

Burmese culture hits the spotlight

Residents get a taste of home during performance at NHS

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The shimmer of brightly colored silk and cotton traditional clothing amplified the movement of the Burmese dancers' feet and arms as they moved in unison across the Nacogdoches High School stage.

group succeeded in bringing a piece of home to the more than 100 Burmese residents of Nacogdoches. "They want to be cultural ambassadors of Burma," said Aye Aye Kyi, former president of the Burmese American Association of Texas. With that mission in mind, a professional Burmese dance troupe on tour across the U.S.



San Min, artistic director for the Hnin Si, or Rose, theatrical dance troupe in Myanmar, performs Thursday at the Nacogdoches High School auditorium. Andrew D. Brosig/The Daily Sentinel

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DANCE » From 1A

made a stop in Nacogdoches Thursday.

"They came here especially for the community because we have Burmese here," said Beh Reh, community liaison for Pilgrim's Pride, which employs the new group of residents. "They want to let the community know this is how Burmese dance the traditional dance from Burma."

Pilgrim's Pride's 110 Burmese employees and their families were excited in the weeks leading up to the event, Reh said.

"These people are very famous dancers from Burma," he said. "I'd like to meet them and see them and especially to take a picture with them."

Dance is an important part of Burma's rich culture, Kyi said.

"Dance is very important to Burmese because Burmese people are community-oriented people," she said. "Whenever people gather for celebrations, dances have to be performed to make it special."

In Myanmar, festivals are a monthly event, Kyi said.

"There are so many pagodas in Burma," she said. "Every pagoda has its own festival to commemorate the build date of the pagoda."

"Wa Wa's Gee Ta Twa Yar Ka Han Par," meaning "Where music goes, the dance goes," was one of the songs performed by Wa Wa Myint, BAAT vice president for Austin.

"Traditional Burmese music is played with a drum circle which has about 21 drums that are tuned to three octaves," commented Kyi. "The drums play melody and also some base. The drums are played with their hands. The drummer sits in the middle of the drum circle. The drum circle is equivalent to piano, a key instrument."

However, not all of the performances aligned strictly with traditional Burmese song and dance.

For "San Min's Tar Win Nyit Khu," meaning "Two Duties," Tin Maung San Min Win (San Min), artistic director of a distinguished dance company in Myanmar, combined old school with new world.

"Being third generation dancers, he has to carry the legacy of his famous grandfather and father by preserving the traditional dance routines," she said. "However, as the time evolves, the dance scene changes. Therefore, he has to fulfill the wishes of the young

generation by creating modern dance routines with western dance influences. He is carrying two responsibilities at the same time.

"He will do the traditional dance routine and also dance to western drum beats with Burmese dance steps. The later routing is his — based on his own imagination."

To add even more flare to the dance, San Min contributed some moves to Michael Jackson.

San Min is the son of U San Win, a famous theatrical artist in Myanmar, and the grandson of the late Shweman U Tin Maung, an artist of the Myanmar dance theatre in both pre-war and post World War II periods.

"Aung Pa Say," meaning "Wish You Success," is an inspirational song written for San Min's grandfather 60 years ago.

"Everyone in Burma knows this song," Kyi said. "It is played and danced in every ceremony. The lyrics and melody are very soothing and inspirational."

Translated, the song wishes success to "people all over the world who are doing good things, such as charities and good deeds," "all who are getting married," "all who are pursuing their careers and financial goals," and "all who are rich or poor."

"Mhon Shwe Yee," meaning "Golden Rose," which originates from a popular film debuted 50 years ago, is also a well-known song among the Burmese people, Kyi said.

Mother and daughter team Ni Ni Win Shwe, a Burmese singer who has recorded 150 solo albums, and Valerie Nang, a child dancer who began performing a little more than a year ago, performed the piece.

The troupe performed for free thanks to the efforts of Kyi, the Nacogdoches Friends of the Library, who agreed to pay the performers' expenses to come to Nacogdoches, and NISD, which agreed to have the performance take place at Nacogdoches High School.

"We hope there are many more programs and events like this, and we know there are many more exciting opportunities for both the library and the school district," said NISD Director of Communications Marty Prince.

The event was also sponsored by the Burmese American Association of Texas and the Network of Myanmar American Association.

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