



UC DAVIS PRESENTS

Community Outreach Program

2001-2002 School Matinee Series

## SAIGON WATER PUPPET THEATRE

Friday, May 10, 2002  
Freeborn Hall, UC Davis, 11:00am and 1:00pm

Dear Teachers:

We hope you will find this Teacher's Guide helpful in preparing your students for what they will see and hear at the **Saigon Water Puppet Theatre** matinee. The Guide provides background information on the Puppet Theatre, its performance repertoire and musical tradition, a brief country profile as well as a review of theater conventions and audience protocol. The Saigon Water Puppet Theatre matinee, which is specially designed for student audiences, promises to amaze young and old with the ancient art of puppetry on water!

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**SAIGON WATER PUPPET THEATRE**



The floor of Freeborn Hall will be transformed into a beautiful blue lake against the backdrop of an enormous intricate temple. From behind bamboo curtains, a laughing jester emerges floating on the water, followed by many other characters: colorful birds, copper turtles, jumping fish and spiraling dragons breathing real fire. All part of the show presented by the Saigon Water Puppet Theatre, one of Vietnam's national treasures, which practices a distinctive art form more than 1,000 years old. The company's astonishing puppetry on water--accompanied by evocative music, spoken narration and fireworks--offers a glimpse of Vietnam's most distinctive cultural tradition. "A truly amazing sight," applauds the *Chicago Sun-Times*, "graceful and mesmerizing storytelling."

The Saigon Water Puppet Theatre combines myth, folklore and scenes from daily life that depict the fishing and farming villages of traditional Vietnam. The program consists of short vignettes, which contrast lyrical contentment with playful action and comic turns. The action unfolds against a backdrop of music played on centuries-old instruments, and Vietnam's best-loved songs. The small orchestra features an array of gongs, drums, bells, flutes and stringed instruments, from fiddle to zither. The musicians sing and provide voices for the puppets. This performance team of 20 includes 5 musicians and about a dozen puppeteers who operate behind the bamboo curtains--standing waist high in water--to move the hand-crafted wooden puppets using long bamboo poles that remain hidden beneath the water. This artistic practice goes back centuries to an

origin in the rice-farming Red River Delta region near Hanoi. The puppet performances took place in the rice paddies and ponds and were presented to aristocratic and official audiences.

The Saigon Water Puppet Theatre was founded in 1977 and has won over 12 gold and 9 silver medals at the National Puppetry competitions in Hanoi. The performers in this ensemble have been featured in over 20 countries across Europe and Asia, and perform over 500 shows a year in their native country.

## **PERFORMANCE PROGRAM**

### **Teu Presents the Program**

Firecrackers explode and several flags emerge from the water to flutter in the wind. Teu is an intelligent, robust, and elegant young man. Always smiling and teasing, he sings the prologue, which describes the program to follow, while commenting on the shortcomings of the villagers.

### **Dragon Dance**

The villagers admire the dragon as it is a legendary animal which appears in the village ponds and lakes during peacetime. The dragon is a quirky, celestial animal that likes dancing.

### **Fight Between Two Lions**

Two lions fight each other and compete for a colorful, magical ball. The fight is a graceful dance performed to musical accompaniment.

### **Phoenix Dance**

Two phoenixes, male and female, swim peacefully in happiness. It is hoped that the love of every human couple will resemble that of the phoenixes, lasting forever.

### **Working in the Fields**

Scenes of farmers working in the fields during the harvest festival.

### **Lion and Unicorn Dance**

This is a dance performed during the Mid-Autumn Festival in every Vietnamese village. It is danced in the open-air under the full moon of the eighth lunar month.

### **Chase the Fox Away to Rescue the Duck**

An old peasant and his wife raise a flock of ducks which is in danger of being killed by a fox. The villagers help the old couple chase the fox away and rescue a small duck which the fox is trying to steal.

