

# Kung Fu for the masses

## Sifu Bernard reveals how it's all in the teaching

by Michelle Chow

Respect your elders. That's the first rule on a list of appropriate conduct at Lorne Bernard's Shaolin White Crane Kung Fu Academy, one of the larger Kung Fu schools in the city.

Students there learn to manipulate wooden staffs and the Quan Dow fork, named after the god of war, General Quan. During any given class, one student might practice their straight sword manipulation in front of a mirror in the back of the room, while others fight wooden dolls or practice their punches on bean bags mounted on pillars.

Because the Academy is offering them a special rate of \$40 per month, Concordia students will not need to spend an arm and a leg to learn this ancient form of self-defense.

"I'd rather have students than bikers coming in," Bernard explained. "And Concordia just doesn't have the facilities to house all students who want to learn Kung Fu."

Students at the Academy can rest assured they're in good hands. Bernard —

or Sifu Bernard, as his students call him — has been teaching there since 1989, and has been practicing the art for 16 years.

Bernard learned the virtues and disciplines of the art from his teachers, Kung Fu Master Augustine Ngu, White Crane Grandmaster Lee Kiang Kay, and Kay's son Lee Joo Chian.

"Personal attention to students is very important," Bernard said, "or else teaching just isn't good."

Bernard and his six Academy instructors pride themselves on good teaching. At the Academy, Bernard teaches three different types of Kung Fu: White Crane, Northern Shaolin and Wing Chun.

White Crane Kung Fu is Bernard's specialty and, by far, the most popular form taught at the Academy.

The 300-year-old form comes from southern Asia, where white cranes and other birds related to storks are common. Before arriving in Montreal in 1977, it was virtually unheard of in North America.

White Crane Kung Fu was invented by a small woman named Fung Xing Yan,

who became a Master by defeating male challengers who thought they could



Lorne Bernard (left) in friendly combat

strike her down.

However, there are other interpretations of this form's origin. These include

a legend of an old man who mimicked the evasive and pecking motions of a stork to defend himself against two armed robbers.

According to Bernard, the main difference between the various forms of Kung Fu are the movements. He said White Crane uses a greater variety of techniques and compact movements, while Northern Shaolin encompasses various northern Kung Fu systems which utilizes mainly large, sweeping motions.

The Wing Chun form, most popularized in western civilizations by Bruce Lee and James Lee in the late 1960s, is composed mostly of close range maneuvers and direct punches.

"You're never too young to learn," said Patrick Wong, a Dawson College student who has been practicing Kung Fu with Bernard for four years.

Earlier this year, Wong finished in first place at the Pan-American Wushu championship for weapons combat. The win, however, hasn't jaded him.

"I still need practice," he admitted. "There is always someone bigger and bet-

ter than you. If you want to get better, you have to strive for more than yourself."

Bernard emphasizes that his teachings are authentic, true to the way Kung Fu was taught 100 years ago.

"They're really misleading people by saying that they take the best of some discipline such as boxing and Kung Fu and mix it up to create a new fighting form," Bernard said of some other instructors. "It's not that simple."

Nevertheless, Bernard said he continues to find fulfillment in the challenges of teaching Kung Fu.

"To see someone come in with no confidence and see their confidence grow as they progress, that's really nice."

*Sifu Bernard's Academy is located in Suite 104 at 1455 Bleury between Ste. Catherine and de Maisonneuve. Registration is available by calling the Victoria Gym (848-3860). For more information, contact the Academy at 843-5177.*