

Kun-Yang Lin is “Home”?

in [Artist News](#) / by [Steven Weisz](#) / on January 28, 2015 at 10:00 am /



photos by Steven Weisz for The Dance Journal

On a Saturday afternoon, before a handful of guests in their studio, Kun-Yang Lin and dancers performed excerpts from his newest work in development, *Home! S. 9th Street*. This is perhaps one of Lin’s more ambitious undertakings as he attempts to address the issues of identity, community, immigration, the notion of “American-ness”, and ultimately one’s own concept of home.

Lin, himself an immigrant from Taiwan, has resided in the United States for the past fourteen years. His current “Home” on 9th street, where the

CHI Movement Arts Center is located, has historically been an entry corridor for newly arrived immigrants looking to settle in Philadelphia. This diversity of cultures continues today, and is reflected in the surrounding community, made up primarily of those of Italian, Vietnamese, Mexican and Chinese heritage.

At the core of his previous works, Lin has drawn upon his Eastern philosophy, spirituality and training, while expanding and incorporating this base in to his own vocabulary of Western contemporary dance. With *Home*, he has departed from his established choreographic process and is utilizing community engagement methodologies adapted from the Cornerstone Theater Company based in Los Angeles. Lin and dancers (KYL/D) have given life, through movement, to stories provided by their neighbors. In turn, the community has provided direction and inspiration for their new work.

Lending further to this collaboration, KYL/D commissioned Corey Neale, a recipient of the American Association of Community Theater Sound Design Award, to develop an original score for *Home*, which will include voices from interviews with area residents. David O’Connor, a teaching artist and director with Philadelphia Young Playwrights, has also been engaged to develop the theatrical elements in the piece.

As *Home* develops, KYL/D is sharing the piece in a series of work-in-progress showings throughout Philadelphia. The most recent showing was at the Philadelphia Museum of Art in conjunction with an exhibit of photography by Paul Strand, who like Lin, examined the question of what it means to be American. Additional planned showings include the Temple University Dance Faculty Concert on January 30th and 31st, an open dialog at CHI Movement Arts Center on April 18th, and several showings in May, including at the 9th Street Italian Market Festival.

Lin adds, “the process is organic, why did I choose this location? (Referring to 9th street). I continually observe the community and new questions begin to unfold and form the seeds for this dance”.

After, providing an introductory framework, a single chair is presented in the middle of the stage and removed in an imaginary blackout as lighting has not yet been set. Six dancers then present in both solo and as a group, each with a chair, folding and unfolding, building, stacking, creating constructs – perhaps obstacles, walls or even borders. The phrases and movements are distinct, yet fragmented, adding to the feeling of struggle and being uncomfortable in new surroundings. At times, the chairs seem like extensions of both the inner and outer self of each dancer or perhaps pieces of a puzzle trying to come together as a community, breaking a part, being re-born and each trying to find their own place, their own home.



In a post talk with dancers, Jessica Warchal-King, Evalina Carbonell, Rachel Hart, Liu Mo, Helen Hale and WeiWei Ma, it was made clear how each of them had lent to the movement with their own stories, some as immigrants themselves and others as members of a family that had their own immigrant journey. At the same time, the dancers expressed their huge responsibility in having been entrusted with the stories of others, which they now express through their own movements.

As Lin struggles to define his meaning of Home, he questions, “is it time to say goodbye to Taiwan?” And yet, he continues to find himself “at middle points, that grey area – half east, half west” and then adds “but half my life has been in Philadelphia”.

The world premiere of Home: S. 9th Street will be presented by Philadelphia’s FringeArts in the Fall of this year. For more information about upcoming showings and performances, visit kunyanglin.com

SNEAK PREVIEW

A video clip of the work-in-process is available here: <http://vimeo.com/116775450>

HOME: A Process Deconstructed

by [Gregory King](#), Visiting Professor of Dance, Swarthmore College for the Dance Journal/ on May 16, 2015 at 8:26 pm /



photo credit: *Bicking Photography*

My first introduction to the *Home /S.9th* street project was at Temple University's faculty concert. The excerpt left me longing to experience more. Set to premiere in November at The Philadelphia Fringe Festival, *Home/ S. 9th St.*, continues to take shape, evolving into an endeavor that is part dance documentary, part community dialogue, and part social commentary.

This choreographed pie is the brainchild of **Kun-Yang Lin**, and abstractly explores the meaning of home, the confusions of displacement and the beauty in adjusting.

Lin's exploration began with a question; what does it mean to move from one place to another?

Lin's initial question forced me to ask of additional questions;

Is home a place and is that place the same for everyone?

In an information session, **KYL/D**'s executive director **Rev. Kenneth Metzner**, explained that *Home* for Lin is a geographical amalgamation of Taiwan – and ancestral home, Indonesia – a spiritual home, and Philadelphia – a physical home.

Metzner also clarified that *Home* was neither narrative nor linear but an abstract representation of the immigrant's story.

His explanation made me latch on to the fact that home can be both a departure and an arrival.

An immigrant myself, I have rested my head on the shoulders of my lineage while continuing to walk in the path created for me by my life in America.

I understood all too well, the journey, the fight, the justification, the anger, the resentment, the joy, the resolve, and the possibilities.

Knowing this, I took Lin's journey home?

The *Home S/9th Street* Project employed the colorful voices of Lin's Philadelphia neighbors living on the block that houses Chi Movement Arts Center, the home of Kun-Yang Lin Dancers. Important to Lin was the plurality of the immigrant experience, attached to the notion of connecting the past to the present, the traditional to the contemporary and the individual to the collective.

With highly effective gestures, texts, and a robust movement vocabulary, the six dancers of KYL/D embarked on a journey to tell the story of leaving home – arriving home. Section by section, they held on to their directives so that the audience could be transported.

Home was solid.

Multi-layered, multi-textured and rich with information, *Home* gave us the license to question citizenship. A huge undertaking and sophisticated handling of a delicate topic, *Deconstructing Home* was the gateway to what the November premier holds.

For curious dance lovers who yearn to find meaning in movement, *Deconstructing Home* offered insight into the inspiration, the process, and the journey.

While Q and A sessions at the end of performances allow an individual to feel somewhat connected to their experience, deconstructing the process allowed a different kind of connection. Lin's explanation and description was laden with information that unraveled the complexity of any unanswered questions. He addressed three major parts of the piece – the gestures, the prop, and the process, by asking the dancer to relive *Home*.

- Their gestures arose from improvisation sessions, tailored to the individual, and specific to self.
- They each had a chair, which represented something different from person to person. Lin explained that the chair was an abstraction of boxes he would witness his neighbors using to pack and unpack along the culturally rich block of [9th street](#) in Philadelphia.
- The process grew out of extensive research and using his 9th street studio as a choreographic lab.

While Lin's dancers were spectacular at delivering carefully executed steps, *Home* was not about dance, it was about acceptance, pride, and identity. A research project that has blossomed over time, *Home* shone the light on a topic we often neglect.

***Home* is poignant, full-bodied and relevant.**

***Deconstructing Home* was not only welcomed and helpful; it was necessary.**

Come Together Dance Festival 2015 Convenes

in [Lew's Danceland](#) / by [Lewis Whittington](#) / on July 25, 2015 at 3:36 pm /

By Lewis Whittington for The Dance Journal

The diversity of the sold-out audience buzzing in the lobby the Suzanne Roberts Theatre for the 3rd Come Together festival is emblematic of the festival's mission not only bring to bring together dance company diversity, but to attract crossover audiences in every direction—Modern dance fans who are clueless about the latest innovations in tap, under represented genres on the same stage as headliners, and so on. Festival directors Roni and Alon Koresh presenting 33 dance companies, in its third outing, is, indeed, a formidable undertaking.

In the Roberts theater lobby, Roni in an elegant black suit stood on the gallery steps congratulating the dance companies and the crowd and launched the 2015 festival with a toast. The first night program had a measure of minor technical glitches and some of the companies could have looked sharper, but by night two, CT 2015 was humming along and the collective energy of the deep field of Philly dance and visiting artists creating a palpable festival atmosphere.

