

Facing East Dance & Music
under the direction of Sue Li Jue presents
“HELD SO CLOSE” REMEMBERING THE POETS OF ANGEL ISLAND

September 12-14 and 20 & 21, 2003, 8 pm / 7 pm Sundays
McKenna Theater, SFSU: 1600 Holloway Ave. San Francisco

EDUCATORS GUIDE

Meet the Artist: Sue Li Jue – Artistic Director, Facing East Dance & Music

Sue Li Jue’s professional dance career includes dancing with many respected dance companies and choreographers throughout the Bay Area. Since 1986 Ms. Li Jue has presented her own work and in November 1999 debuted her Oakland-based company, Facing East Dance & Music (FEDM). Her work has been performed at local dance venues as well as numerous festivals and showcases. Ms. Li Jue’s work has been honored with awards and grants, including the 2001 Isadora Duncan Award for Outstanding Ensemble. Sue Li Jue currently teaches dance as a Lecturer in UC Berkeley’s Physical Education Program where she has taught for 17 years. She also holds both Bachelor and Master of Fine Arts dance degrees. Ms. Li Jue consistently contributes to her dance community as Advisory Board member for Summerfest/Dance, and often as granting panelist for City of Oakland Craft and Cultural Arts, Alameda County Art Commission and similar organizations locally.

About the Performance

“Held So Close” remembering the poets of Angel Island is a multimedia dance and live music production that explores the little known years in U.S. history when Chinese immigrants had limited entry to the United States. Remaining true to FEDM’s signature style of “dynamic modern dance with an Asian aesthetic,” Sue Li-Jue new dance pieces are based on two years of research into this history. Working in tandem with several collaborators, the multimedia production includes modern dance, music, visual design, costume, and spoken word (including both English and Cantonese translations). “Held So Close” is a partnership between Facing East Dance & Music and Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation, and co-sponsored by San Francisco State University’s School of Music and Dance.

The evening-length production will incorporate several dances that support overarching, layered themes. The poems carved into the barrack walls are the catalyst for this important work. Throughout the piece, the visual thread that will unify these vignettes will include the textures, layers and images of paper. Paper, in the forms of passports, Chinese newspapers, the actual written documents of exclusionary laws, letters home, and others, provided the main sources of information that connected Chinese immigrants to their families and their homeland as well as to the American government and the fate of their futures. Paper presented both access to, and barriers from, America. Utilizing the power of dance, live music, text and visual design, FEDM hopes to explore the lives and emotions of thousands of Chinese immigrants whose experiences helped to root today’s Asian American population. For more information, visit: www.fedm.org

About Angel Island Immigration Station

From 1910 to 1940, the Immigration Station on Angel Island was used to process and detain hundreds of thousands of primarily Chinese and other Asian immigrants who entered America through San Francisco Bay. It was not a warm welcome. Upon a ship’s arrival, immigration officials would separate the immigrants on board. Immigrants in first class with satisfactory paperwork would be allowed to disembark in San Francisco, while those remaining, mostly

Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Filipino, Indian, Portuguese, Mexican, and Russian immigrants were ferried to Angel Island. There, they would endure overcrowded facilities, humiliating medical examinations, intense interrogations, and countless days (sometimes months and even years) of waiting at the Immigration Station pending either approval of their applications or deportation.

For Chinese immigrants, who were the largest group processed, Angel Island was a harsh greeting to the United States, a reality far different from the vision they had of their new homeland called “Gold Mountain.” Starting in the 1850s Chinese primarily left Guangdong Province in Southwest China to escape a cycle of poverty and chaos propelled by the Opium Wars, a deteriorating economy, a series of natural disasters, food shortages, and political unrest and violence. In the U.S. they hoped to find of wealth and fortune and worked in the railroad, agriculture and fishing industries, and by opening laundries and restaurants. However, economic depression in the 1870s raised anti-Chinese sentiment as white laborers and politicians blamed Chinese labor for California’s economic woes. After increased violence and discrimination by anti-Chinese movements, the United States passed the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, banning all Chinese laborers into the country and severely restricting large-scale Chinese immigration.

In 1910 Immigration officials opened a new facility to house and process incoming and outgoing migrants on Angel Island, the largest island in the San Francisco Bay, far from the mainland. Replacing an old two-story shed at the wharf, the new station would prevent Chinese immigrants from communicating with those in San Francisco, isolate immigrants with communicable diseases, and, like the prison on nearby Alcatraz Island, be escape proof. Processing and questioning of new arrivals took weeks and sometimes months and years. Admittance was never assured. Because of the exclusionary laws directed specifically at them, some Chinese adopted false identities, becoming “paper sons or daughters”—either children of American citizens or the exempted merchant class on paper only. All entering Chinese had to prove their identity by matching details of their lives with the answers of their relatives in the United States. Inspectors had wide discretionary power in determining the fate of each applicant.

