53rd 香港藝術節
HK ARTS FESTIVAL 2025



上海越劇院
Shanghai Yue Opera House

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27.02—01.03.2025

Grand Theatre, Hong Kong Cultural Centre
With Chinese and English surtitles

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Backstage Tour
27-28.02.2025 (4:45PM-5:30PM)
Grand Theatre, Hong Kong Cultural Centre

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Talk
The Art of Yue Opera: Programme Highlights and Stylistic Schools of the Performers
25.02.2025 (Past event)



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Chief Executive's Message

I am pleased to congratulate the Hong Kong Arts Festival on the organisation of its 2025 season—the 53rd edition of one of the world's most celebrated international cultural events.

This year's Festival brings together over 1,300 international and local artists in some 125 performances covering music, dance, theatre, Chinese and Western opera and much more. The Festival-opening performance, by Italy's Orchestra of the Teatro Comunale di Bologna, conducted by Maestro Donato Renzetti, features classic Italian opera arias. Renowned Chinese conductor Lü Jia and the China National Centre for the Performing Arts Orchestra, together with international pianist Zhang Haochen and soprano Song Yuanming, bring the Festival to a close in grand style.

Festival PLUS returns, presenting a wealth of artist-audience events, including masterclasses and workshops, backstage visits, guided cultural tours and more. Besides, the Festival's "Young Friends" programme features school tours, pre-performance talks, arts demonstrations and other special events designed to engage local young people with a world of arts and culture.

The Government is determined to enhance the appeal of Hong Kong's culture. To further solidify Hong Kong's position as a vibrant East-meets-West centre for international cultural exchanges, the Government has launched the Blueprint for Arts and Culture and Creative Industries Development in November 2024, and has been actively working on the 71 measures under four key strategic directions as outlined in the Blueprint.

I am grateful to the Hong Kong Arts Festival and its dedicated team for their unremitting efforts in promoting arts and culture in Hong Kong, throughout the region and around the world. I am grateful, too, to the many sponsors and donors for their generous support for the Festival.

I wish this year's Hong Kong Arts Festival another resplendent season of arts and culture, entertainment and memorable community engagement.



John KC LEE
Chief Executive
Hong Kong Special Administrative Region

Chairman's Message

A warm welcome to the 53rd Hong Kong Arts Festival. As a leading international performing arts event, the Festival is continuing its mission of enhancing Hong Kong's cultural landscape by showcasing over 1,300 exceptional international and local artists in more than 125 performances of over 45 unique programmes, as well as organising about 300 PLUS and educational activities for the community.

I would like to thank the HKSAR Government, acting through the Leisure and Cultural Services Department, for its annual subvention and matching grant which are not only essential to our operations, but also an important recognition of the work we do. I also want to thank The Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust for its unwavering support during the past 53 years, as well as other corporate sponsors, charitable foundations and donors, whose contributions have enabled us to reach out to different sectors of the community and positively impact society through the performing arts.

My deepest gratitude goes to all participating artists for their dedication and exceptional performances. I also thank all HKAF staff, who worked extremely hard to bring this Festival to life.

Most importantly, I extend my heartfelt appreciation to all audience members for your participation and support. May you find joy and inspiration in our programmes and events.



Lo Kingman
Chairman
Hong Kong Arts Festival

香港藝術節
Hong Kong Arts Festival

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Foreword

Promoting international cultural exchange has always been a key objective of the Hong Kong Arts Festival. This year's Festival continues to invite renowned global masters and internationally recognised young pioneers to present a range of world-class programmes, respecting tradition while encouraging new, innovative initiatives. Many of these works are inspired by classic literature or offer rediscoveries of the original, bringing vibrant artistic experiences to the city.

We will also present a series of programmes centred around "fantasy and adventure". These include works that seamlessly blend the arts with VR and AR technology, as well as captivating new creations that draw on traditional puppetry and circus performances. The Festival will also continue to support local artists and encourage exchanges to foster a vibrant and diversified platform for the arts.

We also remain dedicated to advancing arts education and audience building. Our PLUS programmes will present a series of thoughtfully curated masterclasses, backstage visits, post-performance artist talks and an exhibition. And our Young Friends and educational activities will continue to offer multi-dimensional arts experiences to students.

We hope that you will enjoy this year's arts extravaganza prepared by the Hong Kong Arts Festival team.



Flora Yu
Executive Director
Hong Kong Arts Festival

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Programme

Family
27.02.2025 / 7:30pm
Approximately two hours and 50 minutes including one interval

The Butterfly Lovers
(Yuan & Fan Version)
28.02.2025 / 7:30pm
Approximately two hours and 55 minutes including one interval

The Jade Hairpin
01.03.2025 / 2:30pm
Approximately three hours including one interval

Selected Excerpts

"Storming into the Palace",
from *Hitting the Princess*

"Reunion at the Garden",
from *Questioning His Wife and Demanding to Find His Wife*

"Visiting His Aunt",
from *The Pearl Pagoda*

INTERVAL

"Fortune-Telling",
from *He Wenxiu*

"Daiyu Burns Her Manuscripts",
from *Dream of the Red Chamber*

"Farewell at Chongtai",
from *The Soul of the Plum Blossom*

01.03.2025 / 7:30pm
Approximately three hours and 10 minutes including one interval

Contents

Creatives and Production Team

Creatives and Production Team

Production

Chief Producer
Wu Wei

Producer
Xia Tian

Executive Producers
Chai Liangjie, Lu Xiang

Co-ordinators
Fang Yafen, Ding Lin, Xu Biaoxin

Main Creatives

Family

Adapted from Ba Jin's novel of the same title

Literary Consultant
Chen Sihe

Playwright
Wu Zhaofen

Director
Yang Xiaoqing

Revival Directors
Hu Xiaoping, Xu Jie

Composer
Lan Tian

Vocal Designer
Chen Jun

Orchestration
Zhuang Deyi

Movement Designer
Xin Honghai

Set Designer
Han Sheng

Lighting Designers
Yi Tianfu, Wang Wenqi

Costume Designer
Wang Lijun

Make-up & Character Designer
Hu Yali

Music Arrangement
Huo Yonggang, He Xianyun

The Butterfly Lovers
(Yuan & Fan Version)

