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**THE AMERICAN PREMIERE OF NATIONAL BALLET OF CHINA'S
RAISE THE RED LANTERN COMES TO ZELLERBACH HALL FOR FOUR
PERFORMANCES, FRIDAY – SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 16 – 18**

**AWARD-WINNING FILM DIRECTOR ZHANG YIMOU'S BALLET ADAPTATION OPENS
CAL PERFORMANCES CENTENNIAL SEASON**

BERKELEY, August 12, 2005 – Internationally acclaimed Chinese film director Zhang Yimou's spectacular ballet adaptation of *Raise the Red Lantern* opens Cal Performances' Centennial Season **Friday – Sunday, September 16 – 18**. The **National Ballet of China** will give four performances featuring music by **Chen Qigang** and choreography by **Wang Xin Peng** and **Wang Yuan Yuan**. The company of 58 dancers also features ten Peking Opera performers, including three musicians playing traditional Chinese instruments. *Raise the Red Lantern* breaks new ground for Western audiences by combining Western ballet technique with traditional Chinese iconography and artistic elements of the Peking Opera. In one technically and physically challenging scene, dancers perform Peking Opera gestures and movements simultaneously with Western ballet steps. The *London Daily Telegraph* described it as "a combination of Chinese opera and Western balletic traditions that hooks the ear and opens the eye... Visually, it is ravishing."

Based on the novel *Wives and Concubines* by Su Tong, *Raise the Red Lantern* tells the epic tale of forbidden romance and tragic consequences. A young girl is forced into an arranged marriage with a much older man. Although she loves an actor in the Peking Opera, she becomes the second concubine of the Master. When the Peking Opera performs at the Master's house, the girl is reunited with her former lover; their romance is discovered by the jealous first concubine, who sets out to destroy them.

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THE NATIONAL BALLET OF CHINA

The **National Ballet of China**, founded in 1959, was originally named the Experimental Ballet Company of the Beijing Dance School—known in China as the “cradle of dancers.” The ballet quickly grew under the influence of numerous Russian masters, including Pyotr Gusev, who brought the rigorous training of Russian ballet schools to China. The first generation of Chinese classical ballet dancers and other artists built the company’s classical ballet repertoire and created a solid foundation for the development of the National Ballet of China. Today, the company has over eighty professional ballet dancers, teachers and production team members.

The National Ballet of China has a twofold artistic mission: to introduce Chinese audiences to Western classical and contemporary ballet and to explore the unique fusion possible between classical ballet and Chinese culture. *Raise the Red Lantern* is just one product of this latter goal; other such fusion ballets created by and for the National Ballet of China include *The Red Detachment of Women*, *Ode to the Yimeng Mountains*, *The Son and Daughter of the Grassland*, *The New Year’s Sacrifice*, *Lin Daiyu*, *The Yellow River*, *Butterfly Lovers*, and a version of *The Nutcracker*. The company has also performed Western ballets including *Swan Lake*, *Le Corsaire*, *Sleeping Beauty*, Ben Stevenson’s *Fountain of Tears*, Lycette Darsonval’s *Sylvia from the Paris Opera Ballet*, and George Balanchine’s neo-classical ballets, including *Serenade*. The National Ballet of China has toured the United Kingdom, the United States, Russia, France, Denmark, and Italy. They last appeared at Cal Performances in 1995.

Zhao Ruheng, the director of the National Ballet of China, began dancing in 1955 and studied with several Russian ballet masters before joining the National Ballet of China in 1961. She danced principal roles in *Swan Lake*, *Giselle*, *Les Sylphides*, and *The Red Detachment of Women*. An injury ended her dancing career in 1972, at which time she continued her academic and artistic studies and participated in cultural exchanges. She became executive vice president of the company in 1993 and director the following year.

Composer **Chen Qigang** studied at Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing and also in Paris for four years, where he was Olivier Messiaen's last student. A CD including three of his symphonic works was released by Virgin Classics in 2003; orchestras worldwide have performed his compositions. His score for *Raise the Red Lantern* "combines vivid Chinese and western sonorities" (*The Guardian*, London). Choreographer **Wan Xin Peng** trained in choreography at the Peking Dance Academy, studied modern dance at the Folkwanghochschule in Essen, Germany, and has choreographed in Europe and Asia. "Wang's fusion of classical ballet, Peking Opera and folk moves is beguilingly credible," wrote *The Guardian* (UK). Co-choreographer **Wang Yuan Yuan** holds a BFA from the Beijing Dance Academy and an MFA from the California Institute of the Arts. She directed and choreographed thousands of performers as part of the Return of Hong Kong Celebration and has served as a guest choreographer with New York City Ballet, among other ballet companies around the world.

ZHANG YIMOU

Born in Xi'an, China in 1951, director **Zhang Yimou** graduated from the Beijing Film Academy in 1982 and became a director at Guangxi Film Studio. He began his film career as a cinematographer. In 1988 he directed *Red Sorghum*, a tragic tale revolving around an arranged marriage, and in 1991 he directed *Raise the Red Lantern*, which was nominated for an Academy Award for best foreign film in 1992. The film won the British Academy Award, London Critics Circle Film Award and the New York Film Critics Circle Award for best foreign language film. His recent films, including *Hero* (2002), nominated for an Academy Award for best foreign film, and *House of Flying Daggers* (2004), enjoyed international commercial success and critical acclaim. *Entertainment Weekly* called it "An outrageously gorgeous spectacle of balletic aggression." Zhang Yimou, who is drawn to epic scale projects, has also brought his bold and visually beautiful style to opera; he directed *Turandot* in 2003 in Italy and in the Forbidden City in Beijing.

