# Shen Yun artist profile: Yungchia Chen

## A second chance at life as a dancer

By GENEVIEVE LONG
*Epoch Times*

Yungchia Chen speaks and moves with the quiet grace of a dancer who has been training for a lifetime. His long list of awards, honours, and accolades during his 27-year career reflect his rich artistic background.

Just three years ago, Chen thought he was finished competing and was even considering going into retirement. A torn tendon in his Achilles' heel area from a performance in 2004 had slowed him down and made him feel his age as a performer.

But when Chen was recruited for a dance competition in New York, he had one last chance to be back on center stage—and he took it.

In 2005, while teaching dance at Taiwan Arts University, Chen was spotted by Tia Zhang, a graduate of the renowned Beijing Dance School and a dancer with Shen Yun Performing Arts, a performing arts company based in New York. Zhang eventually convinced him to compete in the 2007 New Tang Dynasty Television Dance Competition in New York City. He won first place.

For Chen, the surprise was not winning the competition—he has won numerous awards in his career—it was the fact that he could still take to the stage and deliver.

"I was surprised during the competition that I could still dance—I could still participate and get an award," recalls Chen.

"I had already decided pretty much that I wasn't going to dance anymore."

Now an instructor at Fei Tian Academy of the Arts, Chen is a choreographer and principal dancer with Divine Performing Arts. Mr. Chen sees his life's work as a way to preserve classical Chinese culture for generations to come.

I think Chinese dancing has many layers of meaning for human beings," says Chen about his craft.

**Early beginning**

Chen's career as a dancer began as a child in China. He was fascinated with dance, but what he saw lacked the inner meaning he longed to express.

"When I was a little boy, during the Cultural Revolution in China, there was nothing to watch but propaganda from the CCP [Chinese Communist Party]," says Chen.

At age 11, Chen joined Guizhou College's Dance Department, and by age 16, in 1984, he became a member of the Guizhou Dancing Troupe.

Chen's passion for his craft has led to a storied career as a dancer and a long list of illustrious awards, including recognition for passing on the essence of classical Chinese dance to future generations when his protégé won an award. He was given the "Gardener Award" as a dance teacher/choreographer for his student's winning second place at the 8th National Peach & Plum Cup Art College Dance Competition last August in China.

**Yungchia Chen** GENEVIEVE LONG/THE EPOCH TIMES

The Peach & Plum Cup Dance Competition, referred to as the "Oscar Award of Chinese Dancers," is revered among dance and other performing arts institutions. It is the largest competition in the country and the only dance competition with multiple categories.

While in Taiwan, he was also showered with awards, including the Formosa Award in 2004, Taiwan's highest award given in a national dance competition. The same year, he was given a lifetime achievement award called the "Flying Phoenix Dancer's Achievement Award."

In 1995 he married a Taiwanese woman and moved to Taiwan, where he continued his dance career. Now 38, he is passing on the tradition to his family—both of his sons are learning Chinese dance.

**A new beginning**

Chen's life almost immediately took another unexpected turn after moving his family to the United States last year. He started practicing Falun Dafa, or Falun Gong, a meditation practice that is persecuted in his homeland of mainland China.

In one year of practicing Falun Gong, more than the hue of Chen's once sallow-looking complexion has changed.

"Before, even if I didn't go and argue with a person, I would be unhappy in my heart," says Chen. "Like why does this person get more than I have? I felt a little envious, a little unhappy. Now, I've learned to let go."

As a dancer, being on stage requires absolute focus to avoid making mistakes. He says one way he maintains his focus is by putting all of his attention into the role that he is playing. The sacrifices he makes are enormous, but in his eyes, so are the benefits.

"Dance is training, is learning; it really has to do with suffering, enduring hardship," says Chen. "In this process, in this suffering, you have to find joy."

The performances are so detailed and rich with color, intricate choreography, and inner meaning that they take him and audience members back to the roots of traditional Chinese culture.

"This performance is more traditional, and so it's a more righteous kind of culture for the audience," says Chen. "I think they relate to it—this traditional culture."

Despite his achievements, Chen does not see his dancing career cooling down anytime soon. He says that in the next 5-10 years, he'd like to train students and promote Chinese dance internationally.

"I think that traditional Chinese dance promotes very pure and traditional culture, and it is quite comprehensive," says Chen.

# India's Nobel Laureate Dreamt of a Borderless World

By SUSHEELA HEGDE
*The Epoch Times*

Rabindranath Tagore, Asia's first Nobel laureate, stands as one of the cultural icons of the world. His literary works distinguished by profundity of thought and beauty of expression have thoroughly influenced the collective intellect of Indian subcontinent and immensely impacted Western thinkers.

Born to a leader of a revolutionary Hindu sect Brahmo Samaj in the western region Bengal in British-ruled India in 1867, Tagore was educated at home until the age of 17. Then he was sent to England for higher studies, but midway in the studies he returned home.

Apparently the formal format of education did not sit well with him. Years later in 1901, he established an open-air school at Shantiniketan which was developed into an international university named Vishwa Bharati after India's independence. This school, which he envisioned as an Indian alternative to the colonial education, became his center of activity for the next 40 years until his death in 1941.

