

Jessica Cohen at Chapter Arts Centre

# Significant personal experience

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## REVIEWS

**IT is very difficult to convey to other people one's experience of an important or significant personal event.**

It always seems so frustratingly difficult to communicate the excitement and the immediacy of the experience. We search for the spark of understanding to light up in the listeners' eyes.

But so often, we search in vain.

Yet, if the experience were strong enough we have an inescapable urge to communicate it.

So it was with Jessica Cohen in her solo dance show *Tails East Heads West*.

In 1984 she spent 10 months in Taiwan studying Tai Chi Chu'an, Chinese opera, and this production represented an attempt in words, music, dance and drawing to communicate her obviously deep experiences to a wider audience.

Jessica Cohen is a particularly graceful and innovative performer. Her floor work is particularly impressive in its fluidity and this combined with her excellent speaking voice provided a number of memorable and amusing moments during the performance.

Each section of the production managed to set a mood and convey a vignette of Taiwanese life seen through Western eyes.

Unfortunately, the dramatic high point occurred at the very beginning with the theatrically effective changing of mask.

Thereafter, the episodic nature of the work failed to help create a sense of development or theatrical tensions which might have gripped the attention.

It was an elementary error of staging to do so much business on the floor, down stage, close to the audience where her action was blocked from the view of too many people.

Jessica Cohen tried very hard to communicate the intensity of her impressions of Taiwan and in doing so created with the help of Dave Hutton's lighting and Nigel Watson's direction an attractive production even though she never quite managed to recreate the obvious intensity of her experiences.

You just had to have been there, I suppose.