

Arts » DANCE

UC prof's works to be performed by Dance China NY at NKU

By Janelle Gelfand
jgelfand@enquirer.com

Like many Chinese-American artists, Qi Jiang's journey from China to the United States was affected by China's Cultural Revolution.

His story begins as a toddler, when his family was wrenched apart after his father died, having been sent away to do hard labor during Mao Zedong's reign of terror. Jiang's life changed again in 1978, after a triumphant visit to America as a performer when, at the invitation of President Jimmy Carter, Jiang's dance troupe became the first Chinese artist ensemble to perform in America.

"When I came to America, it was eye-opening. There were so many things I would not be able to do if I had stayed in China.

It was a time when China was just starting to look outside. At the time, we were very closed," says Jiang, 50, associate professor of dance at the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music.

Today, the Covington resident is an award-winning teacher, dancer and choreographer, who has danced with the famed Joffrey Ballet, Twyla Tharp Dancers and Ballet West. Besides his CCM post, he is artistic director of Dance China NY in New York City.

Jiang has choreographed two dance pieces, which Dance China NY will perform Saturday during a Chinese New Year concert in Greaves Hall at Northern Kentucky University.

Jiang, the son of a physician and a teacher, was 3 when his father was sent to work in a mine in the early 1960s. Only farmers, workers and soldiers were considered "pure" revolutionaries,



Provided / Wu Gang

Dance China NY performs in celebration of the Chinese New Year at NKU.



Qi Jiang

Jiang explains. People such as artists, educators and Jiang's father, a doctor, were sent to fields and mines to perform hard labor, to become "purified." Millions died. Jiang's father died within a year, in a mining accident.

"To send educated people to work without any training — they didn't know how to protect themselves," says Jiang, shaking his head. "My mother was devastated; she had three kids and didn't know what to do."

At age 4, Jiang and a sister were sent to live with his father's relatives in Chengdu, Sichuan Province, where he was raised by his grandmother. There, his uncle was a choreographer for a Chinese folk dance company. He



Provided / Wu Gang

Chinese ballet emphasizes detailed movements in the upper body.

took young Qi (pronounced "Chi") to see a performance.

"I had never seen such beautiful Chinese folk dances, full of color with beautiful music," he

says. "I just liked it immediately."

In 1966, at the start of the Cultural Revolution, which banned all forms of Western culture,

If you go

What: Chinese New Year (Year of the Rat) Concert, with Dance China NY, Qi Jiang, artistic director; Percussion Group Cincinnati; Blue Pipa Trio (pipa, bass and guitar); CCM Chamber Music Group. Presented by the Greater Cincinnati Chinese Music Society

When: 7:30 p.m. Saturday

Where: Greaves Concert Hall, Northern Kentucky University, Highland Heights

Tickets: \$20; \$10 student; \$50 patron

Information: 513-761-6397, 513-761-0245

Jiang's uncle became director of a Chinese revolutionary dance school, and choreographed roles for little Qi and his sister. For Jiang, it began a lifelong love of dance. He graduated from Yin-chuan Dance School and Beijing Dance Academy.

Jiang is trained in both classical Western ballet and Chinese ballet. The latter, he explains, is more about training the upper body, hand motion and facial expression than training the legs. In 1978, Jiang, a member of the China National Performing Art Troupe, visited the U.S. at the invitation of President Carter, dancing a Chinese revolutionary ballet, Madame Mao's "The Red Detachment of Women," and a Peking Opera.

After their two-month tour that included Lincoln Center, Jiang applied to study with the Joffrey Ballet in New York and won a full scholarship.

What he thought would be a two-year stay evolved into decades. He joined the CCM faculty in 2001.

"I feel like I had a wonderful opportunity when I came to America," he says.