According to the script of the film *The Butterfly Lovers* written by Xu Jin and Sang Hu, with reference to the oral narration of the stage play by Yuan Xuefen and Fan Ruijuan; adapted by Xu Jin, Cheng Rong, Chen Yu, Song Zhiyou and Hong Ying

Editor-in-chief
Huang Yan

Director
Sun Hongjiang

Deputy Director
Liu Yongzhen

Original Music Arrangements
Chen Jie, Xue Yan, Liu Ruzeng, Gu Zhenya, Xiang Guansen

Vocal Arrangements
Chen Jun

Orchestration
Luo Jiliang

Set Designer
Wu Huiguo

Lighting Designer
Wang Wenqi

Costume Designer
Zhou Yating

Costume Design Assistant
Xu Jinmei

Make-up & Character Designer
Liu Xinhui

Production Assistant
Ding Lin

Log Keeper
Gui Haiping

The Jade Hairpin

Adaptation
Huang Sha, Hong Ying

Director
Huang Sha

Artistic Director
Jin Caifeng

Music Arrangements
Li Zichuan, Wang Linsong

Orchestration
Zhuang Deyi, Hou Xuening

Scenography

Stage Manager
Zhang Jianyao

Stage Crew
Yang Fei, Zhang Lizhong, Xu Tao, Fu Junjun, Fu Yong, Wang Yicheng, Chu Ya

Lighting
Wang Dewei, Li Hailin, Ma Jinlong, Li Lidong, Ji Yiming, Yang Ji

Make-up
Sun Yiyao, Ma Yue, Shi Chengyi, Liu Xinhui, Wang Mingte

Costumes
Jin Zhongyang, Liu Chengcheng, Xu Jinmei

Props
Jin Lixin, Xu Hua

Sound
Shi Lei, Zhang Ying

Surtitles for *Family*
Jin Ye

Surtitles for *The Butterfly Lovers* (Yuan & Fan Version), *The Jade Hairpin* and Selected Excerpts
Yu Jiana

Family
Synopsis



This production won the 10th China Art Festival's Wenhua New Repertoire Award, the Wenhua Performing Arts Award, the Wenhua Music Award, and the Shanghai Magnolia Best New Supporting Artist Award. It was also recognised as an outstanding work of Shanghai Literary and Artistic Creation.

The Yue opera *Family* is adapted from Ba Jin's famous work with the same title. It tells the tragic love stories of several young couples in a declining feudal family full of conflicts: the love between childhood sweethearts Juexin and Meifen is destroyed by the authoritarian and absurd "drawing lots" arranged marriage system; Juexin and Ruijue's relationship, which is borne out of understanding and mutual support, is destroyed by feudal superstition; and the pure romance between Juehui and his maid, Mingfeng, is extinguished when Mingfeng is forced to throw herself into a lake.

These three tragic love stories revolve around Juexin, the eldest grandson of the Gao family. Although feudal pressure distorts Juexin's character, it also compels him to bravely help his younger brother, Juehui, escape.

Family Scenes

Scene 1 “Plum Grove in the Spring Snow”

Scene 2 “Candle Tears in the Bridal Chamber”

Scene 3 “The Elegant Lotus in a Pond”

Scene 4 “The Plum Grove in Deep Autumn”

Interval

Scene 5 “Clear Water, Turbid Water”

Scene 6 “Eternal Love”

Family
Cast and Characters

Zhao Zhigang (Special Appearance)
as Juexin

Shan Yangping
as Meifen

Deng Huawei
as Ruijue

Xu Jie
as Juehui

Chen Shi (Special Appearance)
as Mingfeng

Xu Lai
as Madam Chen

Huang Ying
as Madam Zhou

Zhang Aijia
as Feng Leshan

Ye Yuanbei
as Fourth Madam

Zhu Yang
as Fifth Madam

Zhou Yaner
as Huang Ma

Yu Jiana
as Shuzhen

Gui Haiping
as Waner

Shi Tingting, Yu Jinglan,
Guo Qianyun, Wang Zirui
as Maids

Gu Aijun, Jin Tao, Yao Lei
as Plum Blossom Hill

Lead Singer
Huang Ying

Chorus
The Troupe's Actors

Family
Musicians

Drums
Jin Zhiliang

Lead Huqin
Ma Lichao

Pipa
Zhu Xiaowen

Solo Erhu, Gaohu
Shen Qi

Erhu
Sun Xiuwen, Zhuang Zhenyu

Zhonghu, Banhu
Wu Baiwei

First Violin
Hu Jiayi

Second Violin
Yao Lina

Cello
Weng Nirui

Double Bass
Guan Xian

Zhongruan, Sanxian
Zhang Xu

Yangqin
Song Xuan

Guzheng
Huang Zhuoqun

Electronic Organ
Hou Xuening

Flute
Ling Jing

Bamboo Flute
Gu Qiuping

Suona, Oboe
Zhang Ting

Soprano Sheng
Hu Jie

Percussion
Hong Jinlang, Huang Hong,
Qian Xiaocong

Family
Appreciation Note

Family is the first episode of an epic novel by the great author Ba Jin (巴金). Together with *Spring* and *Autumn*, they make up the "Trilogy of the Irrepressible Tides" which depicts the downfall and ultimate disintegration of a dysfunctional family, reflecting the changes in cultural values, ideology and society in China after the end of imperial rule in the early 20th century. Yue opera artists picked up this unusual theme and turned the novel into an opera, using traditional musical forms and singing, but wearing contemporary clothing instead of the usual traditional costumes. Yue opera was the first regional opera to tackle this new form of staging with success, but it was also known for its beauty, lyricism and intimate acting, which helped it to realistically depict this momentous era in modern Chinese history.

