



SUNDAY, OCTOBER 27, 2002

DANCE REVIEW  
H.T. CHEN & DANCERS

When: 8 p.m. Friday

Where: The Egg, Empire State Plaza, Albany

Length: 73 minutes plus intermission

Program: "Bamboo Oracle"

The crowd: Good turnout of all ages

## Novice dancers lift 'Bamboo Oracle'

By **TRESCA WEINSTEIN**, Special to the Times Union

ALBANY -- In the dance world, a line is drawn in the sand between professional companies and people who like to dance. Most of the time, the former are on stage and the latter are in the audience, and never the twain shall meet -- unless they encounter one another at a master class or an after-show reception. When professionals and nonprofessionals do team up on stage, the results are often awkward, the sort of thing only a stage mother could love.

It takes a brave and brilliant choreographer to rub out that line and, in the process, create a work that sacrifices none of its artistic merit. With Chen & Dancers' "Bamboo Oracle," performed Friday evening at The Egg, H.T. Chen has done just that.

Over the past year, Chen and associate director Dian Dong have worked extensively with students from Williams and Skidmore colleges and the Emma Willard School, as well as with children and adults recruited through the Chinese Community Center of the Capital District. The product of their collaboration is an evening-long piece that seamlessly integrates the local performers in roles that enrich and complement the work of the 10 company members.

The title of the piece refers to the bamboo sticks used in China and by Chinese-Americans as carrying poles and fortunetelling devices. These poles provide visual and movement themes that knit the piece together: They are used to balance baskets, to suggest the architecture of a house, as percussion instruments and as a wall dividing a son from his family. Early on, they weigh the dancers down, bowing their shoulders; in the final celebratory scene, they are hung with ribbons and tossed and twirled like batons.

Chen, a Shanghai native whose training encompasses both modern dance and traditional Chinese movement, infuses his choreography with lyricism, precision and gestural significance. When a young couple (Tzu-I Yang and Eng Kian Ooi) fall in love against their parents' wishes, the most poignant duets are not between the lovers but rather between the woman and her father (Renouard Gee) and the man and his mother (Hsin-Ya Hou). They pull apart, then spring together, by turns forgiving and frustrated, inextricably bound despite their resistance to each other's ways.

"Bamboo Oracle" also juxtaposes Chinese and American culture with high-energy hip-hop sections featuring local students that flow into traditional ribbon-and-scarf dances performed by older community dancers. Bradley Kaus' atmospheric score conjures up hot city streets and serene courtyards with equal ease.

Chen's choreography for the six local children, ages 5 to 10, is particularly lovely. At one point, three male dancers use bamboo poles to swing, drape and lift three little girls, the most precious of burdens.