Experience the fine arts of Asia at festival

BY KATI SCHARDL • DEMOCRAT STAFF WRITER • SEPTEMBER 26, 2008

Eastern cultures will mingle in a Western melting pot when the Asian Coalition of Tallahassee hosts Experience Asia 2008 on Saturday right in the heart of downtown Tallahassee.

Since the first Experience Asia festival in 2005, organizers have watched the event expand in scope and popularity until it has become one of the cultural harbingers of fall in Tallahassee, according to Thayumanasamy Somasundaram, director of media relations for ACT. Somasundaram said that around 2,000 people attended the first fest and more than 10,000 thronged the Downtown Chain of Parks for the 2007 event. Even more are expected to sample the food, crafts and culture of coalition member groups on Saturday.

"It's a colorful and beautiful one-day event where you get people from 10 to 15 different countries who put on their best performances," Somasundaram said. "It's good for the community."

ACT was formed in late 2004 and is an umbrella organization for a variety of Asian and non-Asian groups, such as the Big Bend Filipino-American Association, the India Association of Tallahassee, Cornerstone Learning Community, the FSU Foundation, Tallahassee Families with Asian Children and the World Economic Forum.

The organization is open to anyone who wants to learn more about Asian cultures, according to its Web site at www.asiantlh.org. It also helps Asians bridge the gap between their home cultures and that of mainstream America without losing their identity. ACT often helps Asians learn more about other Asian cultures, as well, according to Somasundaram, a research scientist in molecular biophysics at FSU.

"Most of my life I had read about Pakistan and Bangladesh, but I didn't meet any Pakistani people until I moved to the U.S.," said Somasundaram, who is from Tamil Nadu (formerly Madras), the southernmost state in India. "It is a mind-opening thing to experience other cultures. It can give you first-hand knowledge of the people and their countries."

This year's festival features even more mind-expanding opportunities in the form of music, dance, martial-arts demonstrations, food and crafts. Here's a look at the lineup:

Main Stage In Bloxham Park

10 a.m. — Dragon entrance/Chinese pipa player Jiahui Chen.

10:30 a.m. — TCC Dance Company

10:45 a.m. — Lilia Shimabukoru.

11 a.m. — Kinaesthetics and Zumba demonstration by Kay Picart.

11:30 a.m. — Spirit Blessing Dance by members of the Thai community.

11:45 a.m. — World Ballet.

Noon — Grand opening ceremony.

12:30 p.m. — Performances by members of the Indian community.

1 p.m. — Performances by members of the Japanese community.

Experience Asia is a one-day banquet of music, dance, martial-arts demonstrations, food and more in downtown Tallahassee. (NICK BALDWIN/Special to the Democrat)

Colorful costumes and masks brighten Experience Asia, which has a grand opening ceremony at noon Saturday. (NICK BALDWIN/Special Democrat)

IF YOU GO
What: Experience Asia 2008
When: 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturday
Where: Bloxham and Lewis parks in downtown Tallahassee
Cost: No admission charge
Contact: Visit www.asiantlh.org
Tallahassee.com: Join our online Asian community at Tallahassee.com fora.

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1:30 p.m. — Big Bend Filipino-America Association folk dance group.

2 p.m. — Performances by members of the Korean community.

2:30 p.m. — Pipa player Liu Sha Zhou.

3 p.m. — FSU's Indak Pilipino group.

3:30 p.m. — Firestorm/Kahu Ahi.

4 p.m. — FSU Belly Dancers.

4:30 p.m. — Vulpes Vulpes.

**Demonstration Stage In Lewis Park**

10 a.m. — Mau'o'o'li' Dancers.

11 a.m. — Arnis De Mano/Kali (Filipino martial arts).

11:30 a.m. — Pipa player Liu Sha Zhou.

12:30 p.m. — Chinese Martial Arts.

1 p.m. — Tenshin Shoden Shurite Society.

1:30 p.m. — TCC Dance Company.

1:45 p.m. — World Ballet.

2:05 p.m. — Yoga demonstration by Manju Kundra and Surekha Kishore.

2:35 p.m. — Trousdell Gymnastics Center Dance Team.

3:05 p.m. — Rain Dance by members of the Thai community.

3:30 p.m. — Naginata Martial Arts.

4 p.m. — Caribbean Revelers.

4:30 p.m. — Pink Shoelaces.

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