Text: Tam Wing-pong



The Butterfly Lovers (Yuan & Fan Version)

Synopsis



Zhu Yingtai, a woman from Shangyu, Zhejiang, disguises herself as a man to travel to Hangzhou for her studies. There she meets Liang Shanbo, a scholar from Huiji. They become sworn brothers and study together for three years. Before returning to Shangyu, Zhu Yingtai confesses to her school master's wife and invites Liang Shanbo to propose to her in the Zhu family village.

To her dismay, Zhu Yingtai's father has already betrothed her to the son of the governor. Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai meet on a balcony and, when they part, they vow to live and die together. Liang Shanbo is devasted and falls ill, passing away soon after. Zhu Yingtai visits Liang Shanbo's funeral to mourn him. On her wedding day, she jumps into Liang Shanbo's tomb. After their deaths, the couple are transformed into butterflies and take flight together in harmony.

The Butterfly Lovers (Yuan & Fan Version) Scenes

Scene 1 “Brotherhood Oath at Cao Bridge”

Scene 2 “Yingtai Finds a Matchmaker”

Scene 3 “Shanbo Sends Yingtai Off on a Homeward Journey”

Scene 4 “Thinking of Yingtai”, “In Memory of His Farewell to Yingtai”

Interval

Scene 5 “Engagement”, “Meeting the Brother”

Scene 6 “Reunion on the Terrace”

Scene 7 “Shanbo on His Deathbed”

Scene 8 “Yingtai Mourning”

Scene 9 “Transforming into Butterflies”

Contents

Cast and Characters

The Butterfly Lovers (Yuan & Fan Version) Cast and Characters

Zhang Ruihong
as Liang Shanbo

Fang Yafen
as Zhu Yingtai

Cai Yan
as Zhu Gongyuan

Guo Qianyun
as Sijiu

Ye Yuanbei
as Yinxin

Tang Lihua
as School Master's Wife

Zhou Yaner
as Mrs Liang

Mao Chunmei
as Zhu's Servant

Ding Lin, Gui Haiping, Jin Ye,
Mao Chunmei
as Servants

Xu Lai, Yu Jinglan, Shi Tingting,
Wang Zirui
as Maids

Chorus
The Troupe's Actors

The Butterfly Lovers (Yuan & Fan Version) Musicians

Drums
Jin Zhiliang

Lead Huqin
Wu Baiwei

Pipa
Zhu Xiaowen

Gaohu
Shen Qi

Erhu
Sun Xiuwen, Zhuang Zhenyu

Violin
Hu Jiayi, Yao Lina

Viola
Feng Sixin

Cello
Weng Nirui

Double Bass
Guan Xian

Electronic Organ
Hou Xuening

Zhongruan
Zhang Xu

Yangqin
Song Xuan

Guzheng
Huang Zhuoqun

Flute, Bamboo Flute
Ling Jing, Gu Qiuping

Oboe, Suona
Zhang Ting

Soprano Sheng
Hu Jie

Percussion
Hong Jinlang, Huang Hong,
Qian Xiaocong

The Butterfly Lovers (Yuan & Fan Version) Appreciation Note

In the 1940s, the Xue Sheng Yue Opera Troupe, led by Yuan Xuefen and Fan Ruijuan, arranged and compiled several early versions of *The Butterfly Lovers*, presenting the Yue opera *The Sad Story of Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai* and establishing the thematic structure of *The Butterfly Lovers*. While performing *The Sad Story of Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai*, Fan Ruijuan, the founder of the School of Fan, created one of the two essential tunes of Yue opera, known as the *xianxia* tune, in the scene “Shanbo on His Deathbed”. Yuan Xuefen, the founder of the School of Yuan, created “Yingtai Mourning”, which, along with “The Crying” from *Fragrant Concubine* and “Crying for Her Husband” from *A Length of Hemp String* , is collectively referred to as the “Three Cries of the School of Yuan”.

In 1953, *The Butterfly Lovers* was filmed as the first colour film of the New China, starring Yuan Xuefen and Fan Ruijuan. In 1954, the film won the Musical Film Award at the 8th Karlovy Vary International Film Festival in Czechoslovakia.

After more than 60 years, Shanghai Yue Opera House restaged the Yuan & Fan Version of *The Butterfly Lovers*, focusing on restoring such traditional excerpts as “Sending Big Brother Off” and “Yingtai Mourning”. In “Sending Big Brother Off” following “Reunion on the Terrace”, Zhu Yingtai expresses her feelings through imagery, embedding the four seasons and the language of flowers in her lyrics, poetically conveying the emotions of their parting. This corresponds with the earlier hopeful farewell in “Shanbo Accompanies Yingtai on a Homeward Journey”. Similarly, the nearly lost staging of “Yingtai Mourning” is a masterpiece of the School of Yuan. The Yuan & Fan Version of *The Butterfly Lovers* fully re-creates this Yuan-style classic.

Text: Shanghai Yue Opera House



Contents

The Jade Hairpin

The Jade Hairpin
Synopsis



The Minister of Personnel, Li Tingpu, arranges for his daughter, Li Xiuying, to marry local scholar Wang Yulin. Li Xiuying's cousin, Gu Wenyou, holds a grudge because his marriage proposal to his cousin failed. On Li Xiuying's wedding day, he colludes with a matchmaker to steal her jade hairpin, forges a love letter and secretly slips it into the newlyweds' room. Wang Yulin, finding the letter, is deceived and suspects that Li Xiuying is unfaithful. He leaves angrily without saying a word.

After their marriage, Wang Yulin's suspicions remain. Li Xiuying suffers from unjust accusations and eventually falls ill from distress. It is only after Li Tingpu investigates and interrogates the matchmaker that the truth is revealed. During the imperial examination year, Wang Yulin is named the top scholar and seeks Li Xiuying's forgiveness by offering her a phoenix headdress. The couple reconciles and restores their relationship.