July 22 opening program

Inside the theater a late **curtain came up on Brian Sanders' JUNK 's 'American Standard' a rustic tableau complete with haystacks and a pommel horse apparatus used by dancer Tedd Fastcher for rawhide mounts and vaults.** Two male-female couples have curiously psychological and mysteriously sensual rolls in the hay. Tanai Jones and Regan Jackson make their own hoedown in mucklucks with some two-stepping rubber tapdancing. The barnburner finish has the dancers, their thumbs hitched to their daisy dukes in an acrobatic dance off featuring Sanders' knarly aerials.

Chisena Danza was next with "Black Lotus" a solo piece by dancer- choreographer Melissa Chesena. Chesena kneels in a column of light, her naked back oscillating. She slowly rises and reveals a velvet skirt and blue silk lining flowing underneath. Chisena's performs multi-vernacular solo all while moving the fabrics ala Graham to stunning visual effect. Dancing to somber piano/cello music by Jonathan Cannon, Chesena's movement has an improvisation feel, as well as structured polish.

Kun-Yang Lin/Dancers performed excerpts of 'HOME/ S. 9th St' in development this past year, is part of Lin's choreographic exploration of Asian classicism and modern movement. The piece revolves around a central duet danced by WeiWei Ma and Mo Liu captivating dancing Lin's gestural narrative and lyrical expression. The music shifts to something more driving and the ensemble is in formation pulsing together in lunging moves laced with martial arts poses and cross-genre balletics. As with previous previews of HOME, this excerpt makes you want to see the whole piece in context.

Spectrum Dance Theatre + Donald Byrd – Choreographer Byrd, in collaboration with dancers Jeremy Cline and Blair Elloit’s ‘Disintegrating Loop’ is a challenging scenario of a troubled couple, set to a pulsing sonar wave soundscape. When Cline and Elliot move through a pool of light they swim the breaststroke beautifully, but as soon as they exit, they convulse in an electroshock. Predictably, things get physically testy between them, they part and he sulks spastically on one side of the stage and she on the other on her back, playing with her feet. More swimming, more convulsive, a few lifts. The dancers have such presence that you want to see them break out of this choreographic haze. Even as this piece moves to beautiful imagery in its resolve, it has the feel of a studio exercise that needed another draft. Clear!



Philadanco dazzled the crowd with choreographer Christopher Huggins’ Latched, set to music by Sohn with lyrics describing the right moment for couples to break from an unhealthy relationship. Signature propulsive drive by Huggins, that just keeps revving up on Danco dancers. Six dancers in black unitards flying through Huggins double tempo phrases, with flash lifts (a stunner by Rosita Adamo and Adryan Moorefield) and mach speed turns. This performance could have looked sharper, less rote in key moments, but the dancers attack was there. Huggins slows them up for sultry flamenco group march that is as fiery as those pyrotechnic moves.

Raphael Xavier has built a following in the festival and his ‘Point of Interest’ opened the second half and it is a good sequel to his piece last year as sort of the Ages of the street dancing man. Xavier indicating he is trying to keep pace with his three younger dancers. Even with some snarky bows to age, he was right with them in the tight unison work. Xavier’s witty mis-en-scenes included a hip-hop warm-up with basic steps shown in adagio ala ballet class. Then the hip-hop dance down among the quartet with Macca Malik taking it with her dervish spider spins on her palms, punctuated with snide runway poses broke the audience up.

Koresh Dance Company showed sections of their recent hit ‘Aftershock’ with their newest dancer Vanessa Quinto, just with the company for two weeks in the center of the comic section ‘Gare Des Etreintes’, with the dancers lined up ala A Chorus Line, mugging to the audience and breaking out in Chaplinesque gestures. In a breakout performance Quinto is most impressive as the one in the middle around a group of dancers in razor sharp unison phrasing next to Robert Tyler. The ensemble section is industrial Koresh and as earnestly danced as it is, keeps hitting the same dissonant chord.

July 23

All systems were more than go on the second night programming with 10 companies conspiring for what proved to be a magical night of dance starting with the performance by “Fula Fare” by **Kule Mele African Dance and Drum Ensemble**. Choreographer Yousouff Koumbassa is stunning in its authenticity of the traditional Guinean dance celebrating the birth of a child. Four women in floral dresses set out the communal patterns and the four men set the rhythm patterns on a slate of percussion instruments. The joyous movement flows in symbolic patterns then frame two of the drummer who fly into a dance off of spins, tumbles, daredevilry and some prototype hip-hop feats. The audience exploded with approval.

AJGarcia-Rameau danced to her own piece “When She Came Back” a silky solo set to music by Max Richter. Garcia has beautiful carriage and unfussy point work has an expressive lyricism that speaks to contemporary audiences.

Alchemy Dance Company “Playground” choreographed by Amy Harding has seven women in men’s shirts for her piece “Playground” but the dancers didn’t seem too happy here. They laugh at one dancer’s interpretive dance, cluster and stalk around with their arms raised. The self-consciousness of the piece starts to cloy and just when Harding starts to move it choreographically, recess is over.

The Clutch Collective is Kenneth Allen Thomas' dance memoir 'Allen vs. 21', reflecting on his experience as a 21-year old new father. Thomas dances to voice over narration that tells his story of unexpected parenthood and the responsibility of raising his child, which he later finds out is not his. Thomas' uses fluid break robotics and fluid micro-moves that build a poetic intimacy and compelling dance theater..

Sakshi Production danced 'Ravana's Homage' choreographed by donia salem and Nandina Sikand who are joined by Nyasa Cusmai for the dance trio telling a mystical tale of Shiva Goddess of Dance. The colorful fabrics and beaded belts evoking a Indian iconography, traditional classicism with yogic and warrior asana laced in. As one audience member pointed out spiritual and sensual. Since Shiva was of both sexes, the intimate end sequence of two of the women cradling one another, is intimacy beyond sex.

Connally and Co. performed 'Mind Has Many' a women's duet choreographed by Lauren Connelly. The spotlight comes up on Kelli McGovern and Molly Galbraith, in black wrestler togs, as they slink into a long pas de deux that is sometimes pugilistic, sometimes tender. intensity of their moves builds as they tangle on the ground or toss off clean demi-point pirouettes. Connelly's style is full of surprises, admirably, not derivative and in the back half the movement becomes so subtly engaging, who cares about the real or imagined s storyline.

Closing the first half was the explosive 'DeeTour' choreographed by six dancers, from an ensemble of 13 dancers in **Face da Phlave Entertainment & Theater**. It opens with hip-hoppers executing rote phrases until their teacher (Lauren Quattrone) lets them know they are just phoning it in and dismisses class. On the street, a homeless man asks her for money, when she gives it to him she is suddenly embraced by a new vision of the world as street dancers who swarm around her. The light dramatically changes and she is suddenly part of a fantasia of hip-hop virtuosity. Set to rock anthems by Andrew Ramsey & AmRa Ricketts, Face's innovative and razor precision ensemble sections build thrilling dance-theater. The audience erupted with sustained, lusty approval.

(At the audience confab after the concert moderated by dance historian Brenda Dixon Gottschild, Face co-director Marcus Tucker cited **Rennie Harris as their troupe's artistic mentor.**)

And after an intermission, it was vintage **Rennie Harris PureMovement** that followed performing Harris' "Bent" (Nothing but a Word) set to Al Jarreau's 70s jazz classic 'Spain (I Can recall)' featuring the dancers surfing Jarreau's scat vocalese, followed by a deep funk number by Mandrill. This work is non-narrative and at his most choreographically spirited and distilled. Cross-current ensemble streams turning up the dance fever to heart pounding dance crescendos. Harris sharp authenticity and esprit of street dance artistry, distinct from being commercially dumbed down. RHPM continues to bring the real thing. At one point the ensemble drops into a 'soul city walking' line-dance formation from the 70s club scene. Even going retro, Harris has a lot to eloquently say.

