

Students celebrate Chinese New Year through Lion Dance

Melissa Truong
MANAGING EDITOR

By itself, it looks like an ornately decorated red, green and gold-colored sheet with a huge, vaguely animalistic head.

George Tye (10) and his partner had a job: to make the sheet come to life.

For about a year, Tye and his partner have been practicing Lion Dancing, which is a traditional dance where two performers mimic the movements of a lion while in a lion costume. Lion dances are usually performed during Chinese New Year for entertainment or symbolic purposes, and Lion Dancing is exactly what Tye plans to do for the Chinese New Year Festival at his Chinese school. Tye and his partner have been practicing every Saturday for their performance, which is tomorrow.

Many students like Tye celebrate Chinese New Year, which starts at the beginning of the Lunar Calendar and lasts for 15 days, with families carrying out various customs, the most important of the traditional Chinese holidays. Lucy Zhou (11) also celebrates Chinese New Year, both at her Chinese School and at home with her family. Like Tye, Zhou plans to perform for the Chinese New Year Festival at her Chinese school, *Hua Xia*, playing the *yao gu*, which literally translates to "hip drum" in English. Every year, Zhou performs her drum with

other players in the festival. She and Tye are putting a lot of time into their preparations for their respective performances.

During practice last Saturday, Tye and his partner draped a sheet over themselves, with Tye in the front and his partner in the back. He poked his head inside the head of the lion and began to walk forward with his partner, coordinating their footsteps as if they were one four-legged animal, moving in-synch to make the lion seem alive.

"It just takes a lot of practice because you and your partner have to move at the same speed, so it takes a lot of practice to get that timing," Tye said. "The tail is supposed to follow the head, so the person in the back looks at the feet of the person in the front for timing and rhythm."

Lions usually have two people inside, while dragons can have upwards of 10. Tye practices Lion Dancing to entertain for the New Year Festival at his Chinese School, but Zhou said that Lion Dances also have a purpose during Chinese New Year.

"The dragons are supposed to scare away demons and bring in luck and fortune," Zhou said. "It's usually guys who do it because you have to be really strong."

Learning to Lion Dance is a requirement for Tye's Chinese school because it teaches students more about Chinese culture. Tye said that Lion Dancing came naturally to him.

"My first experience was pretty cool because I like dancing in general, so the dance steps came naturally," Tye said.

Aside from performances at Chinese school, Zhou also celebrates Chinese New Year at home. There, Zhou's family has various customs for welcoming in the New Year. All their customs have an underlying theme of new beginnings and starting the year on a positive note.

"We clean the whole house to symbolize a new beginning with a clean house and we hang up red paper symbols to bring good luck and fortune," Zhou said.

The theme of fresh starts remains the same at Zhou's Chinese school, this year to celebrate the year of the Tiger.

"In my class [at Chinese school], we have riddles every year," Zhou said.

"If you solve one, it's kind of like an accomplishment, an accomplishment of the New Year. For the Japanese, climbing a mountain at the beginning of the New Year is a good thing because it symbolizes that your year will be good because you accomplished something. Solving the riddle is like that."

Similar to the American New Year, much of Chinese New Year revolves around being together with loved ones because according to Chinese custom, New Year activities set the tone for the entire year.

"It's a time of family and togetherness," Zhou said. "Chinese people like to be near other people from the same place during New Year, so we go to this annual celebration my parents have with their friends from Hunan."

At the Chinese New Year Festival at Tye's Chinese school, Lion Dancing is only part of the festivities.

"There's the performance, but they also have stands where they sell food and games to play," Tye said.

According to Zhou, Chinese New Year is almost like Christmas and Thanksgiving combined because everybody comes together to celebrate. They eat and pass out red envelopes with money inside to bring luck and prosperity in the next year.

"A lot of it is just eating a bunch of great food, kind of like Thanksgiving," Zhou said. "We make spring rolls and *bing*, which is a type of Chinese flat bread, and a bunch of other food."

Many Chinese celebrate Chinese New Year to honor ancestors, but since most of Zhou's family is in China, Chinese New Year is for spending time with loved ones.

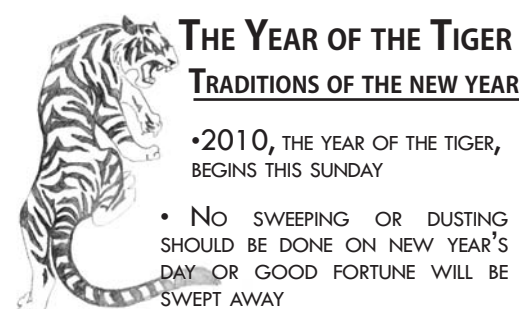
"For me, it's a time when I can be together with my family to celebrate the New Year," Zhou said. "It's a celebration of who we are and there's this feeling of togetherness that the other holidays don't have because there is this sense of the past."

For Zhou, Chinese New Year isn't about staying up to cheer the passing of another year, like the American New Year.

"I know that in America, everyone stays up to watch the ball drop and make resolutions, but it's not really like that," Zhou said. "It's more like having a new beginning."



Photo by Anna Buckley
Illustration by George Jeng
George Tye (10) and his partner practice their Lion Dance routine to prepare for Chinese New Year. He and other students are getting ready for the year of the Tiger.



