

Cal Performances Presents

Friday, September 15, 2006, 7pm
Saturday, September 16, 2006, 7pm
Sunday, September 17, 2006, 3pm
Zellerbach Hall

The Peony Pavilion *The Young Lovers' Edition*

United States Premiere



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Suzhou Kun Opera Theatre of Jiangsu, China

Starring Yu Jiu-Lin and Shen Fengying
Kenneth Pai, *writer & producer*
Wang Shiyu, *artistic & production director*

The University of California tour of The Peony Pavilion is sponsored by Trend Micro Education Foundation, the Richard Liu Foundation Limited, the Peony Pavilion Performing Arts Foundation, and the Institute of East Asian Studies, the Center for Chinese Studies, the Berkeley China Initiative and the Consortium for the Arts at UC Berkeley.



Cal Performances' 2006–2007 season is sponsored by Wells Fargo.



Book I: The Dream of Love

Friday, September 15, 2006, 7pm

Book II: Romance and Resurrection

Saturday, September 16, 2006, 7pm

Book III: Reunion and Triumph

Sunday, September 17, 2006, 3pm

Cast

<i>The young scholar, Liu Mengmei</i>	Yu Jiuling
<i>The young woman, Du Liniang</i>	Shen Fengying
<i>The priestess, Sister Stone</i>	Tao Hongzhen
<i>The tutor, Chen Zui-Liang</i>	Shen Zhiming
<i>The old gardener, Hunchback Guo</i>	Lu Fuhai
<i>Du Liniang's father, prime minister Du Bao</i>	Qu Binbin
<i>Du Liniang's mother, Madam Zhen</i>	Chen Lingling
<i>The maid, Chunxiang</i>	Shen Guofang
<i>The Infernal Judge</i>	Tang Rong
<i>The rebel duchess, Lady Yang</i>	Lu Jia
<i>The Emperor of Song</i>	Zhou Xuefeng
<i>The Envoy of Jin</i>	Fang Jianguo

Running time for each Book is approximately three hours with a 15-minute intermission.

The Peony Pavilion *The Young Lovers' Edition*

Suzhou Kun Opera Theatre of Jiangsu, China

Creative Team

<i>Original Work</i>	Tang Xianzu, the Ming Dynasty
<i>General Producer/Artistic Supervisor</i>	Pai Hsien-yung†
<i>General Producer</i>	Xu Guoqiang, Zhou Xiangqun
<i>Producer</i>	Gao Fumin
<i>Producer</i>	Cai Shaohua, Fan Man-nong†
<i>Libretto Adaptation</i>	Pai Hsien-hung†, Hua Wei†, Zhang Shuxiang†, Xin Yiyun†
<i>Artistic Director</i>	Wang Shiyu, Zhang Jiqing
<i>Production Director</i>	Wang Shiyu
<i>Music Direction, Design, Arrangement and Orchestration</i>	Zhou Youliang
<i>Director</i>	Weng Guosheng
<i>Art Director</i>	Wang Tung†
<i>Costume Design</i>	Wang Tung†, Tseng Yung-ni†
<i>Planning</i>	Lu Fuhai
<i>Directorial Assistant</i>	Ma Peiling
<i>Singing and Diction Director</i>	Zhou Qin, Yao Jikun, Mao Weizhi
<i>Set Design</i>	Wang Mengchao†
<i>Lighting Design</i>	Wong Chooyean†
<i>Choreography</i>	Wu Sujun†, Ma Peiling
<i>Calligraphy</i>	Tung Yang-tzu†
<i>Graphic Art</i>	Hsi Sung†
<i>Original Script and Design for Promotional Literature</i>	Pan Qiru†
<i>Photography</i>	Hsu Pei-hung†
<i>Stage Manager</i>	Wang Yaochong†, Li Qiang
<i>Consultants</i>	Koo Siu-sun‡, Zheng Peikai‡, Zhou Qin
<i>English Translation of Surtitles</i>	Lindy Li Mark

† Creative Team members from Taiwan

‡ Creative Team members from Hong Kong

Support Team

<i>Troupe Leader</i>	Cai Shaohua
<i>Supporting Unit</i>	People's Government of Suzhou City

Cast

Players

<i>Du Linaing</i>	Shen Fengying
<i>Liu Mengmei</i>	Yu Jiulin
<i>Spring Fragrance</i>	Shen Guofang
<i>Sister Stone</i>	Tao Hongzhen
<i>Chen Zuiliang</i>	Shen Zhiming
<i>Du Bao</i>	Qu Binbin
<i>Dame Du</i>	Chen Lingling
<i>Judge Hu, Li Quan, Flower Spirit</i>	Tang Rong
<i>Duchess Yang, Flower Spirit</i>	Lu Jia
<i>Hunchback, Interpreter, Boatman</i>	Lu Fuhai
<i>Jin Emperor Wan Yanliang, Barbarian Envoy</i>	Fang Jianguo
<i>Miao Shunbin</i>	Liu Chunlin
<i>Garden Boy, Wine Shopkeeper</i>	Zhou Xuefeng
<i>Emperor, Tong Xianzu</i>	Zhou Xuefeng, Cao Jian
<i>Flower Spirits, Young Nuns, Maids-in-Waiting</i>	Du Dongyan, Gu Weiying, Dong Xin, Shao Ting, Xu Chao, Miao Dan, Chen Yanyi, Jin Lin, Zhou Jingyue, Zhou Xiaoyue, Chen Xiaorong, Shen Wen, Zhou Ying
<i>Ghosts, Attendants</i>	Yang Yunchao, Wu Haitao, Wang Chao, Liu Chengguang, Liu Chunlin, Xu Dongyin, Bas Zhigang, Ye Xing, Liu Yi, Kong Xi, Cao Jian, Weng Xiaocun, Zhi Xueqing, Miao Tao
<i>Lead Singer</i>	Yang Mei