Tagore's multi-faceted talent found its way in songs, poems, plays, short stories, novels, essays, letters, as well as paintings and drawings. His works reflect a deep bond between humans and nature. More often than not, he appealed for universal peace, love and harmony.

Until his middle years, his influence was mostly confined to the Indian subcontinent, especially to his native region Bengal, as his works were only in his native language, Bengali—India was and still is a multilingual country in which different languages are spoken in different regions.

However, his own translation of his spiritual lyrics from his poetic tome, titled Gitanjali, into English in 1912 opened the floodgates of his luminous poetic talent to the western world. The awe-struck West conferred the highest honor for literature, a Nobel Prize, on Gitanjali in 1913.

Gitanjali is an anthology of songs offered to the Infinite. The poet's meditation and contemplation on God, man, and nature flowed into more than 100 poems in the book.

Following his Nobel Prize-winning book, Tagore translated several of his other works into English, which helped his fame to touch a new height globally. He traveled across continents on lecture tours and friendship tours and became the spiritual and cultural heritage of India.

The British government honored the philosopher poet with the Knighthood in 1915. However, deeply saddened by the infamous Jallianwala Bagh massacre in 1919, in which British soldiers shot dead scores of unarmed people in the northern Indian city of Amritsar, he returned the honor.

Tagore was a close friend to Mahatma Gandhi, who was leading the famous nationalist movement against the British rule in the country. Though seen taking part in several nationalist activities, he had dreamt of a borderless world in which discrimination based on people's nationality and race would not exist.

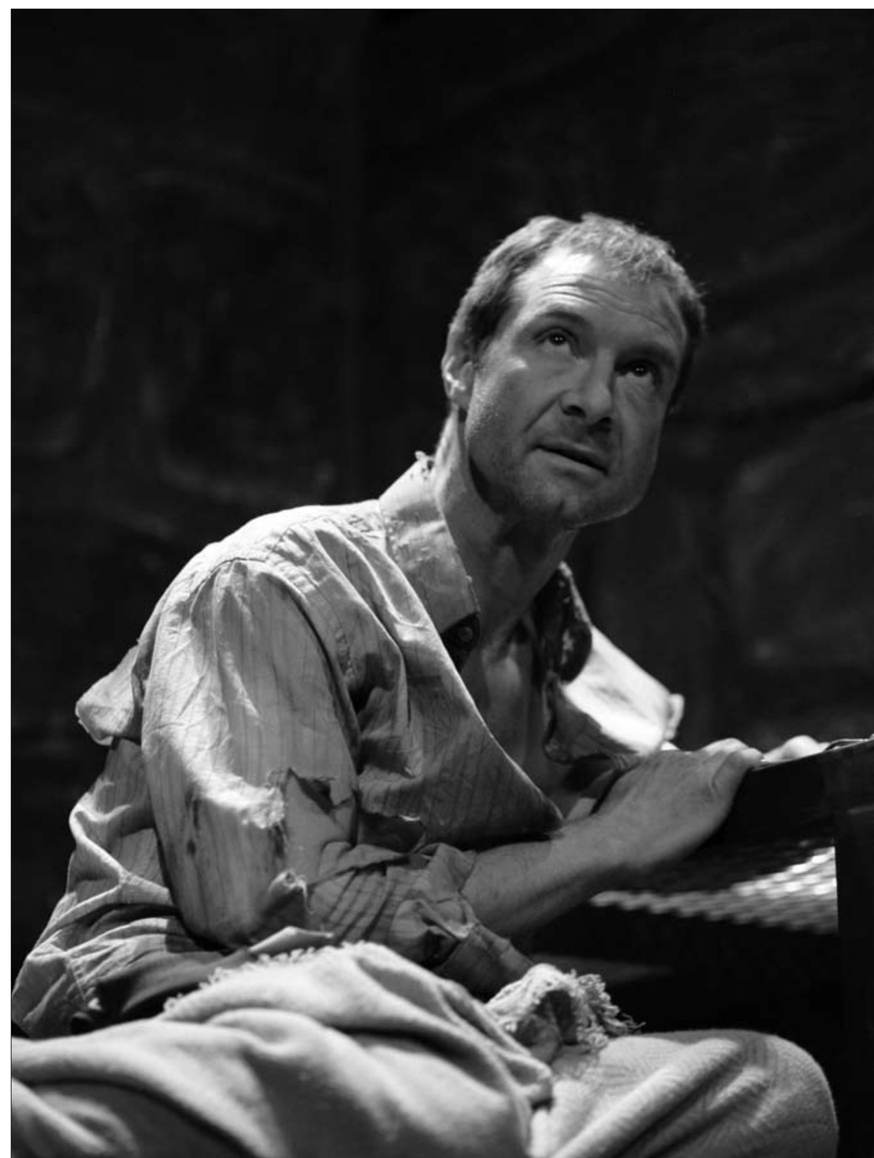
Though his heart grieved at the violence afflicting humanity, he always believed in the divinity hidden in the human heart. This belief was evident in his writing when he was just 18. "A sudden spring breeze of religious experience for the first time came to my life and passed away leaving in my memory a direct message of spiritual reality," he wrote in "The Lord of Life."

