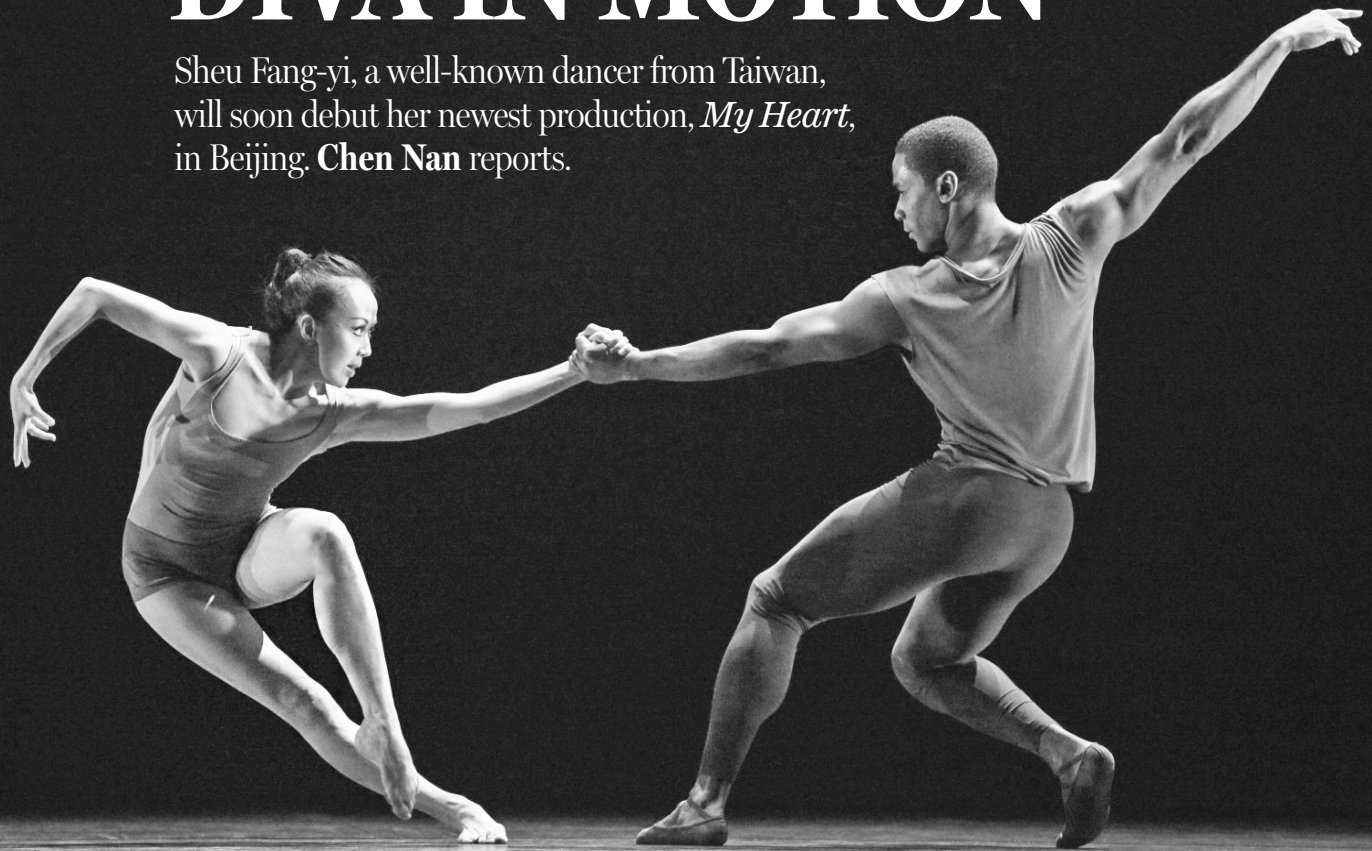


ARTIST

DIVA IN MOTION

Sheu Fang-yi, a well-known dancer from Taiwan, will soon debut her newest production, *My Heart*, in Beijing. **Chen Nan** reports.