Musicians

<i>Conductor</i>	Zhou Youliang
<i>Percussion</i>	Xin Shilin (Book I, Book II), Zhang Xiaotian (Book III)
<i>Transverse Flute</i>	Zou Jianliang (Book I, Book III), Fan Xuechao (Book II)
<i>Small Gong</i>	Liu Changbin Shi Liangyuan
<i>Sheng Mouth Organ</i>	Yan Lin
<i>Bass Mouth Organ</i>	Zhou Mingjun
<i>Vertical Flute</i>	Fan Xuehao, Zou Jianliang
<i>Shawm</i>	Fan Xuehao, Pang Linchun
<i>Pipa</i>	Wang Yingying
<i>Dulcimer</i>	Meng Xianhua
<i>Alto Ruan</i>	Wei Xiuzi
<i>Zheng Zither</i>	Zhang Qian
<i>Bianzhong</i>	Lu Yuangui
<i>Gaohu</i>	Yao Shenxing
<i>Erhu</i>	Yang Lei, Yao Shenxing, Zhao Jianan, Cheng Jiaqi
<i>Zhonghu</i>	Hu Junwei

Violin Zhao Jianan
Double Bass Pang Linchun
Cello Chen Xinyue

Backstage Team

Stage Technical Director Su Jianren
Scenic Painting Huang Jianda
Lighting Ji Maolian, Weng Xiaotao, Zhi Xueqing
Follow Spot Zhu Huiying, Xia Xianling
Sound Engineer Shi Zuhua
Costume Wang Sufang
Makeup Design Gu Ling
Headdress Zhu Jianhua
Props Li Qiang, Xiao Zhonghao
Stage Installation Weng Xiaochun
Surtitle Operator Ye Chun



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Book I: The Dream of Love

Scene 1—Enlightening the Daughter

The scene opens with Du Bao, the governor of Nan'an in the southern part of China, conversing at leisure with his wife, Madame Du. He is thinking of engaging a tutor for their only daughter, Du Liniang. If, on top of her feminine virtues, she is able to converse learnedly with her prospective husband, this will reflect well on her parents. Du Liniang enters with wine, offering a toast to her parents on this beautiful spring day. She exclaims that the birds' chirping seems to verge on human utterance. Instead of being amused, Du Bao scolds her for taking a nap when she should have been reading a book. He decides she needs a stern teacher to guide her.

A contrast is made between society's need for formal order, symbolized by the father, and nature's innate rhythms, expressed in the daughter's urge to celebrate spring. In this production, the oversized hanging scrolls stand in for furnishings typically found in upper-class homes.

Scene 2—The Classroom

Du Liniang's personal maid, Chunxiang ("Spring Fragrance"), is her study companion. The tutor Chen Zuiliang tries to teach the girls the first poem of the *Book of Songs*, an ancient love poem that Confucian tradition construes as a piece on feminine virtue.

When Chunxiang challenges the tutor's traditional interpretation, he becomes thoroughly agitated and befuddled. Chunxiang discovers a large garden behind the classroom and tries to entice Du Liniang to explore it with her. The tutor, furious, is about to hit Chunxiang when Du Liniang claims the high ground by pretending to discipline the maid herself. The two girls put on an act for the benefit of the teacher, who decides to let matters rest. The theme of conflict between youth and ossified Confucian orthodoxy continues.

Scene 3—Interrupted Dream

Awakened by warblers in the morning, Du Liniang is dazzled by the signs of spring. She suddenly realizes she has promised to explore the garden with Chunxiang, who comes to assist her with getting dressed. Pleased with herself in the mirror, she declares that for all her elegant accessories, she likes being natural best. At first, the two girls flit here and there in the garden like birds out of a cage, marveling at its sights and sounds. Soon, however, Du Liniang falls into deep thoughts as Chunxiang attempts to draw her out.

Back in her room, Du Liniang sighs that, at 16, she is wasting yet another spring with no one who truly "knows" her. The Flower God enters, escorting a dream lover for her. Du Liniang and the man, holding a willow branch signifying spring, back into each other. When they turn around, they regard each other with astonishment. The man asks if she might compose a poem for the occasion. Du Liniang inquires shyly how he has managed to find her. Holding her sleeve, he addresses her as "Jiejie" (literarily, "older sister" or "respected sister") and confides that he has been looking her all along. They consummate their love in the Peony Pavilion as flower fairies arrive to provide them cover.

In what is the most famous erotic poetry in Chinese drama, Du Liniang's sexual arousal is couched in nature imagery, also reflected in the costumes.

Scene 4—Declaration of Ambitions

An impoverished scholar, scion of the famous eighth-century prose writer Liu Zongyuan, wakes up from a dream in which he has an encounter with a beautiful woman under a plum tree. He is so affected by the dream he changes his name to Liu Mengmei (“willow dreams of plum”; his family name means “willow”).

As Liu Mengmei is an orphan, the person closest to him is Hunchback Guo, the old family gardener. He announces to Hunchback Guo that he is now ready to take the civil service examinations held in Hangzhou. Hunchback Guo supports this decision and starts packing. The appearance of Liu Mengmei and his sidekick immediately following the previous scene conveys the idea that he is not simply Du Liniang's dream lover, but a real person. This cues the audience to suspend their disbelief. In traditional Chinese drama, clothing reflects status and character rather than temporary conditions, thus we would not expect to see Liu Mengmei in rags even in poverty. The scrolls inscribed with writings by his famous ancestor, in vigorous, free-style calligraphy, underscore Liu Mengmei is a man with a mind of his own.

Scene 5—Search for the Dream

Du Liniang returns to the garden to retrieve traces of her dream. She finds fond memories everywhere. She relives her dream and recalls how she was awakened by swirling flowers.

Scene 6—The Traitor

The barbarian emperor of the Jin Empire, has conquered the northern part of China. He orders Li Quan, a Song general whom he won over by bribery, to harass the Huaiyang region in preparation for a Jin invasion of the south.

This scene anchors the play in the Southern Song dynasty during the 12th century, when chaotic conditions due to political instability rendered personal attachments even more precious.

