

The Shanghai Acrobats and Dance Theatre

Thursday Evening, October 22, 1992, at 7:00

Friday Evening, October 23, 1992, at 8:00

Power Center, Ann Arbor, Michigan

COMPANY

Leader Yin, Xiu-Ming
 Directors of Acrobatic Art Xu, Zhi-Yuan and Yang, Ling-De
 Artistic Director, Shanghai Dance Theatre Weng, Zhu-Fa
 Director of Choreography, Shanghai Dance Theatre Shen, Yi-Ming
 Wardrobe Master Wang, Jia-Lin
 Interpreter Huang, Ziu-Zhen
 Chef Ye, Zu-Yu
 Company Manager Harvey Shain
 Stage Manager/Lighting Director Ann Marie Loomis
 Assistant Stage Manager/Sound Engineer Bob Erickson

ACROBATS

Cai, Zue-Jin
 Chen, Rui-Wen
 Gu, Shun-Da
 Jin, Ke-Min
 Jin, Zi
 Kong, Xiang-Hong

Li, Qui
 Lou, Wei-Wen
 Lu, Jia-Min
 Pan, Lian-Qing
 Mao, Hui-Yun

DANCERS

Chen, Bei
 Chen, Xin-Chun
 Jin, Ye-Ping
 Li, Guo-Gang
 Liu, Qui-Ping
 Liu, Wei-Ming
 Qi, Yue-Xian

Qian, Li-Hua
 Shen, Yi-Ming
 Wang, Shi-Ying
 Wang, Shu-Ping
 Yang, Jian-Hua
 Zhang, Juan-Hua
 Zhang, Jun-Feng

MUSICIANS

Du, Chong
 Wu, Luo
 Zhou, Le

SPECIAL THANKS

Deputy Director, Shanghai Cultural Bureau Xiao, Yan
 Manager, Shanghai Cultural Exchange Wei, Zhi
 Director of American Affairs Section, Bureau of External
 Cultural Relations Li, Wei-He
 Cultural Consular, Consulate General of the P.R.C.
 in Los Angeles Chen, Shu-Yu
 Advisor, Shanghai Cultural Exchange Agency Ge, Hai-Ping

The Shanghai Acrobats and Dance Theatre are represented by Columbia Artists Festivals,
 a division of Columbia Artists Management Inc., New York City

“The Parade of Dynasties”

story conception by

Herbert O. Fox and Michael M. Wilson

I. QIN (CHIN) DYNASTY (221–210 B.C.)

“The Parade of Dynasties” opens with a procession of heroic soldiers jubilantly returning home in celebration of the unification of China. The Dance Theatre of Shanghai marches in revelry over the completion of China’s most famous monument of the past and symbol of the union—its “10,000 li” Great Wall. The leaders of the defeated nations cheer the arrival of the triumphant First Emperor, Quin Shi Huang Di, who basks in their praise as he performs a solo dance. Under the banners of the fearless Emperor, the Shanghai Acrobatic Troupe portrays courageous warriors demonstrating their fierce battle skills and bravery. The Emperor calls for his bravest general to prove his tremendous strength and dexterity by performing bow bending and feats of strength with the heavy halberd. To show his approval, the Emperor bestows upon the general the hand of the most beautiful maiden in the Empire.

Bow Bending: Kong, Xia-Hong

II. TANG DYNASTY (618–907 A.D.)

One of the oldest and most impressive Buddhist shrines in all of China is the Dunhuang grottoes, located in the northwest desert corridor of the modern province of Gansu. Over 1,800 miles from any ocean, this 2,000-year-old shrine was once a caravan stop along the famous Silk Road. Inspired by a vision of a thousand golden Buddhas, the monk Yeu Zun began carving stone figures of the Buddhist deity in the steep sandstone cliffs in the year 366 A.D. For the next 1,000 years the faithful continued carving these figures in a layered honeycomb pattern creating thousands of bizarre, other-worldly frescoes—an eternal tribute to their faith.

