

A Dance across Continents

Harrisburg-area dancers take stage in Beijing.

Hope Primas



Fan dancers: 1st row, Lily Hess, Jessica Chou, Erica Leyder; standing, Patricia Huang, Vicki Chou and Hannah Wastyk.

Lately, we may not think of Harrisburg as a hot destination spot with all the talk about its money problems.

But when three dance students from the Chinese Cultural and Arts Institute of Harrisburg (CCAI) entered the Beijing Dance Academy last July, the city shone on the world stage.

The Beijing Dance Academy chose just 11 American dancers from California, Texas and Pennsylvania to take part in its acclaimed summer program. Other countries included Germany, England and Taiwan. The three Pennsylvania dancers, Helen Zhang, 15, Vicki Chou, 17, and Patricia Huang, 17, attend CCAI and Cumberland Valley High School.

The students did a traditional dance called Wan San Shi Nu at the Grand National Theater of China in Beijing. Performing for about 5,000 people, they said it was thrilling to be on stage in front of such a large audience.

"We were all extremely excited," said Huang, a high school senior. "The sound of that crowd was amazing—it wasn't applause, it was a roar." Zhang, a sophomore, added, "I am glad I had the opportunity to perform on this stage for so many people."

"The Beijing Dance Academy is known as the Juilliard of Asia," said Chen-Yu Tsuei, president of CCAI. "The summer program is

very selective. We are proud our students were able to dance at this prestigious academy."

The dancers received recognition from former Gov. Ed Rendell for their outstanding performance and for raising Pennsylvania's artistic image worldwide.

Committed to growing cultural understanding between the East and

West, Tsuei, a Juilliard graduate and a Taiwan native, and her husband, William Hubler, founded CCAI in 2000 in Harrisburg.

At first, CCAI served a small Chinese-American population. That changed when a group of families asked CCAI to help their adopted daughters to connect with both their Chinese and American cultures.

Today, CCAI is known for its unique brand of excellence in Chinese dance and art and for creating bonds of harmony across cultures. It now serves 100 students during the year and another 100 to 150 students during summer camp. Programs include Chinese dance, calligraphy, painting, language, Erh-Hu music, yoga exercises, Tai-Chi Chuan and ballet. Adult classes include Latin, ballroom and even hip-hop dance.

Hubler said the applause the students received in Beijing strengthened the couple's dream to build a large Chinese cultural center along the Paxton Street corridor, home for many Asian restaurants, grocery stores and shops. They see the center becoming the heart of a new district similar to a Chinatown. It will serve as the hub for art events, cultural expositions, artists on tour, national and international tours and showcasing local artists.

He said it would increase

Harrisburg's visibility and grow Asian businesses here.

"People from this area go to Washington, Philadelphia and New York to get things they can't get here," Hubler said. "Because of the new center and district, we're looking at new shops, restaurants and 300 to 400 jobs immediately around it. By bringing that vibrancy here, just the weekend traffic alone would have a significant economic impact."

For more on CCAI's programs and plans for the new center, visit chineseculturalartsinstitute.org or call 717-585-7701 or e-mail hubimex@gmail.com.

Concertante Plans Free Performance

The highly regarded string quartet, Concertante, will give a free concert at 8 p.m. on Feb. 4 at the Rose Lehrman Arts Center, One HACC Dr., in Harrisburg.

The group will perform Mozart's Piano Divertimento for Violin, Viola and Cello and follow with Brahms' String Sextet in G Major, Opus 36.

There will be a free wine and cheese reception immediately following the concert, during which the instrumentalists will be available to meet the public.

For more information about the ensemble, visit www.concertante.org.

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