Scene 7—Painting a Portrait

With plum blossoms in her hand, Du Liniang sings that the person of her dream is nowhere to be found while she pines away for love. When she looks into a mirror that Chunxiang holds up for her, she is startled by her haggard image. She decides to paint a self-portrait before her beauty passes away. She pours her whole self into this task, which is a celebration of her beauty, a channel for her love, and an act of defiance against the passage of time. By painting her own portrait, Du Liniang boldly affirms her own existence and the validity of her emotions. The playwright suggests that emotions can be fulfilled only when acted upon.

Scene 8—The Taoist Nun

The Taoist Priestess, Stone, enters and confesses matter-of-factly that she is congenitally unable to enjoy sex, her hymen being as hard as stone. She tells a bawdy tale of her wedding night, how she left her husband and became a Daoist priestess.

Scene 9—The Soul Departs

Unpropitiously, rain pours on Mid-Autumn Festival, a traditional day for family reunion. Raising her eyes to the moonless sky, Du Liniang feels life ebbing. All she can think of is her dream lover. Recovering briefly, she gives instructions to Chunxiang to hide her self-portrait under a rock in the garden, and pleads with her mother to bury her under the large plum tree. She apologizes for having failed her duties as a daughter.

Du Liniang's soul, receding into darkness, is cloaked in red—a hint that she will soon return to the land of the living.

Book II: Romance and Resurrection

Scene 1—Hell

Judge Hu is newly appointed to fill a judicial vacancy in hell. His first task is to dispose of prisoners who may have entered hell by mistake. When Du Liniang is led before him, he is so flabbergasted by her beauty that he leaps high up in the air. He cannot quite believe that her death has been caused by a dream and summons the Flower God to cor-

Synopsis

roborate her story. After he ascertains that her crime is only in a dream, and in fact she and Liu Mengmei are predestined to be married, he orders her release.

The audience will appreciate the fact that the judge from hell is more scrupulous and humane than most human judges.

Scene 2—On the Road

On his way to Hangzhou, the capital city of Southern Song, Liu Mengmei is blown about like a dry leaf in a snowstorm. Sick and shelterless for the night, he is grateful to Chen Zuiliang, Du Liniang's former tutor, who leads him to the Plum Blossom Shrine and tends his illness.

Scene 3—Reminiscing about the Daughter

It has now been three years since Du Liniang's death. Her parents and Chunxiang, mourn her in their separate ways. In the intervening years, Du Bao has been promoted to Pacification Commissioner and transferred from Nan'an to Yangzhou in the Huaiyang region, where he is charged with defending the territory against the Jin incursion. Having buried Du Liniang in the garden according to her dying wish, they erected a Plum Blossom Shrine in her memory. Chen Zuiliang and Priestess Stone have been asked to watch over the shrine.

Scene 4—The Portrait Recovered

Liu Mengmei regains enough strength to explore the garden. He finds Du Liniang's self portrait, which he mistakes for the Goddess of Mercy or the Moon Goddess. He reads the poem written on the painting and realizes it is a woman. He is amazed that the poem contains two characters of his own name, saying a union will come about by either a willow or a plum. He becomes obsessed with the woman in the painting, cooing lovingly to it morning and night, and praying that it comes to life.

Scene 5—The Wandering Soul

Du Liniang's ghost returns to the garden which, to her dismay, has gone to seed. Priestess Stone is saying a mass for her in the Plum Blossom Shrine. She

wonders where her parents and Chunxiang are. That everything has changed in such a short time saddens her. Soon, she hears Liu Mengmei calling out to the woman in the painting, "Jiejie, my dearest Jiejie!" His voice sends her heart pounding and she wishes she had someone who spoke to her that way, she did not know then, of course, that the object of his adoration is no other than herself.

Scene 6—Consorting with a Ghost

Liu Mengmei wonders what the woman in the painting is really like, whether she could ever imagine that someone would treasure her portrait. Meanwhile, having watched Liu Mengmei several nights, Du Liniang finally understands that he is addressing herself in the portrait. She decides to show herself to him. Liu Mengmei is both delighted and scared to see her. Well aware that she cannot reveal herself as a ghost, she makes vague references to living nearby. He shows her the portrait and tells her he has once met this woman in a dream. Du Liniang resists identifying herself. Instead, she expresses her admiration for him and offers to share his pillow every night, should he care to. He hesitates, but then, is delighted to accept.

"A woman in traditional society can make such frank sexual advances only as a ghost."

Scene 7—Impending Danger over Huaiyang

The turncoat general Li Quan, ordered to harass the Huaiyang region, relies heavily on his pretty wife Yang for strategy. She advises him to lay siege to Yangzhou to cut off Huiyang's supply lines before the attack.

Instead of portraying these traitors as mean and despicable, the playwright endears this lively pair to the audience. Even traitors have love for each other.

Scene 8—Love Vows

Priestess Stone's suspicion of the nightly going-ons in Liu Mengmei's room puts pressure on Du Liniang to reveal her true identity. Before she does, she wants Liu Mengmei to commit himself to her. In his arms, she inquires whether he already has a wife back home. He, too, has many questions for

this strange woman and asks what kind of man she likes. She replies, “A man who loves deeply.” He assures her he is that kind of man. Finally, Du Liniang identifies herself as the woman in the painting, and told him that her father is the governor. She would tell more only if he agrees to marry her. He is delighted but becomes fearful nonetheless upon finding out she is a ghost. In the end, love conquers his fear.

Even though lovers go through a process of mutual exploration and self revelation, all commitments involve a leap of faith. In Du Liniang’s case, however, knowing how trustworthy Liu Mengmei really is, whether he loves her enough to overcome his fears, and whether he has the courage to carry out an utterly unconventional task, is crucial to her return to the land of the living.

Scene 9—Resurrection

Liu Mengmei manages to convince Priestess Stone at the risk of being charged as a grave robber, to help him open the tomb. Under the protection of the Flower God, Du Liniang’s soul rejoins her body. The flower fairies come to pay their tribute.

Book III: Reunion and Triumph

Scene 1—Wedding

At Priestess Stone’s suggestion, the newly united lovers leave Nan’an immediately to avoid gossip. They are married on a boat, bowing once to Heaven and Earth, once to their parents from afar, and once to each other. Du Liniang tells Liu Mengmei that she is still a virgin. Liu, surprised, asks how that can be possible since they have already been intimate. She replies that what happened when she was a ghost does not taint her real body.

