

Excerpt from Phil Tajitsu Nash's Address to the Natl. Black
American Law Students Association Conference at Temple Uni-
versity, Philadelphia in 1981

"As a Japanese American and an attorney concerned about the civil rights of all Americans, I think that the struggle for redress for Japanese Americans is important on four levels:

1. Spreading the word about the mass incarceration helps to vaccinate ~~our~~ nation against a recurrence of this tragedy. I don't think enough of us know about the fact that the FBI's King Alfred Plan was designed to similarly incarcerate 1960's Black activists, and few realize that one former War Dept. official testified before the Committee that the incarceration precedence might be needed to round up Cubans in Florida if a war with Cuba ever started.

2. The redress struggle helps us to remember that Japanese Americans have been segregated just like other colored people into camps, barrios, reservations, and the Harlems and Chinatowns. It exposes the current "model minority" myth as just another divide-and-conquer tactic.

3. The redress struggle forces everyone to face the contradictions in our nation's military budget. We are spending over 240 billion dollars on military appropriations this fiscal year. The 2.4 billion dollars that would result from each Japanese American incarcerated getting \$20,000 is just 1% of this amount. If Mr. Reagan's public reasons for spending this money are to protect individual liberties, individual property rights and constitutional guarantees overseas, then why won't he compensate American citizens who were denied these rights during World War II?

Finally, the redress struggle is an important devise to relieve the real economic, physical and psychological losses suffered by each individual incarcerated. I support whatever legislative or judicial measures that will further the 4 objectives."

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"Back to Back" Reviewed



Chris Iijima and "Charlie" Chin (l and r), whose album, "Back to Back" is now available on the new East/West World Records label.

By Philip Tajitsu Nash

When two performers have consistently been able to capture the breadth and depth of the Asian American experience in their music—the legacy of the railroads, the search for identity, the struggle for human dignity and the everyday feelings of falling in love—then it should surprise no one to find that these same two, "Charlie" Chin and Chris Iijima have captured that same breadth and depth, in their new album, "Back to Back."

"Back to Back" derives its name from the fact that "Charlie"'s music is on side one and Chris's is on side two. But, before discussing this music, or even trying to put labels on it, an historical perspective is necessary.

The historical roots of this album derive from the "talking story" and folk music that our Asian ancestors brought to this country, combined with the folk, "jazz," funk, salsa, rock and blues that represent the multi-ethnic musical experience of the twentieth century United States.

With Chris growing up in a musical family and "Charlie" becoming an accomplished banjo and guitar player while still a teenager, the musical foundations were ready to take that musical potpourri and blend it into a new musical idiom: Asian American music.

All that was needed was a catalyst. That catalyst was the social upheaval of the late 1960s, which combined the struggle for racial justice for Black Americans with the growing awareness of the continuing racial animosities directed toward the Vietnamese and, by extension, all Asian Americans.

Throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s, Chris and "Charlie" were part of the rediscovery of our immigrant roots, the celebration of our collective contributions to America, the development of an ongoing support network for the development of artistic/political visions, and the active struggle for human and political rights. One of the major written products of that era was a collection of stories, poems and pictures known as the Yellow Pearl Project; and the first and most influential musical product of that era was an album called "Grain of Sand," which metaphorically represented the progenitor of the yellow pearl.

Released in 1973, "Grain of Sand" captured the excitement and political activism of the time. It included a number of songs by Chris and Nobuko

Miyamoto, as well as "Charlie"'s haunting historical ballad, "Wandering Chinaman."

Between 1973 and 1983, both "Charlie" (a nickname given in jest by his neighborhood buddies) and Chris continued to grow, musically and personally. "Charlie" continued his awe-inspiring schedule of concert tours to college campuses nationwide, while both delving ever deeper into traditional Asian music and exploring the non-Asian folk music scene. Chris continued to tour with a politically active music group, while directing some of his creative talents into producing original musicals with his sixth-grade students.

Recently, as a result of discussions with friends in New York and Los Angeles, an idea emerged to both memorialize the music they'd been doing since "Grain of Sand" and create a new outlet for other lesser-known Asian American musicians. The result was the formation of East West World Records, a company *not* bent on selling only Top 40 tunes, and the subsequent release of the first East West product, "Back to Back."

The music on "Back to Back" truly defies easy labels. "Charlie," ever the soul and historian of Asian American music, conjures up imagery ranging from the wide-openness of the California gold rush to the hustle-bustle of present-day New York Chinatown. Through his songs, which some might call ballads or blues, we experience the sleepless nights of the wife of the Filipino fisherman who has promised to return after making his fishing voyage; with "Charlie" we chuckle at the dilemma of an Asian American in Great Falls, Montana, who is tired of his "mayonnaise nightmare" and who would "walk a mile for a *char siu bow* (roast pork bun)."

Chris, on the other side, uses much more instrumentation than the guitar and congas "Charlie" employs. Moving deftly from a "funky" "Dust Don't Fly" to a tender "Say What You Will," from a rockin' "Thinking Ahead" to my own personal favorite, the ballad-like "Asian Song," Chris's side shows off the musical talents of a variety of musicians, and features the colorful voice of Lisa Abe and the production talents of Warren Furutani and Art Ishii. Continuing his politically conscious music with a Spanish-language "El Salvador," as he did with "Somos Asiaticos" (We Are Asians) on "Grain of Sand," Chris also

displays his tender side in a new and highly successful duet with Lisa in "Say What You Will."

As for flaws in the album, I could detect only two. The first is that the studio could not possibly recreate the concert atmosphere in which we've all grown to appreciate Chris and "Charlie"'s music. Chris's rough edges are best appreciated when he's leaning forward on his stool, with only Bob Eng's bass thumping away in the background. "Charlie"'s songs sound out of context when they aren't preceded by a poem or funny story; and a glass of white wine and a group of adoring friends at the periphery of the stage lights give his songs a whole different dimension.

The other flaw is that the album is already a piece of history; they've captured the songs of the past nine years, but what about our other current favorites, like Chris's "Third in Line" and "Charlie"'s "Noodle Connection"? It would seem that yet another album is the only cure for this problem.

Even as East/West World Records gears up for its next release, a jazz album due out later this year, its first product has already set a standard that will drive the folk-singing end of the Asian American musician community in the 1980s, much as "Grain of Sand" did in the 1970. The reason: "Back to Back" captures "...some feeling that I've always known/It's a feeling some people call home."*

To get a copy of "Back to Back," send \$7 plus applicable local tax (\$7.58 total in New York City)—to East West World Records, Box 363 Rockefeller Center Station, New York, N.Y. 10185, or a copy can be picked up at Asian Cine Vision, 32 East Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10002, (212-925-8685).

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