Drumming the Future: Vietnamese Drumming as a Bridge between Tradition and Popular Entertainment

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Abstract
The fascination of Vietnamese with drums and drumming reaches back into the pre-historic when bronze drums (Dong Son), from the Red River Delta region of Vietnam's north, were prized trading commodities throughout the Asian world of that time. Substantial archaeological evidence from the Dong Son culture (1st millennium BCE – 2nd century CE) indicates that the bronze drums, cast in one piece through the lost-wax technique and often weighing two hundred kilograms or more were venerated possessions used as regalia, burial objects and musical instruments for ceremonies and festivals. Now in the twenty-first century the Dong Son and other historically renowned drum types have become symbols for Vietnam's emergence into an international cultural and economic arena. Three Vietnamese international events illustrate the emblematic use of traditional drumming as a nationalistic symbol of modern Vietnam: The Third Asian Indoor Games held in Hanoi in 2009 opened with a drumming spectacle using battle drums; The Jubilee celebrations of the Vietnamese Catholic Church in 2010, drew delegates from across the Catholic world with the opening in the north in the Ha Nam province beginning with an immense traditional drumming performance within its religious setting; The 2012 Hue International Arts Festival incorporated 'Resounding the Vietnamese Spirit', a specific drums and percussion festival with performances using Binh Dinh war drums, royal drums from Hue, Dong Son drums, and Tay Son battle drums. In particular, Hue’s 'Resounding the Vietnamese Spirit' was designed to attract Vietnamese youth to the popular possibilities of traditional drumming. The hallmark of the move to drumming as popular entertainment, extending from the use of drumming in the traditional lion dance performances is the emergence of small, youth drumming groups who perform in the streets of Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City for shop openings and local cultural events.

Keywords
tradition, bridge, between, vietnamese, entertainment, drumming, future, popular

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Dr. Janys Hayes, is a theatre director, actor and teacher of acting. She trained at the Drama Centre in London. Her doctoral re-search investigates Yat Malmgren’s actor training technique using a phenomenological framework. Her thesis is entitled, “The Knowing Body: Meaning and method in Yat Malmgren’s actor training technique”

and has recently been published as a book entitled, The Knowing Body. Janys is currently a Lecturer in Performance at the Faculty of Creative Arts at the University of Wollongong. She is particularly interested in festival and site-specific theatre as a means of “place-making.” Since 1998 Janys has maintained a close relationship with a number of Vietnamese theatre-makers, working alongside Vietnamese theatre practitioners at the University of Wollongong and undertaking study tours of Vietnam theatre practices. She produced Le Que Duong’s first major play in Sydney, Market of Lives and in 2011 spent five weeks researching Le Que’s festival performances in the Mekong Delta. Janys is the regional committee member for the Australasian Association for Theatre, Drama and Performance Studies. Janys has acted for Melbourne Theatre Co., Theatre South, Hunter Valley Theatre Co., Freshwheels and Salamanca Theatre. She has trained actors at NIDA, the VCA, and the Actors’ Centre Sydney.

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