



2023 MVOH Show – program notes for non-Cantonese speakers
Prepared by the translation team of volunteers
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The stories in traditional Cantonese opera are usually set in ancient times. All the songs selected for this benefit concert are from popular operas depicting the dramatic stories involving princes/princesses, heroes/heroines, scholars and talented ladies. The stories are sometimes based on historical figures and facts, or they are at least set in the context of a specific historical time, the conditions of which will be more or less well known to the audience familiar with Chinese history. Empowered by the poetic license they have been granted as artists in this tradition, the playwrights are free to use their imagination to select and re-create those dramatic events that lend themselves well to operatic expression on stage.

Love happens to be the common thread running through all the songs chosen for this show, but love is more than romantic love. It takes many shapes and forms. In Chinese, there is a rich vocabulary with different words for the many kinds of love. How many types have you spotted in the following songs/stories?

Show II (Aug. 19, 2023 at 2pm)
at Michael J. Fox Theatre, Burnaby, BC

1. Iron Horses and Silver Wedding(鐵馬銀婚) – Part I

Ng Chin-Fung & Angela Keung

Written by Mr So Yung of Hong Kong, this opera is about the legendary general Wah Won-Lung, who served under the command of the man who later would establish the Ming Dynasty (1368 – 1644).

The story goes that General Wah has defeated one of the many rival kings, and persuaded another one to let him marry his daughter Princess Ngun-Ping. Wah later leads an army against his father-in-law. In one of the deadly battles, his father-in-law is killed by a flying arrow. Feeling guilty, he surrenders himself to his wife, who pursues him to avenge the death of her father. At a critical point, Wah's sister shoots an arrow at the Princess to free her brother. This song captures a dramatic moment of conflict when husband and wife confront each other on the battlefield.

2. Iron Horses and Silver Wedding(鐵馬銀婚) – Part II

Anthony Cheung & Jennifer Cheung

Princess Ngan-Ping, having been injured by Wah's sister, flees to a dilapidated temple to dress her wound. Wah rushes after her to help. In this duet, husband and wife confess their steadfast love in spite of all the misunderstandings and conflicting loyalties.

3. Taming the Unreasonable Princess (醉打金枝)

Angela Keung & Anthony Cheung

This Cantonese opera is inspired by the story told in a regional opera of the Shanxi tradition. The story focuses on the challenges facing the young man Kwok, who is married to the spoiled daughter of the Emperor. Things come to a head when the princess refuses to accompany him to attend the 80th birthday celebration of his father Kwok Ji-Yi (697-781), who has been made a king of Fun-Yeung by the Emperor for his contribution to the Empire.

This delightful song describes how the slightly intoxicated young lord returns to the palace after being teased and insulted by his siblings for being unable to order his wife to attend this important family celebration. The princess is not pleased when he returns home late. He scolds her for being arrogant, and reminds her how a daughter-in-law should behave according to the social rules of the day. The princess feels that it is beneath her to kowtow to her imperial father's subject. She seems to take pleasure getting her husband into a rage. Find out what happens as he raises his fist!

4. Looking for the Lost Purple Hairpin (拾釵結緣) – from *The Legend of the Purple Hairpin* (紫釵記)

Stuart Ma & Vera Ma

This popular opera written by Hong Kong's famous Tong Dick-Seng (唐滌生) is based on a classical play entitled *The Legend of the Purple Hairpin* by the famous playwright Tang Xianzhu (湯顯祖) of the Ming Dynasty (1368 to 1644). Set in the Tang Dynasty (618 – 907), the story is about the scholar Lee Yick (李益) whose reputation as a poet is spread to the capital and finds a fan in Fok Siu-Yuk(霍小玉), a beautiful and talented lady well-versed in music and poetry. Fok is from a minor royal family and resides in the capital where scholars from around the country gather to sit the Imperial Exam.

This duet shows how this pair of mutual admirers are brought together by fate through the loss and found of Fok's purple jade hairpin at the Lantern Festival in the capital.

5. Reunited by the Purple Hairpin (劍合釵圓) – from *The Legend of the Purple Hairpin*

Wong Chiu-Kwan & Pui Chun-Hin

This popular theme song with an ancient tune re-arranged by Maestro Wong Yuet-Sang (王粵生), who collaborated with Tong Dik-Seng (唐滌生) on many well-loved operas, has enchanted generations of Cantonese opera fans. It describes how Lee Yick overcomes many obstacles to get back to Fok Siu-Yuk only to find her embittered and dying of sorrow, thinking that he has betrayed her to marry the powerful Minister's daughter. In this beautiful piece, Lee explains what has happened, and swears that he will never be untrue to his wife Siu-Yuk. Together they will confront the powerful Minister who has tried to blackmail Lee into submission.

6. *Elegy for the Imperial Concubine Fuk (祭宓妃)* -- from *The Legend of the Goddess of River Lok (洛神)*

Ng Chin-Fung

This opera is inspired by the love story of an accomplished poet Cho Zik (曹植; 192 – 232) whose famous long poem on the Goddess of River Lok describes his love for his muse and lover Yuen-Jing, who somehow is married to Cho Zik's brother through the intervention of their father Cho Cho, King of Wei during the Three Kingdoms Era in China.

This moving song as an elegy is in memory of the woman the poet cannot marry, as she has died as an imperial concubine of his brother.

7. *The Goddess of River Lok (洛神)* – from *The Legend of the Goddess of River Lok*

Angela Keung

This aria tells the story from the point of view of Yuen-Jing. To escape a loveless marriage, she jumps into River Lok. She is finally set free from human sufferings and oppressions, and has become the Goddess of River Lok.

8. **The Dreamy Encounter on River Lok (洛水夢會)** – from *The Legend of the Goddess of River Lok*

Ng Chin-Fung & Angela Keung

This song depicts the poet's unexpected encounter with his deceased lover in a dream-like scene over the River Lok, which he is going to cross on being exiled by his older brother. As he wakes up, Cho Zik realizes that the encounter has happened only in a dream.

Musically, look for the section of naam yum sung at various tempos. See how the singer expresses his emotions through the mastery of different tempos. This aria also includes a beautiful and original tune called (凌波令) composed by Maestro Wong Yuet-Sang (王粵生). Please enjoy!