

ROARING IN THE NEW YEAR

Students celebrate Chinese culture with traditional lion dance

Abbey Marshall | Staff Writer

You're going to hear them roar.

For most students, February consists of heart-shaped candies and roses, but some students like junior Andrew Zhan are celebrating their heritage in a traditional Chinese lion dance to ring in the New Year.

According to the Chinese school principal Jim Lee, the team was created over 10 years ago at a Chinese school in the Kenwood area with only students who graduated from the school, but they have since expanded to contain any students interested in participating. The group now contains seven Mason students, as well as a group of students from Sycamore, and they are taught the routines and dances by lion dance alumni who are now in college.

"The style of the dance (is interesting)," Zhan said. "Lion dance (is a tradition) you don't see very often in America...It connects to our Chinese and Taiwanese culture that we don't really get in America as much."

Zhan said that learning this art is an arduous task at first with so much going on during a performance, especially when you throw in a lion costume.

"Learning was difficult because it's something that we never did before," Zhan said. "I remember the first couple practices were really rough because we had to practice without the suit and then we had to practice in the suit, and it's a lot harder when you're in a 90-degree lion costume. It was pretty difficult at first, but it's a lot of fun performing, in my opinion."

There's a variety of things occurring on the stage at once to create a visually pleasing performance, according to Zhan.

"We have two (lions) and they kind of interact with each other during the performance through

their moves," Zhan said. "There's two people in the lions...There's also two people called fatheads—that's the literal translation. So there's two lions and two people and you wear a giant mask and (the fatheads) will play around with the lions and guide them and hit them."

All the effort pays off during the performance, Zhan said. In October, the group performed at the Chinese school that sponsors them and paid for the lion costume.

"The best experience is definitely seeing the kids," Zhan said. "We throw candy at them from the mouth of the lion so they really enjoy that...They all love watching and it makes them happy, so that's nice."

According to Lee, the appeal of the lion derives from the connotation associated with this majestic animal in Chinese culture.

"The lion is the symbol of success and the king of the jungle," Lee said. "We always perform during the New Year and hopefully people will get the symbol of the new coming year and that everything will be successful. People would like to see this, particularly the Chinese people, at restaurants. They want to have their business to become successful in the near future. They want to have someone or something, like the lion, to cheer up their customers, and this is really a traditional symbol for success in our culture."

Lee said he hopes to expand his performing around the entire Cincinnati area because of its attraction to audiences of all kinds.

"We like to introduce this kind of traditional culture to the Cincinnati area, particularly for people who have never seen this kind of performance before," Lee said. "I trust that everyone who has seen this before will like to see it again."



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