

Tianyi dancers showcase authentic Chinese culture

The Tianyi dance team at the University of Maryland hosted its second “Unfolding Traditions” cultural showcase at Hoff Theater for an audience of several hundred on April 4.

“Last year our goal was just to have an audience,” said senior event organizer Takako Nishimura, one of the original members of Tianyi. “This year we definitely topped that.”

The performance combined cultural elements from various Chinese ethnic groups such as the Dai, the Miao, and the Mongolians with traditional American art forms like jazz and modern dance. Before each performance, masters of ceremony Wenye Yang and Tingrui Zhao explained the history and cultural significance behind each piece.

“The main theme was relating traditional Chinese culture to American society,” said Nishimura. “We say ‘unfolding traditions’ because we’re creating traditions as we go. This is the Chinese-American story, not just the Chinese story.”

The showcase also featured costumes that costed more than \$3,000 to rent and to ship from China. Wenye Yang, described the show as one of “ethnic and traditional authenticity.”



Tianyi dance team took the stage with TerpWushu, a student group that performs traditional Chinese martial arts and acrobatics; child dancers from HuaSha

Chinese Dance Center; and Jasmine Guzheng Academy's Ashley Xu, who played the guzheng, a traditional Chinese instrument similar to a violin.

"A lot of research went into the authenticity of the performance," said Carissa Kwan, a dancer and organizer for the event. "Learning about all the different cultural aspects behind each dance was something I really enjoyed."

Kwan said that Tianyi was important to her because it gave her the opportunity to represent her culture. She and several other dancers said the performance held emotional and sentimental meaning to them as well as their friends and family.

University of Maryland alumni Joyce Yu and Rosie Zhang founded the Tianyi Dance Team in 2012 to bring ethnic Chinese dance to Maryland. Both students shared a passion for traditional Chinese dance and choreography, but could not find a team or group that met their specific needs. Yu and Zhang began Maryland's first and only Chinese dance team with only a handful of members and grew the group into an organized, recognizable presence on campus.

Photos by Henry Ko.