Festival coverage of the second half of program with Evalina Carbonell and more from Koresh Dance & capsules from the festival weekend shows continue in part 2 of this review.

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation

Writing Together about the Come Together Festival

By Lynn Brooks, Kirsten Kaschock, and Lisa Kraus

One of the advantages of a showcase or festival-style summer series is that you get to scan a lot of work by different choreographers and companies to discover who and what speaks to you—or leaves you wishing you were elsewhere. It's also an opportunity to explore what draws different dance-goers to their seats. Three thINKingDANCE writers share their experiences of the [2015 Come Together Dance Festival](#), two as audience members and the third as a post-show discussion leader.

Kirsten Kaschock, on the House and the Show, July 25

The Suzanne Roberts theatre was packed. The audience—an eclectic mix of patrons, students, and members (and veterans) of the dance community—arrived early for happy hour, their mood celebratory.

Young dancers of The Rock School took the stage first (in three Petipa variations and two contemporary works). Their impeccable technique laid the groundwork for performances both engaged and assured. Mackenzie Brown's fawn-like extensions and effortless precision floored me.

When the lights went up on 10 Hairy Legs, there were in truth only six. This trio of men in a tub (a prop, not a metaphor) offered tableaux coy and frontal and all about equal opportunity objectification, while mining the intersection of athleticism and wit. The Beethoven score choreographer Cleo Mack chose heightened the irony of dancers aggressively displaying themselves to the audience yet remaining oblivious to the potential of onstage partnerships.

Melissa Rector and Raphael Xavier's works followed. Rector (Assistant Artistic Director of Koresh and longtime company dancer) created a duet where one woman eventually replaced another centerstage as if offering her a break from repeated gestures of frustration and futility. Between a series of tongue-in-cheek interludes, Xavier's quartet of breakdancers (including himself) powered their movement with diverse styles and strengths. When, after Macca Malik's solo of hand spins and a final feisty posturing, the audience cheered wildly for her, the three men all but rolled their eyes as if to say, "Again?"

The next three companies—Philadanco, Kun-Yang Lin/Dancers, and Koresh—are Philadelphia staples, and although the vision each brought to the stage was unique, there was commonality: the dancers' confidence in each other and the work created micro-worlds that pulled the audience into them.

Risk can only be taken repeatedly when there is trust. Philadanco's six-person *Latched*, choreographed to a Sohn song with the repeated lyrics, "If you're thinking of letting me go then maybe it's time that you do," offered the desperate sadness and angry drama of good break-up sex. Progressive duets had dancers uniting and parting at breakneck speed and with unrelenting purpose without sacrificing particularity (even in their sleek, unisex black turtlenecks and jazz pants). In the **intriguing *HOME/S. 9th St.*, Kun-Yang Lin/Dancers (six dancers in similar white outfits) serendipitously presented a near inverse image of Philadanco, with entirely different motivation. Their risk was in gentle absurdity, in childlike vulnerability—dancers clinging to one another's legs or progressing across a row of chairs as if to create an imaginary journey out of household items.**

By the time Koresh Dance Company finished the program with selections from *Promises I Never Meant to Keep*—the whole company, often in tight unison, performing Koresh’s signature modern-jazz vocabulary and folk-dance inspired sections—the audience was primed for the choreographic invocation of solidarity. When the dancers paired off, it was refreshing to see a female duet take center stage.

Ronen Koresh dedicated this performance to Suzanne Roberts’ late husband. Mrs. Roberts sat in the audience a few seats away from me; when she stood, she was beaming. What better use of a house than to bring people together within it?

Lynn Brooks on the Closing Festival Night, July 26

Attending this evening of the festival assured me that there are plenty of accomplished dancers in Philadelphia, and a few interesting choreographers as well. Because a lot of the work presented that evening was hard-hitting, percussive, group dancing to driving music (all recorded, and all projected way too loud—a seatmate had her hands over her ears at times), the work that fell outside of those descriptors stood out to me. For example, the show opened with JUNK presenting excerpts of Brian Sanders’ *American Standard*, danced to country-western music. The straw-strewn stage was dominated by a pelt-covered artificial bronco and the five dancers had a ball exploring it, one another, and the rhythmic foot-slapping of old-timey dancing. There was plenty of acrobatic virtuosity—a JUNK hallmark—but not only that, and all in service of the consistent and winning Western/cowboy theme.

A company I’d never seen before, idiosyncratic productions, also impressed me with its textured exploration of togetherness and individuality. The piece they presented, Shannon Murphy’s *Conditional*, just went on too long, however, even with these beautiful and utterly committed dancers. Still, I’ll be on the lookout for their shows in upcoming seasons.

Much of the other work in this closing evening was very busy, for my taste, with too many people doing too much movement, too fast and hard, for too long. Thus, Kat J. Sullivan’s work, second in the program, offered a welcome calm and meditative performance quality unmatched by the evening’s other work.* Sullivan’s spare rigor in *Reign*, performed sensitively by Meredith Stapleton and the choreographer, gave the audience room to enter and inhabit the mysterious world of these partly naked, partly overdressed royals.

The evening—and, thus, the festival—closed with the virtuosic Koresh Dance Company in three works by Ronen Koresh. *Change*, *La Vie en Rose*, and *Bolero* were presented in immediate succession, although it wasn’t clear if they were three entirely separate works, or intended to be seen as some kind of suite.

The coming together of these different companies brought their individual styles (including hip hop, modern, lyrical, and ballet) up against one another—no surprise in this age of fusion, but nice to see, nonetheless. The audience seemed to think so, too, lustily cheering on the dancers, then exuberantly greeting them as they appeared in the lobby at intermission or post-show—many spectators clearly there, initially, to support their friends or family members. And that’s a good thing, both the support and the exposure beyond whichever person or group drew each of us to attend. We got to see the big, broad world of Philadelphia dancing.

Several of the festival evenings featured Philadelphia dance leaders moderating post-show talk-backs.

Lisa Kraus, on Post-Show Talks, July 24

How do you talk meaningfully with nine choreographers in a 20-minute post-show chat? Invited to lead

one of these talks during the Come Together Festival, I wondered how to see a slew of pieces for the first time and, immediately afterward, engage meaningfully with each maker in front of an audience. It takes me time to digest what I've seen. So I came up with open-ended questions about process that I might pose to just about anyone:

What was your starting point?

What question would you like to ask the audience about how they saw your work?

What was challenging about making this dance?

How does this dance relate to tradition: adhere to it, take off from it, stretch it?

What aspect of this dance most excites you?

Is there particular training involved with performing this dance?

Do the dancers have any role in creating their own parts?

How do you think about music's relationship to movement in this dance?

Then I came up with some questions just for fun:

If you consider the other works on this evening, which choreographer can you imagine yourself collaborating with?

Which dancer would you like to swipe to be in one of your dances?

As the moment drew closer, all this seemed too complicated. When an evening is made of disparate kinds of dance, I think it can be interesting to hear the varied artists responding to the same question. So I asked:

What does this piece bring forward from your earlier work and what in it is new for you?

This promised to get people to reveal what they value in making a dance and where their frontier lies for exploration. In fact, it became the dance makers' springboard for addressing their work in their own ways.

Roni Koresh, whose almost 25-year-old company initiated and runs the festival, spoke about not looking for originality in movement per se at this point, but being more interested in finding something compelling in how he is putting it together. This was echoed later in connection with Rennie Harris' innovation of taking hip hop onto the concert stage within theatrical frameworks. It turns out that this development owed a debt to Koresh, too. Early on, Harris witnessed Koresh's work and took classes at his studio, helping cultivate his compositional savvy. Kyle Clark of Just Sole: Street Dance Theater, in the Harris lineage, talked about honesty as a value, and about the work the group is doing with youth (their company is indeed full of talented young dancers).

