Under the creative eye of Artistic Director Lin Hwai-min, Taiwan’s Cloud Gate Dance Theatre troupe has spent the last seven years exploring the movement and chi (energy) of Chinese calligraphy. The result is a contemporary dance trilogy that culminates with Wild Cursive/Final Chapter of Cursive, to be performed at the Lied Center October 16.

In conjunction with the Lied Center, the Center for East Asian Studies is offering accompanying programming prior to the performance. Randi Hacker (CEAS Outreach Coordinator) and Sanae Eda (Assistant Professor, East Asian Languages and Cultures) will conduct calligraphy workshops for K-12 teachers October 3 and a family calligraphy workshop October 13. A pre-performance lecture on the Chinese writing system will be open to the public.

In his exploration of Chinese calligraphy, Artistic Director Lin asked the Cloud Gate dancers to improvise before large-scale reproductions of calligraphic works. The dancers interpreted the energy they felt from the images, discovering linear ink routes, lyrical flow, and strong punctuations. The improvisations produced subtle, slow movements and dynamic attacks, similar to martial arts movements, which were also studied during the development phase. Cursive I, the first in the trilogy, emphasized the stronger, darker blacks of calligraphy with vigorous movements; Cursive II, set to the music of John Cage, explored calligraphy’s lighter, more meditative elements. Wild Cursive breaks away from traditional calligraphy and instead derives its inspiration from Kuang Tsao (literally translated as “wild calligraphy”), an expressive style that frees characters from any set form and exposes the spiritual state of the writer.

Lin has remarked that, “when we talk about calligraphy in Chinese, we know there are certain rules you have to observe. But in wild calligraphy you break the rules; you let it go. When the brush is full of water, you just let it go, you feel from the gut. When the brush is dry you have to have more control...in terms of choreography, you let it go and then come back. In and out rules.”

In 2005, Ballet Review declared Wild Cursive “a stunning piece of choreography danced by a truly powerful group of dancers who can move incredibly fast or slow, yet always with such strength, fluidity, and control. At times you can almost feel and see the energy on the stage.”

For tickets, contact the Lied Center box office at (785) 864-2787 or www.lied.ku.edu.
LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Welcome back! We hope you had a great summer, and return rested and ready for another active year.

Last year the Center began organizing programs around annual themes. During the 2006-2007 school year, we focused on the botanical bounty of East Asia, particularly tea and bamboo. One project from this theme continues: the construction of a web page featuring the East Asian plants on the KU campus. When this page is finished, it will offer a map locating the East Asian plants on campus and provide botanical and cultural histories for each type. When the urge strikes you to view Japanese cherry trees or maples, you will be able to do so armed with a bit of scientific information and cultural lore. Watch the CEAS homepage for developments on this project.

Our theme this year, “Countdown to Beijing,” celebrates the upcoming Beijing Olympics. Most of our Olympic-themed activities, including a film festival and major conference, will take place in the spring semester. Mark your calendars now for the conference, “Olympian Desires: Building Bodies and Nations in East Asia,” April 10-12, 2008. This fall we will launch a new web page designed to keep you up to date with the countdown in Beijing through links to photographs and fast-breaking stories in the China Daily. We will let you know as soon as the page goes live.

We are also pleased to announce an exciting Tea & Talk line-up for the fall semester, featuring reports from East Asia and presentations by new faculty on their work, as well as a new event: a moon-viewing party. On September 25, weather willing, we will gather by the pond in front of the Dole Center to enjoy East Asian music and chant poetry as we raise our glasses to the full moon. See you there!

Marsha Haufler
Acting Director, CEAS

NEW ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR

CEAS welcomes Assistant Professor J. Megan Greene (History) as our first Associate Director. The Associate Director role was established to support the work of the Director and to research and establish additional funding streams.

Prior to teaching at KU in 2002, Megan was a postdoctoral research fellow in Taiwan Studies at the University of London and an assistant professor of history at Gettysburg College. She has published numerous articles and books on Taiwan’s history, identity, and politics, the most recent being her forthcoming book Taiwan’s Past, China’s Future: Industrial Science Policy and the Developmental State (Harvard University Press, 2008).

Megan can trace her interest in China and Taiwan to an early age. “It’s actually true, although it sounds slightly flip,” she said, laughing, “but when I was growing up, I really, really loved Chinese food.”

Her love for Chinese cuisine (which she and her father shared in Baltimore) led her to take a one-trimester course titled Women in China when she was in high school. Her interest piqued, she went to college with two ideas in mind: she would either be a French literature major or an East Asian studies major.

“I started taking Chinese my first year, and I started taking East Asian survey courses,” she explained. “I really liked those classes, and I hated the French lit classes. So that was that.”

In addition to her CEAS duties and teaching load, Megan is currently researching ways in which history is being narrated in contemporary Taiwan, especially in regard to identity politics between factions advocating for or against unification or independence from China.

