, performing *The Sound of Ocean* in their West Coast debut **Friday, September 26 at 8:00 p.m.** and **Saturday, September 27 at 2:00 p.m.** in Zellerbach Hall. “With hypnotic intensity, U Theatre’s *Sound of Ocean* is a masterly and profound ritual spectacle,” trumpeted *Il Gazzettino* of U Theatre’s performance in La Biennale Danza e Venezia in 2000.

Founded in 1988 by artistic director **Liu Ching-Ming**, U Theatre actors are trained in popular Taiwanese art forms, traditions and rituals, in addition to intense physical training based on Western and Far Eastern techniques. The 1993 addition of drumming master **Wong Chee-Mon** began U Theatre’s initiation into meditation, and later into Chinese martial arts. Drumming, meditation and martial arts are fundamental to the company’s performance and practice. U Theatre’s philosophy states that an actor first must improve the quality of his/her life, and by doing so their acting will become more intense and meaningful. The *London Times* proclaimed *The Sound of Ocean* “a synthesis of theatre, percussion, martial arts and meditation. At times the gongs swell like a wave rising from the deep, then ebb as the decay of the note reverberates around the auditorium. Lightly tapped, repetitive phrases build into rapid-fire rhythms to evoke the pitter-patter of raindrops building into a downpour.” *The Saturday, September 27, 2:00 p.m. performance is a Family Fare show. Children 16 and under receive a 50% discount.*

U THEATRE

Initially the focus of U Theatre centered on learning the skills of traditional Taiwanese theatrical performance from local folk artists, while concurrently studying the various forms of Western modern theater. The early works of U Theatre were adaptations of classic Chinese tales told from a Taiwanese viewpoint, in the form of song and dance and in a religious atmosphere. In 1993, artistic director **Liu Ching-Ming** invited **Wong Chee-Mon**, a master drummer with nearly 20

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years of drumming experience, to instruct the members of U Theatre in his craft. However, recently back from a spiritual retreat in India, Wong suggested that ‘to learn drum beating, one must first learn meditation.’ At that point, meditation (and later, Chinese martial arts) became an integral part of the training of U Theatre actors. Liu and Wong then worked to combine this specialized training with drum beating, and U Theatre as it is known today was fully realized.

Under Liu’s guidance, U Theatre is a collective of performers who make their home on Laochuan Mountain in the suburbs of Taipei, Taiwan. U Theatre’s philosophy places emphasis on an elevated quality of life and discovery of spiritual strength through the practice of modern theater. Living and working together, U Theatre’s performers undergo intense physical training, and vigorously practice meditation, tai-chi, martial arts, and traditional drumming. Western techniques (which reflect Liu’s study in New York and with modern theater-makers like Jerzy Grotowski and Richard Schechner) are also evident. Aesthetically, U Theatre’s work is rooted in an ongoing exploration of indigenous Taiwanese and Chinese performance history and practice.

THE SOUND OF OCEAN

A dynamic work of rhythm and movement, *The Sound of Ocean* is an original work by U Theatre, created by artistic director Liu Ching-Ming and percussion director Wong Chee-Mun. An intense physical and emotional experience, the work traces the cyclical journey of water from a drop to a stream, then to a river, and finally to the ocean. The work’s five sections are animated by a theatrical tension devoid of explicit narrative. It is propelled by rhythms beat out on temple bells, gongs, and skinned drums of various sizes. The expressive power of the group is made possible by the extraordinary technical and athletic prowess of the individual performers. Feats of speed and precision create sweeping dynamic arcs as the piece moves from section to section. *The Sound of Ocean* illuminates U Theatre’s creative process which centers on the concentric relationships of the individual to the collective, and the larger natural and spiritual environments.

Since its premiere in 1997 at Taipei’s National Theater, *The Sound of Ocean* has been performed more than 75 times around the world, including engagements at the Avignon Festival, the Venice Biennale, Lyon Biennale, Spain’s Millenia Festival, the Sao Paulo Arts Festival, Singapore Arts Festival, Bergen International Festival and BITE: 02 at the Barbican, London.

LIU CHING-MING

Liu Ching-Ming, born in 1956, rose to become one of Taiwan's top stage actresses by the early 1980s. After earning an MA in Theatrical Art from New York University in 1983, she was selected in 1984 to participate in a year-long workshop conducted by Polish director Jerzy Grotowski, a leading force in modern theater. Absorbing Grotowski's teachings, Liu began a quest to imbue her artistic endeavors with deep relevance.

Liu founded U Theatre in 1988, leading a hand-picked ensemble of actors in their own approach to the performing arts by studying and distilling the artistic forms embodied in Taiwanese religious and folk rituals. In retrospect, Liu now views the evolution of U Theatre as a personal journey through which she gained a fresh understanding of herself. The process of evolution for U Theatre has continued, and since 1993 the group has incorporated drum-metered meditation and martial art forms. The full focus of Liu's efforts is now centered on expanding the expressive potentials of the drum. In support of this, she is helping U Theatre performance artists elevate their own artistic consciousness and to experiment with myriad combinations of music, theater and dance.

WONG CHEE-MUN

Drumming director/composer **Wong Chee-Mun** began to study martial arts at the age of 12 in an academy which also taught him traditional Chinese lion drumming and dancing. From 1993 to present, Wong has taught the members of the U Theatre about mediation, martial arts, and drumming. He also acts as the principal performer and composer for the company.

TICKET INFORMATION

Tickets for **U Theatre's *The Sound of Ocean* Friday, September 26 at 8:00 p.m.** and **Saturday, September 27 at 2:00 p.m.** in Zellerbach Hall are priced at **\$22.00, \$30.00, and \$42.00.** The Saturday, September 27 performance is a **Family Fare** show. Children 16 and under receive a 50% discount. Performance tickets are available through the Cal Performances Ticket Office at Zellerbach Hall; at (510) 642-9988 to charge by phone; at www.calperfs.berkeley.edu; and at the door. Half-price tickets are available for purchase by UC Berkeley students. UC faculty and staff, senior citizens and other students receive a \$2 discount, and UC Alumni Association members receive a \$3 discount (Special Events excluded).

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San Francisco Chronicle, *San Francisco* magazine, and KDFC Classical 102.1 FM are season media sponsors of Cal Performances' 2003/04 performing arts season.

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Performances of U Theatre are sponsored by United Commercial Bank.

Cal Performances is a participant in Awake: Art, Buddhism, and the Dimensions of Consciousness, a consortium of artists and arts organizations. During 2002-2004, thanks to generous funding from the Nathan Cummings Foundation, the James Irvine Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, and others, a number of organizations are sponsoring programs, exhibitions, performances, and artist residencies to reveal the threads of Buddhist intellectual, psychological, and aesthetic influence that run through the fabric of American culture.

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CALENDAR EDITORS, PLEASE NOTE:

CAL PERFORMANCES PRESENTS

Friday, September 26 at 8:00 p.m. **Zellerbach Hall, UC Berkeley Campus**
Saturday, September 27 at 2:00 p.m. [Family Fare] Bancroft Way at Telegraph, Berkeley

World Stage
U Theatre
The Sound of Ocean
Liu Ching-Ming, Founder and Artistic Director

Program:

The exquisite collective of U Theatre performers bring *The Sound of Ocean*, a rhythmically-based theatrical exploration of water, the natural environment and sound through dynamically complex drumming, meditation and martial art techniques.

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