



ArtSmarts

2003-2004 Wells Fargo School Matinee Series

The Shaolin Warriors

October 2, 2003 11:00am

Jackson Hall, Mondavi Center

Dear Teachers:

We hope that you will find this teacher's guide helpful in preparing your students for the *Shaolin Warriors* school matinee that they will see at Mondavi Center, UC Davis. The guide provides background information on the performance as well as a review of theater conventions and audience protocol.

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THE SHAOLIN WARRIORS

Nearly fifteen hundred years ago, in their original Shaolin Temple in the Henan province of mainland China (southwest of Beijing), the Shaolin monks originated the art of Kung fu. Training daily for many hours in a practice of Buddhist meditation known as Ch'an or Zen, the monks have cultivated remarkable skill in focusing and directing the life force, or energy, which they refer to as "ch'i." The *Shaolin Warriors* will feature 23 monks in a choreographed theatrical performance portraying a typical day at the temple, from dawn to dusk. The audience will experience the serenity of morning meditation, chanting, exercises, and amazingly synchronized fighting rituals often employing an array of traditional Shaolin weaponry.

Mondavi Center ArtSmarts pg. 2

TEMPLE LIFE

A Shaolin temple housed an active and highly organized community of students and teachers. There were three basic classes of participant: students, disciples, and masters. The monastery also attracted scholars and artists who found a conducive solitude in which to do

their work. Larger monasteries became important learning and culture centers as well as strong economic powerbases. When a child (more typically a boy, but girls also were trained) was admitted to the temple to study for the priesthood, he or she would be assigned the most menial tasks: cooking meals, washing clothes, cleaning and grounds upkeep. The discipline of the work and submission to the authority of the teachers would prepare the student for the years ahead spent coordinating body and mind. Days were also spent learning to read and write, studying math, history, philosophy, art, agriculture, and cooking. The apprentice was expected to become both culturally literate and self-sufficient.

When the student entered the level of disciple, she or he would spend from two to four years in the study of the Shaolin arts of combat (Kung Fu) as well as continue schooling in Buddhist ethics. The disciple would master more advanced combat techniques: weapons use, coordinating breath, mediation, and controlling the “ch’i” (life force). The monks believe that the ability to harness “ch’i” would allow a person of average build and strength to crack bricks with the bare hand and to sense the position and movements of an opponent in the dark. The advanced disciples might also write books of poetry or natural history, paint or learn medicine.

If and when the disciple mastered and perfected the techniques of Kung Fu, he or she would be awarded the full status of Shaolin monk. Now, it would be his/her role to teach what had been learned to new students.

KUNG FU

Kung Fu, Gong Fu in Chinese, means “skill.” It is an ancient combat art as well as a form of disciplined exercise. The basic moves include stances, punches, and kicks. When used as a form of meditation, movements would coordinate with breathing and the student would learn to identify and work with “ch’i” (life force). Kung Fu develops self-control, muscular coordination, and preparedness. The power of the practitioner exists in his or her ability to defend against near impossible odds and situations. The various movements were based on the fighting tactics of animals: examples include the Tiger, Crane, Dragon, Leopard, Monkey, and Cobra.

It is sometimes confusing for Western audiences to connect the Buddhist teachings of non-violence and the discipline of Kung Fu practiced in the monasteries. The martial arts master will make an important distinction: the Shaolin practitioner is never an attacker, and she or he will use skill to avoid conflict. The Kung Fu expert may parry an attack, however, if the assailant is intent upon violence, the monk will end the assault with a decisive lock-

hold or knock out. The art may also be understood symbolically, as a means to combat the wayward self, to restrain ego and develop psychological control.

The Shaolin Temple Kung Fu style has two divisions: southern temples prefer hand techniques while northern temples emphasize kicks and footwork.

BUDDHISM

The Shaolin philosophy was founded in **Buddhism** and later adopted Taoist principles. Before the introduction of Buddhism into China from India, the two main religions were **Confucianism** and **Taoism**. Confucianism entailed the observation of propriety and proper social relationships. Taoism, in turn, declined the outer world in order to seek wisdom in the pursuit of harmony with the Tao (Way). The Shaolin spiritual practice united both native currents (community and interiority) within the metaphysics of Buddhism.

Buddhism's principle tenet is the quest for release from the changes and chances of the world, and the search for serenity in the enlightened state called Nirvana. The Chinese development of **Ch'an** Buddhism emphasized meditation as a discipline of the mind leading to the final goal of spiritual freedom.