Angel Island is often referred to as the “Ellis Island of the West,” yet the experiences of immigrants were quite different. The processing procedures on Ellis Island were romantically softened by the symbolic greeting by the Statue of Liberty and her message, “Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free.” Angel Island offered no such comforts. In contrast, immigration officials considered the Immigration Station on Angel Island to be “the Guardian of the Western Gate.” Immigrants endured harsh prison-like conditions while awaiting the demanding hearing process to prove their status as legal immigrants. They hoped to successfully negotiate the restrictive immigration laws, which attempted to exclude them from entry to the U.S. Thus, Angel Island and Ellis Island serve as bookends to the national story of immigration, not only in geography, but also in meaning and experience.

Poetry

For those who waited, loneliness, isolation, and despair colored their experience. Their chance at a new life hung in the balance. Immigrants etched poems into the walls of the dilapidated barracks serving as reminders of the anxiety, depression, fear, and hopes that the immigrants faced. Some poems include classical allegories and historical references and some were carved with a classical Cantonese technique. As first hand accounts, these poems take a special place in the history of the United States and American literature for illuminating the hardships that immigrants faced because of the exclusionary laws.

There are tens of thousands of poems
composed on these walls.

They are all cries of complaint and sadness.
 The day I am rid of this prison and attain success,
 I must remember that this chapter once existed.
 In my daily needs, I must be frugal.
 Needless extravagance leads youth to ruin.
 All my compatriots should please be mindful.
 Once you have some real gains, return home early.
 -By one from Xiangshan



Detained in this wooden house for several tens of days,
 It is all because of the Mexican exclusion law which implicates me.
 It's a pity heroes have no way of exercising their prowess.
 I can only await the word so that I can snap Zu's whip.

From now on, I am departing far from this building
 All of my fellow villagers are rejoicing with me.
 Don't say that everything within is Western styled.
 Even if it is built of jade, it has turned into a cage.

-- Poems from Angel Island Immigration Station, author unknown

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS

Preservation: A Community Story

The ongoing story of Angel Island Immigration Station includes the collective efforts of members of the larger community to preserve the site. In 1970 the California State Parks scheduled to destroy the barracks. California State Park Ranger, Alexander Weiss, rediscovered the poetry on the walls of the abandoned barracks and contacted Professor George Araki of San Francisco State College and photographer Mak Takahashi. Together they photographed the walls of the barracks. Sparked by the discovery, Bay Area Asian Americans, spearheaded by Paul Chow, studied how best to preserve the station for historical interpretation. His organization later became the Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation (AIISF). Due to their efforts, California allocated money to restore and preserve the barracks as a state monument and in 1983, the barracks opened to the

public. In 1997, the Angel Island Immigration Station was declared a National Historic Landmark by the National Park Service. AIISF works as the non-profit partner of California State Parks and the National Park Service in the work to restore the historic immigration station at Angel Island. The immigration station still benefits from the efforts of volunteers in the community.

- What have you, family members, or friends done to help other people in your community? Actions from people like you can make a difference. What are some issues in your community that you can work on?

Immigration and Detention Today

Since the days of the operation of Angel Island Immigration Station, the U.S. has changed its immigration laws. In 1943 the U.S. repealed the Chinese Exclusion Act because of China's allegiance to the United States during World War II and instituted a quota system based on national origin restricting Chinese immigration to 105 persons annually. In the late 1960s, larger numbers of Chinese were allowed to immigrate as the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965 abolished these restrictive quotas based on race and nationality.

Today, immigration is based on an annual worldwide quota without regard to national origin or other prejudicial restrictions. Immigrants are divided into three entry categories: preference categories - family members, professionals, and needed skilled and unskilled labor; special immigrants - religious and medical personnel, and refugees - those seeking asylum from persecution or oppression in their own country.

After the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, U.S. state and federal officials applied new immigration measures out of concern for national security. These measures have affected the civil liberties and the rights of immigrants. Suspected illegal immigrants with links to terrorism have been detained as authorities traced thousands of leads and sought to prevent a follow-up attack, some facing delays in being charged or getting a lawyer, abuse and harsh conditions. Many people have been deported and none have been charged as terrorists. Civil rights groups have expressed their concerns about the broad net that the authorities have cast in prosecuting the campaign against terrorism are working to pressure the Justice Department to change its procedures.

- How do government policies today affect those who are immigrating and living in the United States? What are some of the issues regarding immigration today, i.e. national security, granting asylum for political refugees, workers for industry, etc.? Do some research on current government immigration policies. How have they affected people in your community?

What is Modern Dance?

Modern dance refers to dance forms that are distinct from both ballet and the show dancing (jazz dance) of musicals. Traditionally, European and American theatrical dance centered on ballet. In the early twentieth century, visual artists, writers, and dancers pioneered new, modern forms moving away from tradition ones. Often, choreographers and dancers based their works on personal experience, using their bodies as instruments to express such emotions as passion, fear, joy, or grief. Rather than adhering to a set and strict vocabulary as in ballet, these pioneers created movement as an outgrowth of his or her own communicative impulses. Dance pieces today use an increasingly broad range of techniques, styles, and source materials.

- How is modern dance different from traditional dance, such as ballet? What skills do dancers need to have in order to create a piece? What are some ways that modern dance conveys emotions, stories or concepts?

