

## Menu

Asian American Association  
Shrimp Chips  
Japanese Green Tea  
Chinese Jasmine Tea

Chinese Students Association  
Wonton Soup  
Fried Dumplings  
Fried Chicken Wings

Japanese Cultural Society  
Maki Sushi  
Inori Sushi

Koreans of Harvard/Radcliffe  
Kim Chee  
and a Surprise

Radcliffe Asian American Women's Group  
Chinese Pastries

South East Asian Students' Association  
Samosa

9:00 pm

## "ABC" - American Born Chinese

A play that celebrates over 100 years of Chinese American history and culture.

44 San Francisco Chronicle

Tues. August 9, 1983

### Musical Self-Portrait Of an Ethnic Group

BY STEVEN WINN

Charlie Chin, a 20-year New York based veteran of the folk and rock music scenes, has turned to theater with "ABC," a 90-minute one man cabaret performance currently at Fort Mason's People's Theater.

Chin's guitar and banjo-accompanied songs, tuneful and often clever appropriations of various pop music styles from blues to ballads, paint a kind of musical self-portrait of the American Born Chinese.

The basic picture is clearly drawn with songs and patter sketching out the differences between tradition-bound, native-born Chinese and the ABC's, who key on the cultural values and norms of American life.

To audiences acquainted with much Asian American theater, the matter of "ABC" is nothing new. American born Chinese face considerable stereotyping and resistance to their breaking away from what's expected of them.

Why asks a sardonically exasperated Chin, do people assume all Orientals practice karate? And why he wonders with a more pondering kind of puzzlement, does the older generation so adamantly oppose intermarriage with whites?

"ABC" doesn't go much farther than pointing up the rough generalities of the group's situation, both historically and currently, but it does accomplish that with wit and affection.

There's an energetic verse bal-

**ABC: AMERICAN BORN CHINESE:** A one-man show by Charlie Chin. (Sponsor: Productions of People's Theater, Fort Mason Through August 28.)

lad about a resourceful Chinese miner in the California Gold Rush, a rueful little lament about life for a Chinese man in Great Falls, Mont., a sweetly sad little subude to a love affair with a long-legged blonde who didn't comprehend the double identity of place and heredity for an ABC.

Despite its mordant touches, the show is mostly upbeat — a celebration that comes a little close to self-congratulations at times. When Chin fancies himself as just another Chinese guy with a banjo who can clog dance, then launches into the dance, our smiles are elicited with at least a measure of patronization. Gee, look at that Chinese guy clog dance.

The show ends with an embrace of life in all its richness, song "ABC from NYC" that feels a little grand in view of the gentler revelations that have come before.

Built around the conceit of a bartender counseling and consoling a young nephew who's in love, to his parents' distress, with a white girl, "ABC" is often at its most appealing when it smiles at itself and even at some of the stereotypes it punctures.

With his ingratiating expressions and a tender vocal manner reminiscent of James Taylor, Chin defies the notion that Chinese men



Charlie Chin: a tender, mordant cabaret show

arent romantic. It's a nice touch, then, when the imaginary nephew doesn't understand what his Uncle Charlie means by romantic. Chin adds a sigh and a shrug; there's at least a grain of truth in the stereotype.

Despite a few lapses in Chinese accent that sounds Italian, Chin is an unflinchingly likable performer. His musicianship is graceful and accomplished. Indeed, with his tense and relaxed timing, his musical personality is finally richer and more evocative than the simplistic labels he assigns himself in the text.

A yearning little homesick ballad about Mott Street in New York's Chinatown soars because it comes from one man's heart, about his particular feelings for the place. "ABC" covers a lot of ground and time in an hour and a half. When it stops and looks closely and feelingly at the surroundings, it's irresistible.