

## A Short History of the Partnership Between Long Beach Ballet and the Classical Ballet of Guangzhou China

When Europeans began trade with southern China centuries ago, the municipality that is now China's third largest city--15 million and counting--was referred to as Canton. Over the past century, Canton has been the scene of countless exotic films, novels and plays, and is considered by many to be the gastronomical capital of the world (read "Cantonese style" cooking). After World War II, the easy-to-pronounce name "Canton" was changed to "Guangzhou" (pronounced Gwahng-Joe') by the Chinese government. The capitol city of "Peking" was also changed to "Beijing."

This same government, so seemingly intent on ridding the country of all vestiges of foreign occupation, uncharacteristically decided that they should become more westernized and began forming western-style symphonic orchestras and classical ballet companies in many major cities. The Central Ballet of China was introduced in Beijing in 1959 under Mao's rule. It's repertoire specialized in propaganda that espoused the glories of communism.

It was then in January 1994 that the government formed the Guangzhou Ballet, installing a prominent ballerina from the Central Ballet as the company's first artistic director. Her name--Dan Dan Zhang.

Over the ensuing 18 years, mainly by hiring prominent choreographers from around the world and scooping up much of the emerging talent from the Beijing Ballet Academy, Dan Dan Zhang built her company into a powerhouse of classical repertoire. Full length ballets such as *Romeo and Juliet* and *Swan Lake* quickly put Guangzhou on China's artistic map. Classical Chinese stories also made their way into the company's repertoire, with such stirring ballets as *Butterfly Lovers*, *Yellow River*, and *Human Sentiment* drawing large crowds to the several theaters in and around the city of Guangzhou.

After four years of rapid growth and artistic success in Guangzhou, Dan Dan crossed paths with Long Beach Ballet artistic director and founder David Wilcox while he was touring through China with his own company. Their respective destinies were changed forever, and a powerful artistic bond was formed that has resulted in impressive success for both.

Wilcox was first asked by Dan Dan to "re-create" his very successful production of *The Nutcracker* for the Guangzhou Ballet in 1999. The company was still rather young, had never toured, and in those early years was not capable of replicating Wilcox's huge spectacle of a production. Wilcox obliged, spent seven weeks working with the company to scale down the production a suitable size for touring, and was present at the premiere in Guangzhou on November 19, 1999.

It was a big success, but then came a game-changer: Wilcox agreed to bring the entire company to Los Angeles on their very first international tour.

Dan Dan didn't believe that it was possible, as she had been promised tours many times but they had always evaporated at the last minute. Wilcox, however, was determined to let the U.S. audiences catch their very first glimpse of this amazing company. So he did it. Fifty dancers and staff presented their new *Nutcracker* in three Southern California theaters in December of 1999, including the cavernous Shrine Auditorium in downtown Los Angeles. Over 5,000 packed into the gorgeous theater, at that time still home of the Oscars, to see the Classical Ballet of Guangzhou, as it was billed for the tour.

This tour paved the way for many subsequent tours for the Guangzhou Ballet, to Russia, Europe, Australia, Canada, and four more times to the U.S. It also solidified the relationship between the company and Wilcox, resulting in his staging two additional full-length ballets for the company.

No other American choreographer has had more influence on China's ballet scene than David Wilcox. His innovative version of *La Bayadere*, a 130-year-old classic now performed in its original format by major companies around the world, helped to put the Guangzhou Ballet in the forefront of Chinese companies beginning with its premiere in August 2003. It features an audience-friendly adaptation of storyline and an abbreviated score that incorporates all four acts of the original into a sumptuous two-act ballet, and it has been performed around the world by the Guangzhou Ballet more than any other of their full-length ballets.

Following his two successes with the company, he was asked in 2006 to add another title to the company's repertoire. He had long wished to create a version of *Cinderella* with a musical score other than the traditionally used score by Prokofiev. Though a fan of the composer, Wilcox believed his *Cinderella* was less than ideal for such a perfect ballet story. For two years Wilcox searched for the ideal music for his "dream Cinderella." Finally, he settled on Leo Delibes' little-performed ballet *Sylvia*, rearranging the score extensively to serve as the perfect accompaniment for one of the world's best-known, best loved fairy tales.

It is this production of *Cinderella* that now highlights the Guangzhou Ballet's one-city tour to Long Beach, California at the end of October. Though the original premiere was in 2006 in China, Dan Dan has commissioned completely new scenery for this tour, scenery large and sumptuous enough to fill the great stage of the Terrace theater and the Long Beach Performing Arts Center. The group this year has grown to 63, compared to 50 on their first tour, and the quality of the dancing is unsurpassed internationally. The company boasts numerous gold, silver, and bronze medals at ballet competitions around the world and more importantly they received The China Culture Bureau's highest award of "Best Ballet" in 2011.

Their first time returning to Southern California since 2009, the Classical Ballet of Guangzhou will perform at the elegant Terrace Theater at the Long Beach Performing Arts Center on Halloween weekend-- October 27th and 28th. Aptly programmed for Halloween, Cinderella's "pumpkin coach" will carry her to the ball pulled by eight dazzling stallions, danced of course by eight dazzling male dancers of the Guangzhou Ballet. Performances of *Cinderella* will be Saturday evening October 27th at 8:00 p.m. and Sunday matinee October 28th at 2:00 p.m.

In addition to Cinderella, the company will present one performance of their best and most popular Chinese story ballets danced in classical form. Featuring the ballet *The Phoenix*, a traditional Chinese folk tale performed in Western ballet style.

Tickets for the Classical Ballet of Guangzhou China start at \$28.00 and go on sale through all TicketMaster outlets and by calling the Ticket Hotline toll free at (877) 852-3177. Special discounts for children, groups and seniors.

For additional information contact the Long Beach Ballet, official presenters of the Classical Ballet of Guangzhou's 2012 tour to Long Beach.

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