The Jade Hairpin

Scenes

Scene 1 “Celebrating Longevity, Betrothal”

Scene 2 “Plotting”

Scene 3 “In the Bridal Chamber”

Scene 4 “Inquiring with the Maid”

Scene 5 “Second Time in the Bridal Chamber”

Scene 6 “Invitation to a Banquet”

Scene 7 “Returning Home”

Interval

Scene 8 “Three Times Covering the Husband with a Robe”

Scene 9 “Returning at Night”

Scene 10 “Elucidating the Misunderstanding Through the Handwriting”

Scene 11 “Presenting the Phoenix Headdress”

The Jade Hairpin
Cast and Characters

Fan Tingting
as Li Xiuying

Xu Biaoxin
as Wang Yulin

Zhou Yaner
as Madam Lu

Gu Aijun
as Li Tingpu

Huang Ying
as Mrs Li

Zhang Aijia
as Wang Yu

Si Yulin
as Gu Wenyou

Gui Haiping
as Chunxiang

Yu Jinglan
as Qiuqui

Zhu Yang
as Matchmaker

Yao Lei
as Li Xing

Guo Qianyun, Wang Zirui
as Maids

Qiu Long, Cai Xiuhui, Jin Tao,
Si Yulin, Yu Jinglan, Guo Qianyun,
Wang Zirui, Xu Lai
as Constables

The Jade Hairpin
Musicians

Drums
Jin Zhiliang

Lead Huqin
Wu Baiwei

Pipa
Zhu Xiaowen

Erhu
Shen Qi, Zhuang Zhenyu

Zhonghu
Sun Xiuwen

Cello
Weng Nirui

Double Bass
Guan Xian

Liuqin, Sanxian
Zhang Xu

Yangqin
Song Xuan

Zhongruan, Guzheng
Huang Zhuoqun

Electronic Organ
Hou Xuening

Bamboo Flute
Gu Qiuping

Flute
Ling Jing

Suona
Zhang Ting

Soprano Sheng
Hu Jie

Percussion
Hong Jinlang, Huang Hong, Qian
Xiaocong, Ma Lichao

Contents Appreciation Note

The Jade Hairpin Appreciation Note

This is undoubtedly one of the most popular works in the Yue opera repertoire. With a relatively mundane comedic plot involving a jealous husband and his wronged wife, *The Jade Hairpin* is an *opera gracioso*, featuring scene after scene of refined singing, elegant acting and dance-like movements. Its highlights include a scene showing the wife trying to keep her husband warm with her fur cape, only to get in return an ungrateful and humiliating slap on the face. But, of course, she will get her satisfaction and her dignity restored in the end! The kind, understanding and humorous mother-in-law, a character long adored by audiences, analyses the young couple's marital problems in a comic aria that is loved and sung by all Yue opera fans. Everyone is sure to feel the charm and enjoy each performance of *The Jade Hairpin*.

Text: Tam Wing-pong



Contents

Selected Excerpts

Selected Excerpts “Storming into the Palace”, from *Hitting the Princess*

Synopsis



This excerpt is part of the Shanghai Yue Opera House’s cherished repertoire. Emperor Tang arranges for his daughter, Princess Junrui, to marry Guo Ai, the sixth son of the Prince of Fenyang, Guo Ziyi. During the prince’s birthday, his sons and ministers gather to pay their respects. But the princess refuses to attend, citing that a ruler does not bow to a subject. An angry Guo Ai returns to the palace and beats the princess.

Cast and Characters

Si Yulin
as Guo Ai

Deng Huawei
as Princess

Guo Qianyun, Wang Zirui Xu Lai, Yu Jinglan
as Palace Maids

Drums
Hong Jinlang

Lead Huqin
Ma Lichao

Appreciation Note

Hitting the Princess is a classic Yue opera piece created through a collaboration between Lu Ruiying, the founder of the School of Lu, and Fan Ruijuan, the founder of the School of Fan. In the excerpt “Storming into the Palace”, one of the most captivating moments is when Princess Junrui makes her entrance, looking quite pleased with herself. Her pride and sweetness are vividly highlighted when she sings, “My crown of pearls presses against my temples. I am the Princess, my husband the Prince Consort”.

Text: Shanghai Yue Opera House

Contents

"Reunion at the Garden"

“Reunion at the Garden”, from *Questioning His Wife and Demanding to Find His Wife*

Synopsis



The young lord of the Prime Minister, Liang Yushu, and the noble lady Xie Yunxia fall in love and become husband and wife. However, they cannot get along due to the hatred between their fathers. On the night of the Mid-Autumn Festival, Liang Yushu hosts a banquet in his garden, subtly expressing his affection and tenderness towards his wife. Xie Yunxia is momentarily moved, but ultimately struggles to reconcile her feelings. Thinking of avenging her father, she decides to return to her room and leaves Liang Yushu behind, feeling bewildered and lost.

Cast and Characters

Wang Qing
as Liang Yushu

Xu Xiaofei
as Xie Yunxia

Shi Tingting
as Hexiang

Drums
Huang Hong

Lead Huqin
Shen Qi

Appreciation Note

Questioning His Wife and Demanding to Find His Wife is another classic piece from the Yin (Guifang) School of Yue opera. The excerpt “Reunion at the Garden” fully demonstrates the distinctive features of the Yin School vocal techniques, such as *jiaoban* (rhythmising the end of a spoken part), *qidiao* (opening tunes), *yunqiang* (controlling the flow of vocals), *luodiao* (lowering vocal pitch at the end of a phrase) and *qingban* (clear and steady rhythm). But the scene also showcases exquisite water sleeves and fan skills, among other movement techniques. This delicately portrays the image of a gentle and affectionate noble person and reflects the unique charms and aesthetics of the art of a female *xiaosheng* (young male roles) in Yue opera.

