

December 3, 1975

POOL REPORT - Mrs. Ford's Visit to Peking Ballet School

The highpoint of Mrs. Ford's visit to the Dance School of the Central May Seventh College of Arts was when she threw off her shoes and joined a group of rehearsing students.

She began with two practice run-throughs and then joined in a full dance with eight girls, all about 13 years old, in blue knit warm-up suits. Mrs. Ford's training with Martha Graham showed through and she was able to ape the other dancers with a minimum of gaffes. After she finished she courtesied to the group -- as she had to two other trainee groups -- and then was told by Madame Wang Man Tien, a leading member of the Culture Ministry, "You had some basic training. It's very quick for you to learn."

"Just so they don't send it back to the United States," Mrs. Ford replied, "it will ruin my reputation."

Mrs. Wang advised Mrs. Ford that if she should take the lead in teaching dancing in the States. Mrs. George Bush, wife of the Chief of the U. S. Liaison Office, Peking, interjected, "And there will be dancing in the streets." Mrs. Ford again said she hoped her performance would not be seen in the States and added, "If Martha sees it, she'll throw me out."

As she left the school, Mrs. Wang solicited her criticism. Mrs. Ford replied that she had none at all, "I think they do excellently."

Escorted by Mrs. Wang and Mrs. Hsiao Meng, the responsible member of the school, Mrs. Ford visited six separate rehearsal rooms and, sitting before floor-to-ceiling mirrors, witnessed male and female students from 11 to 13 years old in folk, traditional and acrobatic dancing. In the rehearsal rooms, there were no political overtones to the dancing. However, in a formal presentation at the end, there was a sequence from the "Red Detachment of Women," the revolutionary ballet that President Nixon witnessed here in 1972. The high point of the formal performance was a children's opera where an avaricious, old bear stole honey from a band of diligent bees and was driven away by stings in his posterior.

There are 238 students in the school and more than 200 staff and teachers.

As she went down the hall, Mrs. Ford passed a wall display of student enunciations of the book "The Water Margin," the current object of discussion and analysis among the political cadres.

In explaining to Mrs. Ford the purposes of the school, Mrs. Hsiao cited a number of sayings of Chairman Mao, such as, "Make the past serve the present," and then surprised some of the Americans present by saying, "Let 100 flowers blossom," the slogan of Chairman Mao's short lived 1957 campaign to stimulate greater freedom and expression among intellectuals.

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