

where, he says, he never experienced racism because everyone was Chinese. Traditional cultural forms—gestures taken from both martial arts and Chinese opera—are juxtaposed with kitschy references to contemporary pop culture.

Chong is a master at fusing fragmentary—and seemingly disparate—bits of verbal, auditory and visual information. By doing so, he instills even the most mundane event with a haunting resonance. Early in the performance, for example, audiences hear the crack of a baseball bat and the roar of an appreciative crowd, clearly a reference to our much sentimentalized national pastime.

Later in the production Chong recounts the 1982 murder of Vincent Chin, a Detroit resident who was beaten to death with a baseball bat by an angry auto worker and his stepson because they thought he was Japanese. The men were tried on both state and federal charges and fined, but ultimately served no prison time.

Figuring out what themes to include and exclude from the piece has been tricky. “We only touch on the immigration laws,” says Chong, who was born in Canada and whose parents—former members of a Chinese opera troupe—were allowed into the United States in 1947.

“The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the first [immigration] law in this country that was racially motivated, continued until 1943,” Chong explains. “Roosevelt lifted it just after the Japanese were interned, but only one hundred and five Chinese were allowed to come into the country per year. That restriction wasn’t lifted until 1965. Unfortunately, I can’t get all of that into the show.

“Each of us is a unique repository of history,” adds Chong, who visited China for the first time three years ago. “We are part of a continuum. *Chinoiserie* is about the consequences of history.”

The production, with text and lyrics by Michael Matthews and the company, music by accordionist Guy Klucsevsek and costumes by fashion designer Byron Lars, is being presented at the Brooklyn Academy of Music’s 1995 Next Wave Festival. The cast includes Ric Oquita, Aleta Hayes, Michael Edo Keane and Shi-Zheng Chen. It will be performed five times at the Majestic Theatre beginning November 14. ■