

Shen Yun—a true depiction of China's traditional culture

By KREMENA KRUMOVA
Epoch Times Staff

VANCOUVER—Shen Yun Performing Arts, the dance company known for capturing the visual, historical, and spiritual wealth of China's traditional culture, returns to Vancouver next week to play five shows at the Queen Elizabeth Theatre.

In these days of mass production and sensationalism it is rare to find an event that portrays real cultural depth. Shen Yun Performing Arts stands out as a diamond in the rough. Traditional Chinese culture and its influence on the most populous nation on earth has not always been something western nations can easily experience or understand and rarely has there been an opportunity to do so.

The fast-paced world and complicated society of the present day stand in sharp contrast to the traditional ways and values of the 5,000-year-old Chinese civilization. Shen Yun Performing Arts presents its audiences with just such an opportunity.

With classical Chinese dance as the vehicle, Shen Yun draws from China's age-old history and incorporates the folk tales and legends that helped shape the Asian continent. Universal in theme and meaning and still relevant today, the stories and dance open a window into the mind and heart of the unique dynasties that existed in China.

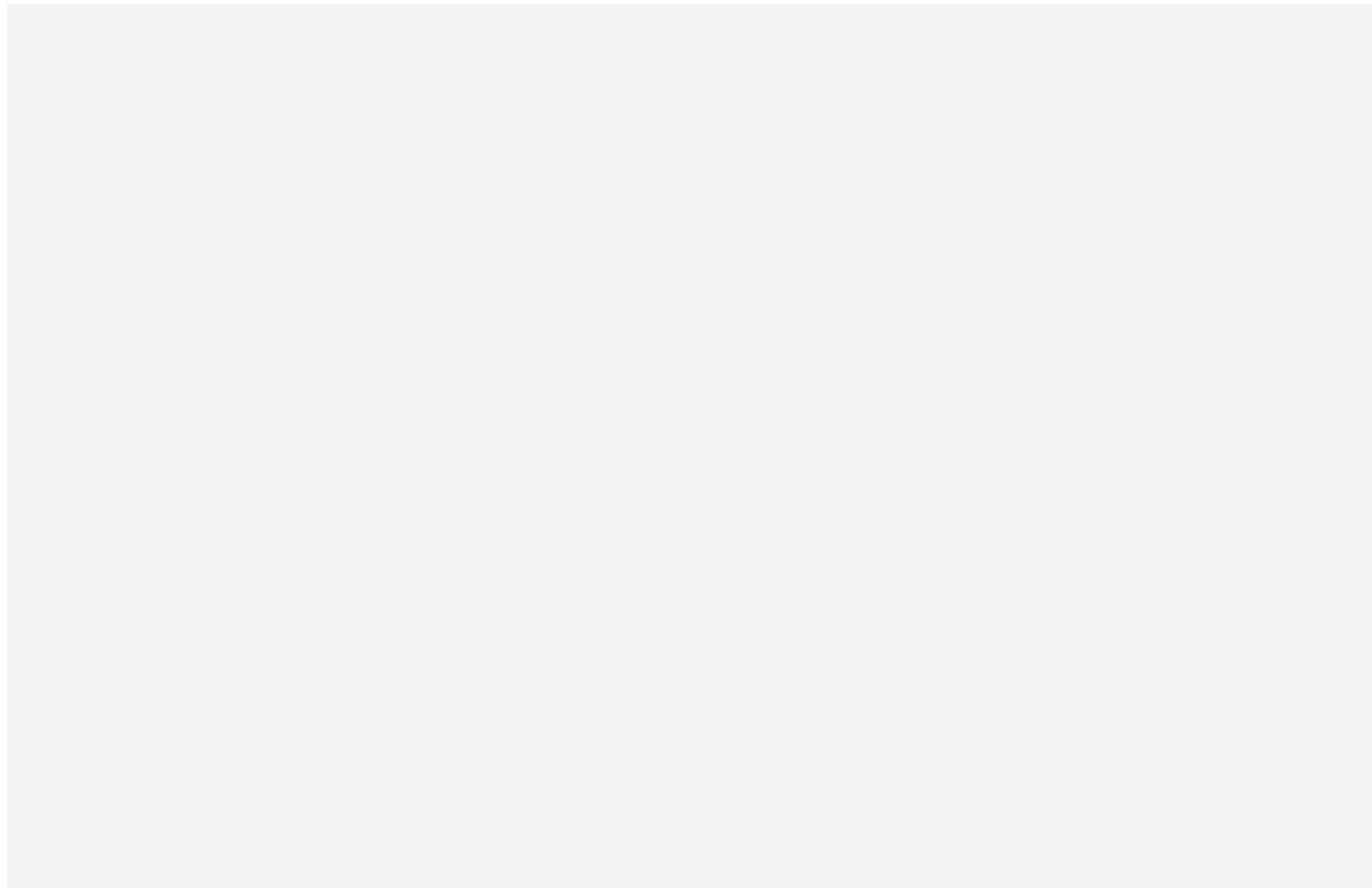
The physical feats of the dancers are complimentary to the cultural substance conveyed. Each dance expresses a cultural essence that goes beyond what can be captured in the pages of a history book.

