

FROM INNER WORLDS TO OUTER SPACE

From Inner Worlds to Outer Space
The Multimedia Performances of Dan Kwong

DAN KWONG

Edited by Robert Vorlicky

The University of Michigan Press ANN ARBOR

Copyright © by the University of Michigan 2004

All rights reserved

Published in the United States of America by

The University of Michigan Press

Manufactured in the United States of America

♾ Printed on acid-free paper

2007 2006 2005 2004 4 3 2 1

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, or otherwise, without the written permission of the publisher.

A CIP catalog record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-

Publication Data applied for

ISBN 0-472-09866-7 (cloth)

ISBN 0-472-06866-0 (paper)

Author's Note/Editor's Note

Dear Reader,

Please note that these texts were originally written for live theatrical performance. The occasional sudden shifts and changes in emotion, mood, or attitude during spoken passages are difficult to communicate in print. I've included some notes indicating how I deliver the text onstage. I hope these notes aren't too intrusive.

Many of these performances involve fairly elaborate multimedia components. Often visual, aural, and physical elements occur simultaneously with text. In some cases, I have used a modified script form, which hopefully will help give you a sense of the what/where/when of things happening onstage. The book's photographs will convey some of the images (special thanks to Jenny San Angel for her computer expertise in capturing and processing still images from performance videotapes). The rest I leave to your imagination.

This book is dedicated first and foremost to my family: my mother Momo Nagano, who shared with me her indomitable spirit, her delight in storytelling, her obsessive attention to detail, and who taught me that "growing up" doesn't mean you stop having fun; my father, Sam Kwong, who showed me how to work hard, to take care of those who work for you, and to always do the best you can; my three wonderful sisters, Maria, Didi, and Poppy, who have graciously tolerated being repeatedly referred to in my work and who are some of the most important landmarks in my life. This book is also dedicated to the late Harvey Jackins, who believed in me like no one else and whose brilliant thinking and generous heart continue to guide my work and allow my life to be ever more focused.

No discussion of my performance work would be complete without men-

tioning Highways Performance Space (Santa Monica, California) and the two people who founded it in 1989, Linda Frye Burnham and Tim Miller. These extraordinary individuals selflessly nurtured, encouraged, and supported my development as an artist. Although both have moved on, their spirit of bold, heartfelt, life-changing art still resonates within me, coloring my artistic conscience. I am forever grateful to them and to Highways itself, the place where I have given birth to most of my performance creations.

Special acknowledgment and gratitude are due to Christine Säng, whose superb directorial and choreographic contributions on *Monkhood in 3 Easy Lessons* and *The Dodo Vaccine* were invaluable. Her wisdom and knowledge led me to profound levels as a performer.

Finally, my deepest thanks go to Bob Vorlicky, whose thoughtful and appreciative interest in my work has been an extraordinarily validating experience for me as an artist.

Dan Kwong

My heartfelt gratitude goes to Molly Vaux, Chris Mills, Ellen Bialo, Scott Loane, Karen Casco, Agosto Machado, Roman Marin, and Jim Muzzi for their generous support. I profoundly thank my editor and friend LeAnn Fields of the University of Michigan Press for remaining steadfast in championing publications in the field of theater studies and performance. Her counsel and professionalism have been invaluable. And special thanks are due, as always, to my son Sasha for his unconditional love.

I am extremely grateful to the Tisch School of the Arts, New York University, for awarding me a Senior Faculty Development Grant, which partially funded this project.

It has been a distinct pleasure and honor to collaborate with Dan Kwong. Thank you, Dan, for your patience, your unwavering cooperation, and the priceless gift—evident in your on- and offstage lives—of performing *and* living the “change.”

In loving memory of Lynda Myoun Hart (1953–2000).

Bob Vorlicky

Contents

1. Introduction: “Flying Alone in Outer Spaces”	1
2. <i>Secrets of The Samurai Centerfielder</i> (1989)	11
<i>Tales from The Fractured Tao with Master Nice Guy</i> (1991)	47
COMMENTARY: “CENTERING”	73
3. <i>Monkhood in 3 Easy Lessons</i> (1993)	81
<i>Correspondence of a Dangerous Enemy Alien</i> (1995)	109
COMMENTARY: “PERFORMING HISTORIES”	139
4. <i>The Dodo Vaccine</i> (1996)	151
<i>The Night The Moon Landed on 39th Street</i> (1999)	179
COMMENTARY: “INSIDE OUT”	219
5. Excerpts from <i>More Tales from the Locker Room (and other smelly places)</i>	229
<i>The Sword and The Chrysanthemum</i> (1997)	229
<i>Al the Barber</i> (1997)	231
<i>Station Wagons of Life</i> (2000)	234
6. Publicly Confidential: Conversations with Dan Kwong (1999–2003)	245
Appendix: Performance History	261
Selected Bibliography	269