Cultures meet and greet

By Jean Smith
Berkshire Eagle Staff

LENON — Eastnear West yesterday at Berkshire Country Day School.

Members of the H.T. Chen and Dancers company performed at the school in a week's celebration to welcome eight Chinese exchange students to their community.

The 11th-graders have come here — along with two faculty members, Yang Jinfeng and Wei Guo — from Chengdu Experimental Foreign Language School to experience life, culture and education in the United States.

In March, BCD will send 12 students to Chengdu.

The dance performances were part of H.T. Chen's two-week intensive, which also includes trips to Boston, New York, Philadelphia and Washington.

"It was a nice surprise to see this here," said Jinfeng of the welcoming performance. "It was very professional."

Yesterday's multidisciplinary program, "Heart of the Lion," incorporated dance, music, fine stage craft and design. A study guide of vocabulary, geography, history and mythology relating to the performance was also provided by the dancers.

According to Dina Dong, associate director of the company, the program is meant not only to give students a better understanding of Chinese dance, but also to offer insights about the country.

"Students can cross culture barriers very quickly," she said.

The Chengdu exchange students have been taking classes.

Chinese students come to learn at BCD

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at BCD's Worthy campus and will attend other local schools, including Pittsfield High School. They will take field trips to Stockbridge, Great Barrington and Williamstown.

In addition, the students are looking forward to visiting colleges in the region and getting horseback riding and shopping.

Earlier in the week, they were officially welcomed to Berkshire Country by Pittsfield Mayor James M. Roberto and the Pittsfield City Council at the council meeting Tuesday night.

Before arriving in the Berkshires, the students spent a night in New York City. Xian Cui, who has adopted the American name of "Eric" during his visit, said the city was beautiful, but cold.

Li Qumin, also known as Hu, said that she had expected Lenon to also have tall buildings and skyscrapers.

"But it has a more beautiful landscape ... and fresh air," interjected Wang "Artice" Wong.

Yang "Forrest" Jinfeng said that students studying different cultures and languages often adapt a name similar to that culture to "create a relationship [between the person] and language."

Carrie Dockery Perkins, assistant head of the secondary school, said she has enjoyed the opportunity to welcome the students into the community. Although BCD has done several international exchange programs, this is the school's first time working with China.

The school's curriculum is carefully designed to expose students to other cultures, she said. Ninth-graders are required to take a world civilizations course and 11th-graders take an Asian studies course.

Dockery said the music program, sponsored by the school's Parents Association, was fortunate in timing.

"It puts students in a global setting," she said.

And BCD students seem to understand the spirit of the program.

"Our generation is part of a big international group (right now)," said BCD senior Rachel Hyman. "We're not just Americans. We're part of the world community."

Dino Salafia, a member of H.T. Chen and Dancers from New York City, dances with a ham- bok lion mask during a performance at Berkshire Country Day School yesterday. The show was part of a celebration that welcomed Chinese exchange students to the school. Page B1.