

An Opera That Springs From China but Laps Distant Shores

By JAMES R. OESTREICH

Even the loveliest and most meaningful tribute may exact a significant toll, as the Chinese opera diva [Qian Yi](#) can attest.

[Ms. Qian](#) (pronounced Chen), now 41, rose quickly to superstardom — albeit in a field few Westerners know — through her portrayal of the heroine in a landmark 19-hour production of the classic opera “[The Peony Pavilion](#)” that was a centerpiece of the [Lincoln Center Festival](#) in 1999 and then toured the world. Ms. Qian, who has since become something of a regular at the festival with starring roles in “The Orphan of Zhao” (2003) and “My Life as a Fairy Tale” (2005), returns this week as the generically titled protagonist, the Woman, in “Paradise Interrupted,” a one-act opera created for her by the director and visual designer [Jennifer Wen Ma](#) and the composer [Huang Ruo](#).

But for this work, which had its premiere at the Spoleto Festival USA in Charleston, S.C., last year, Ms. Qian has had to rethink her training from the ground up. And steeped as she has been since her Shanghai childhood in the ultrarefined opera tradition known as kunqu (which prizes “The Peony Pavilion,” a 1598 epic

歌剧《惊园》，哈哈镜中看昆曲

JAMES R. OESTREICH

中国的昆曲名伶[钱熠](#)可以证明，哪怕最可爱、最有意义的颂词，可能也需要付出相当大的代价。

41岁的[钱熠](#)凭借在具有里程碑意义、长达19小时的经典剧目[《牡丹亭》](#)中饰演女主角，而迅速成为超级巨星——尽管是在一个西方人极少了解的领域。该剧是1999年林肯中心艺术节([Lincoln Center Festival](#))的重头戏，之后在全球巡演。后来，钱熠成为该艺术节的常客，又主演了《赵氏孤儿》(2003)和《童话般的人生》(My Life as a Fairy Tale, 2005)。本周，她携《惊园》(Paradise Interrupted)回归，饰演剧中仅以“女人”为名的女主角。该剧是导演、视觉设计师[马文](#)和作曲家[黄若](#)为她创作的独幕歌剧。

该剧去年在南卡罗来纳州查尔斯顿的斯波莱托美国艺术节(Spoleto Festival USA)上首演。为了这部戏，钱熠不得不彻底重新思考受过的训练。尽管她从小在上海就浸淫于极其优美的戏曲传统——昆曲之中（昆曲的巅峰之作就是1598年汤显祖创作的巨作《牡丹亭》），但这次她不得不学习新的演唱和表

by Tang Xianzu, as its pinnacle), she had to learn new methods of both singing and acting.

“The challenge is to find my own voice,” Ms. Qian said after a rehearsal last week. And that is perhaps as it should be, for this tale of a woman’s vain quest to regain a remembered or imagined ideal state, leading to growth in a new direction, is partly her own. (By way of disclosure, through many interviews and encounters, beginning in 1998 in Shanghai, I have developed a personal friendship with Ms. Qian, who now lives in New York.)

Ms. Qian had already taken a difficult step away from tradition in “The Peony Pavilion,” where the American-based Chen Shi-Zheng’s bold direction called for a degree of naturalism foreign to kunqu (pronounced kwin-CHU), which embraces not only song but also elaborate, flowing stylized dance.

(That naturalism was undoubtedly one reason the [production was detained](#) in 1998 by oversolicitous Shanghai municipal authorities and postponed a year.) But Ms. Ma and Gwen Welliver, the “Paradise” choreographer, take Ms. Qian in another direction, introducing a certain angularity to her movements.

And Mr. Huang’s music carries her into terrain even less familiar. The pentatonic scale and subtle, lilting phrasings of kunqu give way to a world of pitch and melody in which almost anything goes.

Even the seemingly simple matter of responding to the gestures of a conductor — though she also encountered it while performing in Stewart Wallace’s “The

演方法。

“难点在于找到自己的声音，”上周钱熠在一次彩排后说。也许就应该是这样，因为这个关于一个女人徒劳追求重返记忆中或想像中完美状态（从而导致向新的方向发展）的故事，在一定程度上也是她自己的故事（顺便透露一下，从1998年在上海起，我就对她进行过多次采访，打过很多交道，所以我们之间已经建立起私人友谊；她现居纽约）。

钱熠在《牡丹亭》中已经开始背离传统。该剧导演陈士争活跃于美国艺术界，风格大胆，主张一定程度的自然主义（这对昆曲来说是陌生的概念），将歌唱与复杂、流畅的舞蹈融合到一起。

（那种自然主义无疑是该剧1998年遭到过于小心的上海市当局[搁置](#)的原因，因此延迟一年上演）不过，马文和《惊园》的舞蹈指导格温·韦利弗(Gwen Welliver)把钱熠带向另一个方向，在她的动作中加入某种棱角。

黄若的音乐把她带到一个更为陌生的领域。昆曲的五声音阶以及精妙细腻、抑扬顿挫的乐句，让位于一个几乎什么都有可能音高和旋律构成的世界。

甚至连看似简单的跟随乐队指挥的手势都成了一个问题，虽然2008年她在旧金山歌剧院(San Francisco Opera)表演斯图尔特·华莱士(Stewart Wallace)的《接骨师的女儿》(The

Bonesetter's Daughter" at the San Francisco Opera in 2008 — poses problems. In kunqu, Ms. Qian takes cues from the sounds of a drum and essentially goes her own musical way at her own pace.

"Here you have to look for the conductor as you go through your movements," Ms. Qian said. "But in Chinese opera, you cannot look away. It's painful. It's weird."

