

Artistic Differences
An ongoing look at ethnic contributions to
Nebraska state culture.

Eastern Education

Chinese lion dance gives students creative outlet

BY DIANE BRODERICK
Staff writer

A lion's face looms large as its large eyes slowly blink and its mouth snaps open and shut, its body moving to the pulsating rhythm of drums.

But it's no cause for alarm; the sight isn't a menacing one. According to Chinese tradition, when the lion in question is dancing, festooned with colors and requires the aid of at least two people for successful operation, it brings blessings.

It is a practice that has been in Chinese folklore for centuries, said Celine Robertson, who teaches Chinese and English as a second language at Lincoln High School and sponsors a group of lion dancers there.

"When you do the lion dances, you drive the evil spirit away," Robertson said.

Originally from China and raised in Taiwan, Robertson and Gary Yuen, both affiliated with the Asian Community Center at the time, helped bring the art to Lincoln in the early '90s shortly after the organization formed.

Back from a trip to Taiwan, Robertson had learned the art of the lion dance and with Yuen's help in training people, her vision of bringing the lion dance to Lincoln became a reality.

Robertson and Yuen worked with a group of about 100 people - including students and members of the community - to present a troupe in 1993's Star City Parade. The venture was such a success, the group won the parade's Best Specialty Unit Award.

And its success pointed to another aspect of what Robertson hoped to accomplish.

"One of our goals was to bridge the cultures," she said.

Both Asians and non-Asians performed in the event, and that interaction served as a learning experience for everyone involved, she said.

The lion dance troupe continued through the Asian Community Center, but it was not until 1997 that Lincoln High got its own troupe started.

The school's sister city in Taiping City, China, presented Lincoln High with two lions, a drum and other equipment. Then, in the summer of 1997, Robertson visited China and purchased a larger lion in Canton.

She was able to start her own group at Lincoln High that fall.

"I like to initiate things," Robertson said. "New things."

Though Robertson sponsors the group at Lincoln High, she said once they learn the basics, students take the lead.

"The kids kind of take over," Robertson said. "They are very creative. They can create their own stories or movements."

Jeremy Jewell, a Lincoln High senior, is the student leader of its lion dance group. He said the group's performances usually run about five minutes.

"It's high-energy. People get tired really quick," Jewell said.

Martial arts techniques and strength are required to correctly perform the lion dance, she said. During the dance, the performer must hold the

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RICK TOWNLEY/DN
ABOVE: LINCOLN HIGH SENIOR JEREMY JEWELL performs the Lion Dance. The Canton-style Lion he holds was purchased in China. Teacher Celine Robertson said the head cost about \$600 when it was purchased in 1997.



LEFT: CELINE ROBERTSON has been teaching the Lion Dance since 1993. She teaches Chinese and English as a second language at Lincoln High. Having made several dragons herself, she said, "I broke my sewing machine making them, but it was worthwhile."

Former dance director returns with show

Charlotte Adams and Tenth Street Danceworks will hold workshops and a concert.

BY LIZA HOLTMEIER
Senior staff writer

When Charlotte Adams began choreographing "Abandoned Summer," she said to herself, "I need a bathtub."

So, she borrowed a 500-pounder her landlady happened to have in her garage.

The prop became the center of a funny, yet poignant piece about being alone.

Basing the piece on a story she read in The New Yorker, Adams choreographed the movement to revolve around the bathtub. Throughout the piece, the dancer uses the

tub as an escape from the heat of a New York summer.

The quirky foundation and use of the unexpected in "Abandoned Summer" typifies the work performed by Adams' company, Tenth Street Danceworks.

Based out of Arizona, the company returned to Lincoln this week for a series of workshops with Arts Are Basic.

Tonight, the company presents an informal concert of its work at the Wagon Train Project.

Adams, the former dance program director at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, now teaches at the University of Iowa in Iowa City.

For the past few years, as a professor at UNL and now Iowa, she has dealt with the physical distance between her and the company.

While the changes have been difficult, they have helped Tenth Street continue to evolve.

"Any time you have an artist out there in the world," said Paulette Cauthorn, a company member, "you will see their work inspired by new things. Charlotte has brought her growth in Iowa back to the company."

The company's composition has also evolved since the last time it performed here.

Adams said many of the older dancers did not want to perform as much because of the time and energy required from rehearsing, traveling and performing. In their place, Tenth Street has taken on several new dancers whose youth has already begun to

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COURTESY PHOTO
KNOWN FOR
QUIRKINESS and
improvisation, the
Tenth Street
Danceworks performance troupe brings ex-UNL professor Charlotte Adams back to Lincoln.