Tagore was also impressed by the eternal values of Buddha's teachings. For instance, aggrieved by the greed, hatred and violence seen everywhere in the world, he pleads with the Buddha for a healing touch in a poem as below:

Let love's lotus with its inexhaustible treasure of honey  
Open its petals in thy light,  
O Serene, O Free, in thine immeasurable mercy and goodness  
Wipe away all dark stains from the heart of this earth.

Tagore envisioned a humanity free from man-made divisions with one religion for all, which is 'The Religion of Man.' Though inspired by the Advaita Vedanta, a school of Hinduism that propagates oneness (the union of individual self with the Universal Self) as reality, Tagore refused to heed to any institutional creed or dogma. "Think clearly, feel nobly, and act rightly to become channels of truth"—this was his ideal.

**DEVOTION: Indian poet, philosopher, and winner of the 1913 Nobel Prize for Literature, Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) wrote chiefly on spirituality, man, and nature.** PUBLIC DOMAIN


**SURVIVAL: Steven Pounders in "The Unseen."** MATTHEW MINARD

# Theatre review: 'The Unseen'

By JUDD HOLLANDER

NEW YORK—The resilience of the human spirit, the consideration of whether the past is irrevocably linked with the future, and the question of conscience are the central themes in Craig Wright's engrossing but uneven drama, "The Unseen."

Somewhere, two men have been languishing in jail as political prisoners for approximately nine years. There's the cynical, meticulous, and pragmatic Wallace (Steven Pounders), and the hopeful, almost ethereal Valdez (Stan Denman). It's probably no accident that the set (nicely done by Sarah Brown), consisting of a prison cell for each man, with a dark and empty cell between the two, places Valdez in a higher and somewhat brighter area than Wallace.

As the two pass the time, either playing word games to keep their minds sharp or recounting the various tortures they've experienced, their conversations are punctuated by various buzzes and bells announcing the daily routines in the prison. Wallace matches each of the noises with a movement of a bowl of food, a notation on the floor of his cell, or the positioning of other objects he has collected.

At first these actions seems to be a sign of approaching madness. One day, though, Wallace announces he has used this system to figure out the complete layout of the jail. If they can just convince Smash (Thomas Ward), their jailer and interrogator, to let them out of the cells, Wallace can find a way to freedom.

Smash, though, has become upset with having to continually look into the eyes of those he is torturing, as well as with hearing their screams. He is even more angry at being called on the carpet by his bosses for getting too close to Wallace and Valdez. As result, Smash had to work on the day of his birthday party (one where he had arranged to be given everything he always wanted as a kid). He is not inclined to do any favours for the two prisoners—ever.

Over the next several years, as the now-hopeless Wallace begins to decline, Valdez finds his interest piqued by taps emanating from the cell between the two men. Said sounds come from someone who never speaks and whom they cannot see. Through these communications, Valdez learns of a previous oppressive regime, a resistance formed to battle it, and how the two groups were both responsible for the construction of this very prison. Yet can Wallace and Valdez trust this unseen entity? More importantly, can they trust each other?

Wright has crafted an engrossing story, but the tale feels incomplete in several respects. There is no indication exactly when or where Wallace and Valdez are, what they did before they were brought here, or what they have been charged with. Wright seems to be making a statement against oppressive regimes and against torture in particular, but since we know little about the two men who tell this story, the emotional impact of the piece is dampened.

The tone of the story is also uneven. While most of the tale is a drama with violent overtones (violent in words and descriptions rather than deeds), there are points where playwright Wright and director Lisa Denman seem to be trying for irony or black comedy.

For example, despite the fact that Smash has a crisis of conscience, he continues his interrogation work. He talks about lying in bed with his wife while thinking up new torture devices that will end his own anguish about his role in the process. (Never mind what these devices would do to the prisoners.)

However, the shift in tone falls flat since it becomes obvious that Smash has no intention of changing his ways or helping those he regularly brutalizes.

The acting by all three men is fine. Sanders is good as the orderly and somewhat obsessive Wallace, having little patience with Valdez's doubts about his theories, escape plans, or anything else. Denman takes on an interesting persona as Valdez, a man with a bit of a childlike attitude, one always looking at both sides of every statement, while refusing to let hope die. In the end, the two have an almost symbiotic relationship, neither being able to survive without the other.

Ward is nicely effective as Smash, especially with the almost offhanded way he delivers a sometimes chilling speech. However, as with the other characters, the audience gets little chance to understand the man under the torturer's mask. Why is this man asking, "How can I stop being affected by the pain of these people so I can go on interrogating them?" rather than asking, "How can I stop being a torturer altogether?" (A separate play on this character alone might have been interesting.)

Lighting by Travis Watson, costumes by Carl Booker, and sound design by Dustin Chaffin all work well. Ms. Deman's direction is uneven which, along with the script, make the experience less fulfilling than it could have been.

*Judd Hollander is the New York correspondent for the London publication The Stage.*