In this scene, as the lights rise in the mysterious Dunhuang grottoes, a myriad of frescoes seems to come to life as the dancers

create several tableaus from the sculptured murals. Suddenly, a god of war appears to accompany the dancers with a melodic *pi pa* solo. Two young contortionists mimic the unbelievable poses represented in the murals called “Flying to Heaven” which depict mortals reaching enlightenment. Their bodies bend, twist and flow in seemingly impossible ways representing the transient condition of humanity. The performance continues with the Thousand Hands Dance and other Tang Dynasty dances in the mysterious setting of the Dunhuang grottoes.

Pi Pa: Zhou, Le

Flying to Heaven: Jin, Zi and Chen, Rui-Wen

III. SONG (SUNG) DYNASTY (960–1279 A.D.)

Chinese traditional performing arts originated over 900 years ago in the peasant villages with the festivity and merrymaking at the end of a successful harvest. Our celebration begins with a musician playing a *ban hu* solo as peddlers prepare their merchandise for the gathering crowd. Surrounded by countryside merchants, young women whisper amongst themselves as single men show off their athletic abilities and skills at ancient martial arts. A giant harvest god, Zhang Kui, dances and sways through the crowd.

When the harvest god departs, merchants vie for the attention of the throng. A potter sends several young women out to show his fine work by having them twirl his plates on the end of long bamboo poles while they perform astonishing feats of gymnastic prowess. A fanmaker sends several other young girls out to demonstrate his fans as they dance through the crowd like butterflies. To the carpenter’s dismay, several high-spirited youths attempt to steal a bench. To protect the remaining benches from being taken, he balances an inverted pyramid of nineteen 24-pound benches on the crown of his head!

Ban Hu: Wu, Luo

Plate Spinning: Chen, Rui-Wen; Lou, Wei-Wen; Lu, Jia-Min; Li, Qi

Bench Balancing: Pan, Lian-Qing

INTERMISSION

IV. MING DYNASTY (1368–1644 A.D.)

The traditions of the Chinese wedding ceremony were first established during the Ming Dynasty. Under the backdrop of two giant red Chinese “double happiness” characters and accompanied by a musician playing a vibrant *suo na* solo, The bride is sequestered within a classic Oriental sedan chair and is carried by servants to the home of the groom. The chair bearers become exhausted from the long and arduous journey and stop to rest. The bride’s attendants implore the bearers to continue, but the bearers refuse. Only after the cloaked bride emerges from the curtained chair do the servants agree to proceed.

Meanwhile, the groom’s many servants are busy preparing his house for the arrival of the bride. This will be the first time he is ever to have seen his wife-to-be. As the nervous groom steps out for a moment (presumably to have a few drinks), one of the servants breaks a mirror. What follows is a comedy routine in the classic style of the grand old days of vaudeville.

The bridal entourage arrives, led by a Dragon dance to give the couple good luck and good fortune. The groom uses a red ribbon to draw the cloaked bride from her tiny sanctuary; standing apart and each holding an end of the knotted ribbon, the couple is pronounced husband and wife. They bow to their ancestors, the crowd, and then to each other. The celebration begins as the caterers entertain the wedding party with their zany antics.

Chinese tradition dictates that the boisterous crowd try to embarrass the bride by teasing her. The groom comes gallantly to her rescue only to become himself the sport of the rambunctious throng. He must entertain them to prove his worth.

Suo Na: Du, Chong

Groom: Mao, Hui-Yun

Mirror Act/Caterers: Jin, Ke-Min; Mao, Hui-Yun;
Cai, Xue-Jin; Gu, Shun-Da



V. QING (CHING) DYNASTY (1644–1911 A.D.)

“The Parade of Dynasties” grand finale depicts all the majesty and splendor of the Imperial Court of the exalted last dynasty of China. In the Hall of the Imperial Harmony, the maids-in-waiting dance to the melodic sounds of traditional Chinese musical instruments as they prepare the palace for the coronation celebration for the new Emperor. The powerful generals, dressed in their finest, most elaborate and resplendent uniforms, enter the hall with much pomp and ceremony. When all are assembled, the new Emperor and his lovely Empress proceed to their thrones as those present bow in respect and humility. The monarch calls before him the finest entertainers in the land. A great magician produces a seemingly unlimited supply of provisions—wine, bowls of fire, and even live goldfish—from beneath the beautifully decorated cloths draped over his arm; a stalwart lad comes forth to juggle effortlessly ceramic urns of extraordinary weight and size.

