

SOUTHBANK CENTRE

Margaret Leng Tan: Dragon Ladies Don't Weep

24 – 25 May 2024
Queen Elizabeth Hall

A co-production by Chamber Made and CultureLink Singapore

Music List

Obsessive Precision
The Moon is Bright (Cantonese nursery rhyme)
This Counting Thing
The Secret Room
Dragon Lady Calling El Chapo
One
4's and 3's
A Little Winter Music
On the Move
Ricesshowers
Wearing Treads in the Carpet of my Mind
Transcendence

CREDITS

Musician/Performer: Margaret Leng Tan

Composer: Erik Griswold

Director: Tamara Saulwick

Dramaturg: Kok Heng Leun

Video artist: Nick Roux

Lighting design: Andy Lim

Costume design: Yuan Zhiying

Text is drawn from Margaret Leng Tan's writings, observations and reflections.

Additional video footage: Tey Mun Sen (Margaret and Mum), Erik Griswold (Biscuit time), Rick Tejada-Flores (Margaret and John Cage)

Calligraphy for toy piano backing by Mark Chan

Producers: Goh Ching Lee | Kylie McRae

Technical Stage Manager: Yap Seok Hui
Sound Engineer: Joel Fernandez
Administration: Jocelyn Chng | Zoe Nicholson

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The appearance of *Dragon Ladies Don't Weep* at the Southbank Centre has been supported by the National Arts Council, Singapore.

Dragon Ladies Don't Weep was co-commissioned by Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay and Asia TOPA, and received its world premiere on 28 February 2020 at the Playhouse, Arts Centre Melbourne.

Director's Message

Conceived as a sonic portrait, *Dragon Ladies Don't Weep* is a collage of some of the key forces and figures that have shaped the life and career of Margaret Leng Tan. This work came into focus amidst a gently unfolding series of conversations—bridging cultures, generations, continents and art forms.

Counting is the recurring motif that threads through *Dragon Ladies Don't Weep* and speaks to the underlying themes of memory, time, loss and control that have emerged throughout the work's development. We witness the counting that marks time and time passing; the counting that catalogues our rapidly changing world; the ritualised counting that soothes the nerves; and the counting that lives within the architecture of music and inside the mind of the musician. Through this motif, a portal is opened into the interior world of this most singular artist, offering glimpses into the passions and obsessions that sustain and compel her.

Margaret tells me her life is divided into “BC/AC”—“Before Cage/After Cage”. The figure of John Cage looms large in her life, as does the profound influence of his work on 20th century avant-garde music and the performing arts. Symbiotically, Cage was deeply influenced by Zen philosophy and Asian aesthetics. Erik Griswold's exquisite compositions for *Dragon Ladies Don't Weep*, often evoking 20th century minimalism, are also in dialogue with Cage's aesthetic and innovations. Erik's music is the driving force of *Dragon Ladies Don't Weep*, around which visual and text materials have been woven.

Dragon Ladies Don't Weep is also in part an ode to Margaret's mother who passed away aged 98 in December 2018. Her decline into dementia in her final years hovers spectre-like in the shadows of the work. Margaret reveals her greatest fear: “not remembering how to remember.” Aged 78 and with no signs of slowing down, Margaret's vitality as a performer and her energy for life continue unabated. It is rare for performers of Margaret's years to grace our stages, and rarer still for them to be women. In this way—and in her continued passion to explore new territories—she remains a pioneer. It has been a pleasure and a privilege to work with her and the entire creative team.