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REVIEW

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*City Contemporary Dance Company**City of K Gala: 'Plaza X', 'La Vie en Rose', 'Comedy of K', 'It's So Easy to Fall in Love excerpts'**March 2009**Hong Kong, Cultural Centre Piazza**by Natasha Rogai*

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A version of this review previously appeared in the South China Morning Post.

City of K, a gala celebrating the 30th anniversary of Hong Kong's leading modern dance ensemble, City Contemporary Dance Company together with the work of Helen Lai, the doyenne of local choreographers made a fitting close to this year's Hong Kong Arts Festival.

The bold concept of an outdoor performance in the Cultural Centre Piazza was threatened by an unexpected onset of wintry weather. Dancing barefoot on stone paving (in some cases shirtless) on such a cold, damp day must have been an ordeal but it was not allowed to show as the dancers performed with consummate professionalism and considerable courage.

Plenty of spectators came – and stayed - to watch despite the conditions and were rewarded by a well-constructed programme of excerpts from some of Lai's best work.

Scenes from *Plaza X* to solo cello music by Bach, in which a bowler-hatted figure straight out of a Magritte painting forms a link between different tableaux are followed by two numbers from *La Vie en Rose*, Lai's tribute to Edith Piaf. Joann Chou and Noel Pong, wearing versions of the singer's archetypal little black dress, vividly portray aspects of Piaf interacting with an audience of men (and chairs – Lai's use of chairs is one of her trademarks).

The Kafka-inspired *Comedy of K* succeeds in conjuring up both the author's



bleak side and his humour. Chan Yi Jing strikingly conveys the pain of solitude and isolation while Dominic Wong is hilarious as a man in search of someone who will accept a bouquet of red roses. The climax where a bed is used as a trampoline with a succession of dancers bouncing, jumping and competing for space is inventive, absurd and brilliantly executed.



Luo Fan and Yang Yizi in *It's So Easy to Fall in Love*
© Koon Ming Tang



The programme closes with excerpts from *It's So Easy to Fall in Love*, a tender if mostly light-hearted look at love set to Chinese and Western popular songs. There were two movingly danced duets, the first lyrical, with Luo Fan and the superbly expressive Yang Yizi, the second angry, with Lam Po and Qiao Yang. The climax was a delightful finale for seven couples to Leonard Cohen's *Dance Me to the End of Love*, led by a sparkling Chan and Pong.

Special congratulations on the 30th anniversary go to Willy Tsao, the company's founder and artistic director, who has done so much to establish modern dance not only in Hong Kong, but also Mainland China.

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