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### **Kun-Yang Lin/Dancers prove that home is where the art is**

**A Passyunk Square-based contemporary Asian-American dance, company is premiering work that explores the notion of “home.”**

By Bill Chenevert

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“Home/S. 9th St.” uses chairs as an element of how we associate objects in our conception of “home” and its connection to a past and future.

As the national conversation turns to Paris and Syria in the wake of the terroristic attacks on Paris November 13, or as the ongoing U.S. presidential campaigns regularly address immigration policies and even building a wall along our Southern border, Kun-Yang Lin couldn’t have better timing. Lin’s the founding and artistic director of Kun-Yang Lin/Dancers, which has created an artistic home and blossomed in it at 1316 S. Ninth St.

The Taiwanese immigrant’s contemporary dance company’s set to explore what “home” means with a three-night, four-performance run of “Home/S. 9th St.” at FringeArts on Columbus Boulevard this weekend.

Lin hunted and scoured Philadelphia for the right spot to build a headquarters and found it in 2008. South Philly and South Ninth Street became clear winners in his mind, in part for its rich history of old-world immigration and also because of its burgeoning status as a hub for Philly’s newest waves of immigration from Mexico, Central America, Cambodia, Nepal, Burma, China, India and Indonesia.

“I’m very happy and we can be proud that we are South Philly-based and we are an internationally-known dance company,” Lin, who noted that State representatives and City Council members were present at the space’s grand opening almost eight years ago, said.

He's not just patting himself on the back.

"I recruit [dance artists] but they come to me, a lot of dancers come to me. In South Philly we have an international group of artists" who want to work with Kun-Yang Lin/Dancers, he said. In July they had an open audition and more than 60 dancers from all over the world, including practitioners from Greece, Belgium, France, New York City, California, Toronto and more, visited the Passyunk Square studio.



His own company's dancers aren't exactly local, either. Two hires hail from China, others have Polish, Greek, and Irish ancestry, more are African-American and Filipino.

"America is not all white," Lin asserted, and hinted at what can be too-often seen as an America that's one thing or the opposite. "If you're not white, you're black. What about the rest of us? What about the Asian voice?"

Lin has been enthusiastically navigating the process of becoming a United States citizen, in part because he wanted to have his voice heard in the democratic process. Over the years he's embraced what he calls his "American-ness" and, poetically, it emerged when he had to stand up against neighbors who didn't want his art space to be ornately and characteristically mosaicked by South Philly artist Isaiah Zagar.

Through typical zoning needs and hearings, he had to defend his center and Zagar's treatment of its façade.

"It's art – art is allowed. That's where my American-ness came out," he said with a laugh. Still, neighbors objected saying 'This isn't New York City. This is South Philly.' To which he responded "Sir, this is America."

**Though South Philly** may have and still has an incredibly strong connection to Italian, Irish and European ancestries, nationalities outside of those regions have been making a home east of Broad Street and south of Washington Avenue in great numbers since Lin moved to Ninth Street. The South Seventh Street commercial corridor is like a South Philly version of Chinatown. The blocks surrounding Mifflin Square Park are ripe with southeast Asian communities. Dickinson Square, East Passyunk Crossing and Lower Moyamensing have seen countless Latino families creating community.

In a way, Lin says "Home/S. 9th St." is about "learning about who we are – it's a life-long journey. What's our view of American and American-ness? What we believe makes America so vibrant and wonderful is that inclusiveness, that common humanity within multi-culturalism." "Home," as we conceive it, could be a set of walls, a block, an object that reminds of us our past. For many immigrant families, it's about their children and what they hope to provide for them.

"What they perceive as their sense of home is their children, they are the hope," Lin said. "They don't want their children to experience the same struggle."

He and his company, along with sound designer and South Philly resident Cory Neale, sat with groups of immigrants for what they call Story Circles. Born in Los Angeles, the Story Circle provides an open,

welcoming space for dialogues to take place that illuminate the sense of “home” and what America represents to its newest arrivals.

“Hearing the struggles, as well as the relative successes, of the participants really makes one step back and gain a sense of perspective and gratitude,” Neale, a resident of the 1600 block of South 15th Street and a 21-year-South-Philly resident, said.

“I have witnessed this transformation and evolution of the neighborhood. I think the development has been symbiotic in the sense that evolving minds result in transformed neighborhoods which, in turn, attracts evolving minds, and so the cycle can take off and generate a strong community in the process,” Neale explained. “In terms of the South Ninth Street corridor, that evolution and transformation cycle has been going on for decades, as new immigrant populations from different parts of the world settle here and use the neighborhood as a home point for their lives here in the United States.”

Lin and Neale will use recorded bits of the Story Circle moments, other spoken word pieces, lullabies in multiple languages, and childhood songs of import to the dancers. “Home/S. 9th St.” is not intended to be political, but some elements have an undeniable reflection of current affairs – at one point a dancer cocks her leg like she’s pulling at a gun. President Barack Obama’s words will be integrated, too.

“We are a nation of immigrants,” Lin said, a sentiment reflected in one of Obama’s speeches excerpted for “Home.” “That’s what I believe is what’s made this country so wonderful and so beautiful and different from so many countries. That melting pot.”

As for those neighbors who once told him he wasn’t welcome?

”One thing I’m proud of, all my neighbors were against me. Who are you? We’ve been here generations,” fellow Ninth Street residents used to say.

“Now they watch out for us. They care about us. Now I’m their favorite neighbor.”

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Photo Provided by Kun-Yang Lin/Dancers