

An Interview with Mr. Yao Yong **- Dean and Art Director of Yao Yong Dance Academy**

On a sunny winter afternoon, as a freelance writer, a dance enthusiast, I had the honor to interview Mr Yao Yong - Dean and Art Director of Yao Yong Dance Academy.

I have been taking classes at Yao Yong Dance Academy for two to three years by now. During this time, I am deeply touched by the rigor, persistence and profound understanding of the art of dance in the academy. It was a student dance show that originally attracted me to learn dancing here. The dance "Wild Geese" choreographed and directed by Mr Yao Yong deeply touched my heart. The dance depicted a group of wild geese on the grassland. Sometimes staying low, sometimes flying high, sky broad, clouds scattered, wild geese arranged themselves in the sky and looked back at their homeland. Sixteen dancers participated in the performance, the stage layout was extremely picturesque, smooth, and soul-stirring. At that time, I could not help wondering who was such a talented artist, that could choreograph so perfectly utilizing music, body movements, emotions, as well as layout and contrast on the stage.

The choreographer turns out to be Mr. Yao Yong. After that show, I also watched some of his other original dance programs including "Yellow River", "On the Horizon", "Prairie" and so on. From his creations, we can truly appreciate that dance is the art of the soul. What's on stage is not only the visual and melodic aesthetic view associated with the body movements of dancers, but also the boundless inner universe of human kind. The rich vocabulary of Chinese folk dance was here deployed by the choreographer in a beautiful, smooth yet breathtaking way to convey his deep insight into life and unique interpretation of the nature.

Among all categories of arts, dance is perhaps the most arduous. Not to mention the hard basic technique training. Just imagine the journey of turning a choreographer's inspiration into a dance production. Often enlightened by a piece of music, the choreographer creates the perfect combination of dance movements and emotions. Then each step needs to be passed on to each dancer, on top of which, lighting, setup, dynamic and static pictures created on stage, the joy and sorrow, the strength and softness, all these strong contrasts created a soul moving experience which ultimately needs to be conveyed to each audience. What a long and Herculean journey!

This Herculean effort, however, is clearly Mr Yao Yong's passion and enjoyment. When I asked what was the motivation behind his relentless creative passion for so

many years. "Music, nature and life are inexhaustible sources of creativity and motivation to create," he said. He described to me the process of creating the dance "Jasmine Flower" as a return to the immaculate young age. As if walking by the intersection with Jasmine fragrance again, he was pursuing that pure and soft hearted memory of the youth in the dance. Another example was Mr Yao Yong's famous production "Yellow River". With the magnificent music, he relied on his artistic intuition, and fully utilized the stage to present the scene of "Yellow River comes from the sky, it flows into the ocean with no return". His choreography created a thrilling scene with the bodies of dancers. The soul of the music was thoroughly conveyed and vividly depicted in a strong stage presentation.

When asked what was the most important element of his dance choreography, Mr Yao summarized in two words: "Be Natural." The natural formation of the original idea, the natural deployment of dancers' emotional and body movements, the natural combination of music and choreography, including all the transition, contrast, ups and downs, climax, are all natural. No wonder when we watch Mr Yao's dance productions, we see no grandstanding, no coy, only a spirit, a momentum, naturally flowing out from the choreographer's heart and soul, through every music note, to the limbs, fingertips, expressions of the dancers, and to each flow of the picture on stage. It was formed in such a natural way that the audience often longs for more when the program ends. When I paused my writing at this moment, I thought of the poem by Du Fu - a famous poet in Tang Dynasty when he was watching a sword dance by Aunt GongSun "When she moves, she moves like a thunder collecting back her anger; When she stops, she stays still like a river reflecting the clear daylight." Yes, a good dance, is a perfect combination of human and nature, and the most fluent metaphor between the two. This essence of being natural, is exactly the spirit that gets carried through all the creations of Mr. Yao Yong.

Behind every touching stage performance, there are numerous sweaty days and nights. In the environment of the Silicon Valley where there are often more technology than arts, Mr Yao is facing an enormous challenge to lead groups of amateur dancers and create excellent dance productions year after year. By bringing the "small minority" art of dance to the general public, Yao wants all who are willing to learn dance to feel the dual positive impact of dance on their body and soul. In the meantime, the value of this art of dance needs to be sustained. Making each dance the best with existing resources, and supporting each dancer to be her or his own best. What a hard and meaningful mission!

When asked how he was able to manage the school while pursuing original choreography, Mr Yao mentioned the most important woman in his life with great tenderness, his wife, also a dance master - Mrs Wang Guan Shan. Behind every successful man, there is a good woman. Wang, is such a good woman of wisdom. As an excellent dance teacher, Wang brings her serious teaching style and artistic rigor into each lesson for her students. Her students, regardless of level, can often harvest a lot from her meticulous guidance and be able to tap their own dance potential to the greatest extent possible. So for Mr Yao Yong, Wang is not only the best wife, but also a best partner, and the strongest supporter of his creative pursuits.

As the conversation draws to an end, the afternoon sun is warmly shining on the table in the coffee shop. My heart is also filled with a warm touch. Sitting in front of me, Mr Yao Yong looks so moderate and humble, without the kind of pride of an accomplished artist. What I can sense is a solid and practical state of mind in him to continue creating, sharing, and educating in his dance journey. It is such a wonderful thing to have the art of dance in this world, and dance masters like Mr Yao Yong and Mrs Wang Guan Shan are our pride and treasure. With enthusiasm towards the art of dance from their own hearts, they bring to our stage, and also to our lives the artistic beauty, the kindness, the enhancement to our body and enjoyment for our spirit.

Thank you, and wish you all the best, Yao Yong Dance Academy!

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TianHong Foundation
December 2016