

BECOMING THROUGH *DANCE*



By: Micah Seiler

5 In the beginning, I'm five and the stage transforms into the mountains of Tibet. My crimson dress lined with snow-white fur swirls around my feet as I spin, carefully dancing around the rocks. My long sleeves flow like water as I catch them from the air to reveal my hands. I grasp the handle of the *dhyāngro*¹ and strike it with the mallet in time with the music. The motions are immersive, and for a moment, I think I feel the cold of the snow, not the heat of the spotlights. The drum beats echo as I complete my dance, and I'm transported back to the stage, out of breath and surrounded by my dance sisters.

¹ a traditional frame drum used by shamans, or *jhakri*, in Nepal and by Tibetan Buddhist musicians

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Next, I'm six and shrunk down, a paper doll come to life from a young girl's imagination. I twirl my red handkerchiefs, balancing them carefully on my pointer fingers as I mischievously weave through the dancers laid on the stage. My steps are light and trickster-like, inviting the imaginary girl to join in on our fun. By the end, the magic is gone, and we face the back of the stage, our fake doll faces staring back at the audience as we return to lifeless paper and playtime comes to an end.

7 At seven, my expression is stoic and my posture straight. I am no longer just myself, but the face of a thousand-armed buddha. My fingers are dripping in gold as I twirl them in a flower motion, in time with the rest of my arms, stemming from the line of dancers behind me. This time, the dance is intentional and united, as we all come together to convey the power and beauty of a single deity.

At nine, I'm a lotus flower, a symbol of purity, harmony, and beauty. My moves are tentative at first, reflecting the quieter, calmer introduction to the music. My fan opens to a semicircle partway through, the extra fabric flowing like water as I give a hint of the flower's true appearance. Eventually, the instrumental swells and I open the fan fully, finally revealing the full beauty of the lotus flower. The fabric ripples around me and I become part of nature, allowing myself to be flexible and wild. I'm no longer holding a fan, but the petals of a blossom, and my body is no longer human, but a stem and lily pad.

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At twelve, I'm Mulan, a warrior. My dance is strong and powerful, and I'm proud to represent such a legendary figure. I wield my sword as if it's the real thing, embodying the girl defending her country and her family. My steps are precise and solid, imitating the movements of battle as I spin and strike. I'm invigorated by each movement, and I feel the weight of this figure coursing through me as confidence. When the music ends, I'm breathless yet exhilarated.

18 Now, at eighteen, all the characters have remained a part of me and have helped form my cultural identity. Though the costumes, music, and performances have remained fond childhood memories, the spirit of those dances still lingers within me as one of the first ways I truly connected with my Asian heritage. Those moments on stage made me feel seen, like I was part of something larger than myself. Even now, when I watch traditional performances or hear the same melodies, I'm reminded of that younger version of me who danced not just for an audience, but to celebrate who she was becoming.

Micah Seiler is a freshman studying biology and music at CAS. She wrote this piece to reflect on and share an integral part of her childhood.