### **Fishing**

The husband throws the fishing net into the water while his wife draws it out. Their friend fishes with a rod beside them. They all sing while they fish.

### **Children's Games**

The children play and swim in the pond near the communal house. During Tet days, the children take part in cultural and sporting events.

### **The Heroes of Mount Lam**

The heroes meet on Mount Lam to pledge to fight for national independence.

### **Puppets Playing Music**

This concert highlights the different traditional musical instruments which have existed for thousands of years in Vietnam.

### **A Dance to Immortals**

Tay Vuong Mau, the fairy, trains her disciples to dance in the Kingdom of the Immortals where joy and Spring prevail.

### **A Dance of Fabulous Animals**

The gentle dragon dances and spouts colorful water while the unicorn dances to the tune of the drums. The Phoenix stretches its wings and pecks amorously on the shell of the tortoise, which glides into the water and then disappears. This marks the reunion of the four gentle animals.

## MUSICAL TRADITIONS



The traditional songs and instrumental music that accompany water puppetry are part of what has been called “the oldest layer of Vietnamese music,” at least a thousand years old! Typically this type of music is a combination of vocal and instrumental music. Song also plays a principal role in Vietnamese musical form and everyone is encouraged to sing. Instrumental music is usually reserved for professionally trained musicians, to be performed on special rather than daily occasions. The musicians of the Saigon Water Puppet Theatre are among the most well respected practitioners in the country. They include:

**Nguyen Huu Dung**

**Pham Ngoc Tien**

**Le Thi Van Anh**

**Luong Van Dong**

**Trinh Thi Lan**

The traditional instruments played are listed below.

**Dan Tranh** Vietnamese 16 string zither

<b>Chap Cha</b>	Cymbals
<b>Thanh La</b>	Large steel drum
<b>Co'ng</b>	Small drum
<b>Tro'ng Cai</b>	Traditional drum (main)
<b>Tro'ng Phu</b>	Traditional drum (side)
<b>Mo</b>	Gongs
<b>Nhi</b>	Vietnamese two-string violin
<b>Sao Truc</b>	Bamboo flute
<b>Trong Le</b>	Single drum

## **VIETNAM**



Full country name:	Socialist Republic of Vietnam
Government:	Communist People's Republic
Area:	329,566 sq km (128,527 sq mi)
Population:	79 million
Capital city:	Hanoi (pop 3.5 million)
Ethnicity:	84% Vietnamese, 2% Chinese, also Khmers, Chams (a remnant of the once-great Indianised Champa Kingdom) and members of over 50 ethnolinguistic groups (also known as Montagnards, 'highlanders' in French)
Language:	Vietnamese, Russian, French, Chinese, English and a variety of Khmer and Laotian dialects
Religion:	Buddhism is the principal religion but there are also sizeable Taoist, Confucian, Hoa Hao, Caodaists, Muslim and Christian minorities
Major industries:	Rice, rubber, food processing, sugar, textiles, chemicals
Trading partners:	China, Singapore, South Korea, Japan, Taiwan

Occupying the eastern coastline of the Southeast Asian peninsula, Vietnam is bounded by China on the north, by Laos and Cambodia on the west, and by the Gulf of Tonkin and the South China Sea on the east and south. The capital is Hanoi and the largest city is Ho Chi Minh City,

formerly Saigon. Most visitors to Vietnam are overwhelmed by the beauty of the country's natural setting: the Red River Delta in the north, the Mekong Delta in the south and almost the entire coastal strip are a patchwork of brilliant green rice paddies tended by women in conical hats. There are wonderful beaches along the coast too, while inland there are soaring mountains, some of which are cloaked by dense, misty forests.