“As various political actors are struggling to define Taiwan, they use history for that purpose,” she said. “There have been debates over the last few years over curriculum, what the textbooks should look like, what narratives should be used. There are other kinds of issues relating to monumentation, celebrations, museum exhibits advocating for one narrative or another.”

Megan spends her spare time with her daughter and husband, walking their new puppy, reading fiction, and occasionally traveling and cooking. She can be reached at mgreene@ku.edu.
CATCHING THE JAPAN BUG

I first caught the Japan Bug in high school when my parents and I visited my older brother in Tokyo. New sights, sounds, smells, and the ungodly summer heat and humidity made the term “culture shock” laughable: my experience was more “absolute cultural mind shatter.” In a mere 12 days my world view, self-perception, and all other identity-forming components were thoroughly shredded into small particles of mental dust (in a polite and gentle manner characteristic of Japan’s service industry).

As my departing plane separated from the tarmac, I made a tear-felt vow to return to Japan. Eight years later, I sat wedged between two Japanese women drinking America’s attempt at sencha on an airplane back to Tokyo, this time as a student.

In a stroke of doubly good fortune, I went for free thanks to the David L. Boren National Security Education Program (NSEP), the Freeman Foundation, the Association of Teachers of Japanese Bridging Project, and the KU Office of Study Abroad.

Armed with just enough Japanese language skills to get me in trouble, I soon discovered the Japan I remembered was only superficially similar to the Japan of today. My earlier experience of absolute cultural mind shatter was replaced with small moments of delightful surprises; whether befriending a café owner in Hokkaido who showed me my first Japanese Playboy (he claimed he read it only for the articles) or learning the “proper” way to eat okonomiyaki (something like cabbage pancakes) really meant covering the top with enough mayonnaise to kill a small dog.

Thanks to my patient host mothers, my Japanese improved. They also taught me how similar humans really are no matter where one goes. We all gossip, cry, laugh at silliness, dream, and desire (although I also learned that politeness can be a very effective tool to express one’s displeasure with another).

Japan had transformed from an intimidating, mysterious country to another example of the beautiful diversity of a universal human spirit and condition.

The most rewarding experience was not seeing the Zen rock garden at Ryoanji Temple in Kyoto or climbing western Japan’s tallest mountain, nor was it becoming advanced in Japanese or developing the essential skill of not falling over on the subway when the operators suddenly braked (which they seemed to do on Friday nights when the cars smelled of sake, beer, and cigarettes). No, the greatest experience was not a single experience. It was a series of small moments. Those moments of connection: random conversations with friends, bank clerks, security guards, small children playing in the street, or the grocery clerk. It was from those moments that an appreciation for that wonderful, radiant, simple feeling of being peaked above the surface of my subconscious like Pikachu popping out of his Pokeball. I learned that to share humanity with humanity was itself the end goal.

I am now convinced my Japan Bug has taken over a large portion of my cerebral cortex, and I could not feel more thankful. Although that next trip to Japan might just cost me a kidney...

EVENTS CALENDAR

September 25, 7 p.m.
Moon Viewing Party
Please join us on the front lawn of the Dole Institute of Politics to enjoy East Asian music and chant poetry as we raise our glasses to the full moon.

October 16, 7:30 p.m.
Cloud Gate Dance Theatre of Taiwan: Wild Cursive. | Lied Center, KU Lawrence west campus

October 18, 4 p.m.
Tea & Talk: Hong Zhang

November 15, 4 p.m.
Tea & Talk: Kyoim Yun: “Crafting ‘Authentic’ Shamanic Rituals During the 2002 World Cup” New East Asian Languages and Cultures faculty member Yun will discuss her recent research. | Malott Room, Kansas Union, KU Lawrence campus

December 5, 4:30 p.m.
Lecture: Xu Xin, Professor, Dept. of Religious Studies and Dept. of Philosophy, and Director, Center for Jewish Studies, Nanjing University, China. “The Practice of Judaism in China” (location TBA)

Save the Date
Conference: “Olympian Desires: Building Bodies and Nations in East Asia”
April 10-12, 2008
Hong Zhang, KU adjunct professor of art, has been invited to the Third Chengdu Biennial sponsored by the Chengdu Contemporary Art Museum. This year’s exhibition, titled “REBOOT,” will focus on innovative approaches to Chinese ink painting. Zhang’s ink painting on rice paper, “Hair Gods,” will be featured in a gallery focused on emerging artists on the international arts scene. Britta Erickson, a freelance Chinese art curator and critic from Stanford University, invited Zhang to participate. The exhibition also includes works by world-renowned Chinese artists Xu Bing, Wen Da Gu, and Cai Guo Qiang. It will be held at the Chengdu International Convention Center September 13-October 12, 2007.

Zhang will give a Tea & Talk lecture and slide presentation of her Chengdu trip Thursday, October 18 (location to be announced). She is teaching life drawing at KU this fall.