

SCHOOL



Michael Kelley

Schoolchildren line up for matinee performance of Chinese acrobats

Cain, Hibbard gives back to the community by sponsoring events that stress education

600 students are treated to Chinese acrobats' matinee at Mahaiwe

By Michael Kelley

GREAT BARRINGTON—More than 600 school-aged children packed the Mahaiwe Performing Arts Center and ohhed and ahhed with thunderous applause as the Shangri-La Chinese Acrobats performed last week during a special matinee performance as part of the theater's continuing educational programming.

"One of our most important commitments to the community is to offer these thrilling performance experiences for our students," said Beryl Jolly, executive director of the Mahaiwe.

Cain, Hibbard and Myers, a sponsor of the matinee performance, is similarly committed to providing such opportunities to the community's youngest residents.

"We have made education the focus of our giving back to the community," said Lucy Prashker, the managing partner with the firm.

Students from Muddy Brook Regional Elementary School, Sunshine Preschool at Berkshire South Regional Community Center, Great Barrington Rudolf Steiner School, Mountain Road School in New Lebanon, New York and the entire 439 student body of Monument Valley Regional Middle School were captivated by a series of acrobatic, tumbling, juggling and contortionist routines during the one-hour show.

Each of the numerous rou-

tines and stunts received thunderous applause from the crowd but no stunt was more well received than when a female performer balanced herself on a tower of white wooden chairs built upon four green champagne bottles. The routine, which took place a mere five feet from the front row of the theater floor, caused those in the first few rows to be glued to the back of their seats gasping at the feat and those in the balcony leaning in the seats trying to get a better look.

"The enthusiasm of the kids was just infectious and was just as exciting as the acrobats," Prashker said.

"It is great to see the Mahaiwe packed with our community's kids," she added. "I am on the board of the Mahaiwe and go to see a lot of the shows. There are none more fun to see than those packed with our community's kids."

Jolly said the Mahaiwe wants not only continue the educational series, but expand it to create more of an opportunity to have discussions about the performance in the classroom as well.

"We are looking to expand opportunities," she said. "Every school got an educational programming study guide to go along with the performance so that there can be a more in-depth conversation in the classroom after the show."

A show such as the Shangri-La Chinese Acrobats, Jolly said, opens an op-

portunity to discuss topics such as China and Chinese history, the art of acrobatics and live performance, or even the value of hard work and dedication.

Jolly said in the future she would like to see if there could be an opportunity for the performers to stay after for a question and answer session with the students, or have some sort of an appearance in the schools, before or after the performance.

Prashker said Cain, Hibbard and Myers will continue to support the Mahaiwe's education offerings.

"We are going to continue to partner with the Mahaiwe into 2010 and continue to support their educational efforts," she said.

The Mahaiwe launched the educational programming series in April with a live puppeted performance of *Stellaluna*, a children's picture book about a female fruit bat. Jolly said performances continue to be scheduled in 2010 and work begins on 2011 as well.

The next program in the education series will be a performance of the Ailey II dance troupe on March 21.

"I hope many of the children would have been to the theater before with their families, but for those whom this is a new experience for, we really want to go out of our way to make it as fun and welcoming as possible," Jolly said of the Mahaiwe's education series.