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Dancers get a step up

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When the Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company visited Northern Kentucky University last week, students got a performance and also got some dance lessons.

"Her style and teaching can be viewed as sharp, defined and very stylized," said Jane Green, head of the NKU dance program. "Yet there is a very contemporary, free and fluid pulse that translates throughout her technique and choreography. I would say it is a perfect blend of traditional Chinese theatre and American modern dance."

Nai-Ni Chen was born in Taiwan and was instructed in the intense methods of the Peking Opera, martial arts, music, ballet and modern dance. She came to the U.S. in 1982 to find her own style of dance. She started her namesake company in 1988. She infuses free-form American modern dance with the discipline of the traditionally stoic dance of China.

"This is an amazing experience that does not come along too often, and as a dancer, it's always good to learn new styles and keep up with what's new in the dance world," said junior Mark Scherer. Scherer has been dancing for 14 years but this will be his first exposure to this form of dance.

"I hope to have a better understanding of their style and hopefully want to learn more about it and use it in the future," said Scherer. "I am not really familiar at all with the type of dance they do but I am excited to see their performance."

Although Nai-Ni Chen was the first exposure to this form of dance for many of the students, Green noted that they quickly understood it.

"Ms. Chen began her master class for the dancers at NKU with the traditional hand, foot, head gestures," said Green. "This was new and rarely seen in the American dance studio. I believe the students immediately recognized that they were being offered something very special. Ms. Chen then transformed these ancient techniques into a very contemporary and movable dance style. It evolved right in front of our eyes and suddenly I realized there really wasn't a separation or gap at all. Dance is truly a universal language."

The Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company is just one of many visiting groups that visit NKU theater students throughout the year, said Ken Jones, theater department chairman.

"We have brought in playwrights, actors, movie stars, scenic artists, costume designers, and other dancers and choreographers," said Jones. "I feel that bringing in guest artists allows our students to see what the artistic world has to offer them."

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