

Spartans plan a blazing show to celebrate Chinese ties



Kim Kozlowski, The Detroit News 5:27 p.m. EST November 13, 2015

East Lansing — When the [Spartan Marching Band](http://spartanband.net/) (<http://spartanband.net/>) performs at the halftime show during the Michigan State University football game on Saturday, members are going to be on fire.

Smoke — along with a dragon, five musical selections and Chinese instruments — will be part of one of the biggest, most complex shows that has ever been performed at Spartan Stadium. Touted to be full of theatrics, art and emotion, the show is a nod to MSU's Chinese students — the university's largest group of international students, which has grown almost tenfold over the past decade to nearly 5,000 on campus.

The elaborate production, called "The Art of the March: Cues from Sun Tzu's 'The Art of War.'" (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Art_of_War) was designed by artist [Jennifer Wen Ma](http://www.littlemeat.net/) (<http://www.littlemeat.net/>), who was part of the core creative team that designed the elaborate opening and closing ceremonies of the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

The 12-minute show will include 600 performers, lights and musical selections, including the theme song from the film "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon."

Trumpeter James Ngugen looks forward to performing for the crowd at Spartan Stadium, which will include his father, who grew up singing "Jasmine Flower" — a popular Chinese folk song that will be part of the show.

But he says the show has broader implications for spectators, and for Michigan State.

"It develops an international relationship that other people can see," said Ngugen, a sophomore from Lansing. "When you hear a marching band, you don't think of international relationships. It will show what other countries have to offer, and we're a marching band that is not just about songs. We're focusing on everyone on campus."

The performance will be held when the Spartans (8-1) take on the Maryland Terrapins (2-7) at noon Saturday.



The Spartan Marching Band is presenting an extravagant halftime show during Saturday's football game against Maryland. Dale G. Young

It is part of MSU's 18 months of programming that began last year to promote a better understanding of Chinese culture and people.

The show also marks the 10th anniversary of the MSU China Initiative, launched by President Lou Anna Simon, that spawned an influx of students from the world's most populous country. Chinese students now account for almost 10 percent of MSU's enrollment of 48,000.

The show has more props and more collaborating university departments and agencies — 14 in all — than ever before, said John Madden, director of the Spartan Marching Band. Partners range from MSU's Asian Studies Center to the College of Arts and Letters.

It's incidental that Madden recently was a guest conductor of a high school honor band in Shanghai, which he called an eye-opening global experience.

“It will show that there are many ways in which a university can embrace its community,” Madden said, “and the collaborative, intercultural life we live in a university community like Michigan State is just a reflection of how the world is, how the world is becoming.”

Production expenses for the halftime show total nearly \$50,000, which includes Chinese percussion instrument rental, props, visual effects, flags, card stunt art, and assorted supplies.

Additionally, Wen Ma will be given an honorarium of \$10,000 for her creative services, lectures and other campus events. Travel expenses associated with her three visits to campus also are being covered by MSU, at a total cost of about \$5,000, said James Forger, dean of the MSU College of Music.

Wen Ma said she found inspiration for the show in the cross-section of ancient, contemporary history, East and West culture, the artistry of China and sportsmanship of the marching band and football.

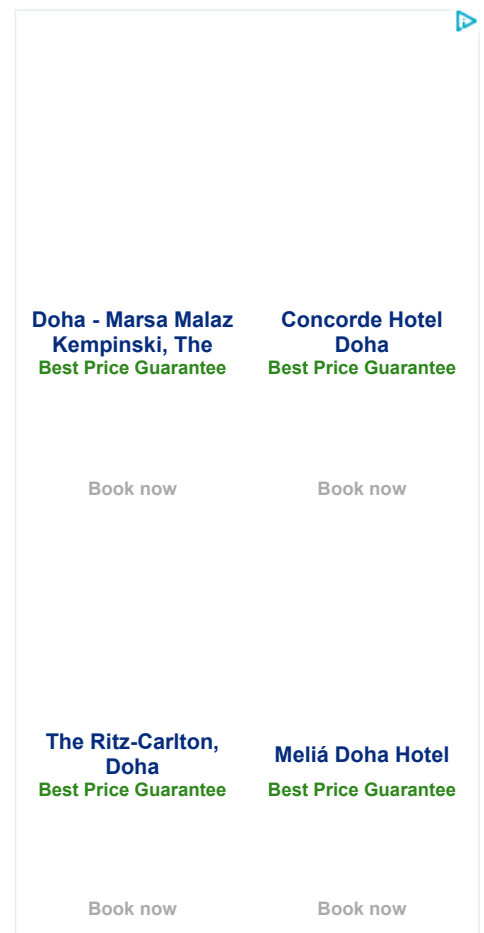
“The ‘Art of War’ is about the tactic to win,” Wen Ma said. “It’s about conflict resolution and strategy.”

Meredith Wright, a junior who’s a member of the Big Ten Flags corps, is excited about performing during the special halftime show, noting that is the biggest production she’s ever been part of at MSU.

“It’s going to be really cool to watch,” Wright said, “and really cool for the students, especially the Chinese students.”

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