The makers call "Paradise Interrupted" an installation opera. The idea originated with Ms. Ma, 43, a visual designer best known for her work on the opening and closing ceremonies of the Beijing Olympics in 2008.

In 2012, she installed a work, ["Hanging Garden in Ink,"](#) with plants painted black, based on the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, at the Ullens Center for Contemporary Art in Beijing. And she began thinking more broadly about gardens: the one where Du Liniang of "The Peony Pavilion" dreams of love, and the Garden of Eden.

Introduced to Ms. Qian's artistry by Lihe Xiao, a lighting designer now part of the "Paradise" creative team, Ms. Ma conceived a work set in a black garden made of huge, collapsible paper cutouts and she enlisted a young playwright, Ji Chao, to help develop a libretto reflecting Ms. Qian's background in kunqu opera. (For touring, the paper is replaced by a sturdier material.) Ms. Qian, in turn, introduced Ms. Ma to Mr. Huang and his music.

"The idea of a garden came first, before a note was written, before a word was written," Ms. Ma said last week. "The music informs the

Bonesetter's Daughter)时就碰到过这个麻烦。在昆曲中，钱熠是踩着鼓点，基本上按照自己的节奏进行音乐表演。

"在这里，你表演时必须寻找指挥，"钱熠说，"但是在中国戏剧中，你不能往别处看。那很痛苦，也很奇怪。"

制作方称，《惊园》是一部装置歌剧。这个想法最初来自43岁的马文，这位视觉设计师以其在2008年北京奥运会开幕式和闭幕式上的作品最为人知。

2012年，她在北京的尤伦斯当代艺术中心做了一个装置作品，名叫[《空中墨花园》](#) (Hanging Garden in Ink)。她以巴比伦的空中花园为灵感，把植物涂成黑色。之后，她开始从更宽泛的角度思考花园：《牡丹亭》中杜丽娘梦想爱情的那个花园以及伊甸园 (Garden of Eden)。

马文通过灯光设计师萧丽河了解到钱熠的艺术成就，构想出一部用可折叠的巨大剪纸做成的黑色花园为背景的作品。萧丽河现在是《惊园》创作团队的一员。马文还找到年轻剧作家姬超帮忙写一个能反映钱熠昆曲背景的歌剧剧本（为了方便巡回演出，剪纸被一种更结实材料所取代）。而钱熠则把黄若和他的音乐介绍给了马文。

"最先出现的想法是花园——在一个音符、一句歌词尚未写出之前，"马文上周在接受采访时说道。"音乐反映视觉，不过视觉引领唱词

visual, but the visual led the text and the music.”

Not that the score is subservient or retiring. Mr. Huang, 39, composer in residence for the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra of Amsterdam and the National Symphony Orchestra of Taiwan, projects a strong and versatile voice, reflecting both his Chinese origins and a vast range of experiences in the West.

“I use the word integration instead of fusion or collage,” Mr. Huang said. “When I compose, I don’t think about what sounds Eastern or what sounds Western, or how to put the two together. I simply write or sing in my own voice. In ‘Paradise Interrupted,’ although it has inspiration from the Chinese traditional kunqu opera, all the music, vocal and instrumental, is newly written.”

The text, sung mostly in Mandarin (translated in titles), is new, too. Some of it uses words invented by Mr. Huang: a “celestial language,” he calls it, for the male singers playing elements — Wind, Air, Earth, Light, Fire — and other parts. One of those men is the remarkable countertenor John Holiday, who has a range more soprano than alto and often soars above Ms. Qian.

This, too, she finds unsettling, as any diva no doubt would. “In Chinese opera,” she said, “no one ever competes with the star.”

Still, this is a star vehicle if ever there was one, and Ms. Qian is grateful.

“These people have been holding my hand,” she said of Ms. Ma and Mr. Huang, “leading me

和音乐。”

这并不是说乐曲是附属或次要的。39岁的黄若是阿姆斯特丹皇家大会堂管弦乐队(Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra)和台湾国家交响乐团的常驻作曲家。他呈现出强烈而多样的声音，反映出他的中国渊源以及在西方的广泛经历。

“我喜欢用‘集成’这个词，而不是‘融合’或‘拼贴’，”黄若说，“作曲时，我不会考虑哪些听起来像东方，哪些像西方，也不考虑如何将两者放在一起。我只是写出或唱出我自己的声音。《惊园》虽然受到中国传统昆曲的启发，但是所有的音乐——声乐和器乐都是新创作的。”

歌词也是全新的，主要是用中文唱出（通过字幕翻译）。有些用的是黄若发明的语言：他称之为“天语”，它们是为饰演风、空气、地、光和火等元素以及其他一些角色的男歌手设计的。其中一位是著名的假声男高音约翰·霍利迪(John Holiday)，他的音域比女中音还高，更接近女高音，而且经常高过钱熠。

这也令她感到不安——任何一位优伶遇到这种情况都会感到不安。“在中国戏剧中，”她说，“没人与主角竞争。”

不过，这是一部造星作品，钱熠对此十分感激。

“这些人抓着我的手，”她提到马文和黄若时说，“带领我前进。他们给了我一面哈哈镜，

forward. They've given me a distorting mirror to look back at my own tradition, to see what I can learn, what I can provide.”

让我回望自己的传统，去看看自己能学到什么，呈现什么。”

更正1：本文稍早前的版本将剧作家姬超的姓名误译为晁寂，特此更正。

更正2：本文稍早前的版本将“他的音域比女中音还高，更接近女高音”误译为“他的音域比普通男声最高音歌手还高”，特此更正。

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