

Performance

Book 'em

The booking Dance Festival gives up-and-comers global exposure. **Nancy Pellegrini** previews troupes coming to the Olympic city.

Most Olympic cultural events are a collection of famous faces sharing the spirit of international cooperation. However, one event straddles the line between entertainment and education, giving rising talents a chance to perform on the world's biggest stage. A brainchild of Manhattan-based booking agent Jodi Kaplan, the

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annual 'booking Dance Festival' gives high-quality but under-funded US dance troupes international exposure. This year, co-producer and Beijing dance guru Alison Friedman includes some local talent, giving the event a truly international flavour. Even more importantly, this is yet another step on the long road to building a modern dance audience. Tickets are reasonably priced for evening performances, and free matinees are scheduled at Chaoyang's Olympic areas. 'Each night, people can see four companies from two countries, all doing different styles,' says Friedman. 'They'll see that modern dance isn't just 'x' and 'y'.'

Friedman describes the US-groups as 'diverse and beautiful' with 'crowd-pleasing programmes.' From the US contingent comes Denver's Kim Robards Dance Company, a 21-year old troupe known for its straightforward athletic style that makes the leap between ballet and modern dance – as well as between critical acclaim and popular support. Along the same vein is Utah's Odyssey Dance Company, which blends modern dance, hip-hop, tap and ballet, and is a favourite of Mary Murphy, judge on the popular US talent show 'So You Think You Can Dance'. Odyssey even infuses comedy into its routines.



The latest tanning technology had them queueing up

For their part, the Chinese choreographers represent both the establishment and the fringe. The National Ballet of China's Fei Bo choreographed the company's most recent original creation, 'Peony Pavilion'.

'I got into choreography by accident,' says Fei. 'We had to do a graduation piece for *Zhong Zhuan* (the middle school dance academy), but our teacher didn't prepare anything, and everyone else made up something on the spot. I actually finished my piece, and really loved the process.' For 'Kunqu Vision', Fei has formed an eclectic *pas de quatre* that includes a folk dancer, an army dancer, himself and another NBC colleague, which started with no plan or story. 'I used *kunqu* for guidance, but the meaning and structure has developed through

the creative process,' he says. 'It's a totally different way of working, and we don't know the result,' he adds disarmingly. 'Maybe it will be really ugly.'

Chinese dance almost invariably equals high-quality training. Tao Ye, however, cobbled together his dancing from various sources, including an army troupe and both the Jin Xing and Beijing Modern Dance Companies. 'Tao's body can do anything, but he's not very technical,' says Friedman. 'He could dance for anyone, but he can't do other people's art. He needs to create his own.' To Tao, choreography is like instinct. 'It forces you to understand yourself deeper,' he explains. 'With dancing you're always giving, giving, giving to audiences. With choreography, you get something back.'

Tao's festival piece is called 'Opposition', a duet with Wang Hao; however as head of his own studio, he predicts a lifetime of development. 'If you find something too quickly, you won't keep growing,' he explains. His quest, however, does not include a search for his own style. 'I don't want to find a single method, where people can say 'that's Tao Ye's,' he says. 'I want to always find something new, something different.' Thanks to the booking Dance Festival, now Beijing audiences have the same chance.

The booking Dance Festival is on at the Chaoyang Cultural Centre's Nine Theatres from August 13 to 16. For information on Chaoyang outdoor shows, call 159 1032 2454. See listings for details.