

NDI'S CULTURAL EXCHANGE WITH THE SHANGHAI CHILDREN'S PALACE

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Disparate Cultures Engage in a Youthful Dance
Wall Street Journal
By PIA CATTON

Dance students flock to New York City every summer to take classes and workshops that aren't offered in their hometowns. But for five young Chinese dancers, this summer in Manhattan has also become a budding cultural exchange between the U.S. and China—one that is independent of the American government.

In June, the National Dance Institute—a New York-based nonprofit that brings dance programs to 30 public schools—sent three teaching artists plus 13-year-old dancer Andrea Ting to Shanghai's Children's Palace, a state-run after-school arts program.

While in Shanghai, the institute's artistic director, Ellen Weinstein, collaborated on a new work, "The Red Thread," with Chinese choreographer Dou Dou Huang. Together, they taught the dance to a group of Chinese children. Five of them (ages 9 to 11) have now journeyed with three of their own teachers and an interpreter from Shanghai to New York for NDI's Irene Diamond Summer Institute. The program offers dance and music classes to 100 students culled from NDI's regular academic-year program. The five Chinese children will perform in several dances—including "The Red Thread," along with five American children—on July 27 and 28 in the City Center studios.

"It's joint choreography spanning from one side of the world to the other," said Jacques d'Amboise, who founded the NDI in 1976 while still a principal dancer with the New York City Ballet.

It's also a bit of an experiment with technology. The Chinese dancers were able to rehearse for Mr. d'Amboise, who was in New York, via Cisco's TelePresence system, which is most often used for virtual business meetings. Though Cisco did not sponsor the project, it provided equipment in the Cisco Pavilion of the World Expo 2010 in Shanghai and in its corporate offices in New York.

The exchange project also illustrates how the private and nonprofit sectors are taking up the mantle of arts and cultural exchange. NDI's connection to Shanghai's Children's Palace was facilitated by Shirley Young, a Chinese-American consultant to corporations looking to expand in China and a member of the U.S.-China Cultural Institute (formerly known as the Committee of 100 Cultural Institute).

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