Text: Shanghai Yue Opera House

“Visiting His Aunt”, from *The Pearl Pagoda*

Synopsis



Fang Qing, the son of an official from Henan, finds his family in decline. He arrives in Xiangyang to seek refuge with his aunt, Fang Duohua, hoping to borrow money to travel to the capital and take the imperial examination. Coincidentally, it is also his uncle’s birthday. Fang Qing arrives without a gift and embarrasses his aunt in front of other guests. His aunt ridicules and mocks her ragged but aloof nephew in every possible way. Fang Qing, filled with shame and anger, vows that he will never return to Xiangyang until he passes the imperial examination.

Cast and Characters

Xu Biaoxin
as Fang Qing

Zhou Yaner
as Fang Duohua

Gui Haiping
as Hongyun

Xie Lin
as Sankuai

Zhang Aijia
as Fang Ben

Chorus
The Troupe’s Actors

Drums
Jin Zhiliang

Lead Huqin
Wu Baiwei

Appreciation Note

During the creation of *The Pearl Pagoda*, Lu Jinhua, the founder of the School of Lu, inherited her performing techniques from veteran artist Hua Bilian. In all aspects of the hand, eye and body techniques, methods and footwork, Lu demonstrated the norms of the *qiongsheng* (poor male scholar, also known as *xiepi sheng*) role. In this performance, Xu Biaoxin, a disciple of Lu Jinhua, plays the role of Fang Qing.

Text: Shanghai Yue Opera House

“Fortune-Telling”, from *He Wenxiu*

Synopsis



During the Jiajing period in the Ming Dynasty, scholar He Wenxiu and his wife, Wang Lanying, travel to the capital for the imperial examination. Along the way, they are persecuted by bullies using deceitful tactics and are forced to separate. Three years later, He Wenxiu becomes the top scholar in the imperial examination and becomes a provincial governor, where he reunites with his wife. However, fearing that their secret may be exposed, He Wenxiu disguises himself as a fortune teller, comforts his wife and writes a petition for her.

Cast and Characters

Zhao Zhigang (Special Appearance)
as He Wenxiu

Chen Shi (Special Appearance)
as Wang Lanying

Zhou Yaner
as Matron Yang

Gui Haiping
as Yang Dingjin

Drums
Hong Jinlang

Lead Huqin
Ma Lichao

Appreciation Note

He Wenxiu is a classic Yue opera that has been frequently staged since the art form was performed exclusively by male performers, with “Fortune-Telling” being one of the most exciting *rouzi* plays among them. In 1950, Yin Guifang rearranged and re-staged the play and adapted tunes from *pingtan* into Yue opera. This resulted in the unique version of “Fortune-Telling” we see today.

Yin Guifang’s outstanding disciple, Zhao Zhigang, will play He Wenxiu, presenting the audience with the authentic charm of the Yin School’s artistic style.

Text: Shanghai Yue Opera House

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"Daiyu Burns Her Manuscripts"

“Daiyu Burns Her Manuscripts”, from *Dream of the Red Chamber* Synopsis



The sickly Lin Daiyu lives alone in the Jia residence, where she shares mutual affection with her cousin, Jia Baoyu. However, to benefit the Jia family, Grandmother Jia and others in the family trick Baoyu into taking Xue Baochai as his wife. Lin Daiyu is shocked, and, in her illness, she burns her poems and vows to end her relationship with Jia Baoyu. Heartbroken, she dies in despair.

Cast and Characters

Shan Yangping
as Lin Daiyu

Sheng Shuyang
as Zijuan

Lead Singer
Huang Ying

Chorus
The Troupe’s Actors

Drums
Jin Zhiliang

Lead Huqin
Wu Baiwei

Appreciation Note

“Daiyu Burns Her Manuscripts” is a classic segment from the Yue opera *Dream of the Red Chamber* and highlights the distinctive vocal features of the School of Wang (Wenjuan). Wang Wenjuan’s direct disciple, Shan Yangping, has been praised by critics as “the best contemporary Lin Daiyu”, having mastered the true artistic essence of her mentor. In this segment of *xianxia* tunes, the character’s evolving emotions are reflected in the melodies of *zhengdiao liushui* and Shao opera styles. This conveys Daiyu’s feelings of melancholy and sorrow when she realises her soulmate is lost, creating a vivid and relatable musical portrayal of the character.

Text: Shanghai Yue Opera House

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“Farewell at Chongtai"

“Farewell at Chongtai", from *The Soul of the Plum Blossom*

Synopsis



Based on the traditional repertoire *The Plum Blossom in Full Bloom Again*, this adaptation premiered in 1945 and featured Yuan Xuefen, Fan Ruijuan and other veteran Yue opera artists. To commemorate the 80th anniversary of Yue opera reform and the 100th birthday of Yuan Xuefen in 2022, the Shanghai Yue Opera House released a revival version of *The Soul of the Plum Blossom*.

The country is invaded by foreigners. Chen Xingyuan is bestowed the title of Imperial Sister and married off to a foreign prince to ensure peace at the border, separating her from her lover, Mei Liangyu. When the peace envoy arrives at Chongtai, Chen Xingyuan is reluctant to part ways, while Mei Liangyu endures his pain in silence. They both make a vow, revealing their unwavering love and loyalty, as well as their determination to sacrifice their personal happiness for the stability and peace of their country.

Cast and Characters

Fang Yafen
as Chen Xingyuan

Zhang Ruihong
as Mei Liangyu

Qiu Long, Cai Xiuhui, Jin Tao, Yao Lei, Zhang Aijia, Gu Aijun, Jin Ye, Mao Chunmei
as Military Officers

Xu Lai, Yu Jinglan, Shi Tingting, Ye Yuanbei, Xie Lin, Wang Zirui, Guo Qianyun, Zhu Yang
as Palace Maids

Chorus
The Troupe’s Actors

Drums
Jin Zhiliang

Lead Huqin
Wu Baiwei

Appreciation Note

“Farewell at Chongtai” is the emotional climax of *The Soul of the Plum Blossom*, where romantic feelings and loyalty to one’s country intertwine, rendering lingering and profound the emotions of the lovers’ separation. The play features several duets between *sheng* (male) and *dan* (female) roles, demonstrating the distinctive characteristics of Yue opera schools.

