

Friday, October 19, 2007, 8pm
Saturday, October 20, 2007, 8pm
Sunday, October 21, 2007, 3pm

Guangzhou Ballet



Mei Lanfang (United States Premiere)

These performances are graciously underwritten by the Richard S. Liu Foundation in celebration of the opening of the C. V. Starr Library, Chang-Lin Tien Center for East Asian Studies.

Cal Performances' 2007–2007 Season is sponsored by Wells Fargo Bank.

Guangzhou Ballet

Artistic Director Zhang Dandan
Scenario Hu Er yan
Composer Liu Tingyu
Choreography Fu Xingbang (*original version*)
Zhang Dandan, Chao Lemeng,
Deli Geer (*second version*)
Planning Wen Zhenya
Set and Lighting Design Wang Zhiqiang, Zhang Huajie
Costume Design Mai Qing
Stage Manager Han Wenjun
Lighting Executive Director Liu Qing
Makeup Hu Shujie
Production Stage Managers Bradford White, Ron Ford

Principal Dancers

Wang Zhiwei, Tong Shusheng, Fu Shu, Sun Xin,
Wang Jun, Deli Geer, Huang Yi, Liu Cheng

North American Tour Direction

World Arts Inc.
Vincent Paul
Michael Cooney
West 79th Street Marina
New York, New York 10024
(212) 496-1730

Program Notes

Mei Lanfang

Through the use of elaborate sets and costumes, a captivating score by Liu Tingyu and the innovative choreography of Fu Xingbang and Zhang Dandan, the Guangzhou Ballet performs an inspired work based on the life of Mei Lanfang, a legendary performer with the Peking Opera who shaped the art of Chinese theater for generations. These are the United States premiere performances of *Mei Lanfang*.

Mei Lanfang is best known for his portrayal of women. Only men performed in the Chinese opera during that time, and had to play both male and female roles. Mei Lanfang perfected his art to a degree in which it was virtually impossible to tell if it was a man or woman one was seeing on stage. This production follows Mei Lanfang's life through dance and music. Mei Lanfang started his career at the age of eight. He spent years perfecting his art, practicing dancing, singing and acting, the essential elements of Chinese Opera. Mei Lanfang performed his role of the *Dan* (female) in the Peking Opera at the age of 20, becoming one of the most significant performers in China. His self-taught techniques were followed by newcomers to the art.

During his 50 years on the stage, Mei Lanfang revolutionized many elements of the opera—makeup, costumes, physical gestures, expressions, poses—and went on choreograph his own work. In 1930, he toured the United States to delight of audiences and accolades of critics. This tour brought a new awareness of the importance of the Peking Opera to the United States. Mei Lanfang also toured Russia and continued performing well into his 60s. He died in 1961, but fortunately passed the gift of his art to his son, Mei Baoujiu, who founded the Mei Lanfang school that carries on his vision for another generation.

Synopsis

Scene 1. Mei Lanfang dedicated his entire life to the art of the Peking Opera. In this scene, he arrives in Beijing and begins his career, gaining acceptance into the Peking Opera and perfecting his art. After

becoming one of the lead performers at the opera, he begins creating his legendary female characters. The four female soloists represent these characters, who were performed by Mei Lanfang himself.

Scene 2. The Peking Opera's unique art form and its cultural and stylistic importance gained worldwide recognition. An American university awarded Mei Lanfang an honorary degree for his literary and artistic achievements and invited him to a gala, which is depicted in this scene. Many scholars and artists attended this event, including Charlie Chaplin. Mei Lanfang went on to become an international celebrity.

Scene 3. China is at war. Although Mei Lanfang is at the peak of his career, he decides to leave the stage due to his tremendous sense of pride and nationalism.

Scene 4. Mei Lanfang remained at home for the duration of the war. Though he was visited by friends and colleagues, Mei Lanfang became isolated and lonely, and longed for the stage. This scene's choreography depicts the inner struggles he was enduring through this difficult time.

INTERMISSION

Scene 5. While China was celebrating its liberation, Mei Lanfang finally came out of seclusion. This time, Mei Lanfang expressed his art as a teacher. He also brought his trademark characters back to life through his elaborately well crafted choreography with the Peking Opera. A production of *Mu Guiying*, the brave woman warrior, became one of Mei Lanfang's greatest roles.

Scene 6. Mei Lanfang performed well into his later years, constantly perfecting his art. Here, he dances with his characters one last time at the twilight of his life.