The Emperor is pleased as he steps down from his throne to survey all within his control. Harmony reigns in the Middle Kingdom.

Er Hu: Zhou, Le

Gu Zheng: Wu, Luo

Di Zi: Du, Chong

Jar Juggling: Kong, Xiang-Hong

Traditional Conjuring: Pan, Lian-Qing

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Established in 1951, the Shanghai Acrobats have toured more than 20 countries and have won many awards in national competitions. Most experienced travelers throughout Asia consider them to be one of the greatest tourist attractions of China, if not of the entire Far East. Membership in this prestigious company is a coveted honor and a lifelong occupation.

The Shanghai Dance Theatre specializes in the development of dance dramas that combine the style of traditional Chinese performance with the innovations of modern dance. The Dance Theatre has been recognized in such prestigious events as the Prix de Lausanne International Ballet Competition, the World Youth Festival and the Hong Kong Art Festival, and has toured in over 35 countries.

For the first time, the beauty and pageantry of these classic crafts of the Chinese stage are being brought together in one grand production. "The Parade of Dynasties" combines the grace and splendor of the Dance Theatre of Shanghai with the incredible athletic skills and hilarious comedy of the Shanghai Acrobatic Troupe. Completely produced in the People's Republic of China by the Shanghai Cultural Exchange Agency, the show features five scenes from great imperial reigns in China and encompasses a 2,000-year panorama of Oriental history. Each scene is authentically costumed, choreographed and scored according to its historical setting.

A Brief History of Chinese Acrobatics

Chinese acrobatics was at first a folk art. It originated in the daily lives of the people, including their work, battles and sacrificial rites. During the Warring States period (770–476 B.C.), acrobatics became widespread. It was believed that the required discipline could steel people's will, as well as increase their physical strength and accuracy of movement.

During the peaceful years of the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.–220 A.D.), acrobatic arts



flowered into a form of entertainment. They became part of the celebration of a good harvest, and folk performers were summoned to the imperial courts to amuse visitors with feats such as balancing porcelain food jars on their heads. This period was followed by years of chaos, during which acrobatics were almost forgotten; however, in 589 A.D., there was another upsurge in popularity that led to the best acrobats being registered as professional performers and traveling to other countries as a part of a huge cultural exchange called the "Hundred Entertainments." Many acrobatic feats were expanded upon during this time, particularly the human pagoda, rope-walking and the dancing horse.

After the collapse of the Tang Dynasty, China once again fell into a state of confusion, and of all the arts included in the "Hundred Entertainments" only acrobatics continued to thrive. Spinning tops and juggling with both hands and feet were added to the repertoire of the acrobats. During the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1911) Dynasties, acrobatics came to be considered by the rulers as an unrefined form of entertainment. On the other hand, the townspeople loved it with its long history. Consequently, acrobats gave most of their performances at local open-air festivals and, by 1949, the art had again been

transformed by this change. The performances were designed to be better seen by spectators from any part of an arena; feats of physical prowess were added; and acts became shorter and more flexible so that they varied with the time, place and conditions of the performance.

