



ArtSmarts

2003-2004 Wells Fargo School Matinee Series

Chi: A New Era in Acrobatics

March 5, 2004 11:00am

Jackson Hall, Mondavi Center

Dear Teachers:

We hope that you will find this CueSheet helpful in preparing your students for the *Chi: A New Era in Acrobatics* school matinee that they will see at Mondavi Center, UC Davis. The guide provides background information on the performance as well as a review of theater conventions and audience protocol.

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CHI: A NEW ERA IN ACROBATICS

Balance, energy and breath – combined, they define “chi,” which is a central part of ancient Chinese philosophy. The words also convey the essence of *Chi: A New Era in Acrobatics*, a fusion of acrobatics, choreography and martial arts from Shanghai.

The astounding acrobatic feats in *Chi* are derived from ancient Chinese traditions. Modern day acrobatics can be traced back to ancient China where the art form began as elaborations on the humble acts of daily work, playing games, crafts and religious ceremonies of the ancient Chinese people. *Chi* also builds on breathtaking choreography and the traditional martial arts of the Orient – the arts of combat or self-defense such as karate, kung-fu and judo.

Today, many years of intense training allow *Chi*'s performance cast to perfect their blended artistry. Featuring members of the award-winning Shanghai Acrobatic Troupe, they focus their bodies and minds to work in perfect harmony and create beautiful scenes. Within the ambience of foggy blues, fire-hot reds and lush greens – and near the image of yin-yang – performers dart through hoops, dangle from trapezes, perform midair ballet, and create geometric and organic forms. They tumble, fly and balance. They're flexible, strong and graceful at once. And they are surrounded by music that moves from sublime orchestration to driving drum beats.

A pillar of Taoist philosophy is the careful interplay between yin and yang. Yin and yang can simply be described as two poles of existence, which are opposite but complementary and exist in all things. *Chi* strikes the perfect balance between yin and yang; a mystifying, poised, and peaceful act will be coupled with powerful, unrestrained, and impassioned scenes.

Chi is a journey beyond space and time. It reflects the harmony between humankind and nature. It's a combination of dance, remarkable athleticism and the magical spirit of long ago. Infused with enchanting music, spectacular lighting, and dramatic costumes and sets, it's a celebration of the old and the very new. It's a living, breathing representation of the yin-yang.



CHINA

CHINA, officially the Peoples Republic of China, is a nation of enormous physical dimensions, rich and ancient cultural history, and powerful influence in the world today. It is the largest of all of the Asian nations, as large as Europe, and has the largest population of any country in the world (one-fifth the world population). Occupying approximately one-fourteenth of the land area of the Earth, China stretches for 3100 miles from east to west and 3400 miles from north to south. Beijing is the capital as well as the cultural, economic, and communications center. Shanghai is the major industrial city, and Hong Kong is the leading commercial center and port city. Chinese geography is as diverse as its other features-- including the highest point (Mt. Everest, 29,035 feet) and one of the lowest places (Turfan Depression in the Sinkiang region, 505 feet below sea-level) on the planet. The climate can be arid and desert-like in the northwest and tropical in the southeast.

Chinese history can be back-dated in the historical records for 4000 years. Much of China's development occurred in isolation, with the notable exception of the introduction of Buddhism from India. And, even when invading groups, like the Manchus, conquered territory, they were summarily absorbed into the Chinese culture. The isolation allowed for the development and maturation of a distinctly Chinese civilization but also resulted in China's unpreparedness to cope with the technological and military advances of the rest of the world, particularly after the mid-19th century. The challenge to change resulted in the revolution at the beginning of the twentieth century and culminated in the establishment of the Communist government in 1949. The unification and consolidation of forces has brought China to a competitive status on the world stage.

MAP OF CHINA



-map taken from <http://www.lonelyplanet.com>

THINK ABOUT IT!

Talking with your teacher, friends and family about a performance after attending the theater is part of the experience. When you share what you saw and felt you learn more about the performance. You can now compare ideas and ask questions and find out how to learn even more. Here are some questions to think about:

- 1) Would you like to be an acrobat? Why or why not?
- 2) Do you study an instrument or practice a sport? How does the discipline of your practice help you grow as a person?
- 3) What did you like best about the performance and why? Was the program different from what you expected? How?
- 4) How would you describe the *Chi: A New Era in Acrobatics* performance to a friend?

This Teacher's Guide was written by MERLYN POTTERS, Undergraduate Program Coordinator,
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ATTENDING THE THEATER

What is expected of student audiences at the matinee:

- Enter the auditorium quietly and take seats immediately (*note that all matinees now have reserved seating*);
- Show courtesy to the artist and other guests at all times;
- Demonstrate appreciation for the artist's work by applauding at the appropriate times;
- Refrain from making unnecessary noise or movements;
- Please eat lunch before or after the performance to avoid disruption;
- Relate any information acquired from the pre-matinee discussion to the new information gained from the matinee;
- Please do not use flash photography.

What you can expect of your experience in a performing arts theater:

A theater is a charged space, full of energy and anticipation. When the house lights (the lights that illuminate the audience seating) go down, the excitement level goes up! Theaters are designed so that the voices of the singers and actors and the music of the musicians can be heard. But this also means that any sound in the audience: whispering, rustling of papers, speaking and moving about, can be heard by other audience members and by the performers. Distractions like these upset everyone's concentration and can spoil a performance.

The performers on stage show respect for their art form and for the audience by doing their very best work. The audience shows respect for the performers by watching attentively. Applause is the best way for audience members to share their enthusiasm and to show their appreciation for the performers. Applaud at the end of a performance! Sometimes the audience will clap during a performance, as after a featured solo. Audience members may feel like laughing if the action on stage is funny, crying if the action is sad, or sighing if something is seen or heard that is beautiful. Appreciation can be shown in many different ways, depending upon the art form and the culture(s) of the people in the audience. While the audience at a dance performance will sit quietly, other types of performance invite audience participation.