Historic Preservation

“We all need such places...just to know who we are...these are the places where we have created our stories, where we find our shared memories...the places where we have experiences community and where we can create it again....Past, present and future are not separate. But we are in the present are not accountable for the story” (Robert Archibald, *A Place to Remember*, Alta Mira Pres, 1999, pp. 220-221).

Historical sites can provide a connection among people, their place and their history. Throughout the United States, individuals and community leaders have worked to preserve and conserve buildings, structures, and neighborhoods that reflect aspects of U.S. history and cultural heritage. Local residents, businesses, and city, state and/or national government agencies will often partner together to preserve buildings to recognize a historic past, instill community pride, and encourage economic revitalization.

- What places in your community do you consider special? Are any of these places in danger of disappearing? What kind of preservation efforts have you seen in your community? Is there anything that you can do to preserve a building or a place?

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

Family History

Immigration is a part of most Americans’ family history. Have students research how their family came to America by interviewing older family members, looking at documents at home, or even using the files at the National Archives Records Administration in San Bruno. How does the experience of Chinese immigrants entering this country through Angel Island compare to that of their families experiences? How is it different? Have them share their stories with other students in the classroom in a written, visual, or oral presentation.

Storytelling

Ask students to select a story of immigration and present it to the class. This could be one from interviews of their own families’ experiences, from oral histories of immigrants on Angel Island or Ellis Island, or from other sources of fiction or non-fiction. Ask them to become the person they interviewed, telling the story of that person’s perspective. Encourage them to use gestures, body language, posture and vocal qualities of their person.

Poetry

Writing is powerful voice for people of all backgrounds to express their experiences, hopes and fears. Have students create their own poetry based on their reactions to learning about Angel Island Immigration Station and/or seeing the performance. How does hearing about the immigrants make them feel? One possible poetry exercise is a found poem where students as individuals or groups can write down words, images, thoughts, and phrases that come to mind about the immigrants’ experiences. Phrases can even be taken from the Angel Island poems themselves. Then individually, in small groups, or as a whole class arrange these phrase into a poem that gets read to everyone.

Movement

When creating a new piece, dancer and choreographer Sue Li Jue might start with a gesture and have that evolve into a series of dance movements. Have students create a small movement piece based on the experience of Angel Island immigrants. Write down or have students write down words or phrases that come to mind about Angel Island on small slips of paper, i.e. boredom, crowded, uncertainty, leaving home, etc. In pairs or in small groups, have students draw a few slips of paper. Using these words and phrases, have students create gestures and movements that

express one or all of their words. Movements and shapes can be simple and expanded by using one or more of these concepts: repetition, slow vs. fast, walking, sitting, standing while gesturing, solo against group unison, all unison, all simultaneous solos, etc. If the groups do not like their words they can return them for a new one. Have the groups perform for one another.

SELECTED RESOURCES ABOUT THE ANGEL ISLAND IMMIGRATION STATION

Books for Students & Teachers

Hooper, Dorothy & Hooper, Thomas (1994). *The Chinese American Family Album*. New York: Oxford University Press. This resource traces the experience of Chinese Americans using historic photographs, diary selections, letters, oral histories, newspaper articles and historical background. The section on Angel Island includes a selection of poems and excerpts of oral histories from former detainees.

Lai, Him Mark; Lim, Genny; and Yung, Judy (1980). *Island, Poetry and History of Immigrants Detained on Angel Island, 1910-1940*. San Francisco: HOC DOI. This book contains an overview of Immigration Station history, provides oral histories excerpts from former detainees, and documents the poetry in Chinese with English translations.

Other Organizations and Resources for Immigration

American Memory <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/>

The Library of Congress site provides primary sources including photographs, periodicals, and documents and lesson plans on American History topics such as immigration.

Ellis Island Immigration Museum, (212) 363-7620, <http://www.ellisland.org>

Ellis Island served as the East Coast immigration depot from 1892 until 1954. Restored and reopened in 1995, this national museum provides information on immigration.

New York Times on the Web Learning Network: <http://www.nytimes.com/learning/>

This internet resource provides student and teacher resource related to contemporary events. Past immigration articles and lessons plans are available in the archive.

The United States Immigration and Naturalization Service, <http://www.ins.usdoj.gov/>

Investigate current policies of immigration in the United States through this web site.

National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (NNIRR), (510) 465-1984, nnirr@nnirr.org
<http://www.nnirr.org/> NNIRR is a national organization composed of local coalitions and immigrant, refugee, community, religious, civil rights and labor organizations and activists. It serves as a resource for important immigrant & refugee issues.

About Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation

The Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation (AIISF) is a non-profit organization founded over twenty-five years ago by concerned citizens and descendants of detainees who were committed to preserving the deteriorating immigration station barracks. AIISF's primary goals are to lead the effort to preserve, restore, and interpret Angel Island Immigration Station, a National Historic Landmark, as the Pacific gateway for U.S. immigration; and to promote educational activities that further the understanding of Pacific Rim immigration in American history. For more information, call at (415) 561-2160, email at info@aaisf.org, or visit the website:

www.aaisf.org.