The conversation on virginity establishes a demarcation between the realm of the living and the realm of the dead. Du Liniang returns to her former virginal identity. Thus, Tang Xianzu was still quite conservative about female chastity.

Scene 2—Armies on the Move

With the enemies approaching, Du Bao receives orders to move his troops from Yangzhou across

the river to the city of Huaian. In the confusion, he loses track of Madame Du. He must take leave of his wife and Chunxiang.

Scene 3—Arrival in Hangzhou

The newlyweds arrive in Hangzhou where they set up house by the river and Liu Mengmei studies for the examination. They also fantasize about the future. Priestess Stone comes to announce that the examination hall is opened. Before Liu Mengmei hurries off, the newlyweds offer each other a toast.

Scene 4—Frustrating the Enemy

Du Bao puts up a strong fight against Li Quan. When an emissary of the Jin emperor comes on a fact-finding mission, Li Quan avoids seeing him. Instead, his wife greets the emissary. The emissary flirts with Yang, but she, not speaking his language, shows off her martial art. This leads to a fight between the two men and the emissary commands Li Quan to conquer Huaian within three days. While Li Quan and his wife grow anxious about the ultimatum, they capture Chen Zuiliang, who is on his way to see Du Bao to report that his daughter’s grave has been plundered. Li Quan’s wife Yang devise a ruse by using Chen Zuiliang as an intermediary to tell Du Bao that his wife has been killed, and that he may as well surrender. However, Du Bao makes a counter-offer by promising Yang a high position in the Song officialdom and all the gold she wants. He convinces the couple to surrender instead.

The bumbling Chen Zuiliang once again becomes, unwittingly, an agent for good.

Scene 5—Reunion with Mother

Madame Du and Chunxiang arrive in Hangzhou as refugees. As night falls, they knock on the door of a house to ask for shelter. Du Liniang comes to the door. Thinking that they have seen her ghost, they try to appease her with spirit money. However, Madame Du’s maternal instinct overcomes her fear and a joyous reunion ensues. Du Liniang tells her mother an expurgated version of past events and proudly displays a document certifying she is officially released from hell.

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Scene 6—Stranded at Huaian

While awaiting examination results, Liu Mengmei risks his life to look for his father-in-law, for his wife's sake. When he reaches Huaian, the city gate is already locked for the night. Having exhausted his money, he seeks shelter at an inn and tells the innkeeper that he is Commissioner. Du's son-in-law. The innkeeper accuses him of being an imposter. Liu Mengmei spends the night at a temple and goes to pay his respects to Du Bao the next morning. He is denied entry to the hall where Du Bao is holding a banquet celebrating his victory. Starving and furious, Liu Mengmei tries to barge his way in, and is promptly arrested.

Scene 7—Searching for the Top Candidate

Unbeknownst to Liu Mengmei, he has placed first in the civil service exams. The imperial guards are looking all over for him, as a banquet will be held in his honor. They run into Hunchback Guo who is also looking for Liu Mengmei. On hearing that his master placed first at the exams, Hunchback Guo is so elated that his back straightens out. The guards carry him on their shoulders as they continue their mission.

Scene 8—Torture

Sitting at court, Du Bao is about to interrogate Liu Mengmei. Still oblivious of his own precarious situation, he wonders whether his manners are formal enough for his father-in-law. When Du Bao learns that his daughter's self portrait is found in Liu Mengmei's bundle, he is convinced that this is the grave robber. Liu Mengmei tries reasoning with Du Bao, but as he talks he sounds more and more improbable and fraudulent.

When he gets to the part about resurrecting Du Liniang, Du Bao is certain the man is a lunatic, and orders him strung up and beaten. Fortunately, Hunchback Guo hears his master's voice outside the gate and comes to the rescue. The imperial guards are happy they have found the top candidate but Du Bao refuses to listen to their story.

The tension in this scene comes from Liu Mengmei's fierce confidence in himself and his version of

events. He carries himself with dignity in the face of severe authority.

Equally convinced of his rationality that the dead cannot return to life, Du Bao refuses to believe Liu Mengmei.

Scene 9—The Emperor's Verdict

Convinced that Liu Mengmei is demonic, Du Bao submits a memorial to the emperor to have him killed. Meanwhile, Liu Mengmei also submits a memorial defending himself. The two argue outside the palace gate and Chen Zuiliang, now promoted to Chamberlain for his role in the Li Quan incident, is caught in the middle. Soon, Du Liniang also arrives seeking an audience with the emperor. Confronted by his daughter, Du Bao accuses her of being a demon. When Madame Du arrives to speak on her daughter's behalf, Du Bao accuses her of being a demon in cahoots with the rest, because to his knowledge, she has been killed in the war.

To settle the issue, the emperor orders Du Liniang tested by a magic mirror. The mirror confirms that she is human as it reflects her form and her shadow. Furthermore, Du Liniang points to the fact that her feet leave imprints where she walks. At the emperor's command, she recounts her story, proud that she has relied on herself to find such an exemplary husband. A recalcitrant Du Bao demands to know who were the matchmaker and the guarantor at the wedding, implying that the marriage is not valid since it took place without the parents' consent. The daughter, defiant, retorts that the funeral star and the sprites of Hell took responsibility for the wedding. Finally, Madame Du intercedes and the emperor personally certifies that Du Liniang is resurrected. The lovers are vindicated and flower fairies reappear to give their blessings.

For happiness to be complete in the Chinese tradition, it is not enough that the lovers are united, they have to gain acceptance by their respective families, and by society at large. The appearance of the fairies signifies that the cosmic elements are now in harmony.



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Classical Beauty and Modernity: On Producing the “Young Lovers’ Edition” of *The Peony Pavilion*

Known for its “delicate tones,” Kun Opera originated in Kunshan near Suzhou. It has a long history of over 500 years and is one of China’s oldest extant dramatic forms. Regarded as “the mother of all operas,” Kun Opera (or Kunqu) merges literature, music, dance, theatre and art into an exquisite and refined art form to a superlative degree. Dedicated writers, composers and performers have contributed to its success over the centuries. Its abstract qualities, aesthetic expressiveness, and poetic lyricism are representative of classical Chinese aesthetics, in which innate simplicity often belies something more sophisticated and complex. Kunqu was listed as one of the 19 inaugural “Masterpieces of Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity” by UNESCO in 2001, representing as well a great honor to the Chinese people.

