

**Search**

Search

- Blogs**
- Take a Bite**  
Mix Cafe downtown – simple and good
  - Aperture Cafe**  
Beanbag toss
  - Fashion Tribe**  
Polynesian Islanders inspire tattoo...
  - Fighting Words**  
Penn/Sanchez on Dec. 12
  - Otaku Ohana**  
The further adventures of the Hakaida...
  - Political Radar**  
New lineup
  - Quick Reads**  
No gambling
  - UH Sports Extra Football**  
Wednesday report from LV
  - UH Sports Extra Volleyball**  
An update on Waber's visit

**HLIFE ONLINE**

HiLife Online

HiLife Cover Story: Fall Film Preview...  
HiLife Online  
fe Online

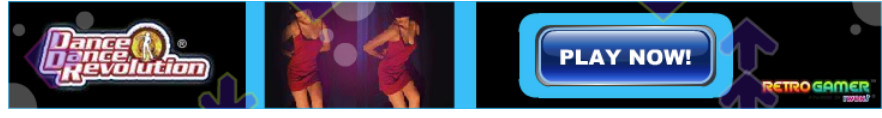
**Give us YOUR Weekly Opinion**

Reader Poll

Do you think Congress will pass a health care plan by the end of the year?

**Vote Now!**

- Most Read**
- 24hrs | 7 days
- ▶ UH running game goes Green
  - ▶ Doctor says death was near for malnourished 12-year-old
  - ▶ There's no need to totally depend on a rice cooker
  - ▶ Longtime local favorites to be found at Portuguese Festa
  - ▶ Kauai highest in foreclosure rate
  - ▶ Cafe fire deals \$200,000 in damage
  - ▶ Unattended cooking causes fire at popular plate lunch eatery
  - ▶ McCully blaze causes \$150,000 in damage to tavern
  - ▶ Built for speed
  - ▶ Elections chief draws ire of Senate's finance chair
  - ▶ Chevron is fined \$43,500 for alleged pollution of ocean



www.starbulletin.com > Features > Features Stories >

## Deep challenge

Ronald Gilliam directs the unconventional 'Nocturnal Wanderer'

By John Berger

POSTED: 01:30 a.m. HST, Sep 11, 2009

(Single Page View) | [Return to Paginated View](#)

One of the University of Hawaii at Manoa's most important contributions to Oahu's broad and vibrant theater scene is presenting works by major playwrights that might otherwise never be seen here. The university delivers again this weekend with director Ronald Gilliam's production of Gao Xingjian's "Nocturnal Wanderer."



COURTESY RONALD GILLIAM / KENNEDY THEATRE  
Michelle Boudreau plays a prostitute seducing a sleepwalker, played by Nicolas Altiburcio, in "Nocturnal Wanderer."

Gilliam admits that the work is challenging -- so much so that he'd like to survey the audience after each performance to get individual reactions -- but in the absence of one-on-one feedback, he hopes Honolulu will enjoy Gao's unconventional "rapid, high-paced" work as much as he does.

"The play itself is quite deep; it has many issues that it addresses," Gilliam said last week.

"Deep" need not be taken as "difficult to understand," Gilliam added. Previous exposure to Gao's work or contemporary Chinese theater in general isn't necessary to appreciate some of the main issues, "especially the spiritual issues -- man's relationship with woman (and) man's relationship with himself."

"It appears very abstract on the surface level, but there are key elements that I think appeal to wider audiences, and I want to share that with Honolulu," he said.

If experience counts for anything, Honolulu audiences are in good hands. Gilliam directed a full-length production of another Gao play, "Between Life and Death," at Butler University in 2003.

"My undergraduate honors thesis was on presenting Chinese theater to Western audiences," he said. "(Gao) has three plays that are very similar -- 'Between Life and Death,' 'Nocturnal Wanderer' and 'Dialogue and Rebuttal.'"

"They all involve one central character with supporting characters that are either manifestations of that person's dreams or just elements of the main character."

"Wanderer" revolves around an unnamed man whose nocturnal excursions bring him in contact with a prostitute, a thug and a ruffian. Gao has described the play as "a nightmare in three short acts."

Gilliam said the nameless man "represents mankind and the choices that we make."

There is no intermission.

Gao Xingjian was born in China in 1940, grew to adulthood amid the chaos of the "Great Leap Forward" and was forced to work as a peasant in a rural commune during the Cultural Revolution. He was eventually allowed to return to Beijing, and was later permitted to leave the People's Republic permanently.

Gao's works -- novels and poetry as well as plays -- were banned following the Tiananmen Square protests in 1989. Eight years later he was granted French citizenship. In 2000 he received the Nobel Prize in Literature.

One highly unusual element in "Wanderer" is that the characters refer to themselves in the second person -- as "you" rather than "I." Gilliam said that unconventional device reflects Gao's belief in the importance of "tripartating" the character.

"The actor on stage should be the actor, just a normal human being, but he should also be in the character, and he should also be the actor commenting on the character," he said. "The (use of the word) 'you' forces the actor to go in and out of character naturally, and to organically get attached to the moments that he would naturally be attached to instead of forcing (the attachment)."

Gilliam added that "Wanderer" is "a lot more natural on the surface level" than "Between Life and Death," because "there are only a couple of moments where reality seems to be distorted."

Summing up, he said Gao's plays reach audiences "on a deeper level."

"It's not so abstract that people are thinking, 'What it this?' They actually can see through the body movements, and through the images that Gao Xingjian is giving us, what the message actually is."

Get your **Health Care Administration bachelor's degree** online from **UNIVERSITY of HAWAII** UH West O'ahu WEST O'AHU

**Apply Today!**

Ads by Google

**Fly Hawaiian Airlines**  
America's #1 On-Time Carrier 5th Year in a Row. Book Online & Save.  
www.HawaiianAir.com

**La Pietra**  
College prep for girls grades 6-12 For education beyond education  
www.lapietra.edu

**Affordable Luxury Condos**  
Newly Renovated units in Honolulu VA, FHA, First Time Buys Programs  
www.brokerseye.com

**Romantic Hawaii Honeymoon**  
Great Hawaii Honeymoon Packages in Kauai Beach Resorts, Car, Golf.  
Suite-Paradise.com

**COMPARE Your Loan Options**

**CURRENT OFFERS**

**Refinance \$400,000 for Only \$1,824/month**

**Refinance \$300,000 for Only \$1,368/month**

**Refinance \$200,000 for Only \$912/month**

**lendingtree**

\*Terms & Conditions Apply

**E.A Buck Company**

**Retirement Planning & FREE Yearly Tax Reviews**

**545-2211**  
eabuck.com

**Today's Edition**

**Hawaii News**

- ▶ BOE panel rejects rise in bus fares
- ▶ Doctor says death was near for malnourished 12-year-old
- ▶ Elections chief draws ire of Senate's finance chair
- ▶ Meetings to explore plans for a Kalapupapa memorial
- ▶ Chevron is fined \$43,500 for alleged pollution of ocean
- ▶ Camaraderie at work: Two sailors from Hawaii are aiding combat operations in the Middle East
- ▶ Cafe fire deals \$200,000 in damage
- ▶ Memorial for Mahelona at Kealahou
- ▶ Services to remember slain 5-year-old
- ▶ Improvements under way on Kamehameha Highway
- ▶ Hawaii students listed as National Merit semifinalists
- ▶ Newswatch
- ▶ Police and Fire
- ▶ Corrections and Clarifications