Buddhism began in India between the 6th –5th century BC with the historical figure of **GAUTAMA**, sometimes called **SIDDHARTHA**. The term **BUDDHA**, literally “the awakened one” or “enlightened one,” is a title and not a proper name. Gautama was the son of a king and queen, descendants of the Khattiya or ruling, warrior caste. Many legends surround the Buddha's life. He was brought up in royal luxury then rejected comfort and privilege for the life of a wandering ascetic. Gautama's enlightenment came while he sat in meditation under a *bodhi* tree. The following words are attributed to him: “My mind was emancipated, . . . Ignorance was dispelled, science (knowledge) arose; darkness was dispelled, light arose.” He continued his life wandering, teaching, and gathering disciples to him, well into his 80th year.

CHINA

CHINA, officially the Peoples Republic of China, is a nation of enormous physical dimensions, rich and ancient cultural history, and powerful influence in the world today. It is the largest of all of the Asian nations, as large as Europe, and has the largest population of any country in the world (one-fifth the world population). Occupying approximately one-fourteenth of the land area of the Earth, China stretches for 3100 miles from east to west and 3400 miles from north to south. Beijing is the capital as well as the cultural, economic, and communications center. Shanghai is the major industrial city, and Hong Kong is the leading commercial center and port city. Chinese geography is as diverse as its other features--including the highest point (Mt. Everest, 29,035 feet) and one of the lowest places (Turfan Depression in the Sinkiang region, 505 feet below sea-level) on the planet. The climate can be arid and desert-like in the northwest and tropical in the southeast.

Chinese history can be back-dated in the historical records for 4000 years. Much of China's development occurred in isolation, with the notable exception of the introduction of Buddhism from India. And, even when invading groups, like the Manchus, conquered territory, they were summarily absorbed into the Chinese culture. The isolation allowed for the development and maturation of a distinctly Chinese civilization but also resulted in China's unpreparedness to cope with the technological and military advances of the rest of the world, particularly after the mid-19th century. The challenge to change resulted in the revolution at the beginning of the Twentieth century and culminated in the establishment of the Communist government in 1949. The unification and consolidation of forces has brought China to a competitive status on the world stage.

MAP OF CHINA



-map taken from <http://www.lonelyplanet.com>

THINK ABOUT IT!

Talking with your teacher, friends and family about a performance after attending the theater is part of the experience. When you share what you saw and felt you learn more about the performance. You can now compare ideas and ask questions and find out how to learn even more. Here are some questions to think about:

- 1) Many of the Kung Fu combat tactics are modeled on the stances and behaviors of animals. What animals or insects did you recognize during the performance? Can you describe the specific qualities of the movements that helped you identify the animal?
- 2) Do you study an instrument or practice a sport? How does the discipline of your practice help you grow as a person?
- 3) What did you like best about the performance and why? Was the program different from what you expected? How?
- 4) How would you describe the *Shaolin Warriors* performance to a friend?

ATTENDING THE THEATER

What is expected of student audiences at the matinee:

- Enter the auditorium quietly and take seats immediately (*note that all matinees now have reserved seating*);
- Show courtesy to the artist and other guests at all times;
- Demonstrate appreciation for the artist's work by applauding at the appropriate times;
- Refrain from making unnecessary noise or movements;
- Please eat lunch before or after the performance to avoid disruption;
- Relate any information acquired from the pre-matinee discussion to the new information gained from the matinee;
- Please do not use flash photography.

What you can expect of your experience in a performing arts theater:

A theater is a charged space, full of energy and anticipation. When the house lights (the lights that illuminate the audience seating) go down, the excitement level goes up! Theaters are designed so that the voices of the singers and actors and the music of the musicians can be heard. But this also means that any sound in the audience: whispering, rustling of papers, speaking and moving about, can be heard by other audience members and by the performers. Distractions like these upset everyone's concentration and can spoil a performance.

The performers on stage show respect for their art form and for the audience by doing their very best work. The audience shows respect for the performers by watching attentively. Applause is the best way for audience members to share their enthusiasm and to show their appreciation for the performers. Applaud at the end of a performance! Sometimes the audience will clap during a performance, as after a featured solo. Audience members may feel like laughing if the action on stage is funny, crying if the action is sad, or sighing if something is seen or heard that is beautiful. Appreciation can be shown in many different ways, depending upon the art form and the culture(s) of the people in the audience. While the audience at a dance performance will sit quietly, other types of performance invite audience participation.

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