John Somers conducts Interactive Theatre workshop

Caption: Prof. John Somers discusses with participants in his Interactive Theatre workshop at TNUA in December.

Prof. John Somers, an honorary fellow of the Department of Drama at the University of Exeter, gave an Interactive Theatre workshop at TNUA on December 12, engaging participants in discussions and an improvised interactive performance.

Prof. Somers founded the Applied Drama program at Exeter, from which he retired in 2005. He has worked extensively outside the UK, teaching in many countries including Finland, Turkey, Greece, Poland, the Czech Republic, and Taiwan.

Prof. Somers has developed, along with students and professional actors, a range of Interactive Theatre programs on issues such as alcohol abuse, runaway children, suicide, self-inflicted harm, problems among farming communities, and teenagers' mental health. He has been to Taiwan for a number of times and worked with its students. He has a good understanding of the theatre education and community theatre in Taiwan.

In his December workshop, Prof. Somers mainly showed the participants what Interactive Theatre was. He said Interactive Theatre makers have to understand the goals that a particular group is seeking to achieve by commissioning a project, and each stage of the project has to be carefully planned and executed.

Research has to be done using resources from the Internet, advice from professionals, experts and individuals, libraries, media reports and others – all these are sources of ideas related to the project goal and elements that can be included in the story for the Interactive Theatre program.

There were over 30 participants in the workshop, six of whom were from a theatre group formed by parents of a Taipei elementary school. The workshop focused on the issue of homosexuality.

Sang Jijia recreates 'Sticks' for School of Dance production

Choreographer Sang Jijia from China was at TNUA last year recreating "Sticks," a work that students staged at the School of Dance's 2013 year-end production.

Mr. Sang Jijia, who studied with William Forsythe and worked with the Forsythe Company as choreographer and dancer until 2006, said stick figures are commonly used by dancers to record dance.

He has been using this tool since he started learning to dance. The circles and sticks forming the figures have no expressions and carry no significances, and the readers must fill them up with their own emotions and meanings.

"Sticks" makes use of the contrast between black and white to create a texture and represents the two-dimensional stick figures with the language of dance, he said.

Mr. Sang Jijia, an ethnic Tibetan Chinese, was hailed in 1998 by the province of Guangdong, China as a "star of the next century." He became the first dancer selected by the Rolex Mentor and Protege Arts Initiative in 2002.

He left Forsythe's company and returned to China in 2006. Sang is now Resident Artist of BeijingDance/LDTX.

Mr. Sang Jijia said there is no place for "laziness" in the world of dance, because a dancer improves through constant training and learning. Dancers have to practice for hours daily, but the hard work is not meant to help them make money. The hard work is all about perseverance and devotion to one's creative work.

Caption:Choreographer Sang Jijia instructs TNUA students during a rehearsal for "Sticks," a dance that was staged at the School of Dance 2013 year-end production.