### **History**

The sophisticated Bronze Age Dong Son culture emerged around the 3rd century BC. From the 1st to the 6th centuries AD, the south of what is now Vietnam was part of the Indianised kingdom of Funan, which produced fine art and architecture. The Hindu kingdom of Champa appeared around present-day Danang in the late 2nd century and had spread south to what is now Nha Trang by the 8th century. The Chinese conquered the Red River Delta in the 2nd century and their 1000-year rule, marked by tenacious Vietnamese resistance and repeated rebellions, ended in AD 938 when Ngo Quyen vanquished the Chinese armies at the Bach Dang River. During the next few centuries, Vietnam repulsed repeated invasions by China, and expanded its borders southwards from the Red River Delta, populating much of the Mekong Delta. In 1858, French and Spanish-led forces stormed Danang after several missionaries had been killed. A year later, Saigon was seized. By 1867, France had conquered all of southern Vietnam, which became the French colony of Cochinchina.

Communist guerillas under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh resisted French domination during and after WWII. Ho Chi Minh's declaration of Vietnamese independence in 1945 sparked violent confrontations with the French, culminating in the French military defeat at Dien Bien Phu in 1954. The Geneva Accords of 1954 temporarily divided Vietnam into two zones (the Communist north and the anti-Communist, US-supported south). Political and ideological opposition quickly turned to armed struggle, prompting the USA and other countries to commit combat troops in 1965. The Paris Peace Agreements, signed in 1973, provided an immediate cease-fire and signaled the withdrawal of US troops. Saigon eventually capitulated to the Communist forces on April 30, 1975.

Vietnam soon found itself at loggerheads with Khmer Rouge forces along the Cambodian borders. A protracted round of fighting eventually saw China enter the fray in support of Cambodia and the killings continued until the UN brokered a deal, with Vietnamese forces being pulled out of Cambodia in 1989. Vietnam went through something of a postwar economic boom, before suffering the economic setbacks that plagued the entire region when the foreign investment bubble burst in the late 1990s. It has recently recovered part of this ground with some economists predicting it will be the next Asian 'tiger' economy.

### **Culture**

Four great philosophies and religions have shaped the spiritual life of the Vietnamese people: Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism and Christianity. Over the centuries, Confucianism,

Taoism and Buddhism have melded with popular Chinese beliefs and ancient Vietnamese animism to form what is known as Tam Giao (or 'Triple Religion'). Vietnamese (kinh) is the official language of the country, although there are dialectic differences across Vietnam. There are dozens of different languages spoken by various ethnic minorities and Khmer and Laotian are spoken in some parts. The most widely spoken foreign languages in Vietnam are Chinese (Cantonese and Mandarin), English, French and Russian, more or less in that order. Popular artistic forms include: traditional painting produced on frame-mounted silk; an eclectic array of theater, puppetry, music and dance; religious sculpture; lacquerware and ceramics. Vietnamese cuisine is especially varied: there are said to be nearly 500 different traditional dishes that include exotic meats and fantastic vegetarian creations. However, the staple of Vietnamese cuisine is plain white rice dressed up with a plethora of vegetables, fish (which is common in Vietnam), meat, spices and sauces. Spring rolls, noodles and steamed rice dumplings are popular snacks, and the ubiquitous soups include eel and vermicelli, shredded chicken and bitter soups. Fruit is abundant; some of the more unusual ones include green dragon fruit, jujube, khaki, longan, mangosteen, pomelo, three-seed cherry and water apple. Vietnamese coffee (ca phephin) is very good; it's usually served very strong and very sweet.

*--For more information on Vietnam, consult the Lonely Planet web site:*

*[http://www.lonelyplanet.com/destinations/south\\_east\\_asia/vietnam/](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/destinations/south_east_asia/vietnam/)*

## **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) What feelings did you have while you listened to the singing and watched the Saigon Water Puppet Theater matinee performance?

2) Pretend you are a reporter for the *Sacramento Bee* newspaper. Write a cultural review of the matinee for the *Arts* section. Describe the puppets, settings, music and stories with as much detail as you can remember. Then discuss what you liked best about the performance and why.

## **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.

*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.

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