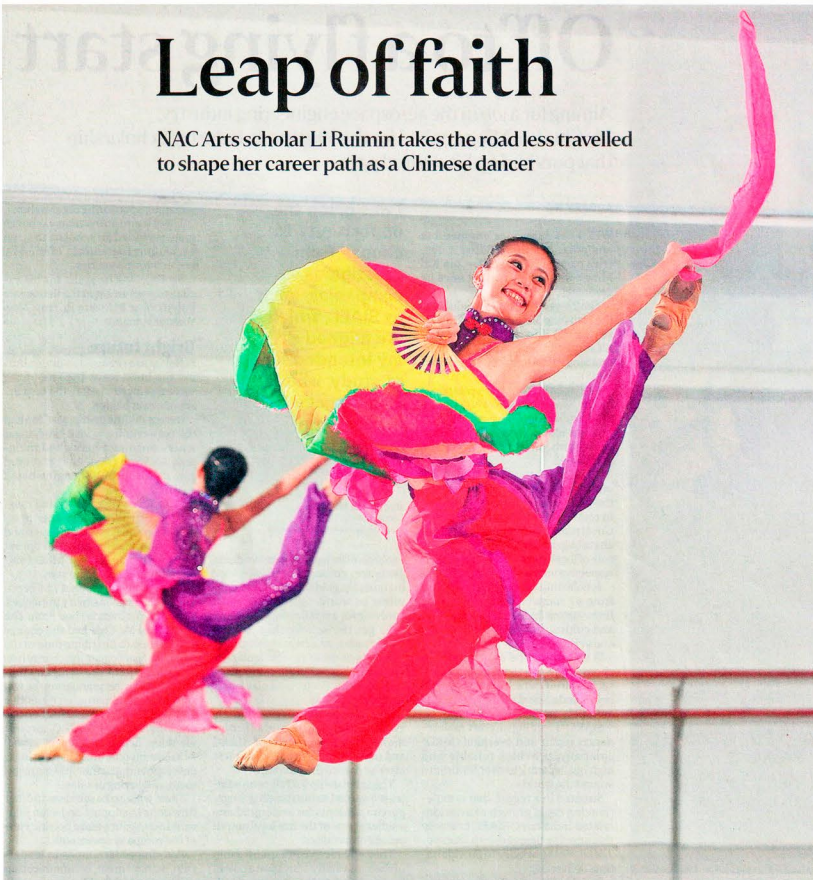


SPECIAL SCHOLARSHIPS & TOP UNIVERSITIES FAIR 2015

Leap of faith

NAC Arts scholar Li Ruimin takes the road less travelled to shape her career path as a Chinese dancer



During Ms Li's dance journey, she had to overcome a late start, parental objection and injuries that threatened her career. PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG

JAMIE EE WEN WEI

A CAREER as a Chinese dancer may seem impractical to most Singaporeans.

But when she was 17, Ms Li Ruimin chose to embrace her passion rather than practicality — and has not looked back since.

Now at 24, she is a rising star in the local dance scene, dancing full-time with the Singapore Hokkien Huay Kuan Dance Theatre (SHHKDT) and snagging lead roles in its productions.

A recipient of the National Arts Council (NAC) Arts Scholarship (Overseas), the versatile dancer has also performed in prestigious overseas productions such as No Sacre under star choreographer Ismael Ivo in Vienna and Brazil; and the Asia Dance Project by the Cultural Exchange Agency of Asian Culture Complex and cooperated by the Korea National Contemporary Dance Company.

Despite her achievements, her dance journey was not a walk in the park. Along the way, she had to overcome a late start, parental objection and injuries that threatened her career.

"I've learnt to think independently and to be a stronger person throughout all the achievements and setbacks," she says.

"Dance is not a bed of roses, but it's not a bed of thorns either."

A late start to dance

Unlike most professional Chinese dancers, Ms Li did not enrol in a dance academy at a young age.

Chinese dance was her co-curricular activity in school. In secondary school, she met an inspiring senior and a dance instructor who made her believe she could be a professional despite her late start.

"At that point, I was completely aware that this was an impractical path in Singapore," she recalls.

"But I knew I wouldn't regret my decision, so I went ahead with all the preparations."

After completing her O levels and convincing her parents of her decision, she went for auditions at the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts — a leading performing arts school in Asia — and won a spot to study Chinese dance there.

She spent the next five years pursuing a two-year Diploma in Performing Arts and a three-year Bachelor of Fine Arts (Honours) in Dance.

She says her experience studying in the school was "amazing".

"The school has superb facilities and really good teachers. Every year in the course served a different purpose in shaping me as an artist," she says.

The programme also exposed her to other genres of dance like contemporary and ballet, which trained her to be versatile and helped her to understand her body better.

As a testament to her dance abilities, she was awarded two scholarships from the school — the William Au Arts Education Scholarship and the Chinese Dance Faculty Scholarship — in her second year for showing great potential and progress.

Living out her dream

In the first year of her degree course, Ms Lee also applied for and won the NAC Arts Scholarship to finance her studies.

The scholarship covered the tuition fees for the remaining two years of her degree, as well as provided a monthly allowance and an international travel allowance.

It required her to serve two years in Singapore's arts and cultural sector within five years of her graduation. Besides financial support, the scholarship also provided her with opportunities to perform.

Through NAC's recommendation, she was selected to represent Singapore in the Asia Dance Project from 2013 to 2015.

Since joining SHHKDT as a full-time dancer two years ago, she has been busy training and performing with the company, as well as doing choreography work, conducting workshops and teaching its Children's Performing Troupe.

She is grateful for the opportunity to pursue her dreams, and hopes to help more people understand and appreciate the beauty of Chinese dance.

She advises those who wish to follow her footsteps to keep an open mind about their career.

"There's usually no right or wrong, just different ways of doing things."

"Take charge of your own learning, persevere and have faith," she says.