Sheu Fang-yi (left) is now devoted to discovering more possibilities about herself by working with other dancers from diverse styles. WANG XIAOJING / FOR CHINA DAILY

Family background, ample talent or training since early childhood are often cited as reasons behind the success of many artists.

But the story of Sheu Fang-yi from Taiwan is a bit different. The former principal dancer of the Martha Graham Dance Company, a well-known dance platform founded by American modern dancer and choreographer Martha Graham in 1926, began her journey as a way to escape school studies.

"Because I wasn't good at studying, nobody had any expectations from me, including my family," Sheu, 45, tells China Daily in Beijing. "But when I interpreted a person's life onstage, I felt free and confident."

When she started to learn dancing, it seemed like the "only thing" she could do, she says.

Sheu is ready to premiere her latest production, *My Heart*, a contemporary dance piece, at the National Center for the Performing Arts in Beijing over Nov 2-3.

The production is part of Sheu's ongoing project, Fang-Yi



Left: Sheu Fang-yi (left) and Zhu Yan attend a Beijing event to promote the production *My Heart*. Right: Sheu rehearses for *My Heart*. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Sheu & Artists, which she launched in 2011 as a forum to expand her passion for the performing arts. With this project, she has worked with some of the world's finest dancers and choreographers, including Lin Hwai-min, Akram Khan and Tan Yuan-yuan.

As for *My Heart*, a couple of young contemporary dancers, including Li Xing and Liu Liwei, whom Sheu met at festivals organized by the NCPA in the past few years, will join in the production.

What excites Sheu most is the participation of Zhu Yan, the principal dancer of the National Ballet of China. The two dancers will tell the story of a woman who experiences her life traveling the world.

In December, Sheu was in the audience when Zhu performed in Beijing, the leading role in the two-act ballet *La Chauve-Souris* choreographed by Roland Petit.

Then they met again during rehearsals of the national ballet and after a brief talk, Sheu



asked Zhu to join in her new production.

"When I saw her (Zhu) dancing in the rehearsal room and taking off her ballet shoes, I felt more connected. She is sincere and focused when she dances, which I really appreciate," says Sheu. "We have lots of similarities, such as our personalities and attitudes toward art."

For Zhu, who has been dancing with the NBC since 1995 and performed leading roles in most of the classical

“When I interpreted a person's life onstage, I felt free and confident.”

Sheu Fang-yi, dancer from Taiwan

ballets, including *Swan Lake* and *Don Quixote*, the idea of participating in a contemporary dance production was both challenging and alluring.

"I was thinking about some change after being a ballerina for 20 years. Sheu's invitation came right on time," says Zhu, who flew to Taiwan earlier this year to train with Sheu.

Zhu says she wasn't sure at the beginning of the training if she could do it, as modern dance is different from classical ballet.

"Thanks to Sheu, I gained a different perspective on dancing."

For Sheu, what matters to her as a dancer-choreographer now is to discover more possi-

bilities about herself by working with other dancers from diverse dancing styles.

Born in Yilan county in Taiwan, Sheu always loved dancing though her family was initially against the idea, she says.

At 19, she made the decision to become a professional dancer after Ross Parkes, former lead dancer of Martha Graham Dance Company, spotted talent in her.

"For the first time in my life, someone said that I had potential. I worked very hard to become a dancer," Sheu says.

After graduating from Taipei National University of the Arts with a bachelor's degree in dance, Sheu went to New York on a scholarship to study at the Martha Graham School of Contemporary Dance.

In 1995, she joined the platform, becoming a soloist two years later and was promoted to principal dancer in two more years.

Being the lead dancer in Martha Graham's iconic works, *Clytemnestra* and *Chronicle*, Sheu was praised by critics as "the finest present-day embodiment of

Martha Graham's technique and tradition."

"I showed the pages to my father, who finally agreed that I could dance," recalls Sheu of the time she was featured in the US press.

When she was principal dancer of the established company, she was free to dance any role she wanted. But Sheu made the decision to quit the job and return to Taiwan in 2010 only because of her need to discover more about herself, she says.

Besides Fang-Yi Sheu & Artists, Sheu also initiated "creation weeks" in 2015, inviting international young talents to participate in new works.

