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Finding Expression And Acceptance Through Dance

By Jenn Domashevich

What was once a tale of hardship and loneliness transformed into an inspirational tale of how Yung Yung Tsuai prevailed over the struggles of acculturation to become a successful, seasoned dancer and choreographer.

Tsuai was torn from her homeland at the age of one during the Communist Revolution in the 1940's. She and her family fled first to Macao and then to Taiwan, where she began to train in traditional Chinese folk and opera dance at the age of five.

While still hoping to return to her homeland, Tsuai immersed herself in dance and was granted a scholarship to study at the prestigious Martha Graham Dance School in New York City 15 years later. She began a new life in a strange country.

With no understanding of English, Tsuai found herself alone, and overwhelmed by American culture. Her feeling of alienation deepened as the Chinese people she met spoke dialects that she didn't understand.

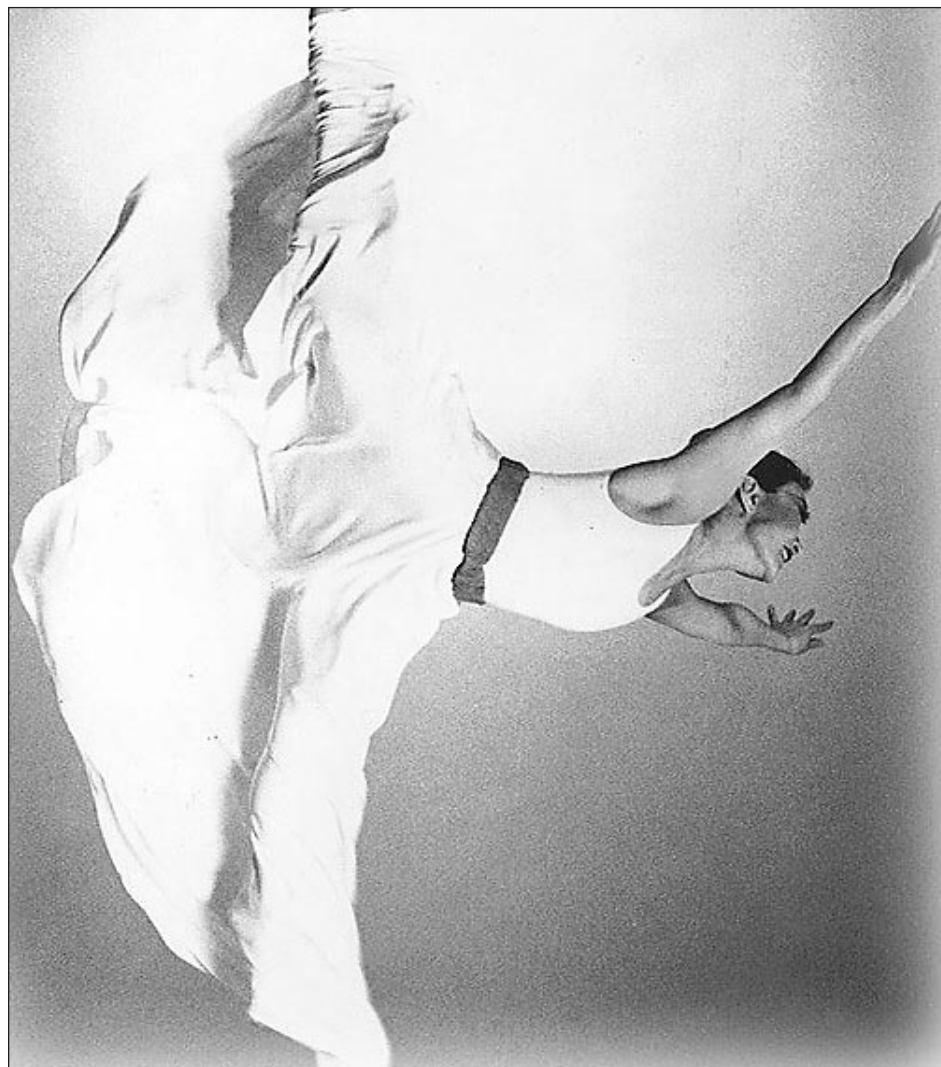
Tsuai suffered a nervous breakdown because she felt she lacked a true cultural identity. She found some help in therapy, but the emptiness inside her remained.

A turning point in her life came when she met and married an American named Martin Lerner in 1973. "I couldn't speak English and he couldn't speak Chinese," said Tsuai.

She opened her own successful dance studio in New York, and toured across the United States with the well-known choreographer, Pearl Lang.

Tsuai moved to the Smoky Mountains in North Carolina, where she lived in solitude and researched American folk dancing for two years.

But she still felt haunted by a feeling that something was missing in her



Yung Yung Tsuai overcame the obstacle of acculturation and found expression through dance.

Photo courtesy Lucy Zhou

life.

Then, after 20 years of absence, Tsuai returned to Taiwan to work as a rehearsal director with Taiwan's leading modern dance company, the Cloud Gate Dance Theater. She was sur-

rounded by people she understood on a spiritual level, but she couldn't converse fully with them.

"I started to awaken to my heritage. Memories from my childhood came back...it was healing," explained

Tsuai. "But I couldn't express myself, my Chinese had gotten very bad."

When Tsuai returned to America, she took delight in trying out for dancing parts that had Asian themes. She starred in Broadway choreographer, Susan Stroman's, "Sayonara," where she interacted with Japanese consultants who were hired for the show. She learned the Kabuki dance, which is related to China's Tang Dynasty.

Tsuai opened a Chinese antique shop in Woodstock, New York while she taught at a dance school. Although the antique shop was not very prosperous, it was an excuse for Tsuai to fly back and forth to China twice a year and take classes on Chinese art history and culture.

Tsuai is currently involved with the New York-based multi-lingual television network, New Tang Dynasty. The station is preparing to stage its third global Chinese New Year Show. The show has an English-speaking co-host and classic Western singing and dancing performances. Many of the performances in the show retain the traditional Chinese culture in a variety of artistic forms.

Although she has been retired for a year now, Tsuai is choreographing a dance for a Chinese New Year show being held at Radio City Music Hall this January, called the 2006 New Tang Dynasty Chinese New Year Gala.

It just one of the many ways Tsuai finds to give back something to her adopted country and the community she calls home.

The 2006 NTDTV Chinese New Year Global Gala at Radio City Music Hall will be held Friday, January 20th at 8 p.m. and Saturday, January 21st at 2 and 8 p.m.

Call (888) 260-6221 or (212) 307-7171 for tickets.



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— Yung Yung Tsuai