

Friday, September 11, 2015, 8pm
Saturday, September 12, 2015, 2pm & 8pm
Zellerbach Hall

National Circus and Acrobats of the People's Republic of China



Peking Dreams

Cal Performances' 2015–2016 season is sponsored by Wells Fargo.

Peking Dreams

PEKING (known today as Beijing), the capital of the People's Republic of China, is a famous historical and cultural city with a history spanning 1,000 years and a wealth of precious Chinese cultural heritage, including the Great Wall, the Forbidden City, the Summer Palace, and the Temple of Heaven.

Acrobatic art, Chinese circus, and Peking opera are Chinese cultural treasures and are beloved among the people of Peking. These art forms combine music, acrobatics, performance, mime, and dance and share many similarities with Western culture. Foreign tourists walking along the streets or strolling through the parks of Peking can often hear natives sing beautiful Peking opera, see them play diabolo or perform other acrobatics.

Peking Dreams, incorporating elements of acrobatics, Chinese circus, and Peking opera, invites audiences into an artistic world full of history and wonder. The actors' flawless performance, colorful costumes, and elaborate makeup will astound audiences with visual and aural treats.

PROGRAM

Opening

Acrobatic Master and His Pupils

The Peking courtyard is bathed in bright moonlight. In the dim light of the training room, three children formally become pupils to an acrobatic master. Through patient teaching, the master is determined to pass his art and tradition down to his pupils.

The Drunken Beauty

Amidst hundreds of flowers in bloom, the imperial concubine in the Forbidden City admires the full moon while drinking and toasting. Hanging on the swing of a trapeze, the actress performs a variety of stunts. Beneath her, the beautiful maids of the palace perform the spinning plates.

Martial Art

Inspired by Chinese philosophy and legend, Chinese martial art combines hard and soft elements with the philosophical principles of *yin* and *yang*. Actors strike, kick, throw, and jump onstage in a jubilant manifestation of freedom and boldness.

Solo on a Pole

This performance represents a perfect combination of energy and beauty beyond compare.

Contortion with Carpet-Spinning

In the Forbidden City, the Emperor and his maids drink wine and dance. Artfully waving long sleeves, the maids sway and twirl with a tapestry. This act is a combination of dancers' long sleeves in classical Chinese dance, contortion, and carpet-spinning, and a reflection of suppleness and beauty.

Hoop Diving

Everyone is merely a transient guest in Beijing, a fast developing modern city, and each visitor is prone to a sense of loneliness. This seemingly negative attitude is a vivid picture of how helpless the people of Beijing sometimes feel. Young people work at an extreme pace and constantly achieve new speed records. The two actors sweep past two hoops on the table, somersault backward past five hoops, execute a 360-degree twist past five hoops, and somersault backward past six hoops. The actors perform with enormous vitality, spirit, and extraordinary skills in a perfect representation of Peking culture.

INTERMISSION

Diabolo

Diabolo has a long history in China, initially as a game in the imperial palace and then becoming popular among the greater population. The diabolo craze swept Peking and to this day is known to every household there. Diabolo comes alive in the hands of the girls who fly backwards and forwards, allowing us to see the quickness, gracefulness, and even humor of the performers.

Aerial Silk

A boy from Peking is handsome and forthright; a girl from Peking is beautiful and elegant. From acquaintance to friendship and from friendship to love, the couple represents a moving, romantic story. The actor and actress move and dance with remarkable skill on the colored silk high above the floor. At times they express tender and romantic sentiments, hugging tightly, and at other times they gaze deeply into each other's eyes, deeply emphasizing the sentiment and glamour.

Umbrella Foot-Juggling and Hula Hoops

In autumn, the weather of Beijing is unpredictable: sometimes sunny and peaceful and sometimes raging and stormy. Dexterous and quick in action, the performer juggles umbrellas by feet. The umbrellas fly on the girl's feet, and the hoops twirl around the other girls. This act demonstrates the flexibility and beauty of the Chinese circus and acrobatic art.

Straw-Hat Juggling

In old Peking, a rich family marries off their daughter and many people take part in the merry-making. The actors perform various stunts while holding straw hats and spinning them high in the air in this humorous and popular program.

Bicycle Stunts

This act is based on a famous Peking opera story, *The Generals of the Yang Family*. Accompanied by music and dressed in the costume of women warriors, the acrobatic girls execute spectacular and stunning tricks on their bicycles.