David Suzuki was among the audience members who attended last year's show in Vancouver.

"It's quite staggering—the costumes are sensational. But the physical athleticism of the performance is quite impressive," said the world-renowned environmentalist.

In Chinese classical dance, elements of movement have been preserved through generations. They are reflected in the martial arts and ethnic dances and permeate the entire culture.

The effort and dedication of the performers to truly convey a sense of divinity in their performances is un-



GRACE AND BEAUTY: Shen Yun performers capture the richness and diversity of China's ancient heritage SHEN YUN PERFORMING ARTS

surpassed. A common audience reaction is tears and a sense of wonder.

"It was so well done," said Irving Guttman who also took in last year's show. Guttman is known as the father of opera in western Canada.

"The professionalism of the cast was fabulous. The music, the patterns in the dancing, and the energy—it was absolutely marvellous. We were taken away in a wonderful world of dance and movement that I

haven't seen in a long time."

It was Mao Zedong's destructive Great Cultural Revolution that almost wiped out China's ancient traditions. Thanks to Mao, artistic performances became propaganda vehicles for the Chinese Communist Party and by the end of his reign, the country's culture and arts were severely damaged.

To truly portray the essence of a lost culture takes more than dance

and song. It has taken much study and dedication for Shen Yun to espouse the true beauty, depth, and excellence of China's traditional culture.

The New York-based company currently has three touring groups performing in cities throughout the world. One of the unique features of the Shen Yun performers is that most are ethnic Chinese living in the United States, with some hail-

ing from Canada—something that impressed Senator Mobina Jaffer.

"What is really amazing, and it's something to be very proud of, is that Canadians are participating in this. The countries [the performers] originally come from, to preserve that art, to in fact make it go further, that's the strength of Canada—to make sure that people are able to express what their heritage is. And this is what we see today—people

expressing their heritage."

Shen Yun Performing Arts will play five shows at the Queen Elizabeth Theatre from March 25-28. Show times are: Thursday, March 25, 7:30pm; Friday, March 26, 7:30pm; Saturday, March 27, 2:00pm; Saturday, March 27, 7:30pm; and Sunday, March 28, 2:00pm. Ticketmaster: 604 280 4444; Online: ticketmaster.ca/shenyun; Hotline: 1 800 683 0191.



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Top Shelf: 'Thimble Summer'

By SHARON KILARSKI
Epoch Times Staff

If Elizabeth Enright had been an actress instead of a writer/illustrator, she would have been hailed as a chameleon. Moving from her series the Melendy Quartet to her '39 Newbery Award winner, "Thimble Summer" makes this clear.

Enright's writing in the Melendy series matches the tone of the children who meet (or contrive) a happy set of circumstances; it is witty and full of fun.

"Thimble Summer" reads entirely differently. The prose is still sprinkled with lots of dialogue, but the characters aren't particularly clever or entertaining. They are down-to-earth and so is the writer's style.

The rhythm and tone match the setting in rural Wisconsin. The book feels entirely natural and the adventures simple. Nine-and-a-half-year-old Garnet is not a personality (as the Melendy children are) but, plainly put, someone through whom we experience. Garnet's experiences become the reader's.

We experience one summer of remarkable yet utterly ordinary events, starting with the discovery of a silver thimble. This discovery seems to precipitate the end of a heart-wrenching drought and ushers in the safety of her father's money.

In addition to good luck, the thimble brings with it a series of adventures. She and her best friend get trapped in the town library; the family takes in a strange boy who becomes a new

brother to her; she goes on a bus trip and buys presents for her family—all by herself—and helps a truck driver catch his load of escaped chickens. The events end as all rural adventures must, with the county fair.