Matthew Soojian, who showed a tap trio, said he was excited to make a pure tap dance—his first. Others spoke about the origins of their work. Diane Sharp-Nachsin related how her piece was developed on a Greek island through a visionary dream her dancer had. Tara Madsen Robbins told how her women's duet was created while getting her MFA and has since been performed by multiple, changing casts. Lauren Putty White spoke about her work as a response to recent violence against blacks, equating this violence with humans' animal nature.

Anne-Marie Mulgrew's quintet on this show was especially lyrical. An audience member asked the Philly dance-scene veteran how she "keeps on keeping on," recognizing her as an inspiration. All the artists expressed appreciation for the opportunity to show work in this festival focused on

community, audience development, and cross-pollination.

For those who could extend their involvement beyond watching the performances and participating in the post-show chats, the festival also included several master classes in styles identified as breaking, Indian, modern jazz, contemporary ballet, and hip hop; pre-show happy hours; and a closing-night party. Now that's festive!

* Full disclosure: during her years studying at Franklin & Marshall College, Sullivan was Lynn Brooks' student.

Come Together Dance Festival, Koresh Dance Company, Suzanne Roberts Theatre, July 22-26.

By Lynn Matluck Brooks
August 3, 2015

True Philly stories of immigration, addiction in new dance productions



Samantha Melamed Posted: Tuesday, November 10, 2015, 3:01 AM

The Inquirer

Dance, as a genre, might not appear conducive to documentary storytelling, what with the lack of words and all.

Yet two such projects, both based on sociologies of marginal Philadelphia communities, are set to debut within a week - and a few blocks - of each other.

One of these world premieres, at FringeArts, is *Home/S. 9th St.* by **Kun-Yang Lin/Dancers**, a kinetic tale of migration that draws on interviews with more than 60 immigrants in South Philadelphia. The other, at the Painted Bride, is *Pushers* from **Dance Iquail**, based on choreographer Iquail Shaheed's family history of addiction - his father died of a heroin overdose in March - and on conversations with young people from the city's Mantua section, where he grew up.

Kun-Yang Lin said dance was uniquely able to convey the essence of lived experience.

"Dance is not theater: We cannot tell the story. But we can bring the feeling out," he said. "A lot of feelings we can't articulate through words. So sometimes I observe those people who I interview - not just what they say, but the simple gestures they make. I translate those simple gestures into dance. A gesture is a word we all know. In dance, we take that bigger."

For Lin, the story of immigration starts with his own biography. He arrived from Taiwan in 1994 and opened his studio on Ninth Street in 2008.

"When we first moved here, we had a lot of challenge and conflict from the older generation," he said. "But now, people embrace us. We shifted their viewpoint."

While creating *Home*, he reached out to neighbors and invited them to view the work in progress. Then he asked them to share their stories.

But turning community members - expatriates from Mexico, Southeast Asia, and Italy - into collaborators wasn't easy. He reached some of them through open-dialogue sessions and Zumba classes held at his studio. Others he found by visiting parks, community centers, and breakfast joints.

"Some of them really opened themselves up. They don't feel we're the outsiders. They trust us," Lin said. "Some of the older Italians, I had to go to five or eight breakfasts before they would talk."

But he persevered. The result is a performance that begins with humans migrating out of Africa two million years ago, and that lands in the Italian Market, where dancers remark on the wonder of snow and the rigor applied to the language of cheesesteak-ordering.

There are visual references to vintage photographs from Ellis Island and Philly's Washington Avenue Immigration Station, and snippets of interviews mashed into the sound track. There is, perhaps, the most ambitious artistic application to date of Ikea folding chairs, which serve variously as luggage and gates, tunnels and cages, belongings to pack and unpack. At moments, there's agitation and fragmentation; other times, there's optimism.

"A lot of immigrants have those struggles and confusion," Lin said. "At the same time, I try to honor what makes this country great, and why we want to be here."

There is, likewise, ambivalence in *Pushers*, the work Shaheed based on the addictions that rule life for some young residents of Mantua - and on his memories of his parents, both of whom died from effects of drug use.

"Addiction is ruining the community. There's a loss of family and connection," Shaheed said. "I thought, can I use my work and process not only to create a work of art but also as therapy and as activism?"

Shaheed found his way out of that cycle by participating in double-dutch competitions and drill teams, learning to dance along with Michael Jackson videos. At the High School for the Creative and Performing Arts, he realized dance could be a career. He continued his training with Philadanco and, later, many New York dance companies.

Still, he likes to return home to develop new works in collaboration with area community organizations - in this case, the Mantua Haverford Community Center and the nonprofit Mighty Writers.

He worked with nine teens, inviting them to meet and write in journals, discussing drugs, or issues in the media, or their obsessions with social media. One 12-year-old revealed that she has 5,000 Instagram followers and sometimes shares sexualized images with them.

"Talking to her and getting her to write, we realized she was lonely. That was a way for her to not be lonely," he said.

He concluded that social-media-addicted teens - much like drug pushers following fathers or brothers to the corner - are hooked, above all, on validation. The dance he developed explores manifestations of that, and the score integrates sounds from social-media sites.

The kids were invited to help, as stagehands or ticket-takers. Some are hoping for bigger roles.

Kayla Watson, 15, would like to get on stage and read her poetry during the show. She break-dances, so she can relate to what Shaheed is doing.

"Dancing is a way to express yourself without having to go to violence or putting everyone's business on social media. It helps me a lot," she said.

Back on Ninth Street, meanwhile, Lin found the reaction was mixed. Some of his contributors are eager to see the show. Others, not so much.

"We're allowing people to understand what is the purpose of art. Every day I see my neighbors and say to them, 'Come see the show! I'll give you tickets.' They sometimes say, 'Well, maybe not. I enjoy watching my TV,'" Lin said. "You can't force them, but you extend yourself."

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Read more at

http://www.philly.com/philly/entertainment/arts/20151110_True_Philly_stories_of_immigration__addiction_in_new_dance_productions.html#ose2I7lu0uXeoIYt.99

NEWS > COVER STORY

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

| Posted Nov. 20, 2015



“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.”

Contact Staff Writer Bill Chenevert at bchenevert@southphillyreview.com or ext. 117.

Photo Provided by Kun-Yang Lin/Dancers

KYL/D Company tells the South 9th Street immigrant experience through dance in HOME



Kun-Yang Lin Dancers in HOME/S. 9th St. Photo: Frank Bicking

By Nicole Contosta
Tue, Nov 17, 2015

Does home represent a specific memory or a particular location? How does the concept of home change for immigrants trying to preserve their cultures while assimilating into a new one?

Kun-Yang Lin's world Premier of HOME this week explores those themes beginning this Thursday, November 19th. Presented by the Philadelphia Fringe Festival, HOME runs through November 21st at 140 N. Columbus Blvd.

For those not familiar with the KYL/D companies work, its inventive choreography pushes the limits of national identity. Artistic Director Kun Yang blends Eastern philosophies and contemporary dance in his performances.

And the world premier of HOME/South 9th Street proves no exception.

"Research for this project goes back to 2013," explained Ken Metzner, the Executive Director of KYL/D from the studio's headquarters at 1316 S. 9th Street. Throughout our early morning interview, the music and movement from local

neighbors taking a Zumba class in the next room punctuated the conversation. KYL/D for those not in the know—offers a host of classes for both professional and non-professional dancers.

Seeds for HOME were planted during a 2013 trip to Indonesia, Metzner continued of the journey he, Kun Yang and Dr. Nancy Watterson, of Cabrini College took.

"We like our work to be challenging," Kun Yang explained, adding, "We often invite scholars to participate in the practice because we want to create a culmination of body, mind and spirit. This is called Chi awareness."

For HOME, part of the piece's Chi Awareness came directly from the South 9th Street community.

The neighborhood has always remained rich with immigrants. And as Kun Yang and Metzner realized through their research, there's a very logical explanation. From 1860-1913, there was a miniature Ellis Island Station at Washington Avenue where it intersected with the Delaware River. Historically, immigrants flooded the South 9th Street neighborhood for that reason. And in recent decades, they have continued to do so due the immigrant populations already there.