The same year, she expanded her artistic field by starring in Taiwan-based filmmaker Hou Hsiao-hsien's movie *The Assassin*, which won the award for best director in Cannes in 2015.

"I always try to remind myself of why I dance and the joys it brings to me," says Sheu.

Her autobiography published in 2008 is called *Dare to Be Different*.

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SPOTLIGHT

Fighting spirit lives on in Long March veteran

By YANG YANG
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It all started toward the end of 1994, when Li Guang accompanied a charity team to a primary school in Zunyi, Southwest China's Guizhou province.

As a Red Army veteran, he was angry to find that the school's playground didn't have a national flag. Li asked the headmaster: "How do you hold flag-raising ceremonies for the children?"

Furthermore, he noticed holes and cracks in the mud walls of a classroom. The children were without shoes and in thin clothing, exposed to the cold air from outside. They had wooden boards on stumps for desks and there were no chairs.

Li donated 400 yuan (\$60), all the money in his wallet, to

the school. Back then, the average annual income of an employee in State-owned enterprises in Guizhou was a little more than 4,000 yuan.

After leaving the school, Li kept thinking of the children who reminded him of his own childhood.

Born in Zunyi in 1921, Li was orphaned at age 2. By the time he turned 8, his foster parents had left him.

He started herding cattle for landlords and often went hungry.

In January 1935, when a faction of the Red Army arrived in Zunyi after crossing the Wujiang River, as part of the Long March, Li waited for the Communist soldiers. In a bid to get people to vacate the now prefecture-level town, the nationalist Kuomintang forces spread the rumor that

Red Army members "ate human flesh".

Li wanted to find out if the rumor was true.

Instead, he saw the Communist soldiers helping the elderly people, looking after the sick and giving their own rations to the area's starving people.

The Communist Party of China hosted one of its most important meetings in history in Zunyi on Jan 15, 1935, when New China's founding father Mao Zedong was elected leader of the CPC.

It was around the time that Li went to a Red Army soldier and volunteered to join them.

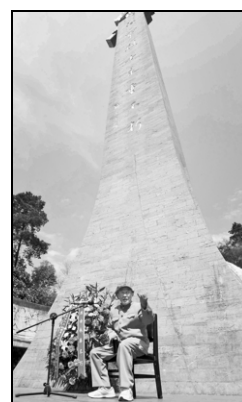
As a child he never had the chance to study and knew limited Chinese characters, which led to a mistake in a battle later.

As a battalion commander, Li received a written order from higher officers that he



Red Army veteran Li Guang visits schools and gives lectures to tell young people his stories of the Long March.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



and his troops "should evacuate before daybreak".

He didn't understand the word "daybreak" and his assistant was not around to help. The next day, when Li gathered his army and decided to leave in broad daylight, it was too late. They were captured by the Kuomintang and a lot of people died.

Since then, he has always emphasized the importance of education.

Now 95, Li still recalls the hard years he spent with the Red Army in snowy mountains and marshy grasslands where they ate little food and wore handmade clothes.

"We spent five days walking along the Jinsha River to the Luding Bridge, eating only one meal. For that meal, before we cooked the food thoroughly, we needed to fight the enemy. So we put the food in our hats, running while eating the half-cooked food," he recalls.

He says many of his comrades lost their lives during the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression from 1937 to 1945 and the three-year war of liberation.

"So many people died to build a better life for the generations to follow," Li says.

Li has been donating his pension to children from poor families so they may continue studying until university. Since 1995, he has donated more than 400,000 yuan to help more than 1,700 such children.

In 2000, Li was diagnosed with rectal cancer and survived a major surgery and follow-up treatment.

In 2002, he had acute pancreatitis that kept him in a coma for 20 days. Four years later, he was diagnosed with skin cancer, which took a few surgeries to control.

Despite his poor health, Li visits schools and armed forces institutes to tell young people about the struggles of the Long March, asking them to cherish life and the chance to get educated.

"I was born in the age of war, without a chance to study. Today, I feel sorry if some children cannot go to school because their families are poor. I've been a CPC member for 77 years, and helping such kids is my responsibility."