The present production of Tang Xianzu’s masterpiece, subtitled the “Young Lovers’ Edition,”

essentially interprets *The Peony Pavilion* as a work that pays homage to youth, love, and life. Here, I have selected two young and good-looking artists from the Suzhou Kun Opera Theatre of Jiangsu Province, Yu Jiulin and Shen Fengying, to play the lead roles of Liu Mengmei and Du Liniang. They will enact the opera in a nine-hour performance over three days. As adept in singing as in acting, their portrayal is very close to what the script dictates; performing on the same stage will be mostly young actors and actresses of the same age. The emphasis on a young cast sprang from our realization that Kunqu is in danger of disappearing because its artists are aging and so is their audience. We invited two leading performers and veterans of the genre today, Wang Shiyu and Zhang Jiqing, to take the the young artists playing the lead male and female roles by hand, and teach them their own repertoire. We also provided intensive and stringent training for the other young members of the cast, in hopes that we would not only groom two talented young performers to become brilliant starts, but also through the staging of a full-length opera, we can groom a whole generation of Kunqu artists.

The melding of classical and 21st-century aesthetics remains the greatest challenge in producing the “Young Lovers’ Edition” of *The Peony Pavilion*. How is it possible to develop a 500-year-old opera for a modern stage, so that it is given a new, youthful lease on life? We are guided by the following principles: We respect tradition but do not follow it unquestionably; we employ what is modern but do not misuse it. In other words, we are clothing a traditional opera in modern garb. Our production adheres to “orthodox” Kunqu styles for singing, acting and recitation, but utilizes modern lighting techniques and stage design in such a way that they would enhance the performance, rather than impede it.

Since its premiere in Taipei at the end of April 2004, the “Young Lovers’ Edition” of *The Peony Pavilion* has played to full houses in Hong Kong, Macau, Suzhou, Hangzhou, Beijing, Nanjing, Shanghai, Tianjin, Shenzhen and Foshan, including such prestigious venues as China’s top academic institutions Beijing University, Beijing Normal University, Nankai University, Nanjing University, Fudan University, Tongji University, Zhejiang

Program Notes

University and Suzhou University, as well as important universities in Taiwan and Hong Kong. Over the last two years, nearly all of its 75 performances were sold out. Feedback at the theaters or schools, especially from the young audiences, has been overwhelming. Though many factors like the support of cultural and theatrical circles rest behind its success, undeniably it has been the outstanding performances of the two young leading actors which have won the hearts of all. Traditional and yet modern, their elegant, 21st-century renditions have injected a new life into this 400-year-old romantic drama, and in so doing, they may have already taken their place as the *Romeo and Juliet* of the Chinese world.

Kenneth Hsien-yung Pai

The Play

Chinese musical drama reached a high point during the Yuan and Ming dynasties (AD 1206–1368 and 1368–1644, respectively). When learned men wrote plays to express ideas they could not in scholarly writings. *The Peony Pavilion* is a drama in song, about love, passion, death and resurrection. It was written during a time when Confucian orthodoxy about rationality, moral rectitude and social propriety was challenged by a new breed of thinkers, who advocated the primacy of human emotions. Among them was the scholar, poet and man of letters, Tang Xianzu (1550–1616). His school of thought proposed that love, between parents and children, husband and wife and, above all, between young women and men, not excluding sexual desire, was the driving force to all human endeavors. This is the central theme of this poetic drama. Daring for his time, Tang's portrayal of sexual love, especially in women, shook the Chinese theatrical world when it was first performed at the end of the 16th century (c.1598–1599). Since then, it continues to touch the hearts of generations of men and women. Like many dramatists of the past, Tang Xianzu used existing tales and legends as the scaffold for his philosophy about values and the meaning of life. *The Peony Pavilion*, also known as *The Return of the Soul*, was a tale about a pair of young lovers who first met in dreams. After the girl died, despairing of ever finding her "dream

man," they met again as ghost and human lovers. Finally, the young man, overcoming his own fear of ghosts, braving capital punishment for grave robbing, exhumed and resuscitated her. The traditional tale was fable-like, short and simple. Tang Xianzu extended it into 55 scenes, composing over 400 arias in poetry, with spoken dialog. His poetic genius rendered this unbelievable tale convincing today, as it was 400 years ago, when people really did believe in ghosts. Be assured, however, the audience will not be subjected to all 55 scenes; only half that many.

The Music

In the mid-16th century, a new form of musical drama evolved in the Yangzi River delta region, around the town of Kunshan and the city of Suzhou. This genre later acquired its name after Kunshan town Kunqu (the suffix *-qu* is pronounced something like "chew") means "songs of Kun." Kunju (*-ju* is pronounced like "Jew") means "drama of Kun." Its elegant poetry, melodious arias and refined woodwind ensemble, combined with pantomime and dance, swept the Chinese empire during the 17th and 18th centuries. However, by the mid-19th century, Kunqu, or Kun opera, faced competition from other performing genres, including what is now known as Beijing or Peking opera, and began a slow decline. However, Kunqu, valued as much for its dramatic literature as for its musicality, survived to this day, nurtured by small enclaves of devotees. Historically, *The Peony Pavilion* may have been set to other musical styles, but it is the Kunqu version that has survived the test of time.

Traditional Chinese music is primarily melodic with only incidental "harmony," or heterophony. However, when several instruments play together, each with its characteristic embellishments, the music has a rich linear sound, not the dense harmonies of Western opera.