Text: Shanghai Yue Opera House

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Musicians for Selected Excerpts

Musicians for Selected Excerpts

Pipa

Zhu Xiaowen

Erhu

Shen Qi, Zhuang Zhenyu

Zhonghu

Sun Xiuwen

Violin

Hu Jiayi, Yao Lina

Viola

Feng Sixin

Cello

Weng Nirui

Double Bass

Guan Xian

Electronic Organ

Hou Xuening

Zhongruan, Sanxian

Zhang Xu

Yangqin

Song Xuan

Guzheng

Huang Zhuoqun

Flute, Bamboo Flute

Ling Jing, Gu Qiuping

Oboe, Suona

Zhang Ting

Soprano Sheng

Hu Jie

Percussion

Hong Jinlang, Huang Hong, Qian Xiaocong

Interview

A Thousand Shades of Tenderness: Yue Opera as a Female Emotional Outlet

Yue opera has captivated audiences with its all-female productions since the 1930s, touching hearts with countless tales of romantic love. In an interview, the director of the Shanghai Yue Opera House, Fang Yafen, reveals how the themes of pursuing love and independence in Yue opera resonate with female audiences, offering them an emotional outlet.



The Shanghai Yue Opera House will present several classic Yue opera works and excerpts at the 2025 Hong Kong Arts Festival. Fang Yafen will play Zhu Yingtai in *The Butterfly Lovers* (Yuan & Fan Version), portraying Zhu as spirited and intelligent in female attire, and as bold and heroic when disguised as a man. Liang Shanbo, played by Zhang Ruihong, differs from traditional male protagonists, as he is not only handsome but also tender. In the renowned "Reunion on the Terrace", after their long-awaited reunion following "Shanbo Accompanies Yingtai on a Homeward Journey", Liang's joy turns to sorrow and anger upon learning that Zhu has been betrothed to another man. Fang explains that this role, which resonates with popular sentiment, presents a great challenge: "The difficulty lies in breaking through established styles while maintaining my own unique interpretation, bringing forth a performance full of raw emotion. It's physically and mentally exhausting."

The Yuan & Fan Version of *The Butterfly Lovers* originated from a 1954 colour Yue opera film starring Yuan Xuefen and Fan Ruijuan. Yuan Xuefen, a founding member of the Shanghai Yue Opera House and Fang Yafen's mentor, never performed this play on stage after the release of the film, keeping it out of theatres for more than 60 years. In 2012, to commemorate the first anniversary of her teacher's passing, Fang restaged the production, bringing back one of Yuan's three most iconic crying scenes, "Yingtai Mourning", stirring poignant emotions among the audience. As Fang had never seen Yuan perform this piece on stage, she could only refer to Yuan's acting in the film version. Combining this with her own strengths, she made every effort to preserve Yuan's vocal style while integrating elements like the original film music.

Fang explains that Yue opera, originally known as Shaoxing opera, developed its unique language by incorporating the Zhongzhou dialect and ancient Mandarin phonetics into its Shengzhou dialect. Yue opera has a history of just more than 110 years. Initially performed by all-male troupes, women were prohibited from participating until the 1930s and 40s when all-female Yue opera troupes started to emerge.

"In the 1930s, the introduction of female performers, especially actresses playing male roles, satisfied the desire for women to create idealised male characters—dashingly charming, respectful of women, gentle and considerate—a projection of women's emotional aspirations," says Fang. She points to the male protagonists of the excerpts "Reunion at the Garden", from *Questioning His Wife and Demanding to Find His Wife*, and "Fortune-telling", from *He Wenxiu*, as perfect examples of the "sweet, caring guy" image.

Fang believes that Yue opera's appeal to women lies in stories that allow female characters to pursue love freely. In *The Butterfly Lovers*, for example, the plot is emotionally rich with bold expressions of love. "In areas like autonomy in marriage, mutual respect and reciprocal love, women were historically repressed. Through the emotions in the opera, they found an outlet for their feelings. It was said that you couldn't watch Yue opera without bringing a handkerchief to wipe away tears." She cites *The Jade Hairpin* as an example: "The heroine, Li Xiuying, is mistreated by her husband, and while the social constraints of the time prevent her from rebelling, she ultimately compels him to kneel and apologise in the scene 'Presenting the Phoenix Headdress'. For women, this provides a sense of satisfaction after releasing their grievances."

However, Yue opera is not only about the tender romances of ordinary women, but also encompasses themes of loyalty and national duty. In "Farewell at Chongtai", from *The Soul of the Plum Blossom*, the heroine Chen Xingyuan is married off to a foreign prince to secure peace for the kingdom, even though it means leaving her true love behind. "These female characters may appear delicate, but they carry immense inner strength."

In the 1940s and 1950s, Yuan spearheaded reforms in Yue opera, expanding its repertoire and music, and enhancing its production scale, eventually raising its international profile. Over time, the troupe began admitting male actors, and since 1959, it has been performing both all-female and mixed-gender productions, making this a unique feature of the troupe. This approach maintains a balance between modern sensibilities and traditional characteristics, though male Yue opera actors remain relatively rare.

Now the troupe is bringing a range of performances to Hong Kong that showcase both all-female and mixed-gender productions. Among them is *Family*, adapted from Ba Jin's novel of the same name, which features a male and female cast, with Zhao Zhigang, known as the "Prince of Yue Opera", in the lead role. The production is filled with rich tales of love and family. "While different schools and styles are important tools, what truly touches the audience is the emotional expression of the performers—it has to reach deep into the heart. Whether it's a mixed-gender or an all-female production, Yue opera always stands out because of the way we convey emotions through the story," Fang concludes.