Balancing on High Chairs

The Great Wall, the greatest miracle created by the people of China, is recognized as a symbol of Peking. It has witnessed thousands of years of Chinese culture. It has heard the drums of war roaring. It has seen countless dynasties rise and fall. It can tell of the vicissitudes of history. In this piece, the actor flawlessly executes various stunning and breathtaking movements on stacked chairs.

Finale

The final act ends with a finale featuring all performers.

The program is subject to change.



THE ORIGIN OF THE CHINESE CIRCUS is a subject of great debate. However, what is clear is that it is an ancient art. First records date back over 2,000 years to the Qin Dynasty (225–207 B.C.), when China was unified by the First Emperor Qi Shi Huang. It is believed that the art actually started about 3,000 years ago.

Some believe that the circus evolved out of the imperial court performers, something similar to court jesters in medieval Europe. These performances, however, tended to be quite formal and staid, and it is believed that the adaptation of some of these acts into performances for the people in turn became popular with the ruling classes. Given its age, it is likely that the circus was first a folk art which was later adopted by the imperial houses. The ancient Chinese came to call the circus “the show of a hundred tricks.”

As in Europe, families became involved in the circus, and a family tradition developed with skills being passed from generation to

generation. The most famous circus families were well known. In 1949, following many years of decline because of war, the art received a boost from the government of the People’s Republic of China as an art form to be preserved.

There are over 200 circus and acrobatic troupes in China today, and most of them have toured around the world. Within China, acrobats in the circus troupes are regarded with respect and admiration. Training begins as early as four years old. Training for specific acts may begin by age eight. Basic training—balancing, tumbling, dancing, flexibility, and strength—is given in the early years. Although some children can perform at young ages, normally performers start their career in their mid-teens.

There are many classical acts. But after 1949, Chinese circus troupes have all developed into non-animal performing companies concentrating on developing human acts.

THE NATIONAL CIRCUS of the People's Republic of China was founded in 1953, making it one of the longest running and most distinguished circus troupes in China.

The National Circus is especially acclaimed in China because of the unique acts in their program such as Great Teeterboard, Grand Flying Trapeze, Group Contortion, Straw Hat Juggling, Head Balancing with Bowls, and many other outstanding acts. Many of the artists in the troupe have won international awards, including Li Liping, the first Golden Clown winner from China at the renowned Monte Carlo International Circus Festival, and Madame Xia Juhua, the "Chinese Ulanowa" of the Circus World and Chairwoman of the International Chinese Circus Society since the early 1980s. The Company has won over 20 gold and silver medals and various other awards at international circus festivals, including the Monte Carlo International Circus Festival, Cirque de Demain, Wuqiao International Circus Festival, Wuhan International Circus Festival, and China National Acrobatic Competition. The contribution the Company has made to the world circus society is profound. During the 1980s, the Company started to change the concept of the animal circus to a new style of nonanimal circus which influenced the *nouveau cirque* pioneers of Cirque du Soleil, who invited many coaches from the Company to teach them such acts as Balancing Chairs, Bicycle, and Chinese Poles, which culminated in the revolutionary program *Circus Reinvented!*

The Company has toured to 80 countries around the world. In 1987, the troupe toured Western Europe for six months as the "Great

Chinese State Circus." In fall 1988, a cast of 75 members and the Company toured Canada and Seattle, Washington, for three months with a Giant Panda, who flew between China and North America in the first-class cabin (a feat which required removing all passenger seats from the plane). The Company performed in France as "Cirquede Pekin" in 1988 and 1989, three months each year, and was so ecstatically received that the French National Television and Radio Company broadcast the performances for months after the French engagements were finalized. In 1993 and 1994, the Company toured to Germany and Switzerland under the Direction of Andree Hiller, the Austrian director who produced *Africa! Africa!* in 2004.

In the 2004–2005, 2005–2006, and 2007–2008 seasons, the Company toured to the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, and Spain for six to ten months each year as the "Great Chinese State Circus" under the management of Henk van der Meijden, the famous European Impresario. The Company's Flying Trapeze troupe was invited to perform with the United States' Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus in 1999 and UniverSoul Circus in 2007. Additionally, the Company has performed in Europe again in 2008 for Swiss Knie Circus, Stuttgart Winter Circus, and Amsterdam Winter Circus. In fall 2012, the Company performs their new program *Cirque Chinois* while undertaking its inaugural coast-to-coast tour of the United States and Canada. The troupe owns the Wuhan Circus Center, a famous circus dome in China and the site, every two years, of the Wuhan International Circus Festival.