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Shadow theater comes alive

By Noah Buchan

STAFF REPORTER

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Traditional shadow theater uses opaque puppets made of leather whose shadows are projected onto an illuminated screen to create the illusion of moving images. But having puppets dance behind a screen is not enough for award-winning master puppeteer Larry Reed. With his new production, drawing on his background in film, the founder and director of ShadowLight Productions takes shadow theater one step further by incorporating human characters into the drama.



The result is a shadow theater production with a cast of 12 actors, two singers, puppeteers and musicians to create theater that unites the power of film with the immediacy of live performance.

"The whole idea of these shows is that we create size with long shots and close ups ... like movies, but it is entirely live. It's the only live movie in the world," Reed said in a telephone interview with the *Taipei Times*.

Reed has teamed up with Taiwan's shadow theater troupe The Puppet and Its Double Theater (無獨有偶工作室劇團), to bring *The Monkey King at Spider Cave* (孫悟空大戰蜘蛛精) to the stage tomorrow at the Hsinchu Municipal Arena. The production will then embark on an island-wide tour.



The world's only live movie.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE PUPPET AND ITS DOUBLE

different perspective to a story that been done on television, in film and theater

The play is based on one episode from the Chinese literary classic *Journey to the West* (西遊記) — a story that follows the adventures of the cunning and acrobatic Monkey King who travels with his disciples to India to bring back Buddhist scriptures to China.

Monkey King at Spider Cave features the monk and his disciples battling against the flesh-hungry Spider Demon and a hoard of evil insects.

Reed and Cheng Chia-yen (鄭嘉音), director of The Puppet and Its Double Theater, chose the work because of its challenging puppet-making requirements and the pair wanted to bring a

Theater notes:

What: Monkey King at Spider Cave (孫悟空大戰蜘蛛精)

Where: Hsinchu Municipal

"Creating this kind of production usually takes one or two years," Reed said.
"But we have spent the last three years perfecting the production."

The longer than usual time, says Reed, was necessary to train actors to convincingly interact with puppets.

The score was also specially created for the production, which live percussion and computer-generated sounds along with traditional Chinese instruments.

The result is a sublime mixture of puppetry and human drama on a large scale, which Reed said was "the best of my career."

Auditorium (新竹市文化局立演藝廳), 17 Tungta Rd Sec 2, Hsinchu City (新竹市東大路二段17號)

When: Tomorrow at 2:30pm and 7:30pm

Details: Tickets are NT\$300 to NT\$1,000 and are available through NTCH ticketing

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