Because the neighborhood has remained a home for immigrants, Kun Yang and Metzner interviewed 65 immigrants from the neighborhood for HOME.

"We wanted to create a collective voice," Kun-Yang said. "But how do you translate that into dance...how do you put 65 voices into one voice?" Kun-Yang continued, explaining, "Dancing is an abstraction of that...It gives a visual to the feeling you cannot explain."

Subsequently, HOME does not tell a narrative story. "It's not linear, and it does not tell a particular culture's story either," Metzner explained. Rather, "it travels between the past, the future, the present and back again."

The immigrants weren't just interviewed and pushed out of the process, Metzner noted. Instead, they participated in community dialogues and attended shorter performances of the piece as it developed at venues such as the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Temple University as well as at the Italian Market Festival last May.

Throughout HOME's formation, practice and execution before audiences, Kun-Yang has stressed the importance of Chi Awareness.

"It's a philosophy," Kun-Yang said. "It's how we open ourselves and our energy so there aren't any boundaries. People who don't have Chi awareness, that's when you feel like there's a wall between people."

Kun-Yang also asks his dancers to cultivate Chi awareness. "The company is very demanding of our dancers and their ability to tap this energy."

It's an energy the company would like the audience to experience as well.

KYL/D's Artists include Evalina Carbonell, Brian Cardova, Annielille Gavino-Kollman, Helen Hale, Mo Liu Wei Wei Ma, Grace Stern and Jessica Warchal-King.

The performances will run at the Fringe Arts, 140 N. Columbus Blvd, 11/19-11/21 at 8 p.m. with a 3 p.m. matinee on 11/21. Tickets range from \$15-\$29. For more information about the show: 215-413-1318, www.fringearts.com. For more information on KYL/D: 267-687-3739, <http://kunyanglingin.org>.

ARTS

Kun-Yang Lin/Dancers bring it 'Home' in new show

Larry Nichols

November 12, 2015



Kun-Yang Lin/Dancers, the acclaimed local dance company, is addressing the issue of immigration, refugees and community in its latest show, "Home/S. 9th Street," Nov. 19-21 at FringeArts.

In the show, the dancers explore their experiences as well as those of their neighbors along Philadelphia's South Ninth Street corridor.

Out choreographer and artistic director Kun-Yang Lin said getting the dancers and members of the community to share their stories was an important part of the creative

process for the show.

"The whole process is about surrender," he said. "You have to surrender yourself to open up. We would like to hear what other people's viewpoints are. What is their story? The creative process for me, that's the first important element. You have to surrender yourself and then have no expectations. I think how the piece unfolds is really from that surrendered state and creates that possibility. And then the piece grows from there.

"I think the piece has a sense of wholeness. It's not just about self or growth, it's also about my students, my family, people in the show or my community. It becomes something bigger than the capacity of ourselves, about acceptance, diversity, race and gender."

Lin said the resulting piece is intensely personal while also being universal, and that what audience members take away from the show depends on their own experiences going in.

"It's a microcosm of the larger world," he said. "What people can experience is our common humanity. For immigrants who are in the minority, there is a fear and struggle. It's like in life sometimes as a gay person. We experience that. Of course I think it's about owning that awareness of that common humanity. It's a metaphor to allow us to re-look at the small things that we can learn from. The beauty of the piece is that people can take the stories of that particular area and maybe manifest it into something bigger, maybe into their own childhood or where they are coming from. So the piece and how it unfolds is a surprise for the audience.

"The piece is not literal to the title, giving people the sense it's about one particular location. It's about a metaphor of our larger world. The piece allows you to appreciate the diversity of this country. That's why the piece is called 'Home,' because we carry our home with us all the time. That's the beauty of the dance experiences because it stimulates the audience's imagination."

Kun-Yang Lin/Dancers presents "Home/S. 9th Street" Nov. 19-21 at FringeArts, 140 N. Columbus Blvd. For more information or tickets, visit www.kunyanglin.org or call 215-413-1318.



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By Shaun Brady

Published: November 17, 2015

Kun-Yang Lin/Dancers explores what it means to become an American

The dance company, led by Kun-Yang Lin, is premiering "Home/S. 9th St."



See Kun-Yang Lin/Dancers perform "Home/S. 9th St." Nov. 19-21 at FringeArts.

Frank Bicking Photo

Much of Kun-Yang Lin's work has focused on the restlessness of the immigrant experience. Last year, the Taiwanese-born choreographer premiered "Be/Longing: Light/Shadow," with inspiration roaming from Mexico to Venice, Indonesia to the Jersey Shore.

But Lin has lived in the United States for 14 years and in South Philadelphia since 2008. His new piece, "[Home/S. 9th St.](#)," explores the idea of settling down and the notion of finding a home in a place where immigrants from different cultures have been doing so for generations.

“When immigrants move to a new country, they give up whatever they have,” Lin says. “They have to rebuild themselves and start a new home. That sense of questioning becomes an important element to tap into what it means to be a human being. This piece is about that sense of a microcosm, where we can learn so much about ourselves and what it means to be American for all those immigrants.”

RELATED: [Doogie Horner: Horror flicks, yes; drunk bros, no](#)

Lin was attracted to the diversity of the South Ninth Street corridor when he was searching for new headquarters for his [Kun-Yang Lin/Dancers](#) company in 2008. Alongside the Italian Market Lin found pockets of Asian, Latino, Irish and Jewish immigrants co-existing, sometimes uneasily. “My own experience was the sense of diversity, the colors, the smells,” he recalls. “I’ve seen it changing just from when I first moved there, at one point broken down and then revitalized. It’s like life in how it goes up and down. You could say that about every place, but it’s such a vivid experience on Ninth Street because you get the sense of embracing old and new and in between.”

To create “Home/S. 9th St.,” Lin and his dancers — many of them foreign-born — conducted story circles with their neighbors, and drew on what they learned for the creation of the dance. Not everyone was comfortable sharing in that way; Lin recalls pursuing some of his neighbors to places where they felt more at home. “People may feel more comfortable talking in the park, a senior center, the Italian Market or one of the two big Asian shopping malls, or one particular breakfast place where they go every day,” he says. “I had to spend maybe five breakfasts with one single older Italian in order for them to feel comfortable to share their experiences with me.”

In the news

With the thundering of endless presidential debates on TV, the issue of immigration is particularly timely. Lin insists that he didn’t set out to make a statement, but admits that one inevitably arises.

“I’m an artist, not a politician. But this piece is about right now while embracing our memories and perspectives,” he says. “It’s not primarily focused on a political point of view, but that becomes part of the piece because that’s what we’re dealing with as a society.”

If you go

Kun-Yang Lin/Dancers: ‘Home/S. 9th St.’

Nov. 19-21

FringeArts, 140 N. Columbus Blvd.

\$15-\$29, 215-413-1318

Fringearts.com

shaun brady

HOME/S. 9TH ST. (Kun-Yang Lin/Dancers): Home is where the dance is

by [Brendan Tetsuo](#) - November 24, 2015 - [Dance](#), [Reviews](#)



Addressing the issues of immigration and acceptance, Kun-Yang Lin/Dancers use dance and theatrics to explore the meaning of home. Shifting from moments of dancing to moments of dialogue throughout the work, the dancers share their personal relationships to home. The dialogue expands from personal experiences to more generalized opinions for and against immigration.

Each dancer shares their experiences of home and how that changes over time. Lin is able to show us how these experiences parallel by using both American born and non-American born dancers. By hearing multiple perspectives, the lines of immigrant and non-immigrant blur. We see each experience as something that diversifies and unites us.

