

CHINESE LION DANCERS

The Chinese Lion Dancers are sponsored by the Chinese American Benevolent Association of Eugene/Springfield and have been dancing for twenty years. The dance troupe is comprised of middle school and high school youth who train weekly for the lion dance. Students are recruited annually to participate, since older youth move on to allow younger youth to participate. The Chinese Lion Dancers perform throughout Oregon at various community events and private functions.

HISTORY OF THE CHINESE LION DANCE

The lion dance is an important tradition in China and usually performed as part of the Chinese New Year festivities. If well-performed, the lion dance is believed to bring luck and happiness.

Although lions are not native in China, they came to this country via the famous Silk Road. Rulers in what is today Iran and Afghanistan sent lions to Chinese emperors as gifts in order to get the right to trade with Silk Road merchants. The lion dance dates back to the Han Dynasty (205 B.C. to 220 A.D in China) and during the Tang Dynasty (716-907 A.D.)

The lion is enacted by two dancers. One handles the head, made out of strong but light materials like paper-mache and bamboo, the other plays the body and the tail under a cloth that is attached to the head. The 'animal' is accompanied by three musicians, playing a large drum, cymbals and a gong. A Little Buddha teases it with a fan or a giant ball. The head dancer can move the lion's eyes, mouth and ears for expression of moods. The lion dance combines art, history and kung fu moves. Normally the performers are kung fu practitioners. Every kind of move has a specific musical rhythm. The music follows the moves of the lion: the drum follows the lion, the cymbals and the gong follow the drum player.

Quite often people observing the dances think that they are looking at dragons. The main difference between lion dance and dragon dance is that the latter is performed with more people than two.