In Kunqu, singing is supported by the transverse bamboo flute, in unison. The flute has a thin membrane covered hole, between the embouchure and the first finger stop. The membrane vibrates to produce a bright timbre that blends and resonates with the singing, such that the audience may not notice it. This accompaniment differs from Peking

opera in which the strident two-stringed fiddle (*jinghu*) accompanies the singing, with instrumental interludes between phrases. In addition to the flute, the vertical flute (*xiao*) or mouth organ (*sheng*) may accompany the singing. Additional plucked, bowed and various percussion instruments make up the ensemble.

In recent years, under Western influence, the Kunqu ensemble has expanded to orchestral proportions with the addition of lower registered instruments such as the cello, the double bass and even the violin. Arrangers might also employ Western musical devices such as counterpoint and triadic harmony, to “enrich” the sound. When applied judiciously, such practices can indeed enhance the musical experience. The present producers have wisely preserved the traditional melodies, as sung since the late 17th century. We are assured of their authenticity because 35 arias, in its present form, are found in musical notation, in an imperial compendium compiled in the years 1742–1746. The complete score of *The Peony Pavilion* was preserved in the mid-19th century. Therefore, it is safe to assume that these 35 arias, if not all, existed well before these dates.

Kun opera differs from Western opera in important ways. It is dominated by solo arias, and there is very little choral singing, no multiple part duets, trios, quartets and the like. Historians have proposed that this performance practice evolved from *chantefable* style of storytelling, in which a single performer sang and spoke all of the parts. In addition, different role types, such as young females, young males, old males, etc., are differentiated by vocal timbre, rather than pitch range. Since the late 17th century, all roles were largely performed by men; and this might have contributed to the small differences in vocal range. Indeed, the young male arias frequently have wider and higher pitch ranges than that of the female.

Kunqu melodies are highly ornamented and singing them requires fine breath control and careful phrasing. One syllable may be carried over four to six slow beats with numerous melodic turns. The vocal style is also quite different from Western art song, and upon first hearing may seem high pitched and thin. The young male role, especially, requires skillfully switching between the true voice and falsetto. The painted face roles, usually

martial or rogue characters, sing in a strident, guttural voice. Perhaps like all cultivated vocal styles, Kunqu singing is an acquired taste.

Singers must simultaneously execute choreographed dance movements, amplified by flowing white silk sleeves that extends two or more feet beyond the hands. From walking to pointing, expression of the eyes, each movement is stylized according to traditional notions of beauty and expression. Men stride in boots with white, four-inch-thick soles, leap and even turn somersaults in them. Women step daintily by placing one foot directly in front of the other, sometimes with such speed that they appear to float on air across the stage. Kunqu demands strenuous training and stamina of performers.

The Young Lovers' Edition

The works of playwrights are ever at the mercy of producers and performers, and other playwrights who think they can do better. *The Peony Pavilion* is no exception. Despite its popularity, or perhaps because of it, it has been subject to revisions and abridgements shortly after its first performance. To begin with, the length is daunting. Plays of the Ming Dynasty genre run characteristically to scores of scenes, but 55 certainly is the record. The present adaptation is one of the latest in a long tradition of excerpted scripts, but it is perhaps the most complete in terms of the story line.

Bowing to modern theatrical time frames, the adaptors have pared the lengthy original to its logical, rich and most melodious core, namely, 27 episodes or scenes, grouped into three books. These scenes comprise the most dramatic and moving, as well as the liveliest and most comic episodes. English titles have been added to the books which are not original to the play. However, each scene within the book retains its original title referencing the action therein.

Book I: The Dream of Love centers on the heroine, Du Liniang, a sheltered, lonely girl of 16, daughter of a stern Confucian father. During a walk in the family's garden with her maid, she is moved by the beauty of spring flowers and laments the passing of her own youthful spring time. Upon return

Program Notes

she has a dream in which she meets a handsome young man. Smitten, but realizing that he was only a dream, she pines away. Before she dies, she paints a self portrait and instructs her maid to hide it in the garden. She also makes her mother promise to bury her in the garden, under a plum tree.

Meanwhile, her father the governor has been called to defend a distant city attacked by a hen-pecked bandit leader who surrendered to the enemy Tartar king. A shrine dedicated to Du Liniang is erected in the garden and tended by a nun. Most of the singing and action in Book I is done by the young female lead, in melismatic, haunting melodies. In between are scenes featuring the male lead and minor characters, such as the Tartar king.

Book II: Romance and Resurrection revolves around the hero, Liu Mengmei, an impoverished young scholar. He dreamt of a beautiful lady standing under a plum tree who prophesied that only she will bring him romance and success in his career. Liu travels to the capital to sit for another round of examinations, but falls ill in a storm. He finds shelter in the shrine in the garden where Du Liniang

is buried. Finding Du Liniang's portrait, he falls in love with the image, which he carries around and whispers endearments to.

Du Liniang's wandering ghost hears him and appears to him. After she is convinced that he truly loves her, she reveals that she is a ghost but that she can be revived. Braving his own fear of ghosts, and capital punishment for grave robbing, he opens her grave. With the divine protection of flower goddesses, she comes back to life.

Book III: Reunion and Triumph is the lively resolution of the love story. Liu Mengmei succeeds as the First Place Scholar of the realm, but not before he enduring a flogging by his father-in-law, the judge, on suspicion of grave robbing. Du Liniang is reunited with her parents, but not before her straightlaced father grudgingly accepts the fact that love can indeed conquer death. The last book contains some of the liveliest and most humorous episodes in the entire repertoire of Kunqu. Traditional Chinese theatergoers prefer to go home happy. You will, too.

Lindy Li Mark

About the Artists

The **Suzhou Kunqu Opera Theatre of Jiangsu** was formerly known as the Su and Kunqu Opera Troupe of Jiangsu. Established in 1956, it has performed both Kunqu Opera and Su Opera. In the last few decades, it has been active in the southern part of Suzhou, Shanghai and Zhejiang. In 2001, the Su and Kunqu Opera Troupe of Jiangsu was expanded and renamed the Suzhou Kunqu Opera Theatre of Jiangsu. The company has groomed four generations of performers, numbering over 100, with Ji, Cheng, Hong and Yang as the middle character of their stages names. It has therefore contributed to the salvaging, upholding and developing of the classical art form.