With such a relevant topic in American Society today there can be a lot of risk involved. Unraveling the harsh realities and truth of any subject can radically shift the audience and create a profoundly polarizing result. This work by KYL/D is able to introduce and remind the audience of the importance of immigration with out the radical shift. But does that make the work more or less successful and affecting? The aesthetic of KYL/D can make this a widely accepted and appreciated work but that aesthetic interlaced with a serious and thought-provoking content allows a larger platform to be accessed. Though some of KYL/D's theatrical techniques may be transparent to the more experienced viewer, there is still a resonance that this work is able to produce.

THE DANCE Journal

a publication of PhiladelphiaDANCE.org

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. 9th 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 9th 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 stealthily 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. 9th 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.

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Bill Hebert

Belonging at Home

by Kalila Kingsford Smith

What is a home? Simply: where one lives. More broadly: a place where one feels safe, comfortable, rooted within community and family. But what happens to your concept of home when war and disaster threaten your safety? How do you build a home within a place that does not share your culture or background? Can you truly feel “at home” in a community that senses your difference?

Kun-Yang Lin/Dancers’ *Home/S. 9th St.* tries tackling these questions from the viewpoint of the immigrant while addressing his experience settling in Philadelphia’s S. 9th St. corridor. Lin’s choreography reflects the effects of cultural displacement through the bodies and the voices of his dancers, many of whom have migration stories of their own.

Six chairs in the upstage corner form what appears to be the shape of a boat: one in front, four in the middle, and one in back. Dancers sit in the bow and stern, and the remaining four stand in the middle facing each other. They gesture with their arms—pointing, stretching, shaking—one forms a corner with her two hands as though building a roof over her head. The dancer at the bow scoots her chair forward, and the dancers behind her follow—they slowly inch their way across the stage. Are they trudging through water? My mind can’t help but wander to the horrifying images of child refugees drowning on the way to asylum.

The dancers sit in chairs lined against the back wall. They look left and right, fling their hands forward and up, rest their elbows on their knees, grip a steering wheel. Their gestures build with increased speed and tension. Lin appears as a silhouette downstage. Pacing across the front of the space, he speaks into a microphone, “Sit up. Look at me. Look front. 1 2 3 4 5. Stop. Stop moving. Sit front. Look at me...” The dancers don’t seem to hear him or understand, and they continue dancing in their chairs, unresponsive to the increasing panic and volume in his voice. I make note of his accent, reminded that this is his story.

“Number 207. What is your flight number? What is your final destination? Why are you coming to the US? Why do you identify as an artist?” Each dancer is “called up,” and made to answer a deluge of immigration questions. Moving fluidly, they travel directly downstage, rolling through their bodies and jumping across the space. They shout answers to these questions “44. Philadelphia. Uh, I don’t know. Because I create...”

Liu Mo sits in a chair facing forward, expressionless. Three dancers approach him and push his shoulders, his arms, his legs. Each time, Mo resists, swiping their hands away from him. Their manipulations increase in speed, and still Mo remains expressionless, tossing their hands away, refusing to react. Meanwhile, Helen Hale and Evalina Carbonell circle around behind this group, laughing loudly and pointing at the interaction. I see a boy, bullied by his peers, unaccepted due to his difference, and refusing to give into this tug of war.

“Parades of children...ice cream truck...grapefruit...” As Carbonell vocalizes what seems like a random set of phrases, the dancers roll their bodies and sweep their legs up around their chairs. They are fluid, yet contained, able to stop their motion with precision. Watching the exchange between her voice and the dancers’ movements, I am reminded that dance works more like poetry than like news. It moves within an abstract world, reflecting the internalization of an idea rather than a direct account. While words may suggest or add to an interpretation, the dancers’ movements express in ways that transcend translation.

I can’t help but wonder how much of the work’s impact came from Lin’s choreography. His representation of cultural displacement is potent and powerful, however many of my own interpretations were heightened by the current social debate and fear regarding refugees and migration from the Middle East. While Lin’s work participates in this discourse through his depictions of passage and cultural transition, I believe his intentions were to also symbolize his established sense of belonging as an artist and as a contributor to the character of Philadelphia. The evening finished with a recording of a community member saying, “Despite our differences we can still work together as a community.”

By Kalila Kingsford Smith
November 28, 2015

THE DANCE Journal

a publication of PhiladelphiaDANCE.org

Kun -Yang Ling/ Dancers: Stories, Blessings, Home!

in [Gregory King](#) / by [Gregory King](#) / on November 30, 2015 at 4:13 pm /

photo credit Frank Bicking

by Gregory King, Visiting Assistant Professor of Dance at Swarthmore College for the Dance Journal



At the world premiere of Kun-Yang Lin's *Home/S. 9th St.*, executive director Dr. Ken Metzner offered joss paper to patrons gathered to celebrate the culmination of what has been a process of research, story circles, workshops, and movement exploration. The napkin-like square of paper held a sea of contrasts – textured and smooth, colorful and plain, opaque and transparent (in parts).

In an email exchange, Dr. Metzner explained that in many Asian cultures, Joss papers are

burned as an offering to one's ancestors in order to seek guidance in times of indecision. He clarified that this is done with the hope of achieving a positive outcome and to offer solace to the person praying.

The paper, a metaphor for life, held my attention as I questioned the meaning of the red shimmery symbol on the front. That process of discernment became symbolic to my own personal journey especially since that journey took me from Jamaica to America; a new land, a new home.

Recently, choreographers Ronen Koresh and Silvana Cardell share their own immigration stories by crafting evening length works (Cardell from Argentina and Koresh from Israel). Adding to the conversation, choreographer and director Lin (from Taiwan) used his personal immigration story plus stories from residents living along Philadelphia's 9th St., to create the narrative of *Home*. It was a **ritualistic revelation, highlighting a common thread among immigrants; fear, displacement, hope, sadness, assimilation, and ownership of identity.**

Set designer Britt Plunkett created a sterile white room that offered no indication as to the room's purpose. I settled on believing that the starkness was a canvas for creating possibilities – where Lin's immigration stories could be painted.

A slow moving Brian Cordova cascaded towards dancer Evalina Carbonell who was coiled in a fetal position on the floor. Step by step he planted one foot before the other while slowly rotating the gesture leg. Almost ghostlike, he appeared otherworldly, as he wafted through the space. An unhurried exit made

room for Carbonell to drift on the diagonal, lunging in to the space as she lengthened and slid along a strip of light. At one moment, she extended her leg to the side, inhaling as she surrendered to the moment – in my opinion, a decisive moment to leave home.

Dancers Helen Hale and Jessica Warchal-King were humorous in their oration of anti immigration rhetoric in support of alleged nationalism. Holding a flashlight like object their faces, they became slightly animated in their appearances. Each argument was delivered with comedy and sarcasm causing the audience to respond with laughter.

In an assimilated interrogation session, Lin's ten dancers sat in chairs that were placed upstage while being questioned about their intentions in the country.

“What is your name?”

“How long will you stay?”

“What is your occupation?”

Watching the dancers, I noticed how very little vocalization the small-framed Liu Mo had to do. I wondered if it were his discomfort speaking or his discomfort speaking a language that wasn't his native tongue. Regardless, he moved like a skillful swordsman performing a martial arts ballet and I soon forget about his speaking voice. He used one arm to slice through the space and the other he used as a shield. With each jump, he soared through the air as if approaching a doomed target and landed each jump with a soundless punctuation.

Through movement, text, and live audio, Lin delivered a story that explored what it meant to move from one country to another; to leave one home and create another. In the final tableaux there was an amoebic huddle while Cordova entered the stage carrying a bouquet of the textured joss paper. Held together by sticks of incense, the joss papers had the writings, musings, drawings (about home and community) of the artists, collaborators and a number of people who participated in the story circles for this project. Cordova floated from stage left to stage right shaking the bouquet, and with each tremor, the burly scent of frankincense aerated the space as the papers floated to the ground.

THE DANCE ENTHUSIAST

Impressions from Philadelphia: Kun-Yang Lin/Dancers

By Naomi Orwin / Published on December 2, 2015

Photo by Frank Bicking



"Home" S. 9th St: Finding Home Wherever You Are

FringeArts, 140 N. Columbus Boulevard (at Race).

