

# THE DANCE Journal

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## Kun-Yang Lin's messages from HOME

Dance Review by Lew Whittington for The Dance Journal / on November 25, 2015 at 12:22 pm /



photo by Bill Hebert

Over the past year, KYL/Dancers performed excerpts from choreographer Kun-Yang Lin's *HOME/S. 9<sup>th</sup> St.* at their studios and at the Come Together Festival. The troupe unveiled the complete two-act piece at FringeArts this month. Lin's theme of what it is like to emigrate to the US couldn't be more relevant as the anti-immigration fervor sweeps the nation, stoked by right wing politicians who want forget that we are, in fact, a nation of immigrants.

Lin left his homeland Taiwan in the 90's and moved to New York where he established himself as a dancer-choreographer with several companies and then started his own. Lin and husband Ken Metzner, executive director of KYL/Dancers, relocated the company to South Philly in 2008. They also founded the CHI Movement Art Center of 9<sup>th</sup> St, which has since become a hub for area dance and a fixture in the community.

Lin's choreography is packed with personal reflection, that also chronicles immigrant experiences of some of his dancers, as well as from his South Philly neighbors.

The piece opens with dancer Brian Cordova, wrapped in a ceremonial skirt, floating over the floor in Butoh-ean (& hypnotic) motion from one door to the next in Britt Plunket's surgical white set cut into the Fringe Arts amphitheater.

It is a meditation about leaving your birth country and the physical, emotional and psychological implications of the journey. This serene tableaux is shattered as the ensemble of seven dancers then tumble and scramble on the stage. They cart folding studio chairs and the fling themselves around or build stacks of them or configure waiting areas. Lin keeps building expressions of hope, curiosity and dreams, contrasted with physical mayhem and psychic impact of being a stranger in an even stranger land.

The soundtrack, by KYL/Dancer's resident composer Cory Neale, is cinematic and driving electronica, contrasted by incongruous exotica like 30's crooner Al Bowlly singing 'The Nearness of You.' Neale uses a jabbing rhythmic sound field to accompany a scene where the immigrants as they are being grilled by voices demanding to know where they are from; why they are leaving their country; what is their religion; if they are the in a relationship; what is there business in the US; and other assaultive personal questions.

Dancers Helen Hale and Jessica Warchal- King have an argument about allowing illegal and legal immigrants to stay in the US, threatening the country.

All of this of pointedly resonates to today's headlines about the US refusing Syrian refugees, not to mention the politically charged issue of millions of 'illegal aliens' being allowed to seek citizenship through an amnesty or face deportation. As ambitious as HOME's editorial message is, as well as Lin's torrent of crowded choreography, the accumulation scuttles a fluid narrative arc.

Lin articulates the fears and courage physically on each dancer. At one point he appears onstage, menacingly, with a mic and orders them about like a drill sergeant. The dancers cower at his commands, some twisting their body, others slamming against the back walls in fear, anger and confusion.

Lin's wry dance comedy peeks through and some liberating dance moments. Annelille Gavino-Kollman, who danced with the Philippines Ballet, for instance, joyously flies into pirouettes; later she portrays a stereotype of an Asian woman over-enthused about selling fish heads. Evalina Cain Carbonell also stealthy navigates out of knotted phrases and uses her chair as a barre to hover over or mount it in a powerful yogic position.

The most dynamic segments are when Lin locks the dancers into tight geometric patterns and dancey martial arts phrases ignited by Neale's driving soundtrack. These segments are short, but so dynamic in conveying the power of each dancer and the ensemble. Also outstanding is lyrical central duet danced Mo Liu and Wei Wei Ma, with Lin taking more time to develop their characters and their story.

Lin's final tableau has the dancers huddled together (echoes of "Give me your huddled masses/ yearning to be free") when Cordova reappears, stunningly, inching across the stage and letting calligraphic leafs drop to the floor from a bountiful fan. As much as there is to absorb and understand in *HOME/S. 9<sup>th</sup> St* still has the feel, perhaps deliberately, of an unfinished work.

- [About the Author- Lewis Whittington](#)



Lewis Whittington is an arts journalist based in Philadelphia. He started writing professionally in the early 90s as a media consultant for an AIDS organizations and then as a theater and dance reviewer for the Philadelphia Gay News. Mr. Whittington has covered dance, theater, opera and classical music for the Philadelphia Inquirer and City Paper.

Mr. Whittington's arts profiles, features, and stories have appeared in The Advocate, Dance International, Playbill, American Theatre, American Record Guide, The Harvard Gay and Lesbian Review Worldwide, EdgeMedia, and Philadelphia Dance Journal. Mr. Whittington has received two NEA awards for journalistic excellence.

In addition to interviews with choreographers, dancers, and artistic directors from every discipline, he has interviewed such music luminaries from Ned Rorem to Eartha Kitt. He has written extensively on gay culture and politics and is most proud of his interviews with such gay rights pioneers as Frank Kameny and Barbara Gittings.

Mr. Whittington has participated on the poetry series Voice in Philadelphia and has written two (unpublished) books of poetry. He is currently finishing *Beloved Infidels*, a play about the murder of filmmaker Theo van Gogh. His editorials on GLBTQ activism, marriage equality, gay culture and social issues have appeared in Philadelphia Inquirer, City Paper, and The Advocate.