The company's stock repertory includes *The Peony Pavilion*, *The Story of the White Rabbit*, *The Story of the Wooden Hairpin*, *The Story of the Hairpin and the Bracelet*, *Fifteen Strings of Cash*, *A Houseful of Lords*, *The Story of the Lute*, *The Palace of Eternal Life*, *The Injustice Done to Dou E*. and 270 excerpts of the traditional Kunqu Opera repertory. The company has made highly successful performing tours to Italy, Japan, Singapore, Taiwan and Hong Kong.

Creative Team



Pai Hsien-yung (*general producer, artistic director*) is an internationally acclaimed author and founder of *Modern Literature* magazine. His publications include the collections of short stories *Lonely Seventeen*, *Taipei People* and *The New Yorker*; the collection of prose writing *Suddenly the Past*; and the novel *Crystal Boys*. Pai has been keenly interested in Kunqu opera since his youth. His short story "Wandering in the Garden and the Interrupted Dream" was inspired by the Kunqu opera, *The Peony Pavilion*. His love for Kunqu opera has made him a "volunteer" in the promotion of the art form for more than 20 years, and he is actively involved in introducing it to the younger generation. He has given public talks in conjunction with Kunqu artists of Hong Kong and Taiwan. Producing the

youth version of *The Peony Pavilion* has been his dream of many years, and he is delighted to see it come to life.

Cai Shaohua (*producer, director*), a native of Suzhou, began his career in the Suzhou Bureau of Culture in January 1980 and has since served as Head of the Foreign Affairs Section, Director of the Centre of Literature and Art and Chief of the Section of Art.

Since 2002, when he took the post of Director of Suzhou Kunqu Opera Theatre of Jiangsu, Mr. Cai has exerted his efforts on the artistic and managerial dimensions in equal earnest. He has sponsored the Joint Conference of All-China Kunqu Troupe Directors and works as the secretary general of the organization. The exchanges and cooperation between the troupes on this broadened basis have greatly pushed forward the cause of Kunqu opera.

Mr. Cai, deeply committed to the study and performance of Kunqu, has attended many international seminars on Kunqu opera.

Wang Shiyu (*production director, artistic director*) An internationally renowned Kunqu artist and former Director of Zhejiang Peking Kunqu Opera Arts Theatre, Wang Shiyu is a National Class One Performer and a recipient of the Third Plum Blossom Award for Chinese Theatre. He was a student of the renowned Kunqu artist Zhou Chuanying, specializing in the *sheng* (young man) roles, including the subcategories. He is especially outstanding in his *jinsheng* (scholar) roles, which have earned him the reputation of "top artist for Kunqu jinsheng roles" at home and abroad.

Zhang Jiqing (*artistic director*) is the Honorary Director of Suzhou Kunqu Opera Theatre of Jiangsu. A National Class One Performer, winner of the First Plum Blossom Award for Chinese Theatre and a performing artist of international acclaim, she was trained under highly venerable artists of the orthodoxy, such as You Caiyun and Zeng Changsheng. Her vocal style is a fine mix of strength and soft femininity, her enunciation and delivery clear and rich. She is very particular where her art is concerned, and over the decades she has created many well-known stage personae. She has

About the Artists

earned the nickname “Zhang with three dreams” because she has made famous three operatic excerpts, “The Interrupted Dream,” “In Search of a Dream” and “The Infatuated Dream.” She has in recent years dedicated herself to training of young performers.

Wang Tung (*art director, costume design*) studied Fine Arts at the National Taiwan University of Arts and Technical Theatre at the University of Hawaii. He has been working in the Central Motion Picture Corporation of Taiwan since 1964, from a technician in the Art Department to head of the studio today. His track record includes 110 film productions, of which he was director in 14. They include *If I Were for Real*, *Straw Man* and *Hill of No Return*, which won Taiwan’s Golden Horse Award for Best Film, as well as other international film awards.

Zhou Youliang (*music director*), the Jiangsu Suzhou Kunqu Opera Troupe’s resident composer, is the general editor and arranger of the music for *The Peony Pavilion: The Young Lovers’ Edition*. Mr. Zhou is a national first-class composer who is Chairman of the Suzhou Musicians’ Association and a member of the Musicians’ Association of China. He is an academician of the Chinese Nationalities String Music Society.

Over the last 20 years, Mr. Zhou has composed musical works in a multitude of themes and styles. He has published hundreds of musical pieces in the magazines *Music Composition*, *Songs* and *Music Weekly*. His works are also adopted by radio and television stations ranging from the local level to the national level.

Wang Mengchao (Austin M.C. Wang) (*set design*) holds an MFA in Scenery and Lighting Design from the University of Southern California. His major scenic designs include *Sketch* (2004), *Cursive II* (2003), *Smoke* (2002), *Bamboo Dream* (2001), *Moon Water* (1998), *Symphony of the Sorrowful Songs* (1995) and *Songs of the Wanderers* (1994) for Cloud Gate Dance Theatre; *Metamorphosis* (1998), *One Bed for Four* (1999), *I Want You Before Dawn* (2000), *No Comment* (2001), *Family Photo Album*, *Your Madness*, *Mr. Shakespeare* (2002), *Sound of*

Music (2003), *The Game* (2004) and *Reel Murder* (2005) for Creative Society; and the operas *Tosca*, *Falstaff* and *Salute to Taiwan* for the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts in New York. He has also created designs for *The Mikado* and *Seascape*.

Mr. Wang is Cloud Gate Dance Theatre’s Technical Consultant and Resident Set Designer. He also serves as the Technical Design Director for the Creative Society and teaches in the Theatre Department at the Chinese Cultural University. He also serves as the president of Taiwan Association of Theatre Technology, Taiwan Center of OISTAT.

