

Four Walls

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Thursday, 13 March 2014, 7.30 pm at Sir Mutha Venkata Subba Rao Concert Hall

InKo
centre

KOREA **KF**
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Consulate General
of Korea



ON A NOTE OF HOPE

Korean choreographer and dancer Sincha Hong discusses the psychological depths to her performance, *Four Walls*. Her husband, Werner Sasse, is a calligrapher in whose presentation, *From Darkness to Light*, writing and painting merge

GAUTAM SUNDER
Deccan Chronicle

As far as artistic couples go, you'd be hard pressed to find one more gifted. The husband-wife team of Werner Sasse and Sincha Hong are in Chennai to present their respective performances — and it promises to be one vibrant spectacle. Invited by Rathi Jaffer, Director of the InKo Centre, in association with the Korea Foundation and the Consulate General of the Republic of Korea in Chennai, the duo's unique talents should fail to impress none.

Choreographer, dancer, vocalist and writer Sincha Hong will present a meditative performance *Four Walls* — which was developed in association with her artistic collaborator and friend, the legendary composer, John Cage. The performance is both a tribute to John Cage's mastery as a musician and a testimony to Sincha Hong's resilience as a dancer.

"Everybody can once in a while experience a psychological situation where one does not know which direction to go... a feeling as if being blocked in a room with four walls but seemingly no door to escape. John Cage in 1943 was in such a situation. He did not know whether to stop composing music and become a Zen monk in Japan, or whether he should continue as a musician. This situation of being blocked is the main theme reflected in this music, but just as John Cage found a way out of this block (and continued to compose music), the music of *Four Walls* in the end finishes with an expression of hope,"



Werner Sasse



Sincha Hong



For Sincha, who claims to be a spiritual seeker, India is her spiritual home and she will always return here

says Sincha.

"On performing here, she quips, "India is my spiritual home, since I was a spiritual seeker roaming India for years in the late 1970s. I always live with the realisation of impermanence, somewhere between *samsara* and *nirvana*. I will always return to India to reconnect with my spiritual homeland. Chennai is famous for having a long history as a city of dance, music and the arts, and also today is a leading city of culture in India. I therefore hope and expect that the audience is ready to appreciate my dance, which is avant-garde, based on and further elaborating the avant-garde dance scene of New York."

Sincha adds, "Avant-garde dance is not only contemporary, it is a step into the future. People should see the performance without any preconception based on their experiences when seeing dance on stage. They should empty their brain and look at it with their heart, just like children willing to get to know the unknown."

A remarkable polymath, Werner Sasse who is originally from Germany, is an acclaimed scholar of Korean art, history, language and culture and is credited with having single-handedly established two centres for Korean Studies in the Universities of Bochum and Hamburg in Germany. Werner,

who has now retired from regular teaching, now concentrates on translating classical Korean literature while pursuing his love for painting and calligraphy.

His calligraphic presentation is titled *From Darkness to Light* — what will it be about? "Generally speaking, calligraphy in the narrow sense has to do either with writing in a beautiful style that's pleasing to the eye or with a special style, reflecting the contents of what is written. This can be aggressive, lyrical, and so on, or (as in Zen calligraphy) is reflecting the spiritual movement in a meditation. In a broader sense, in calligraphy, and especially in Zen calligraphy, the border between

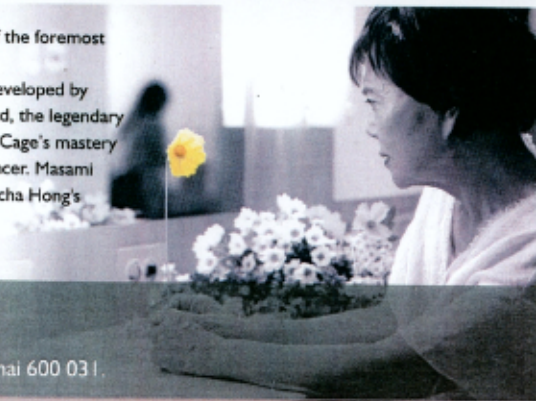
writing and painting is transgressed: writing as if painting and painting as if writing," Werner explains.

He talks of the motivation behind the idea, "The ordeal of overcoming darkness (materialism, anti-social feelings, stupidity) and reaching the light, the enlightenment, is one of the basic themes not only in Indian philosophies and religions, but one of the basic subjects in any spiritual movement in the world. I was inspired by the moon when I translated a literary work of the 15th century Korean King Sejong the Great, which is a long libretto for a ritual about Buddha's life. It is called *The Moon Reflected in a Thousand Rivers*."