THE YEAR OF THE TIGER TRADITIONS OF THE NEW YEAR

• 2010, THE YEAR OF THE TIGER, BEGINS THIS SUNDAY

• NO SWEEPING OR DUSTING SHOULD BE DONE ON NEW YEAR'S DAY OR GOOD FORTUNE WILL BE SWEEPED AWAY

• IF SOMEONE WASHES THEIR HAIR ON NEW YEAR'S DAY, THEY WILL WASH AWAY THE LUCK FROM THE NEW YEAR

• THE FIRST PERSON SOMEONE MEETS AND THE FIRST THING SOMEONE HEARS ON NEW YEAR'S DAY ARE SIGNIFICANT TO WHAT THEIR FORTUNES WILL BE FOR THE REST OF THE YEAR

Sidebar by Katelyn Hennes



Linnea Whitney

Performing at Applebee's with the Tri-M music club, Jessica Lontayo (12) and Jessica Westberg (12) play their flutes. The Tri-M club plays at retirement homes, schools and libraries for community service.

Musical group Tri-M does not play the blues, raises spirit in community

Anna Buckley
STAFF WRITER

Before beginning her solo for the Modern Music Masters (Tri-M) club, co-president Rose Hill (12) scanned her audience and saw the faces of the elderly residents of The Arbors Senior Care Center. With the rest of the Tri-M club standing behind her, Hill began to play an old Disney song on her flute.

As Hill played, a few of the Arbors' residents began to sing along. More joined in, and soon the previously quiet room was filled with the voices of people singing and reminiscing together through an old Disney classic. Hill sensed that they were enjoying her song, when an elderly man with a walker jumped suddenly from his seat, located directly in front of Hill. He began to dance along to the song, continuing to sing while enjoying the music.

Hill continued to play the song, trying hard not to smile. The elderly man continued to dance as a nurse attendant asked him to sit back down, worried about his heart condition, but the man continued to dance. When she had finished the song, Hill let out the smile she was holding in as the audience stood and applauded.

The club Tri-M consists of band, orchestra and choir

members, who perform for community service hours at libraries, elementary schools and retirement communities such as The Arbors, which is Hill's favorite place.

"The people there don't really get to see young people a lot and so they like having kids come and take the time to perform for them," Hill said.

Moments when residents love the songs so much that they feel compelled to dance are what make performing with Tri-M so special for Hill.

"I felt happy that my music had made him care so much that he [wanted] to get up and dance," Hill said.

For co-president Denise Doan (12), who plays the french horn, and other Tri-M members, getting to perform for the residents at The Arbors has allowed them to brighten the days of the elderly. While performing in front of an audience who is eager to listen, members have improved their performance skills and developed a deeper gratitude towards being able to play music for others.

"You're close to the [audience] and you can see how your music inspires them," Doan said. "For me, it changed my playing because I appreciate music and performing more. You [also] have to think about what you're playing so [the audience] enjoys it too. Then everything becomes closer and more personal."

Alumna returns to volleyball court seven months after suffering debilitating stroke

Andra Kovacs
FINAL FOCUS EDITOR

When she arrived a semester late at Rhodes College in Tennessee last January, Claire Cordua ('09) hadn't been able to fully use her muscles for almost seven months. Joining Rhodes' volleyball team on a scholarship, she had to push her still-recovering body to its limit in order to get to the same level as her already in-shape teammates.

But Cordua said she doesn't mind; she prefers intense workouts over the bed-rest she had grown all-too accustomed to. Her motivation to push herself comes from the day that her life almost came to an end.

She was driving to the beach last summer with her boyfriend, Chris Price (12), in the passenger's seat. All of a sudden she got a terrible migraine and her speech began to slur. Cordua didn't understand what was happening until she blacked out. While driving, she was having a stroke.

Price saved both of their lives by reaching over and steering the car out of oncoming traffic to safety.

After being taken to the hospital, the doctors learned that she had a clot in her brain, so they began a highly advanced surgery to break up the clot.

The surgery was a huge success despite an aneurism in her brain caused by the procedure. Due to the aneurism, she was on bed rest, meaning that she could do little more than eat and sleep. It took

Cordua almost a week to be able to actually sit up in bed.

"I'm a really active person, so staying in bed for that long was really hard," she said.

But after two-and-a-half weeks in the hospital, Cordua was finally allowed to go back home. Yet she soon found that she wasn't physically able to do the things that she previously could do.

"I was just tired all the time," she said. "My body was just worn out. I would take a shower and have to take like an hour nap. I'd get weak and tired and dizzy so I couldn't run, I couldn't work out, I couldn't do anything."

For three weeks following the surgery, Cordua attended physical therapy, where she had to work on getting her body back to normal.

"My brain was still healing," she said. "When I [shifted my eyes] really fast, I would get a huge headache, which of course wasn't good for volleyball because you're doing that constantly."

Because of the recovery time, she wasn't able to leave for college during the fall, and instead waited for the second semester, which meant missing the volleyball season. But now, she focuses on preparing for the next season. Cordua said that she's working harder than ever before in order to get to the level that the rest of the volleyball team is.

"They've been playing the season while I haven't worked out in seven months, so I have to push myself 10 times harder," she said.

While it has been a challenge to come into the school and onto the team so late and in the recovering state she's in, Cordua said her teammates have been a huge help in finding her place.

"The hardest thing for me was coming in late because everyone already had their group of friends and was already settled in, and I was the only freshman who was still going through the homesick process," she said. "But [my team] was really open and welcoming, they were here to support me. It was like having an immediate group of friends."

Cordua said that the transition to college and back into volleyball has been a tough one, but gets easier by the day. She said everything that happened has only improved her life.

"Sure, it was a horrible thing to happen but in the same case, it has given me so much more drive with volleyball and school, and I got closer with my friends and family," she said. "It gave me a new outlook on life that I don't think I would have if that didn't happen."

She said that her appreciation for everything has grown exponentially and she feels blessed to be able to still live the life she has today.

"I know now I'm here for a reason," she said. "Not only was I able to walk again, but I'm able to play again; I'm able to go to school again. I was given that second chance and not many people who have strokes are given that chance, so I definitely want to use that and make the best I can out of it."

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