

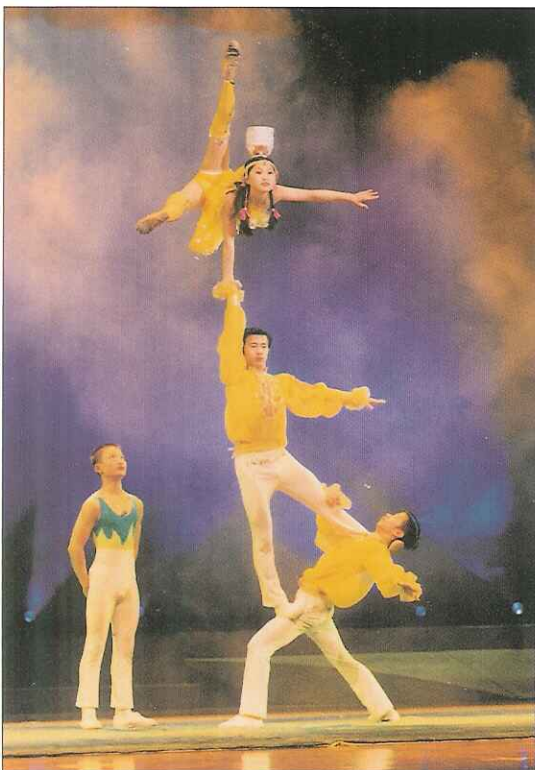
# Chinese Acrobatics and the Nanjing Acrobatic Troupe

“Chinese acrobatics is a 3,500-year-old art form that evolved from everyday activities and common household objects. For example, as powerful symbols of abundance, bowls were often balanced on the head as a token of high esteem and gratitude when making sacrifices to Heaven. Pagoda of Bowls, an act featured in *Birdhouse Factory*, derives directly from these ancient ceremonies. Similarly, Hoop Diving, another act featured in this year's production, can be traced to harvest festivals when workers ripped the bamboo screens from the tools used to separate grain from chaff and dove through stacked hoops in celebration of the bounty.

By the time of the Han Dynasty (206 BC to 220 AD) Chinese acrobatics had developed into a spectacular art form popular among both royalty and commoners. Acrobatics was the earliest performing art to be used in cultural exchanges between China and foreign countries. Emperor Han Wudi (140 - 87 BC) was the first ruler to present acrobatics at a state function. It is recorded that in 108 BC he entertained emissaries from the Western Regions with an opulent banquet that featured not only pools of wine and forests of meat, but also a spectacular performance of the Hundred Entertainments as the art form was called at the time.



Lu Yi performing with the Nanjing Acrobatic Troupe

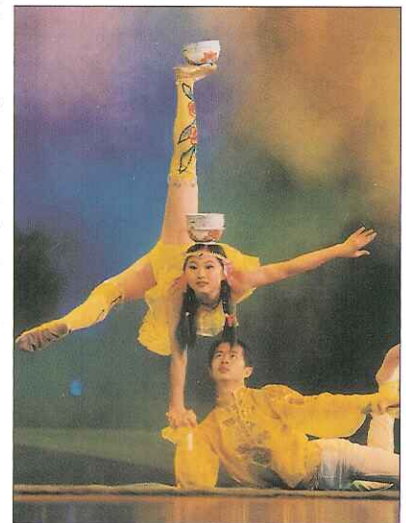


*Birdhouse Factory* cast members, Liao Heng Juan (top) and the Zheng brothers, performing with the Nanjing Acrobatic Troupe

While Xia was in the air, Lu Yi ran to catch him in a head-to-head balancing position! After retiring from his performing career, Lu Yi became the company's artistic director, a position he held until he came to the United States and eventually started working with the Pickle Family Circus in 1989. Lu Yi is now the Pickle's artistic director and master trainer at the San Francisco School of Circus Arts.

During Lu Yi's tenure as the Nanjing Troupe's artistic director, the company gained world wide fame with top prizes at circus festivals and competitions. During a trip to China last year, he extended an invitation to members of the Nanjing Acrobatic Troupe to perform in the Pickle's 2004 holiday show. Through the good efforts of the Chinese consulate general here in San Francisco, Mr. Keyu Peng, the invitation was accepted.

Nanjing Acrobatic Troupe members appearing in *Birdhouse Factory* are: Liao Heng Juan, Zheng Ming Xuan, and Zheng Wen Xuan. They are accompanied to the United States by their coach and former star performer with the Nanjing Acrobatic Troupe, Chen Mei Hong.



*Birdhouse Factory* cast members, Liao Heng Juan (top) and Zheng Wen Xuan, performing with the Nanjing Acrobatic Troupe

(Quotations in the first two paragraphs are taken from *A Primer of Chinese Acrobatics* by Fu Qifeng and Li Xining.

© 2003 Foreign Languages Press)