Scene 7. The Mei Lanfang school carries on his artistic vision through this grand finale. Mei Lanfang still remains the symbol of China's performing arts and is the pride of his people and nation.



Guangzhou Ballet

The Guangzhou Ballet was formally organized in January 1994. It is an organization designated by the Municipal Government of Guangzhou to be a trial unit for comprehensive reforms in art performance organizations. Zhang Dandan, who was a state-level grade-A performer, is the Artistic Director of the Guangzhou Ballet.

In the years since the company was established, the Guangzhou Ballet has developed a rich and varied repertoire wide-ranging in scope, the Guangzhou Ballet has successfully mounted over a dozen full-length classical ballets, including *Coppélia*, *Swan Lake*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Giselle*, *The Nutcracker*, *La Bayadère* and *Don Quixote*. Also included in the company's repertoire are works performed with the China National Ballet Opera and the National Symphony Ballet of China, such as *The Celestial Phoenix*, *Mei Lanfang*, *Turandot*, *Little Blue Flower*, *Yellow River* and *Butterfly Lovers*. The Guangzhou Ballet produces two to three new works each year. Its repertoire now consists of 11 full-length ballets and more than 30 medium-

length works. The Guangzhou Ballet has toured extensively to Cuba, Germany, the United States, Canada, Australia and Spain.

Inviting well-known national and international choreographers to lecture and choreograph has become standard practice for the company. These guest-artist residencies enhance the professional development of the dancers, enabling the overall performance level of the ensemble to reach the highest standards in the world. The Guangzhou Ballet features young, highly talented dancers, such as Tong Shusheng, Fu Shu, Zou Gang, Chao Lemeng and Wang Zhiwei, who have attracted the attention of the ballet world both at home and abroad. These dancers have won prizes in the Paris International Ballet Dance Competition, the Varna International Dance Competition (2004), the Moscow International Ballet Competition (2005), the Helsinki International Ballet Competition (2005), the China Drama Festival, the National Water Lily Cup Competition and the Peaches and Plums Cup Competition, among others. These triumphs have expanded the influence of Chinese ballet all over the world.

About the Artists

The Guangzhou Ballet has jointly organized and established a pre-professional training school, as well as a school designed for those who want to dance recreationally. In addition, the Guangzhou Ballet has established cultural communications and video advertising companies.

The youngest ballet company in China, the Guangzhou Ballet is growing up rapidly, making an important contribution to the culture of Guangzhou and adding a new and significant chapter to the history of the development of Chinese ballet. This is the Guangzhou Ballet's West Coast debut.

Zhang Dandan

In 1978, Zhang Dandan (*artistic director*) entered the Central Ballet Ensemble, and in the more than 10 years that followed, she performed the principal roles in almost all of the repertoire of the Central Ballet, including *Swan Lake*, *Giselle*, *Don Quixote*, *La Fille Mal Gardée*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Red Women's Detachment*, *Mermaid of the Sea* and *Lin Daiyu*. Over the years, she won the performance prize and prize for outstanding artists issued by the Chinese Ministry of Culture and the prize for outstanding contributions issued by the State Council.

In 1994, at the peak of her performing career, Ms. Zhang left the stage of the Central Ballet and came back to Guangzhou, her hometown, at the invitation of the Party Committee and the city

government to establish the Guangzhou Ballet. In her capacity as Artistic Director, she has served as head administrator, ballet mistress, mentor and facilitator of the contract system. But her performing career has never subsided. Her performances of *Anna Karenina* and *La Traviata*, in which she danced the principal roles, won her Plum Blossom Prize of Chinese Drama, the Lu Xun Art Prize of Guangdong Province and the Guangzhou Art Prize.

In 2002, Zhang Dandan took the concurrent position of the headmaster of Guangzhou Art School. Since then, the school's facilities were renovated and upgraded to meet new, higher educational standards, making it one of the key schools in the province.

Thanks to her outstanding achievements, Ms. Zhang was elected as the Vice Chairman of Guangdong Provincial Association of Dancers, Chairman of Guangzhou Association of Dancers, Director of Guangdong Council for the Promotion of International Exchange, Director of the Research Center of World Culture and Art and Director of American Association of Overseas Artists. She was awarded the titles of Middle-Aged and Young Artist of Guangdong Province and Excellent Expert of Guangzhou, entered into the *World Who's Who* and *Famous Females in 21st Century* and received the ABI Global Laurel.

Zhang Dandan was honored as one of the "Greatest Intellectuals in the 21st Century" by the British *Dictionary of International Biography*.