

Reimagining America

Like many immigrants, Chinese composer **Tan Dun** identifies with two worlds. “My last trip back to China was in January, after seven years,” he says. “Before, I thought of New York as my home. But this time, to feel so warmly about China was a big shock. I felt, ‘This is my home; now I have two homes.’ ”

Tan’s ability to find a sense of place in both cultures is rare. Most immigrants feel adrift, and that dislocation is at the heart



of *America Dreaming*, a collaboration with Japanese-American writer Chiori Miyagawa now in previews at the Vineyard Theatre. It’s about the Japanese-born Yuki, who marries an American named Robert and struggles to forge an identity.

It’s the first pure theater piece for Tan, who’s finishing up a work for the Kronos Quartet and was recently named the composer in residence for the BBC Scottish Symphony. Performances of Tan’s music often involve intriguing, vague-

ly religious rituals, and *America Dreaming* is no exception. “The most interesting thing for me, always, is something abstract, surrealistic, extremely mysterious, and very, very spiritual,” he says. “We’re using the text of ‘The Star Spangled Banner,’ but just the words. We’ve recomposed all kinds of melodies for it, from Bulgarian to Chinese to Japanese to jazz. For me, the music structure itself represents *America Dreaming*. At the beginning, melodies are sung one by one; but at the end, all the multinational melodies overlap.”

MICHAEL GILTZ