

# Child dancers off for New York

by Dai Jiaxiang

Sun Guangyan, 51-year-old associate professor of Chinese dances at the Beijing Dance Academy, will fly to New York tomorrow together with 56 Chinese children to participate in the dance drama China as the feature of the annual presentation Event of the Year.

The dance extravaganza, to be held in the Felt Forum of Madison Square Garden in New York on May 31 and June 1-2, is part of a cultural exchange programme involving the National Dance Institute (NDI) of the United States and the China Association for the Advancement of International Friendship in China and the Centre for Sino-US Arts Exchange in the States.

As the art-director of this 56-child performing troupe, Sun has worked for the past eight months, choreographing the dance and training the children chosen from all the children's palaces in Beijing. All are aged about 10.

Now, after all their hard work, she and her fledglings are prepared to join the large-scale performance held in New York City every year and sponsored by Jacques d'Amboise, former principle dancer of the New York City Ballet, and his National Dance Institute. In celebration of The Event's tenth anniversary this year, China has been chosen as the theme.

The dance drama China will last about half an hour and will include 2,000 American youngsters as well as the young visitors from Beijing. In the dance, after an expedition through the earth's core, the American youngsters will arrive in the Middle Kingdom, represented on stage by a terracotta army in papier-mache, and by the joyous, welcoming group of Chinese children dressed in costumes of China's different nationalities. The show will culminate with a song Hello! and three dances entitled Welcome, Panda, and Lovely Flowerettes.

"The show is sure to be a success because of its strong Chinese national character," said Professor Sun in an interview.

As a member of the Chinese Dancers' Association and council member of Beijing Chinese

Dancers' Association, Sun has taught Chinese dances at the Beijing Dance Academy for 32 years.

Anyone familiar with her work would find it difficult to believe that she would love to teach children. Twice a week, however, she goes to the Children's Centre near Jingshan Park to teach the children, using her *Textbook of Dances for Chinese Children*.

"So far, there are no written instructions in China for teaching dances to children. And small children lack chances to dance. I wish to do my bit of pioneering work," Sun said.

"To write dancing materials for children as well as to teach them to dance is just a way to fulfil my dream of letting children dance."

Sun is ambitious. To carry out her vision of making the arts accessible to adults, she said it is necessary to reach the children first, especially those who might not otherwise have the opportunity to dance. She is now directing her energy toward spreading to others her knowledge of and enthusiasm for dance.

At the age of 51, Sun looks back on a career that made her one of the best known choreographers in China.

At the age of 15 she joined the Central Song and Dance Ensemble. She had been instructed by the noted dancer Dai Ailian and learned Chinese classical dance movements from Peking opera stars Ouyang Yuqian and Han Sichang. She became a teacher at the Beijing Dance Academy when it was founded in 1954.

She specializes in classical Chinese dance, which has borrowed many dance movements and performing techniques from classical drama as well. Her productions have received enthusiastic response from the public. The dance-drama Wencheng Princess, of which she is one of the choreographers and producers, won the Distinction Prize from the Ministry of Culture in 1983.

As one of the originators of training methods for Chinese dances, she has been invited to dance and teach abroad several times. Between 1957 and 1959, she taught dance in Sri Lanka. It was the first time that a Chinese dancing instructor went to Sri Lanka to teach Chinese classical dance and she gave performance in Colombo.

After the "cultural revolution," in which she was persecuted and sent to Shijiazhuang, Hebei Pro-

vince, Sun became the dean of the Department of Chinese Dances. Life grew even busier. In 1980, as head of the Chinese delegation to the Hong Kong International Dance Camp, Sun taught Chinese classical dance. Her work in the camp was such a success that she is now invited to return to Hong Kong to teach in September this year.

Sun hardly stops for a moment. Apart from teaching and lecturing around the country, Sun has written a number of books and articles, such as *Training Methodologies of Chinese Classical Dances*, *The Fundamental Movements of Chinese Classical Dances*, and *Textbook of Dances for Chinese Children* with a video tape record.

"As retirement draws close," said Sun, "I'm in a hurry to do more."

Now, Sun is working on a Chinese dance programme for children, part of which involves the 56-child performing troupe going to the United States.

"I'm looking forward to this opportunity of exchanging my ideas and thoughts with American dancers and to do my best to promote aesthetic education for our children."



Professor Sun Guangyan trains children to dance.