

# 'Drushyanjalee' - A brave and moving performance

by Tissa Devendra

This year, the University of Colombo took a bold and unprecedented step towards providing equal academic opportunities and residential facilities to a 'cohort' of visually handicapped undergrads. 11 young women and 15 young men have been accommo-

dated at the former 'Aquinas' at Havelock Road and at Kithyakara in Maradana. The initiative was taken by Vice Chancellor, Kshanika Hirimburegama, ably assisted by Professor Amal Jayawardena, Dr. Nayana Melegoda, Dr. Premakumara de Silva and many others. The University Alumni Association President, Mrs. Ramani Amarasuriya, backed this ini-

tiative by inspiring a group of its members to be 'guides, philosophers and friends' to these undergrads, young men and women from distant villages, now living in Colombo for the first time and experiencing the vagaries of University life. I believe that good relationships have been established in most cases. These undergraduates

arranged for a professional orchestra for musical backing, which had its own sightless vocalist. Most of the items were songs, generally of good standard. A violin solo too was performed. The singers were drawn from a wider network which showcased the talent of visually handicapped undergraduates and staff from sister universities as well. A fine gesture of inter-university solidarity. There was a lovely tea-plucker's dance to the lilting music of Chitra Somapala's "Udarata kandukara." The show ended with a dramatic skit which made a light-hearted plea for "normal" people to be more understanding of their visually handicapped brethren. It was a grand and heart-warming performance

which had these students presenting tokens of appreciation and gratitude to the staff members who had guided their first faltering steps into University life. A concluding thought, in view of the fine, though untrained, voices we heard may I suggest to the authorities to persuade reputed musicians to volunteer to weld these singers and musicians into a fine choir and orchestra.



**Xiao Changyan**  
China Daily/ANN

Photography in China is finally getting flashy. While Chinese contemporary art has been making waves in recent years at international museum exhibits and auction houses, paintings and sculptures have most often stolen the limelight.

Now a new focus in Chinese art is drawing praise from critics and collectors alike — photography.

"Photography is now muscling into the sacred territory once reserved for paintings and sculptures, and becoming the new landmark in the art development," says Dong Mengyang, CEO of Art Beijing.

For the past three years, Art Beijing has organized a grand exhibition of Chinese contemporary art, with cooperation from galleries around the world.

This year, for the first time, the celebrated annual art expo will feature a new component: Photo Beijing.

Both Art Beijing and Photo Beijing are open to the public this weekend, from September 6 to 9 at the Beijing Agricultural Exhibition Hall.

Of the 16 galleries participating in Photo Beijing, 10 are based in China.

Whether visitors are looking to appreciate art, glimpse the history of Beijing through old photographs, or cash in on the hot market for contemporary photography, a trip to the expo will offer much to stir the imagination.

Among the photos that win the hearts of collectors, quite a few are old photos, especially photos with historic value.

For instance, British photographer Thomas Child's six early



## Flash of inspiration

of visual art, that old attitude is quickly changing. "Photographers have been allowed now onto the same ladder as their fellow painters and sculptors," says Dong. (In 2006, Sotheby's achieved the highest-ever single-photograph sale price in history, selling Edward Steichen's "The Pond-Moonlight" for a record \$2,928,000.)

The value assigned to photographs, including those taken by top Chinese photographers, is steadily rising. In 2006, Zhang Huan's series of photographs entitled Family Tree drew high praise, and hefty bids, at Sotheby's "Contemporary Art Asia" auctions, held in New York.

Last year, Beijing hosted its first major photo auction, further boosting the field.

"I think photography is still greatly undervalued in the scheme of art," says Joshua Holdeman, international director of photographs at Christie's Auction House. "You can buy one of the icons of art history in the photography genre for the same price as a third-rate Renoir sketch."

But critics predict that this attitude is fast changing.

"Photographs worth collecting should be of special significance and be a record of history," says Xu Jianing, an official at Huachen Auctions.

pictures of the Summer Palace and Winter Palaces (taken in Beijing in the 1870s) have been fiercely chased by collectors. And Zhang Dayi's arresting image of the demolition of parts of the Forbidden City has been hailed as an icon of Chinese photography.

Although the romance of the old photographic image is certainly appealing, some contemporary photographers have been successful with a more conceptual approach.

Today a new generation of curators and collectors is discovering that international art lovers can relate to the subject matter depicted in photographs, whether the images show old Beijing or the fast-changing landscape of modern China.

While photography was once less celebrated than other forms

**Debra Messing** Saks Fifth Avenue in Beverly Hills threw a celebration to honor the premiere of Debra Messing's newest film *The Women* and the 10022 Shoe Salon. Messing and other partygoers kicked back on the comfy couches at the shoe haven to try new designer pairs.

**SHOE IN** Debra Messing cuddles with a sexy stiletto at a bash Wednesday for her film *The Women* at Saks Fifth Avenue in Beverly Hills. The actress costars with Eva Mendes, Ikeg Ryan and an ensemble cast full of — what else? — ladies in the remake of the 1939 comedy, which opens Sept. 12.

**Liv Tyler** Fresh off the plane from Italy, Valentino Garavani stepped out in New York City to celebrate the first event in the Samsung Imagination Icon Series *The Red Thread: The Inspiration and Passion of Valentino*. Valentino fans like Liv Tyler, Mary J. Blige and Rachel Zoe browsed displays of the designer's flawless designs and got a sneak peek at exclusive footage from the upcoming documentary *Valentino: The Last Emperor*, which recently received rave reviews at the Venice Film.

**Leighton Meester** (in Fendi) joined the boys of *Entourage* for the season five premiere at the Ziegfeld theater in New York City. Rather than feeling intimidated by the young guns on the show, Meester—who guest stars as a virginal pop star—admitted that it was her scene with music legend Tony Bennett that made her nervous. "I actually don't know how I got through it," the actress said. "I was pretty sure that I was going to sweat my palms off!"

**FAST FINGERS** Milley Cyrus, who's set to present at this year's MTV Video Music Awards, stays connected Sunday, texting on her Slidekick LX while out for frozen yogurt with her family in

**SO HAPPY TOGETHER** LeAnn Rimes and Dean Cain — who just celebrated their seven-year anniversary — stay connected after making an appearance on NBC's *Today* show in New York City on Wednesday. The singer recently spoke out about her struggle with psoriasis, an illness she's hidden for most of her life.

**COOL IT NOW** Leona Lewis chills out with an iced drink while out Tuesday in New York City. The British singer will join the star-studded lineup at the Stand Up to Cancer TV charity event on Sept. 5.