

Ophthalmologist shares his passion for ballroom dancing

by Ellen Stodola EyeWorld Senior Staff Writer/Digital Editor



Dr. Wang continues to practice ballroom dancing weekly and competes regionally and nationally.



Dr. Wang plays the erhu (the Chinese violin) alongside Carlos Enrique on the guitar.

Dr. Wang discussed his childhood in China, how he became involved in the ophthalmic profession, and the evolution of his interest in ballroom dancing

During his time at Harvard and MIT, Ming Wang, MD, PhD, Wang Vision Cataract & LASIK Center, Nashville, Tennessee, was training to eventually become an ophthalmologist and also picked up ballroom dancing. He and a few fellow students started the Harvard and MIT Ballroom Dance Club, which he said ended up winning the U.S. National Collegiate Championships. "I learned ballroom dance, and it quickly became a life-long passion," he said.

Dr. Wang continues ballroom dancing today, practicing two nights a week for several hours each night. He also participates in regional and national championships. "Several years ago, I was a finalist in the United States National Championships in the Pro-Am International 10 Dance," he said.

Dr. Wang's story of how he became an ophthalmologist and an avid ballroom dancer begins in Hangzhou, China, where he was born in 1960. His family, which included himself, his parents, and his younger brother, was very poor; his parents' combined monthly income was only \$15.

"Education was everything—it was the only way to escape poverty," Dr. Wang said. "I remember my dad used to tell me, 'Ming, if you can master mathematics, physics, and chemistry, you can go anywhere in the world.'"

Despite striving for an education, in 1966, at the beginning of China's Cultural Revolution, all colleges and universities in the country were shut down and high school graduates were deported to the poorest part of the country. "Each of us would therefore be condemned to a life sentence of poverty and hard labor, earning only \$2–3 a

Source (all): Ming Wang, MD, PhD

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month for the rest of our lives," Dr. Wang said. Attempts to escape could lead to imprisonment.

When Dr. Wang was 14, he had graduated from the 9th grade with straight As, but faced a deportation order and was not allowed to continue his education.

"In a desperate attempt to avoid that destiny, I learned to play the erhu and practiced dancing, since those who could play music or dance well had the chance of getting into the communist song-and-dance propaganda troupe," he said. "Doing so allowed them to stay in the city and be exempt from being sent to labor camps."

Even though Dr. Wang's plan to avoid the deportation through music and dancing was discovered and stopped by the government, he was able to eventually make his way to the United States. He had only \$50 and a Chinese-English dictionary in his pocket, but "an American dream in [his] heart."

After coming to the United States, Dr. Wang got a PhD in laser physics and graduated with an MD from Harvard Medical School and MIT.

He completed his ophthalmology residency at Wills Eye Hospital in Philadelphia and a cornea and refractive fellowship at Bascom Palmer Eye Institute in Miami.

"I decided to pursue a career in ophthalmology because I thought that combining my training in laser physics and ophthalmology could make me a unique laser eye surgeon," he said. "In 1997, I took the job as the founding director of Vanderbilt Laser Sight Center, and in 2002, I started my own private practice." Dr. Wang also has numerous publications, several patents, and nine ophthalmic textbooks; he has worked as a panel consultant to the U.S. FDA Ophthalmic Device Panel. His primary research interests are the amniotic membrane contact lens, corneal topography for refrac-

tive corneal and lens surgeries, and surgical correction for presbyopia.

Dr. Wang has also found a way to incorporate his love for ballroom dancing into his philanthropic endeavors. The Wang Foundation for Sight Restoration, a 501(c)(3) non-profit charity, hosts the "Eye-Ball," a medical charity gala event, with proceeds supporting the foundation patients.

"I came up with the idea for the ball while trying to bring the sight restoration efforts out of the four walls of my medical clinic and into the forefront of society's awareness," he said. "The EyeBall is a unique event, merging music and medicine. To date the foundation has helped patients from more than 40 states in the U.S. and 55 countries, with all sight restoration surgeries performed free of charge."

Dr. Wang thinks that being involved in ballroom dancing has helped him become a better doctor. "Through learning ballroom

dancing, which requires connection and communication between two human beings as they have to move together synchronously, I have learned to feel what a patient feels, to listen to my patients, to communicate better with them, and to be more sensitive and aware of their suffering and needs," he said. "Ballroom dancing is not just about music, movement, and exercise, but more importantly, it is about one's awareness of and sensitivity to another human being—not only the person's physical position but also his/her emotional position." **EW**

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