November 19-21, 2015

Dance Artists: Evalina Carbonell, Annelille Gavino-Kollman, Helen Hale, Mo Liu, Wei-Wei Ma, Jessica Warchal-King and Grace Stern alternating with Brian Cordova.

Artistic Director and Choreographer: Kun-Yang Lin

Sound and Original Music: Cory Neale

What is the meaning of home, and how can it be expressed through movement? That's the question Kun-Yang Lin, Artistic Director of Kun-Yang Lin/Dancers explores in the world-premiere of *Home/S. 9th Street* at FringeArts in Philadelphia.

"For me 'home' is metaphor for past, present, future—the gifts, memories, and weight that we carry with us, the communities in which we currently live and express, the physical, psychological, emotional, spiritual yearnings that we have," says Lin. An immigrant from Taiwan himself, he has lived the experience of finding a new home in a new place, and now he has turned it into a dance.

The white stage with three walls and four doors, designed by Britt Plunkett and lit by Alyssandra Docherty, provides a neutral space where the dancers journey toward whatever they call home. Dressed in white jeggings and long-sleeved turtlenecks, the six dancers (Evalina Carbonell, Annelille Gavino-Kollman, Helen Hale, Mo Liu, Wei-Wei Ma, Jessica Warchal-King) search for the place where they belong. Their socks distinguish them, each wearing a different color—red, black, green, brown.

The intimacy of the space means the audience is almost part of the dance; we see the dancers' faces and the wrinkles in their costumes. They interact with each other and us; Gavino-Kollman even flirts with an audience member.



Photo by Frank Bicking

White folding chairs become a boat, a bus, or an ice cream truck. The dancers travel across the stage, moving around, under, and through these chairs. Their movements are strong but not smooth; their halting steps mirror the obstacles of the immigrant's journey. Sometimes they huddle together; at others times, they struggle to make it alone. Asked to define themselves by name, by number (a flight number, a social security number), they try to answer the questions; they try to find ways to fit in and absorb the culture. They learn to count out loud, and they form the shapes of the alphabet with their bodies.

The music by Cory Neale is relentless. The audience enters to the odd sounds of "South of the Border, Down Mexico Way," but when the show begins, the music switches to a percussive beat interspersed with ethnic children's songs and hypnotic melodies.

The intermission shocks us with its sudden silence, but the dancers don't abandon the stage. They sit in chairs and sprawl on the floor. They remain part of the dance space, even as we come and go, not sure if we're doing the right thing. Then, the break is over, and we return to discover that the immigrants have found their new home. There is a cacophony of sounds and voices with accents.

Dancers are usually silent, letting their gestures speak for them. Here, they voice their thoughts. They answer questions and make statements. While watching this production in the early stages of development, I noticed that the dancers were timid and unaccustomed to speaking on stage. Now it's part of the dance. They claim words as part of their expression. I asked dancer Evalina "Wally" Carbonell about this via email.

"As dancers we communicate physically and visually, moving with a specific relationship to space and time in order to impact the audience," she says. "When speaking on stage, I choose my tone, volume, enunciation, and rhythm with as much care as I use when detailing my dancing. The voice becomes another limb."



Photo by Frank Bicking

Home is a moving, compelling look at the immigrant experience. The show grew out of personal experience and community input. In addition to Lin, some of the dancers are immigrants themselves—Mo Liu and Wei-Wei Ma were born in China, and Annielille Gavino-Kollman is from the Philippines. The troupe spent a year participating in story circles, listening to immigrant tales, and getting to know the residents of the multi-ethnic South Philly community where Lin has his studio and his home. Lin translated these narratives into movement and sound.

It's a timely piece. The dancers offer arguments against letting immigrants into the country: they will take our jobs, they will change our culture, "they can't even order a cheese steak." The arguments are also timeless, says dancer Wei-Wei Ma. This is not a new discussion; it has been going on forever.

The show starts and ends with ritual. Grace Stern, who alternates with Brian Cordova, cleanses the space before the dancers enter. At the end, she shakes a bundle of incense filled with Chinese blessing papers that are a metaphor for the collective history of the dancers and the audience. Even if we don't fully understand the meaning of the gesture, it leaves us with a sense of mystery and connection.

Explore Philly

Art

Kun-Yang Lin Dancers Explore What Philly Really Means in “HOME/S. 9th St.”

[Jill Beckel](#)

Thursday, December 10, 2015

Home/S. 9th St. show flyer doesn't really tell you what to expect.



Story, photos by [Jill Beckel](#) (*unless otherwise noted*)

What does “home” mean to you? Is it your childhood home, your current home or maybe a place you visited once that felt like the home you never had? Maybe it’s a mix of a lot of feelings and images. Home is not the same for everyone.

The world premiere of *Home/S. 9th St.* took place at [FringeArts](#) right near [Penn’s Landing](#) with shows on Nov. 19th, 20th and 21st. The notions of “home” and “American-ness” were discovered in part through stories of residents living on Philly’s diverse South 9th Street where the [Kun-Yang Lin Dancers](#) rehearse at [CHI Movement Arts Center](#). [Kun-Yang Lin](#) teaches CHI Awareness Technique which is a philosophy involving bringing one’s whole self into the dance. While the [Kun-Yang Lin Dancers](#) are a contemporary dance company, for this piece they focused more on the movement and emotion of the piece rather than a strict type of dance.

Explore Philly got a chance to observe a rehearsal of the show a week before the performance and sit and chat with Artistic Director Kun-Yang Lin and Executive Director Kenneth Metzner. Kun-Yang Lin came up with the idea for the show in the summer of 2013 after a trip to Indonesia. The trip was a moving experience for him as he worked with three other contemporary dancers. He observed them “completely surrender themselves to the dance” and was in awe. He began to think about his own home in Philadelphia living as an immigrant and what it meant to him. What you call home may be very different from person to person. And home is not always a location. The process and exploration of discovering what “home” means to you connects us as humans. *HOME/S. 9th St.* is a journey into our neighborhoods and communities, and an exploration of what we can learn from each other. It explores the past, present and future of all of the communities’ stories melded into one.

Through the story circles with neighbors on S. 9th St. and local performances, the dancers and Kun-Yang Lin connected with the community in more ways than they had ever even thought possible. They interviewed their neighbors to hear their reflections of home and shared theirs as well. Kun-Yang Lin and his dancers really explored S. 9th St. – the people, the sights, the sounds and the smells. The market located on S. 9th St. brings in a wide variety of people from all walks of life, locals and visitors of Philly alike. Kun-Yang Lin said that to him the “market infuses rhythm in peace.”

The Kun-Yang Lin dancers include Evalina Carbonell, Brian Cordova, Annelille Gavino-Kollman, Helen Hale, Mo Liu, Wei Wei Ma, Grace Stern and Jessica Warchal-King. This show featured seven of the dancers, some of them immigrants themselves. With no gender focus in the piece, the dancers were free to focus on just being human and what type of story they wanted to portray. Each of them did not play one roll, but a variety of different immigrants’ journeys. After viewing their pieces in progress, [Cory Neale](#) composed the music to go along with it.

The dancers rehearsed for the show for over a year and showed excerpts of it throughout the community at local venues since January. PNC Bank Arts Life funded the project and allowed Kun-Yang Lin to give some free tickets to community members, some who had never even seen a dance performance before in their lives.

The performance had so many intricate parts with each dancer playing their own part, but then, effortlessly, they would become part of the group again. Many of the duets throughout the piece involved two dancers working together – helping each other extend a leg, singing together, lifting each other, etc. After rehearsal, the dancers told me that this dance piece is unlike any that they had ever performed before. They talked about how they had to “let go” and revisit and refine the pieces over time while rehearsing it. They brought their own memories of S. 9th St., their interviews with community members and their idea of what “home” meant to them as inspiration.

