

Dancer to perform, teach exercises in martial arts

By ANN KELLY
Of the Emerald

During the next few weeks, workshops and performances on the ancient martial art of Tai Chi Ch'aun will be given by Virginia Wagner.

As a professional dancer, Wagner studied with leading teachers in New York City and in the past eight years has studied Tai Chi Ch'aun.

Believed to have originated with the Taoist monks as a form of meditation in exercise, Tai Chi Ch'aun is now taught as a form of passive self-defense. It is important as a meditation in movement, which increases physical and mental well-being, according to Wagner.

"Tai Chi Ch'aun is an exercise for health, a slow rhythmic dance, which involves a suspended spine, from the crown of the head, and a rooting of the feet in the ground," she says.

Many of the thoughts of the Chinese philosopher Lao-Tzu are manifested in the movement technique.

"Two of Lao-Tzu's principles are polarization and cyclicity," Wagner explains. "The main principle is yielding: be like the water, never directly confront. The movement is cyclical; one movement flows into the other. There is interchange and the continual supportiveness of the Ying and Yang, which are the soft and hard, the dark and light, the insubstantial and the substantial."

She describes Tai Chi Ch'aun as a healthful slow rhythmic dance and a passive, defensive martial art.

"It develops strong legs and a light upper torso," she says. "The back supports the body and the arms and legs move freely from the torso. It is based on the balance that man is the link between heaven and earth. Tai Chi Ch'aun is like planting a seed and you wait for it to come up."

Tai Chi corrects posture and alleviates kinesthetic disruption by renewing the true balance of the body, she adds.

For eight years, Wagner studied under the Yang school of Tai Chi Ch'aun. Her Master for five years was Abraham Liu, whom she studied with in Los Angeles. She also studied with Marshall Ho'o, Kai-Ying Tung, Wen-Shan Huang, John Yalanezian and Ben Lo.

While dancing she worked under leading New York teachers and directors, including Doris Humphrey, Martha Graham, Jose Limon, Margaret Craske and Anthony Tudor. She also studied the Alexander Technique with Judith Leibowitz for six years in New York City and taught this system of balance and psycho-physical integration during the past 15 years.

Wagner uses principles of the Alexander method in her instruction of Tai Chi, particularly the system of touch on the part of the teacher and thought processes of both teacher and student. Both techniques involve the release of skeletal muscles to effect natural postural reflex.

Wagner conducted her own school of dance technique in Teacher's College, Columbia University and has taught at the YMHA in New York, in Taos, Los Alamos and at the Santa Fe Opera. She had a school in Santa Fe, New Mexico at The Museum of Fine Arts.

Wagner's workshops will be held from 7 to 8:30 a.m. Monday through Friday and possibly the following week. Depending upon the weather, the workshops will be held at either the Open Gallery, 445 High St. or at Spencer's Butte Park.

The cost per workshop is \$4. Two more workshops are set for Saturday. One will be from 9 to 11:30 a.m. and the other from 1 to 3:30 p.m. Cost for each workshop is \$20 each or \$35 for both.

Wagner will perform and demonstrate movements of combat and sword Friday, and again Wednesday July 12. Both performances will begin at 8 p.m., with admission charge of \$2.50. Call the Open Gallery, 345-4857 for further information.

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