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The music of 'Paradise Interrupted'

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The score for "Paradise Interrupted" is a fusion of Eastern and Western musical traditions, out of which a new form emerges. In addition to using traditional Western instruments — such as the violin, viola and cello — composer Huang Ruo incorporates unconventional percussion instruments into his innovative score.

The waterphone is one of these unique instruments, and it produces a wide range of eerie, haunting sounds that helps establish the atmosphere of the opera and the story. Other instruments include a Tibetan singing bowl, rain stick, metal wind chimes and wood blocks, all of which enrich and broaden the musical color palette.

Elements from the Western tradition also add dimension to the score, such as the four Western operatic voices that compliment the Eastern voice of Qian Yi. "It was just going to be an opera for one female voice, and I thought that if we brought in four Western operatic voices, it would add to the spectrum of colors," Ruo said.

Throughout the opera, the voices and the instruments guide the female protagonist on her journey.

"The music itself is organic; it's original," Ruo said. "It integrates both Eastern and Western tradition, but they're not just mixed together. It's a very personal voice."

Natalie Piontek is a Goldring Arts Journalist from Syracuse University.