As we entered the theater, we received a Chinese blessing with our program. These papers were featured in the performance at the very end and had the writings, musings, drawings (about home and community) of the artists, collaborators and a number of people who participated in the story circles for the project written on the back.

The show inspired us to remember to cherish our past, move forward and also live in the moment. When you’re celebrating and spending time with family and friends this holiday season, stop and think about what “home” really means to you.



Kun-Yang Lin/Dancers rehearsing for their HOME/S. 9th St. performance at CHI Movement Arts Center.



Everyone moving as one.



Duets throughout the piece told their own unique stories.



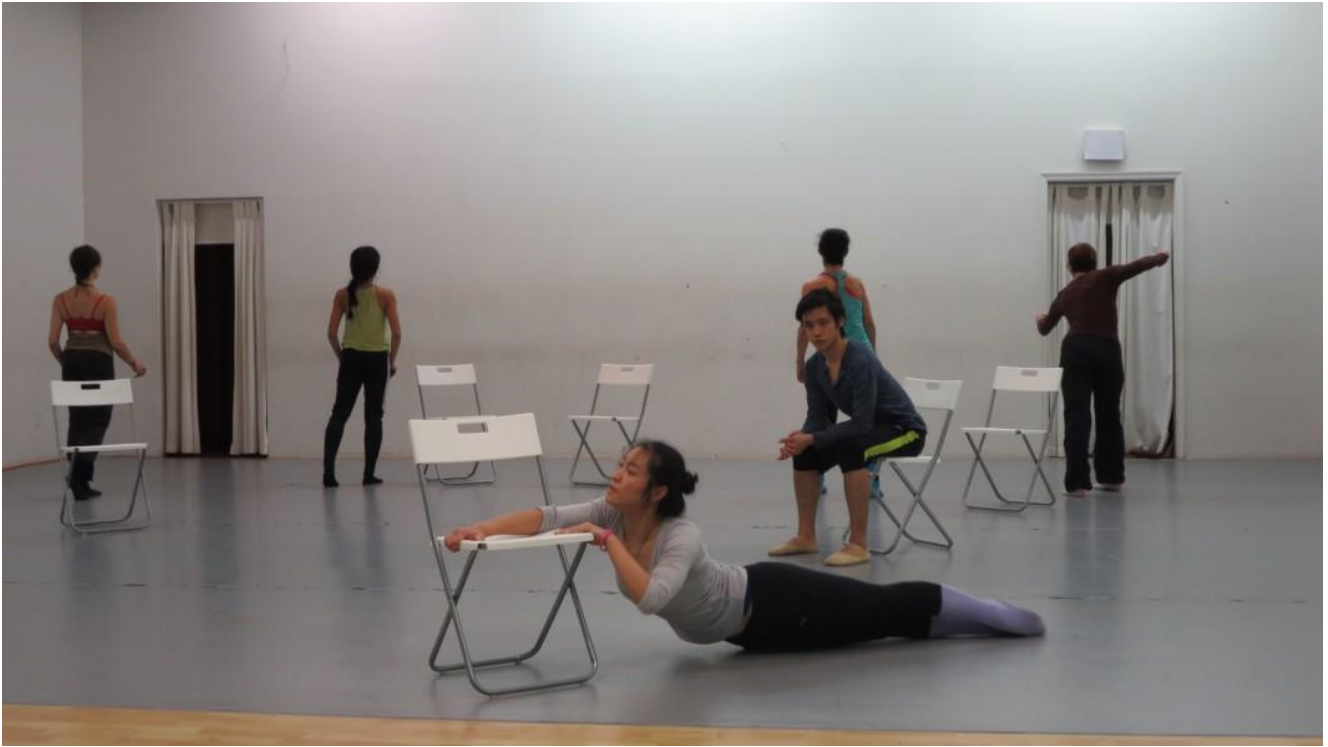
The dancers were focused on their rehearsal with the show opening just a week away.



Chairs were used as props throughout the performance.



Dancers connecting both physically and emotionally during the piece.



Each dancer had their own solo.



The dancers showed many emotions throughout the piece including happiness, sadness, fear, joy, uncertainty.



The dancers made beautiful shapes with their bodies.





The dancers waved during a more cheery, circus music part of the performance.



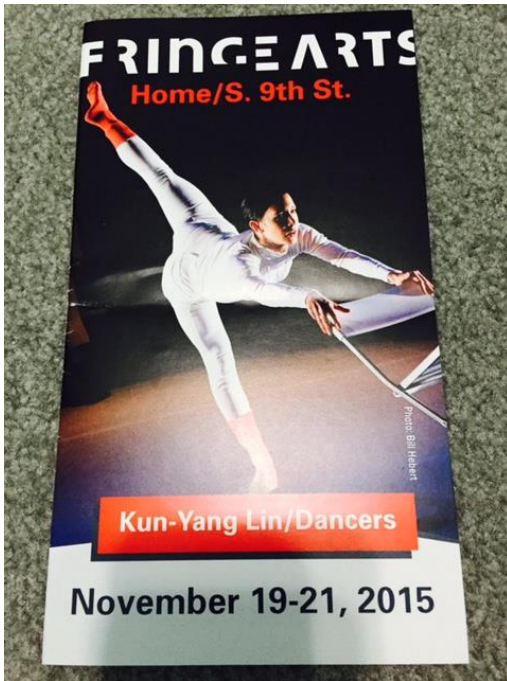
Amazing flexibility and poise.



The dance was very powerful when all the dancers danced as one, breathing together as one being.



Dancing through the end scene at rehearsal.



The show program.



Chinese blessing paper that all audience members received.

From Kun-Yang Lin regarding the Chinese blessing papers: *“The paper we distributed (and which was carried among and shaken loose from the incense bundle by the lone figure at the end) is layered with meaning and history. In many Asian cultures with Chinese roots, papers such as these are burned as an offering or invocation to one’s ancestors, to the mysteries of the universe or to the gods...to honor memories of loved-one’s passed, to seek guidance in times of indecision, to assist in the manifestation of a hope or particular outcome, to offer solace to the one praying. They are part of deeply-rooted ritual and thus serve as metaphor for our personal and collective histories – all that we carry with us from our past and that which we yearn for. The metaphors extend as well to the tangible form of the paper – it is both rough and smooth in parts, plain and colorful, reflective and dull in texture like the twists, turns, mundane and contemplative moments of our lives. Too, we were mindful of the fact that most people in the audience who received one (and by design not all did) would be unclear/confused/curious as to its significance and thus would have to “figure it out” themselves – a state in which many immigrants find themselves during countless encounters in a new land. The papers carried on stage bear the thoughts, writings, musings, drawings (about home and community) of the artists, collaborators and a number of people who participated in the story circles for this project; and their “release” on stage is symbolic of an offering to the mystery of the universe and an homage to our collective humanity.”*



A very powerful opening scene to the show kept audience members guessing.



The scene was set with a stark white background as if we were peering in on the seven dancers in a world of their own.

The *HOME/S. 9th St* stage was a plain white set with three walls almost like the audience was looking down into a small room. It featured exquisite contemporary dancing, spoken word, music and singing. The piece as a whole was very unique with honest movement. Even though the dancers often moved different ways at different times, they were all one and connected throughout the entire performance through their breathing and motions. I found the solos to be the most moving throughout the piece because each dancer added their own unique personality and take on what “home” meant to them. Half of the dancers in the performance were immigrants themselves, so they were telling their own stories of immigration – the good parts and the bad. Their own real experiences added richness to the piece. It was politically-charged as well, especially the “interrogation scene” in which one of the dancers was interrogated by airport customs officials and then another spoken piece with arguments #1-7 against immigrants.



HOME is a journey into our neighborhoods and communities.

“From the intensely personal to the universal experiences of all who call a new place home, in this multi-layered, multi-textured performance, Kun Yang Lin and his dancers use their bodies to tell layered and personal stories of immigration and displacement.” – [FringeArts](#)



Photo by Frank Bicking.



Photo by Bill Hebert,
the final scene with the Chinese blessing papers.