

Asian Arts & Culture Program



NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

What: Nomad: The River
Yin Mei Dance

When: February 24 at 8PM

Where: Bowker Auditorium at UMass

Call 1-800-999-UMAS or 545-2511 for tickets

Press release text and press-quality images are also available on our website at www.fineartscenter.com/press

Contact: Sheila Siragusa at 413-577-2486 or 413-545-1980

Movement/Theater Artist Yin Mei's *Nomad: The River* has shocking resonance about the violence of the Cultural Revolution and her transcendent journey.

War has never served to ensure peace. The history of civilization shows repeated examples of human tragedy, agony, terror and destruction, and the lingering effects on peoples mind and psyche. Asian Arts & Culture program and New World Theater at the Fine Arts Center have joined forces to present the innovative and personal experiences of renowned dancer/choreographer Yin Mei growing up during the Chinese Cultural Revolution in a work titled, *Nomad: The River*. Scheduled for **8:00 PM in Bowker Auditorium** at UMass, general admission is \$20, \$15, with Five College student admission \$10, \$7. Further information about the performance and associated events is available by calling the Asian Arts and Culture office at 413-577-2486, or online at www.fineartscenter.com/asian.

Ranjana Devi and Andrea Assaf, at AACCP and NWT respectively, share a commonality of vision in highlighting original and cutting edge work by artists of color in their programs. The voices of these creative and eloquent artists are vital to new American audiences. Further, both presenters are committed to addressing issues that are relevant to the realities of our audiences.

Nomad by Yin Mei has particular resonance for our communities during this time of increased political unrest and government involvement in our daily lives.

Nomad: The River was commissioned by the Bessie Schönberg/First Light commissioning program of Dance Theater Workshop. In an interview with Cathy Edwards, DTW's Artistic Director, Yin Mei describes her work on the project:

Yin Mei: In making this work, I was inspired by the notion of a spiritual journey. But my emphasis was not on the goal or endpoint of that journey – heaven, nirvana – nor even on the journey per se, but rather on what *provokes* it: what sets it in motion. I wanted to look at *why* someone becomes hungry for spiritual knowledge. More specifically, I wanted to look at how my own childhood – a childhood shaped by the mass insanity of the Chinese Cultural Revolution – engendered that desire in me. The predicament is that of the child witness to brutality: one who sees, who takes in, but who does not act. Seeing one's parents humiliated and divided one against the other; seeing the parents of friends commit suicide; witnessing executions of "counterrevolutionaries" – for a child, such horrific events are beyond comprehension. They burrow inside, they feed on the self.

Remembered violence retains a quality of unreality, of distance – as in a nightmare. Unprocessed images of violence and degradation do their damage through repetition, creating a species of psychic claustrophobia, fostering an inner restlessness. The urge to escape – to seek peacefulness, rest, calm, whether in dreams or reality – becomes irresistible, though it may ultimately prove futile.

The two rivers that inspired this work – the Ganges in India and the Yellow River in China – represented for me different ways of reacting to, and possibly transcending, this dilemma. The link to the theme of the journey was intuitive, not literal. I was fascinated by the idea of contrasts and perspective shifts: escape/immersion; movement/stillness; intimacy/distance; anger/calm; presence/absence; violence/transcendence.

YIN MEI was born in China and started her professional career in traditional Chinese dance during the Cultural Revolution. Before coming to the United States to study modern dance on a grant from the Asian Cultural Council, she was a member of a leading Chinese dance company. Yin Mei now choreographs and performs her contemporary work worldwide, having forged a dance style employing Chinese energy direction and spatial principles as a means of creating dance within the rubric of Western dance-theater.

Yin Mei's most recent work, *Nomad: The River*, produced by MAPP, premiered at Dance Theater Workshop in New York City in March 2005. Prior work includes */Asunder*, a multi-media, cross-cultural dance theater work created in collaboration with installation artist Cai Guo-Qiang and composer Robert Een, which was produced by MAPP and premiered at Danspace Project in New York in May 2001. */Asunder* toured to eleven U.S. cities throughout 2002 to critical and audience acclaim. Yin Mei's evening-length dance theater work, *Empty Tradition/City of Peonies*, premiered at the Asia Society in New York City in fall 1998 and was presented at the Jacobs Pillow Dance Festival in August 1999. Conceived, choreographed and directed by Yin Mei, *Empty Tradition/City of Peonies* was the product of a year-long collaboration with Indonesian composer Tony Prabowo and prominent Chinese installation artist Xu Bing.

Yin Mei received a Guggenheim Fellowship in 2004 and a Choreography Fellowship from the New York Foundation for the Arts in 2002. A longtime practitioner and teacher of Tai Chi and a student of the I Ching, her research into Chinese contemplative practice was recognized with a Contemplative Practice Fellowship from the American Council of Learned Societies.

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