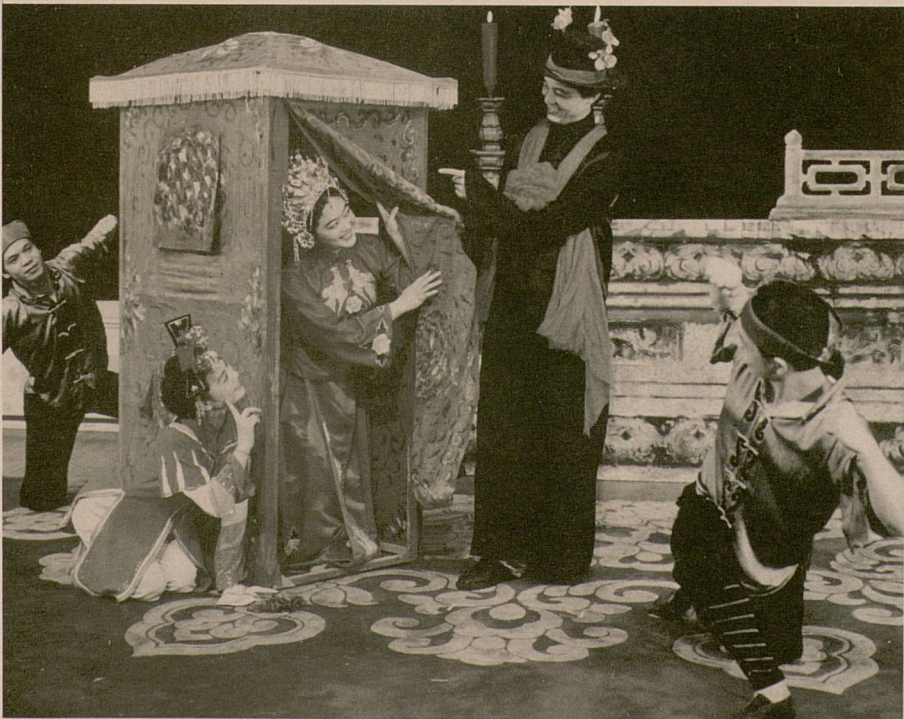
In 1950, after the founding of New China, reconstruction took place and the Ministry of Culture of the Central People's Government set about establishing an acrobatic troupe to prepare for the revival of the traditional acrobatic arts. Outstanding acrobats from major cities in China came together in Beijing, and each performed his or her own masterpiece. Soon China's acrobats were organized into large professional troupes, one of the principal being the Shanghai Acrobatic Troupe, founded in 1951. Today there are over 250 acrobatic arts organizations in China.

Acrobats are held in high esteem by the Chinese community, receiving the same kind of respect that is bestowed upon ballerinas and opera singers in the United States. Training for an acrobatic troupe starts as early as age eight. The first two years are spent in basic training, which focuses on balancing, tumbling, dancing, flexibility and strength training. Students

practice five hours daily, six days a week. The next three to five years are spent training for a specific act. Acts may be selected by students, but are most often assigned by the troupe's instructors according to need and recognized ability. During the training period, students may leave at any time if they are unhappy or if their skill is not developing according to expectations. Between training and becoming performers, students spend one year bringing their acts to the desired level of performance perfection. The average age of first-time performers is fifteen to sixteen years old.

Students are also given academic training to ensure that they become well-rounded. At the end of their training, which is about seven years, students must pass an academic examination. They are not allowed to perform unless they pass the exam.

For some of the performers, acrobatics are a way of life long before they join the troupe; the tradition often has been passed from generation to generation in their family. Others gain admission to the troupe with an audition, similar to a dance audition in the United States. Students exhibiting special talent in gymnastics school may also be recruited.





The decision to join an acrobatic troupe is a lifetime one. When a member becomes too old to perform, he or she is given another job in the theatre, such as costume design, training of young acrobats or administration of troupe affairs. The troupe becomes the performer's life.

A Brief History of the Shanghai Dance Theatre

Shanghai has long been recognized as one of the leading arts capitals of Asia. The Shanghai Dance Theatre continues this long tradition of artistic excellence. It has been internationally recognized for both individual and group efforts in such prestigious events at the Prix de Lausanne International Ballet Competition, the World Youth Festival and the Hong Kong Art Festival.

The Dance Theatre specializes in the creation and development of dance dramas. Combining the style of traditional Chinese performance and the innovations of international modern dance, the dancers create a vibrant theatrical experience that appeals to all audiences while preserving a uniquely Chinese flavor. Costumes flash across the stage in resplendent

color, accenting the dance and the motion of the dancer.

The dances are based on a variety of themes, representing anything from modern urban life to mythical legends 2,000 years old. Due to their unique contributions, the members of the Dance Theatre are sought after as choreographers in other dance troupes throughout China and around the world.

The Shanghai Dance Theatre has inspired audiences in over 35 countries in Asia and around the world. Its participation in "The Parade of Dynasties" continues its legacy of expanding the limits of the Chinese arts.

Many of the performers in the Shanghai Dance Theatre are recruited directly from the Shanghai Dance Academy. Founded in 1960, the school was created from several acclaimed professional dance institutes to supply the ever more demanding needs of the Shanghai Dance Theatre and Ballet. The students are chosen from the best classes in the country. They then undertake an exacting six-year program, studying all elements of dance in addition to the standard schooling. Due to the high quality of graduates, the academy has become known in China as the "Cradle of the Dancing Arts."