Text: Eugene Chan
English translation: Stanley Leung

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About the Shanghai Yue Opera House

About the Shanghai Yue Opera House

The Shanghai Yue Opera House was established in March 1955 and is a renowned opera troupe both at home and abroad. It is a protected organisation on the National Intangible Cultural Heritage list, a key institution for creating and performing local operas, and a base for the inheritance and development of Yue opera, boasting many accomplished artists.

The troupe has created, adapted and reinterpreted more than 450 productions. *The Butterfly Lovers, Dream of the Red Chamber, Romance of the West Chamber* and *Aunt Xianglin* are recognised as the “Four Classics” of Yue opera. Additionally, it has produced a series of high-quality works that integrate intelligence, artistry and entertainment. These include *Stage Sisters, Family, Meilong Town, Jade Love, Zhen Huan, Double Flying Wings* and *Deep Affection Across Mountains and Seas*.

With a comprehensive artistic practice involving many influential artists and works, the troupe has consistently maintained a leading position among professional Yue opera troupes in the country. It has long received attention and support from leaders at all levels, from the Central Government to local authorities. Furthermore, it has performed at various prestigious events, including the bilateral meeting between the heads of state of China and France, and the WLA Forum featuring top international scientists, exhibiting the unique charm of Yue opera.

Cast Profiles

Shan Yangping



Shan Yangping is a First-Class Performer, contemporary Yue opera artist and renowned *huadan* (young female) performer from the School of Wang (Wenjuan). She is a member of the China Theatre Association and a Representative Bearer of Yue Opera of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Shanghai City.

Her main repertoire includes *Dream of the Red Chamber, Legend of the Embroidering Girl, Tears of the Paulownia Blossom, The Legend of Purple Hairpin, Shixi Returns to Yue, Regrets of Luoshan, A Beautiful Minister, The Jade Hairpin, Cao Zhi and Zhen Luo, Stage Sisters, Spring in Isolation, Family* and *Beauty Yu*.

She has received the 17th Chinese Theatre Plum Blossom Award, the ninth Wenhua Performing Arts Award, the Outstanding Performance Award at the 10th Chinese Theatre Festival, the Best Actor Award at the 11th China Population Culture Award and the Outstanding Female Star Award for Chinese Opera on National Television. She was also named one of the top 10 actors for outstanding Chinese opera television and is known as "the star of Yue opera".

Zhang Ruihong



Zhang Ruihong is a First-Class Performer, contemporary Yue opera artist and renowned *xiaosheng* (young male) performer from the School of Fan (Ruijuan). She is a member of the China Theatre Association and a Representative Bearer of Yue Opera of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Shanghai City.

Her main repertoire includes *The Butterfly Lovers, The Peacock Flies Southeast, Story of a Virtuous Courtesan, Hitting the Princess, A Beautiful Minister, The Pear Blossom Courtyard, Qinhuai River Romance, The Legend of Purple Hairpin, Fishing and Woodcutting in Windy Snow, Meilong Town, The Teal Robe and the Red Cloak, Deepening Shades of Fall* and *Baoyu's Nocturnal Sacrifice*.

She has received the 19th Chinese Theatre Plum Blossom Award, the Outstanding Performance Award at the seventh and 12th Chinese Theatre Festival, the Performing Arts Award at the fifth Shanghai Magnolia Stage Performance Awards, the Shanghai Municipal Major Initiatives 2011 Shanghai Literary Artist Honourary Award and the first prize at the National Chinese Opera Radio Singing Individual Theme Competition.

Fang Yafen



Fan Yafen is a First-Class Performer, a contemporary Yue opera artist, a leading talent in Shanghai and a renowned *huadan* (young female) performer from the School of Yuan (Xuefen). She is a member of the China Theatre Association and a Representative Bearer of the National Intangible Cultural Heritage item. She is currently the Company Director of the First Troupe of Shanghai Yue Opera House.

Her main repertoire includes *The Butterfly Lovers, Dream of the Red Chamber, Romance of the West Chamber, Aunt Xianglin, Fate in Tears and Laughter, Double Pearl Phoenix Hairpin, The Early Spring of February, Red Cotton Tree, Timeless Love and Heartache, Jade Love* and *Deep Affection Across Mountains and Seas*.

She was the top winner at the 23rd China Theatre Plum Blossom Award, a two-time winner of the Lead Actor Award at the Shanghai Magnolia Stage Performance Awards, the Best Female Actor Award at the fifth Paris Chinese Opera Festival, the "Top 10" Performer Award at the China Yue Opera Festival and the Shanghai Municipal Major Initiatives Shanghai Literary Artist Honorary Award. She has been twice named a Shanghai Municipal Model Worker.

Zhao Zhigang (Special Appearance)



Zhao Zhigang is a First-Class Performer and a contemporary Yue opera artist. He is also a distinguished professor of the "Qiantang Scholar" programme at Hangzhou Normal University. He is an apprentice of the Yin (Guifang) School and has been named the "Prince of Yue Opera".

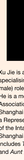
He is an outstanding expert in the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of China and was once a committee member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference in Shanghai Municipality and Zhejiang Province, a director of the China Theatre Association, the Vice-Chairman of the Dramatist Association of Zhejiang Province, the Vice-Chairman of the Hangzhou Province Federation of Literature and Art, the Chairman of the Hangzhou Theatre Association, the Vice-President of the Shanghai Yue Opera House and Artistic Director of Zhao's Workshop.

Over the years, he has starred in various productions, such as *He Wenxiu, The Wayward Son, The Prince of the Desert, Family, The Orphan of the Zhao Family, Butterfly Lovers Across the Sea* and *Dream of the Red Chamber*, as well as the films *Face-Changing* and *Awakening in a Dream*.