The acknowledgment of all of these adventures leads Garnet to an awareness of the happiness of being alive: "But now the happiness was growing out of all bounds. Garnet felt that pretty soon she might burst with it, or begin to fly, or that her two pig-tails would stand straight up on end and sing like nightingales."

The lesson that Enright teaches, it seems, does parallel her Melendy tales: happiness comes from being open to experience, so that even something as simple as a thimble can launch a magical journey.

Taiwanese potter crafts world's thinnest bowl

Courtesy of New Tang Dynasty Television

A Taiwanese ceramist is hoping to shatter world records with his porcelain bowls.

At only 2mm thick, potter Huang Cheng-nan says his creations are the thinnest ceramic bowls in the world.

His secret technique has been a ten-year process in the making.

Huang Cheng-nan, the Potter in question, said, "More than ten years ago, I toured in China's Jingdezhen ceramic town and I was surprised by their thin eggshell porcelain, so I brought one back. Afterwards I studied it, of course helped with my family's generations of experience with pottery, and finally worked it out after more than a decade."

The process of creating something so light and fragile is painstaking work.

Huang says he broke thousands of pieces while he was perfecting his technique, and that just the process of painting the bowls is often enough to shatter them.

"The clay must be very good, and it is also very difficult when burning in the kiln, because it is thin as a sheet of paper; it could easily break with a slight touch. Painting on the bowl without breaking it is a challenge. Some painters would break the ceramic just on a harder stroke, and after a while they were afraid to paint. So we started painting on top of the glaze."

Cheng-nan plans to offer the exquisite creations for sale in China after the World Expo 2010 in Shanghai in May.

The smallest of the bowls is expected to fetch upwards of 5,000 Euro, making the bowls exclusively for those who can afford the "finer" things in life.

Israeli superstar RITA takes on America

By EMAN ISADIAR

If you missed RITA in New York, Philly, and Miami, fly out to L.A. this weekend where the Israeli songstress will finish her tour of the United States.

On March 21 at the Fred Kavli Theater at Thousand Oaks Civic Arts Plaza, braces for what promises to be a blockbuster concert by Israel's most popular singer of all time—RITA—along with a perfor-

mance by American-Israeli dance company Keshet Chaim ("Rainbow of Life") to the exotic beat of L.A.'s own Naked Rhythm Drummers.

THE VOICE OF A NATION

Now in its seventh decade of existence, the state of Israel has finally accomplished what may have been only a distant dream to the country's founders—to create a cohesive society from a hodgepodge of immigrant populations coming from

places as far-flung as Yemen and America, with little or nothing in common except a legacy of persecution for their faith or ancestry.

Perhaps no other single artist has had so profound an impact on the nascent culture of Israel as the Persian-born songstress known simply by her first name, "RITA."

Launching her singing and acting careers in the 1980s, RITA has become a powerful unifying force, loved and admired by multiple generations of Israelis, whether they trace their cultural roots to Eastern or Western Europe, to North Africa or Central Asia. Her deeply moving rendition of the national anthem in Israel's 50th Anniversary Jubilee has forever engraved RITA's name in the pages of history and in the hearts of her people.

And now, RITA seeks to conquer

America's heart.

New Music Weekly recently named RITA as the latest "Top 40 Breakthrough Artist" for her new American single "Love Has Begun," which continues to make its way through American music charts. She has raised the Western-style pop song to new heights with her impressively wide vocal range and musical ornamentation akin to ancient Persian music.

Throughout her career, RITA has also recorded, performed and paraphrased well-known songs by the late Persian diva "Hayedeh," indicative of her deep reverence and passion for the music of her birthplace.

RITA's deep chest voice has a grainy, rich timbre while her high head voice is powerful, pure, and penetrating. Her natural gift, her

technical prowess, and her diverse cultural influences have combined in a rare convergence of elements to create a truly unique artist.

Perhaps in an effort to connect with her younger fan base, RITA seems to have dropped the emblematic rolled "r" of the Mizrahi accent, which she has now replaced with its guttural counterpart of mainstream Hebrew.

Whatever the accent, Los Angeles will once again fall under the spell of RITA, as it did in her last appearance, also produced by Keshet Chaim. This single performance on the first day of spring—the Persian New Year—could very well be the harbinger of many more concerts in the United States by Israel's beloved superstar, and possibly America's new dark-haired sweetheart.