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Motus O Lights Up The Stage
Little Match Girl to premier at Nineteen on the Park

The *Little Match Girl*, written in 1845 by Hans Christian Andersen, is a haunting tale of poverty and loss which has been widely adapted for film, music and television.

On May 31, June 1 and 2 at Nineteen on the Park, Motus O will present the premiere of their own version of the tale, which combines the poignancy of the original with hope for a better future. The inspiration for the dance collective's interpretation came both from the book and a back story and musical score written by Chinese-Canadian An-Lun Huang, said co-artistic director Jack Langenhuizen.

"An-Lun was asked by his government in 1977 to create a Western style ballet score that would be performed by the Beijing Ballet School of China in Beijing. This was only one year after the official end of the Cultural Revolution. He chose the story of *The Little Match Girl* as he felt it mirrored the chaos and deprivation he witnessed first-hand in his own country, where ideology had surpassed basic human dignity."

Set during the Cultural Revolution, the story begins with a pair of street performers, father and daughter, preparing to present a puppet version of *The Little Match Girl*. Two Red Guards forbid them to present a production with a Western theme, and imprison the father for breaking the law. The puppet stage and the family's livelihood are destroyed in the process.

Desperate and destitute, the daughter retreats into the comforting world of her dreams, in which dancing snowflakes and life-sized puppets come to life and become her friends. Towards the end of the story, her hope is reborn as she is reunited with her father.

The Little Match Girl was created by Motus O artistic directors James Croker, Cynthia Croker and Jack Langenhuizen, along with company dancers Sarah Felschow and Laura Day. Lighting designs by Travis Stocking and

video footage by Alan McIntosh create a sense of the many emotional transformations that take place during the show. Cynthia and James Croker designed the costumes and props for the premiere and original music is by An-Lun Huang, with excerpts from Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake*.

The Little Match Girl will be performed May 31, June 1 and 2 at 7 p.m. at the Lebovic Centre for Arts and Entertainment-Nineteen on the Park in downtown Stouffville. For tickets call 905-640-2522 or visit www.nineteenonthepark.com.



Sarah Felschow performs in Motus O dance theatre's *Little Match Girl*, which premieres at Nineteen on the Park on May 31, June 1 and 2 at 7 p.m. James Croker photo

ACCLAIMED COMPOSER WORKS MUSICAL MAGIC

Chinese-Canadian composer An-Lun Huang, who wrote the original score for Motus O's production of *The Little Match Girl*, took piano lessons from the age of 5 and completed his first piano album at 7.

In 1966, An-Lun was nearing the end of his musical studies and planning to follow in his father's footsteps as a musician, composer and conductor of Western classical romantic music. But when the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution was declared by Mao Zedong, Mr. Huang's world changed.

The revolution was designed to advance socialism by removing capitalist elements from Chinese society and imposing Maoist orthodoxy. The result was chaos, as social norms largely evaporated and established political institutions disintegrated at all levels of government. The 11 million

strong Red Guard, made up mostly of young adults, were given the power to enforce this ideology.

Like many others, Mr. Huang was sent to perform manual labour in the country. His education ceased, and access to music, especially Western music, was forbidden. For the next 10 years he was forced to work on farms and in factories as part of the "The Great Leap Forward."

In 1976, the policies that had dominated the previous 10 years relaxed. Mr. Huang returned to his studies and eventually was asked to compose the first Western style ballet to be produced in China since the mid 1960s.

He was appointed composer-in-residence of the Central Opera House of Beijing, and became a member of the China Musicians Association in 1976. He received the Fellowship in Composition, Trinity College of Music, London in 1983, then completed his Master's Degree of Music at Yale with the Alumni Association's prize in 1986.

Mr. Huang, who is president of the Chinese Canadian Music Society of Ontario, moved to Toronto in 1980 and now lives in Markham, where he first got to know members of Motus O. He has written more than 20 symphonic works, 11 operatic productions, three ballets and four oratorios, as well as choral, chamber and film music, and his compositions have been widely performed by many major symphony orchestras and warmly received around the world.

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