He was the top winner at the 21st China Theatre Plum Blossom Award, the 11th Wenhua Performing Arts Award, the Outstanding Performance Award at the ninth Chinese Theatre Festival, the second China Gold Record Award, the second China-Japan Theatre Goodwill Award, the Leading Actor Award at the third Shanghai Magnolia Stage Performance Awards. He was also a recipient of the Top 10 Actors Award at the first China Yue Opera Festival.

Cast Profiles (con't)

Xu Jie



Xu Jie is a First-Class Performer specialising in *xiaosheng* (young male) roles of the Lu (Jinhua) School. He is a member of the China Theatre Association, a director of the Shanghai Dramatists' Association and a Representative Bearer of Yue Opera of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Shanghai City. His main repertoire includes *The Early Spring of February* and *Aunt Xiangjin*.

He was nominated for the Supporting Actor Award at the 25th Shanghai Magnolia Stage Performance Awards and won the Supporting Actor Award at the 29th Shanghai Magnolia Stage Performance Awards.

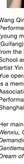
Xu Biaoxin



Xu Biaoxin is a First-Class Performer specialising in *wenwuxiaosheng* (young civil and martial male) roles of the Lu (Jinhua) School. He is an apprentice of Yue opera artist Fang Yafen. He is a member of the China Theatre Association, the Shanghai Dramatists' Association, the Shanghai New Art Workers Association and the Shanghai Committee of the China Association for Promoting Democracy. He is currently the Deputy Company Director of the First Troupe of Shanghai Yue Opera House.

His main repertoire includes *The Pearl Pagoda*, *Double Phoenix Phoenix Hairpin* and *An Incident at Tongque Tower*.

Deng Huawei



Deng Huawei is a First-Class Performer specialising in *huadan* (young female) roles of the Lu (Ruijun) School. She graduated under Yue opera artist Lu Ruijing. She is a member of the China Theatre Association, the Shanghai Dramatists' Association and the Shanghai New Art Workers Association.

Her main repertoire includes *Three Glimpses of the Princess*, *Gentleman Among Flowers*, *Tao Li Mei, Family, Hitting the Princess* and *The Desolate Moon in the Lonesome Palace of Liao*.

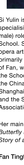
Wang Qing



Wang Qing is a First-Class Performer specialising in *xiaosheng* (young male) roles of the Yin (Guifang) School. She graduated from the Shanghai Traditional Opera School and studied under Yue opera artist Yin Guifang and contemporary Yue opera artist Zhao Zhigang. She is a member of the China Theatre Association, the Chinese Opera Performance Society and the Shanghai Dramatists' Association.

Her main repertoire includes *He Wenxiu, Questioning His Wife and Demanding to Find His Wife*, *Gentleman Among Flowers* and *Dream of the Red Chamber*.

Sheng Shuyang



Sheng Shuyang is a First-Class Performer specialising in *huadan* (young female) roles of the Fu (Guanxiang) School. She graduated from the Shanghai Traditional Opera School and studied under the Yue opera artist Fu Guanxiang and renowned actor Hu Peili. She is a member of the China Theatre Association and the Shanghai Dramatists' Association.

Her main repertoire includes *The Butterfly Lovers*, *Story of a Virtuous Courtesan*, *Dream of the Red Chamber*, *Romance of the West Chamber* and *The Story of Jade Hairpin*.

Xu Xiaofei



Xu Xiaofei is a First-Class Performer specialising in *huadan* (young female) roles of the Fan (Ruijuan) School. She studied under Yue opera artist Fan Ruijuan. She primarily specialises in the School of Fan, with additional training from the School of Bi. She is a member of the China Theatre Association, the Shanghai Dramatists' Association and the Shanghai New Art Workers Association.

Her main repertoire includes *The Butterfly Lovers*, *Tao Li Mei* and *Story of a Virtuous Courtesan*.

Fan Tingting

Fan Tingting is a First-Class Performer specialising in *qingyi* (young and middle-aged female) roles of the Jin (Caifeng) School. She graduated from the Shanghai Traditional Opera School and studied under Yue opera artist Jin Caifeng. She is a member of the China Theatre Association and the Shanghai Dramatists' Association. She is currently the Company Director of the Second Troupe of the Shanghai Yue Opera House.

Her main repertoire includes *Search for the Husband*, *The Jade Hairpin* and *Flowers Han Wen*. She won the Supporting Actor Award at the 31st Shanghai Magnolia Stage Performance Awards.

Chen Shi (Special Appearance)

Chen Shi is a contemporary Yue opera artist, a First-Class Performer and winner of the Lead Actor Award at the Shanghai Magnolia Stage Performance Awards. She specialises in the School of Fu (Guanxiang) and the School of Lu (Ruijing). She is also a producer at Zhao's Workshop.

Over the years, she has starred in various Yue opera productions, including *The First Intimate Encounter*, *Five Times Glimpses of the Princess*, *Written on Skin*, *Butterfly Lovers Across the Sea*, *A Chinese Ghost Story*, *He Wenxiu*, *The Red Detachment of Women* and *Dream of the Red Chamber*.

She has received the Zhejiang Theatre Festival Outstanding Performer Award, the Outstanding Contribution Award from the Shanghai Dramatists' Association and "The Colourful Years" Star of the Year Award. She has also won the New Artist Award and Lead Actor Award at the Shanghai Magnolia Stage Performance Awards.

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The HKAF is a **non-profit organisation**. The total estimated income for FY2024/25 (including the 53rd Hong Kong Arts Festival and 2025 "No Limits") is approximately HK$150 million. Current Government annual baseline funding accounts for around 12% of the Festival's total income. Around 23% of the Festival's income needs to come from the box office, and around 45% from sponsorship and donations made by corporations, individuals and charitable foundations. The remaining 20% is expected to come from other revenue sources including the Government's matching grant scheme, which matches income generated through private sector sponsorship and donations.

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