

Meet Professor Wilcox -A hobby turned avocation



Hui Wilcox in "Shyamali," Ananya Dance Theater. Photo courtesy Ananya Dance Theater. Photo Credit: V. Paul Virtucio.

As it happened, a rising professor of dance, Ananya Chatterjea, sat on Hui's Ph.D. committee. "In 2004, Ananya sent out an email, calling for women of color who wanted to move." Hui responded. She performed on stage with two dozen other dancers in June 2005, just 6 weeks before giving birth to Lynn. "It was such a tight group, I didn't want to leave," Hui said. Eventually that group became Ananya Dance Theater. As Hui's involvement with Ananya Dance Theater deepened, dance shifted from hobby to profession. Even so, Hui continued to interact with CAAM CDT as an occasional performer, dance teacher, master of ceremonies, and — of course — dance mom.

Hui's own dance career has only strengthened her connection to her girls and their ever-growing love of dance at CAAM CDT. "It becomes who they are. It's great to see how they learn and how they grow," she said. "We appreciate each other's strengths. We have learned that beautiful and powerful dance can take on different forms. . . . The older they get the more they appreciate that their mama can also dance and can relate to some of their struggles."

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CAAM Chinese Dance Theater thinks of itself as a family, and for the Wilcoxes of North St. Paul, that's literally so.

Sisters Claire and Lynn have attended CAAM Chinese Dance Theater since they were very young. The family's involvement with CAAM CDT began with their mother, Hui Wilcox, who started dance classes shortly after she came to Minnesota to work on her doctorate in sociology. "I learned about CAAM CDT from my tennis partner," says Hui. "She showed me some of her dance moves and said dancing was fun. Growing up in China, I always wanted to dance, but I never had any opportunity. The teachers picked [the students] who did the dances — usually [the ones chosen] had to be skinny. I didn't have the 'right' body type, so I was never picked."

When Hui first started dancing at CAAM CDT, "I was really stiff, 'like an athlete,' but Shen Laoshi [CAAM CDT's first artistic director] believed in me." The school's dance philosophy was a revelation to Hui: "Shen Laoshi had an amazing idea that everyone — even grown-ups — can dance," she said. "She believed I could dance, and that was really important. She had faith." Hui loved dancing, and the experience changed her life — so much so that she made dance the center of her doctoral work. In 2004, she completed her dissertation, "Dancing the Tales of China: Ethnic Construction through Chinese Dance." Little did Hui know that Chinese dance would also be a steppingstone to a whole new world of dance.



Hui Wilcox with her daughters Claire and Lynn. PC: The Wilcox family