

The Oregonian

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 19, 2006

# KUNG FU AMBASSADOR

Shi Xiao Yun of the Shaolin Kung Fu Performance Troupe brings martial mastery to a Portland school



Shi Xiao Yun gets help with his English from Amy Sandberg (seated left) and, in back (from left), Kyle Armstrong, Melanna Oeser, Elizabeth Kisch and Sydney Bright, all 10.

By KATY MULDOON  
THE OREGONIAN

**T**he boy stood out. Surrounded by playground banter and laughter, he pursed his lips and stared straight ahead. He stepped forward with his left foot as his right kicked a graceful arc high above his head. He leaped. He spun. He lunged across the schoolyard blacktop, and as he did the boy's yellow silk robe and trousers bloomed like a sunflower amid the denim jeans and cotton T-shirts of his newfound classmates.

At 13, Shi Xiao Yun is the youngest member of the Shaolin Kung Fu Performance Troupe touring the United States. With a monthlong layover in Portland before performing at Benson High School on Oct. 1, Shi is enjoying a rare exchange: For an hour before classes begin each morning he helps a colleague teach Shaolin kung fu to fifth graders at The International School in downtown Portland. For the remainder of each school day, he studies, eats and plays with the pupils whose daily routine is a far cry from his own in central China's Songshan Shaolin Monastery, where he lives.

The nonprofit Portland Art & Cultural Center and Please see **KUNG FU**, Page E4

## Performance of kung fu and chi kung

**What:** The Chinese Shaolin Kung Fu Performance Troupe from the Songshan Shaolin Monastery in China will perform kung fu and demonstrate chi kung, an ancient Chinese art involving cultivating an individual's energy.

**When:** 5 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 1

**Where:** Benson High School, 546 N.E. 12th Ave.

**Tickets:** \$18-\$48 through Ticketmaster, or call 503-709-1728

**Details:**  
[www.shaolinkungfuspectacular.com](http://www.shaolinkungfuspectacular.com)

## Kung fu: Chinese student loves clean air, cheesy pizza

the Portland Chinese Times newspaper are sponsoring the troupe's visit, designed to promote Chinese art, culture and the kung fu form practiced by the Shaolin.

The order dates to about A.D. 540, and the sect's philosophy incorporates Buddhist roots with Taoist principles. For centuries the Shaolin have practiced a fluid style of kung fu representing the movements of such animals as the tiger, crane and praying mantis; they believe that those who study kung fu learn to understand violence so that they can avoid conflict.

So, last week, as morning rush-hour traffic rumbled past The International School's modest playground, a dozen children followed along as Shi and his colleague, Shi Heng Shuang, demonstrated the simple forms and movements they learned as young boys in China.

Two-by-two, side-by-side, the children aimed to move as Shi Xiao Yun did: Left feet stepped out. Right feet swung high. Hands slapped crisply together as the boys and girls traveled across a playground colored by chalked-in foursquare and hopscotch courts.

The 355-pupil school founded in 1990 began offering a Chinese-immersion track 10 years ago, adding to its Spanish and Japanese tracks. Initially, many of those in the Chinese-immersion track were children adopted from China, but the program increasingly attracts U.S.-born pupils of varying races,

said Linda Bonder, the school's marketing director.

They spend their school days studying an American curriculum and Chinese culture, all delivered in Mandarin. The chance to study Shaolin kung fu, as so many schoolchildren do in China, fit perfectly.

As 10-year-old Katie Stern-Stillinger of Milwaukie put it: "It's cool to learn new stuff... and it's nice to have people who are professionals to teach it."

Back home at the Shaolin temple where he lives, Shi Xiao Yun's days begin at 5 a.m. and move directly into 90 minutes of intensive stretching, he said through his new International School classmates, who served as interpreters during an interview. After a rice-cereal breakfast and a 30-minute rest, he

practices kung fu for three hours. He rests another 30 minutes after a lunch of noodles and vegetables, then spends a few more hours practicing kung fu. Finally, at 4:30 p.m., Shi's school day begins. Sundays are his only day off.

When asked his favorite subject, he said through his interpreters that what he most likes is to play with his friends.

Traveling in the States, he's learned that Portland's air looks and smells far cleaner than that of Henan Province, where he lives. He's learned, too, about the cheesy joys of pizza.

In teacher Yafei Liu's fifth-grade classroom, where a brilliantly painted dragon mask appears to watch from one corner and colorful paper parasols lean in another, the American students were learn-

ing last week, too. As they sat cross-legged on the floor reciting classical Chinese poem, they mimicked the subtleties of Shi's so-voiced inflection.

"He has the right accent," said year-old Collin Yu of Lake Osweg

With the morning's lesson finished, the class spilled onto the playground at recess. A soccer game ensued on a small bark-ch

With his ropey arms and shaven head, wearing his yellow silk robe and trousers, Shi, of course, stood out. But then the ball hurtled his way.

Shi drew back his foot and kicked.

He fit right in.

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Shi Xiao Yun can kick his foot up above his head in a morning workout with the Shaolin troupe masters and students at the International School — who are not as limber.