



Name in English: Charlie Chin (William David Chin)
Name in Chinese:
Name in Pinyin:
Gender: Male
Birth Year: 1944
Birth Place: New York City
Current location: San Mateo, CA

Musician, Smithsonian Institute Folklorist

Profession (s): Musician/Performer, Author, Folklorist

Education: High school diploma

Awards: 1989, Community Folklore Scholar Certificate, Smithsonian Institution

Contribution (s): For over 30 years, Charlie Chin has used art, music, and theater to educate people about Asian American history. Because of his long time success as both a historian and entertainer, Chin is renowned as a “pioneer in Asian American Arts and Theatre.”

Chin was born and raised in New York City. His father immigrated from Toishan (Hoisan), China, and made his living working in laundromats and Chinese restaurants. His mother sold grooming products door to door to pay her way through night school, where she studied to work as a lab technician. Chin’s interest in race politics was spawned at an early age by frequent conversations with father about the social and financial struggles of immigrants and people of color throughout his childhood. Chin experienced racial discrimination and prejudice firsthand. As one of the few Chinese kids in his NYC neighborhood he was also often targeted. Racial slurs, slights, and open discrimination would at times escalate to violence.

Chin started his music career in the mid-1960s playing various gigs in Greenwich Village and the Lower East Side of Manhattan. In 1962, at the young age of 18, Chin left home to pursue music. In 1967, Chin, as lead guitarist, joined with a group called “Cat Mother and the All Night Newsboys.” In the same year he had the distinction of playing banjo on the Buffalo Springfield song, “Blue Bird.” In 1969, his group released their first record, “The Street Giveth and the Street Taketh Away.” The album was the only one produced by longtime friend, Jimi Hendrix, with whom the group toured as the opening act. The only Top 40 hit from the album, "Good Old Rock and Roll," was a medley of pop classics from the late 1950s. Chin left the group and moved to the San Francisco Bay Area in 1970.

Inspired by the growing Asian American Movement of the early 1970s that was centered in the San Francisco Bay Area, he collaborated with political activists and fellow musicians Chris Iijima and Nobuku Miyamoto to form the group, Yellow Pearl, known as one of the first-ever Asian American folk music groups. The trio sought to raise awareness about the tragically unknown stories of Asian American history. “The average person doesn't have a clue about history and what happened in this country before they were born. A dry "laundry list" of facts has little effect, so a theater presentation that is a

thinly veiled history lesson seems to work best.” Chin said of his decision to use music and theater as a medium to discuss Asian American history and politics.

The band was a great success, notably appearing on the Mike Douglas Show with John Lennon and Yoko Ono in 1972. In 1973, they recorded and produced songs such as “Wandering Chinaman”, and “Asian Song” which were featured on their album, “*A Grain of Sand: Songs from the Birth of Asian America*.” In 1983, Chin and Iijima again teamed up to record “*Back to Back*,” another album that focused on Asian American history.

In 1993, Chin authored an adaptation of a Chinese folk tale titled, “*China’s Bravest Girl: The Legend of Hua Mu Lan*.” Chin’s interest in the story began when he was a child walking through NYC’s Chinatown and noticed a statue of a warrior woman standing next to a horse that he initially thought was a man. His father told him the heroic tale of Mu Lan (in Cantonese known as Fa Muk Lan), a young woman who bravely disguised herself as a man to fight in the Chinese army to take the place of her aged father. Chin’s work had no relation to the Disney movie, *Mulan*, which treated that same character.

Chin has been honored as a member of the American Folklore Society, and has frequently been a consultant for the Smithsonian Office of Folk Life and Folkways about Asian American communities. He notably appeared to shed light on Chinese American history and folklore on Bill Moyer’s 2003 PBS series, “*Becoming American: The Chinese Experience*.”

In 2009, Chin did a storytelling performance called “Uncle Toisan”, which explores a Chinese American immigrant’s life in the US throughout the Chinese Exclusion Act, Angel Island, WWII, and the civil rights movement. This has been the latest of a line of several performances where Chin has adopted the persona of a Chinese immigrant in association with the Chinese Historical Society of America based in San Francisco.

Chin continues to educate people of all ethnicities and backgrounds on Asian American history through music, acting, and storytelling.

Publications/Patents:

Plays: *A.B.C, American Born Chinese; The Last Spirit Boxer; 10, 000 Stories of Chinatown; Sex, Love, and Marriage*.

Books: *Hua Mu Lan: China’s Bravest Girl* (1993), Children’s Book Press
Cleverbird (1996), Celebration Press

External Links:

<http://www.greatleap.org/charlie/>

<http://www.folkways.si.edu/searchresults.aspx?sPhrase=Charlie%20Chin&sType='phrase'/>

<http://www.nichibeitimes.com/?p=175>

<http://www.folkways.si.edu/TrackDetails.aspx?itemid=4015>