

In Performance;

DANCE

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Byline: By Jennifer Dunning

By Jennifer Dunning

Body

Chinese Immigrants' Story,
From the Gold Rush On
Chen and Dancers
La Mama E.T.C.

It has been nearly two decades since H. T. Chen, a Shanghai-born dancer and choreographer who trained in Taiwan and the United States, founded a company in New York City, and his dances have grown sophisticated. Happily, Mr. Chen has lost little of his interest in the great themes and in his ancestry and in their expression in choreography that seamlessly blends Asian traditional and Western modern dance and culture.

In "Transparent Hinges" on Saturday night, Mr. Chen took on nothing less than the history of Chinese immigrants in America. The full-evening piece, set to a rich and intensely evocative score by Zhou Long, ranges from mid-19th-century immigrants' dreams of Gum San, the "Golden Mountain" of California, to mass detentions early in the 20th century and the Yellow Power movement of the 1960's.

All this is suggested, for the most part clearly, in the large, roiling picture painted by Mr. Chen as dancers group, spread and surge across the stage with something of the expressive power of Mary Wigman's group dances. Accents of traditional dress and customs, most of them embodied in the frail but steely figure of Dian Dong, are seamlessly woven in, bringing color and biting contrast to this dark landscape. There are several magical bits of stage business. And there is a message of hope at the end as families from Mr. Chen's Arts Gate Center school in Chinatown walk determinedly to the front.

"Transparent Hinges" would benefit from being condensed, but this ambitious new piece could well become a signature work for Mr. Chen. JENNIFER DUNNING

Graphic

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Photo: Renouardi Gee, facing the camera, and Hikari Baba in H. T. Chen's "Transparent Hinges." (Carol Rosegg)

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