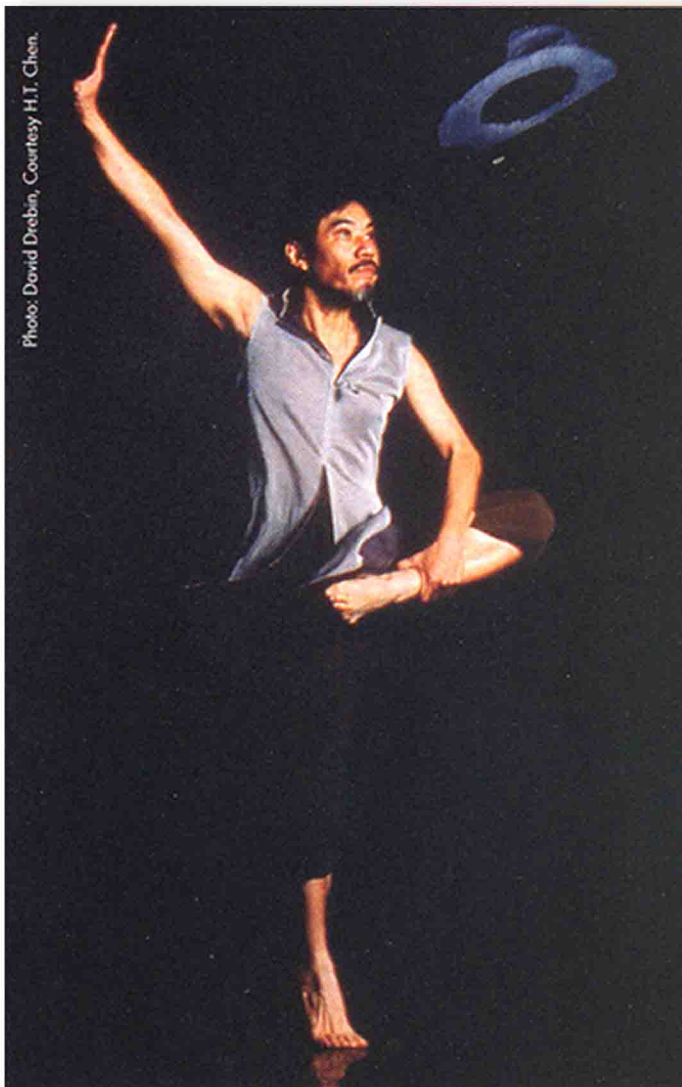


MAGAZINE DANCE

Featured on:

June 2005,
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H.T. Chen has served at the forefront of Asian American dance in New York City for three decades. Many Asian dancers and choreographers have appeared in his small Chinatown theater that doubles as a neighborhood dance school. He says he learned his strong sense of community from Ellen Stewart, La Mama Theater's founder. "I came to the U.S. without English, money, or any idea where the Graham school was, even though I had a scholarship there. Ellen took me in. I learned when you have an empty hand and then get something, you should share it."

While still in Taiwan, Chen was part of a group of young artists who wanted to modernize Chinese art forms. But until he arrived at The Juilliard School and then followed with a master's at New York University, much of what they were doing was mere imitation. He went through a retraining process, but continues to blend traditional Chinese forms with modern dance. He says that Americans have limited views of Asia and Asians. When his company, H.T. Chen & Dancers, tours the U.S., he finds it's hard for middle America to accept his brand of fusion. "They think we should either be doing traditional ribbon dances or butoh." He feels audiences in rural America are more open-minded.

Chen still has to make the case for dance to the parents of children he teaches. Dance can't pull in the level of salary that immigrant families expect, and it remains low on the priority list of social issues among Asian foundations. But he is committed to educating the dance world about Asian forms. "I learned from the civil rights movement and internment camps. People can't understand these other experiences from just one exposure. We have to bring it up for discussion over and over again."