Werner is delighted at the reception to Korean culture in Chennai. "It seems to have a bright future ahead, because it looks as if it is really just in the beginning stage. The work of the InKo Center has made great progress in facilitating cultural exchange between the two cultures, and thereby the groundwork has been laid. But how much do the people know of the cultural exchange 2,000 years ago, when an Indian princess became a queen in Korea? Or how much are they aware of the application of old Indian phonology, which helped create the Korean Hangeul?" he asks.

Werner goes on, "And why is Chennai especially important for this? Because Chennai is known worldwide as a city of art and culture. Also due to InKo, the newly established Consulate General and with the presence of many Korean big companies in the vicinity, Chennai is predestined to be a leader in the India-Korea cultural exchange," he concludes.

Sincha Hong, choreographer, dancer, vocalist and writer, one of the foremost avant-garde dancers from Korea, is considered to be one of the most influential artists of the 20th century. *Four Walls* was developed by Sincha Hong in association with her artistic collaborator and friend, the legendary composer, John Cage. The performance is both a tribute to John Cage's mastery as a musician and a testimony to Sincha Hong's resilience as a dancer. Masami Tada on piano and Masau Soga's lighting design, complements Sincha Hong's meditative performance.



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Shenstone Park, 13/1 Harrington Road, Chetput, Chennai 600 031.

Dancer/Choreographer: Sincha Hon (Korea)

After winning critical acclaim with her debut performance *Morning* in New York, Sincha Hong founded the Laughing Stone Dance Theater company and worked with legendary artists like John Cage, Yuji Takahashi, Margaret Leng Tan and Nam June Paik. On her return to Korea in 1993, Sincha Hong founded the Laughing Stone Dance Group Inc. which presents several public performances and meditation workshops. From 1995 to date, she organizes the Juksan International Arts Festival which is renowned for its presentation of avant-garde art.

Sin Cha Hong met John Cage (1912-1992) in the early 1980's and was inspired to create a dance drama with his music. *Four Walls*, was first performed by Merce Cunningham in 1944. Sin Cha Hong's version was first performed in 1984 in New York and was presented at the John Cage Festival at Wesleyan University in 1985 and later in the Pacific Ring Festival at San Diego. This was followed by a tour to Germany, Japan, and Korea. In 2012, 28 years after the first performance, *Four Walls Encore* was presented in Seoul to commemorate the 100th birth anniversary of the legendary musician, John Cage.

Composer : John Cage (USA)

John Milton Cage Jr. (Sep. 5, 1912 - Aug. 12, 1992) was an American composer, music theorist, writer and artist. He is known as a pioneer of indeterminacy in music, electroacoustic music and non-standard use of musical instruments. Cage was one of the leading figures of the post-war avant-garde movement. Critics have lauded him as one of the most influential American composers of the 20th century. John Cage was also instrumental in the development of modern dance, mostly through his association with choreographer Merce Cunningham. He worked extensively with the acclaimed video artist Nam June

Paik and choreographer Sin Cha Hong to create powerful works that fluidly combine music, video art and dance.

Four Walls composed by John Cage

Written at a time when Cage was considering the serious move of ceasing to write music in order to devote time to being psychoanalyzed, the title is both deeply poignant and personal. Cage resolved to keep his tryst with music, which resulted in highly influential work, post-1950's.

Four Walls, written originally as music for a theater piece, a "dance play" about a family, was conceived by the dancer Merce Cunningham. The piece is mostly solo piano played in the diatonic scale (white keys only) with a short vocal phrase in the middle. It is a work of direct, evocative, mesmerizing musical gestures, set off by silences of varying length or by insistent rhythm with simple variations.

Piano: Masami Tada (Japan)

Masami Tada studied composition in the Showa Academy of Music in Japan. He learned to play the piano under the tutelage of Takehisa Kosugi. His teacher, Takahisa Kosugi, was the artistic partner of John Cage at the Merce Cunningham Dance Company.

Lighting Design: Masaru Soga (Japan)

Masaru Soga studied composition under his father and grandfather who were jazz and traditional musicians in Japan. He studied philosophy at Waseda University. In the 70's, Masaru Soga studied philosophy and composition under John Cage in New York and also studied theatrical techniques at theatre schools in London, New York, Sydney and Tokyo. He is now director of Office SOGA in Japan.