Wong Chooyean (*lighting design*) graduated from the Department of Theatre Arts, Chinese Culture University, Taipei. Productions he has lit include *Journey to the West* and *Phases Within Four Colors* by Dance Forum Taipei; *Not a Love Story* and *@ Dream* by Image in Motion Theatre Company; *Time and the Room* by Performance Workshop; *The Sun, Life and Light*, *Dream* and *Silk Road* by the Tai Gu Tales Dance Theatre; *Click, My Baby* and *I Want You Before Dawn* by Creative Society; *The Tempest* and *SOLO: Experimenting Traditional Chinese Operas* by Contemporary Legend Theatre; *Falstaff* of the NSO Opera Series; *Tan Dun and Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon: A Multimedia Concert*; *Dancing in the Air* and *Flowing Water* by Headspring Theatre; *Aurora* by Sun Son Theatre; and *WAHYU*, a cross-cultural showcase that was part of the Korea Arts Festival.

As a freelance photographer for more than 15 years, **Pei-Hung Hsu (Johnson)** (*photography*) has devoted himself to photography and adventures around the world. His ability to capture people’s best expressions and verve with his camera reflects his monumental encounters with famous artists, musicians, dancers, dramatic artists and sculptors.

With a huge collection of works, Mr. Johnson is generous in sharing his experience through many vocational and public lectures and five individual exhibitions. For the past two years, he has been acting as an assigned photographer for the road show of the famous Kun opera, *The Peony Pavilion*, in Taiwan, China and Hong Kong. Besides disseminating his masterpieces about his journeys around the world via several bestselling publications, he

offered his entire valuable image collection of the scenes and character portrayals of the opera to a series of publications about *The Peony Pavilion*, published in 2004 and 2005.

Performers



Yu Jiulin is a National Class Two Performer. He is an outstanding young artist of the Suzhou Kunqu Opera Theatre of Jiangsu. He was trained in the *jinsheng* (scholar) roles. He was coached by Wang Shiyu and Shi Xiaomei, famous Kunqu artists in the field. His representative repertoire includes “Finding the Portrait” and “Calling Upon the Portrait” from *The Peony Pavilion* and “Seduction by the Sound of the Lute” and “Stealing the Poem” from *The Story of the Jade Hairpin*. He has won the Performance Award at the First Kunqu Arts Festival in China, and the Gold Award at the Accreditation Showcase for Young to Middle-aged Performers in Professional Companies in Suzhou.



Shen Fengying is a National Class Two Performer. She is an outstanding young artist of the Suzhou Kunqu Opera Theatre of Jiangsu. She was trained in the *guimendan* (high-born lady) roles, and was coached by Liu Jiyan, Zhang Jiqing and Wang Fang, famous Kunqu artists in the field. Her representative repertoire includes *The Peony Pavilion*, *A Poem on “The Peony Pavilion”* and *Catching Sanlang Alive*. She has won the Performance Award at the First Kunqu Arts Festival in China and the Silver Award at the Accreditation Showcase for Young to Middle-aged Performers in Professional Companies in Suzhou.

Shen Guofang is an outstanding young artist performing the *liudan* (vivacious young girl or servant girl) roles. Her performances of young maiden roles such as Chunxiang in *The Peony Pavilion* and Yunxiang in *The Story of the Hairpin and the Bracelet* are recognized for their sweetness and natural, refreshing charm.

Qu Binbin is an outstanding young artist performing the *guansheng* (kingly) roles. He became a formal disciple of the famous Kunqu virtuoso, Cai Zhengren, in 2003. He plays Du Bao in *The Peony Pavilion: The Young Lovers’ Edition*, in a breakthrough attempt at portraying a new character role with style and aplomb. He is recognized for his handsome persona and broad vocal range.

Chen Lingling is an outstanding young artist performing the *laodan* (old woman) roles. She has won a name for herself as the *xiao laodan* (a young actress adept in playing old woman roles). Despite her young age, she is able to create personae that are much older in appearance and with venerable airs.

Tao Hongzhen is a National Class One Performer. She began her training in 1977 and has won many awards since. She is noted for her performance in *zhengdan* (middle-aged or high-born woman) roles and *liudan* (vivacious young girl or servant girl) roles. She became a formal disciple of the famous virtuoso, Zhang Jiqing, in 2003, and has since become a fine exponent of her mentor’s performing style. She has a broad vocal range and is versatile in her interpretation of character. She is noted for her excellent performance in *The Obsessed Dream* and *The Injustice Done to Dou E*.

Tang Rong is an outstanding performer of *jing* (painted face) roles. A hardworking, modest player, Tang is recognized for his elegant stylized movements and solid groundwork. He has made impressive appearances in *Infernal Judgment* and *Luhuadang*.

Lu Jia is an outstanding performer of *liudan* (vivacious young girl or servant girl) and *wudan* (military female) roles. She became a formal disciple of

the famous Kunqu virtuoso Liang Guyin in 2003. A gifted actress capable of performing both civil and military roles, she is known for her adaptability to her assignments. She has won the heart of her audience with her sweet portrayal of young maidens.

Lu Fuhai is a National Class One Performer specialized in the *chou* (comic) and *fu* (*comprimario*) roles. He began his training when he joined the company in 1977, and was taught by Master Wang Chuansong. He is recognized for being a fine exponent of his mentor's performing style, and is known for his timing, control, fine wit and humor. His interpretations of Zhang Sanlang, Lou the Mouse and Han Shizhong are perfectly controlled and convincing.

Shen Zhiming is an outstanding middle-aged performer, specializing in the *chou* (comic) and *fu* (*comprimario*) roles. He has a high-registered voice

and excellent control of stylized movements. He has made impressive appearances in *Abandoning the Temples* and *Meeting in the Catkin Marshes*.

Zhou Xuefeng is a National Class Three Performer. He is an outstanding artist performing the *jinsheng* (scholar) and *guansheng* (kingly) roles. Coached by Wang Shiyu and famous Kunqu virtuoso Cai Zhengren. He is recognized for his handsome persona and broad vocal range. He has won the Gold Award at the Accreditation Showcase for Young to Middle-aged Performers in Professional companies in Suzhou and the Performance Award at the First Kunqu Arts Festival in China.

Fang Jianguo is a National Class Three Performer. He is an outstanding artist performing the *laosheng* (elderly male) roles. Coached by Ni Chuan Yue, also trained by Xu Zao Joe for *guansheng* (kingly) role. He has won the outstanding performing award for young artists in Suzhou.