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SAN FRANCISCO
OPERA

The Monkey King

猴王悟空

BY HUANG RUO AND DAVID HENRY HWANG





Cartier

Union Square - 199 Grant Avenue



SAN FRANCISCO
OPERA

Vol. 103, No. 5 • 2025–26 Season • November 2025

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AT A GLANCE AND SYNOPSIS

Get *The Monkey King* details quickly on pages 6 and 34.

《猴王悟空》中文版「匆匆一瞥」精簡介紹（第6頁）與故事大綱（第35頁）。

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Joyce DiDonato,
mezzo-soprano
Time for Three
Emily – No Prisoner Be

In a series of 24 intimate songs based on the deeply touching poetry of Emily Dickinson, superstar mezzo-soprano Joyce DiDonato brings an all-star collaboration with Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Kevin Puts and Grammy-winning chamber ensemble Time for Three.



Feb 7
 ZELLERBACH HALL, BERKELEY

The English Concert
Handel's *Hercules*
Harry Bicket, conductor

Harry Bicket, conductor



A true season highlight! Britain's extraordinary early-music ensemble visits with a concert performance of Handel's musical drama *Hercules*, a showcase for the expressive mezzo-soprano Ann Hallenberg, who sings the demanding role of the hero's wife Dejanira.

ANN HALLENBERG,
 SOPRANO

Mar 8
 ZELLERBACH HALL, BERKELEY

Opera Parallèle
La Belle et la Bête

Nicole Païement,
artistic director and conductor
 Brian Staufenbiel,
director and scenic designer

Music and libretto by Philip Glass
 Based on the film by Jean Cocteau
 Hadleigh Adams, baritone
 (La Bête/Avenant)

Opera Parallèle presents an astonishingly original production of the classic *Beauty and the Beast* tale that blurs the distinctions between cinema and live opera, merging Jean Cocteau's surrealist 1946 film with Philip Glass' mesmerizing 1994 score.



Mar 13–14
 ZELLERBACH HALL, BERKELEY

Silkroad Ensemble with
Rhiannon Giddens
Sanctuary: The Power of
Resonance and Ritual

Visionary musician Rhiannon Giddens leads an accomplished collection of performers steeped in American, South Asian, West African, and southern European musical traditions, in an interactive presentation that explores music as a medium for healing and connection across cultures.



Mar 19–20
 ZELLERBACH HALL, BERKELEY

Théotime Langlois
de Swarte, *violin*
Justin Taylor, *harpsichord*



Two charismatic and masterful early-music performers return to Berkeley with a dynamic program of Baroque showpieces, including works by Bach, Vivaldi, and Vitali.

Mar 22
 HERTZ HALL

Renée Fleming, *soprano*
Inon Barnatan, *piano*

Among the most celebrated singers of our time, Renée Fleming captivates with her sumptuous voice, consummate artistry, and riveting stage presence. Here, the five-time Grammy winner is joined by gifted pianist Inon Barnatan for a program of songs and arias.



May 3
 ZELLERBACH HALL, BERKELEY

The Monkey King

MUSIC BY HUANG RUO • LIBRETTO BY DAVID HENRY HWANG

Structure: 2 acts, including one intermission

Total running time: 2 hours, 20 minutes

Language: Sung in English and Mandarin with English and Chinese supertitles

Key Characters:

- *Monkey King (Sun Wukong)*, an ambitious, headstrong hero who accumulates tremendous power
- *Guanyin*, the Goddess of Mercy who watches over Monkey's journey
- *Jade Emperor*, ruler of a corrupt heavenly realm
- *Master Subhuti/Buddha*, Monkey's teacher turns out to be Buddha in disguise, helping Monkey in his search for enlightenment and compassion

The Monkey King follows the charismatic and irreverent character in *Journey to the West*, the Ming dynasty novel (1592) that is considered one of the four great classics of Chinese

literature. Adaptations of the story have thrilled audiences for centuries, and this new operatic version—uniting the stage disciplines of singing, puppetry, mixed media, dance, and martial arts—interweaves Monkey's action-packed escapades with the wisdom of the Buddhist *Diamond Sutra*, the humility of which Monkey must learn as he gains awesome powers. Huang Ruo's score propels the narrative with wit, energy, and the expressive possibilities of the human voice while David Henry Hwang's libretto distills from the epic novel's opening chapters a compelling tale of adventure and enlightenment.

Listen for: Between Monkey's high action run-ins with the gods of the seas and the heavens are episodes of repose and contemplation featuring Guanyin and a chorus of Bodhisattvas, enlightened individuals who delay nirvana out of compassion for those who remain in their suffering. Guanyin's scenes (the first time Mandarin has been sung onstage in a San Francisco Opera production in the Company's 103-year history), set the words of the Buddha to meditative, lilting melodies.

「匆匆一瞥」精簡介紹

《猴王悟空》

作曲：黃若 編劇：黃哲倫

結構：兩幕歌劇（含中場休息）

時長：2小時20分鐘

英語與普通話演唱，附中文字幕

主角：

猴王悟空——雄心勃勃、性格頑強，力量龐大

觀音菩薩——智慧仁慈，默默守護猴王悟空

玉皇大帝——道德崩壞的天庭統治者

菩提祖師/如來佛祖——悟空的祖師與佛祖是同一神明，讓牠頓悟慈悲憐憫之心

《猴王悟空》改編自中國四大名著之一，明代經典小說《西遊記》(1592年)。這位機靈又富有魅力的猴王於過去幾百年來出現在不同改編版本，令人津津樂道。這部新歌劇結合歌唱、偶戲、多媒體、舞蹈與武術等不同範疇。猴王悟空動感十足的奇遇與《金剛經》的靜心樂段形成對比。猴王力量越強，就必須學會謙虛。黃若的音樂幽默機智，演員的不同唱段富有感染力。黃哲倫的劇本把小說中孫悟空大鬧天宮的章回濃縮成引人入勝的歷險與自性覺醒的故事。

聆聽：猴王從深海龍宮至浩瀚天庭，跟眾多神明戰士大打出手的精彩場景之間，觀音與眾菩薩唱誦佛教《金剛經》的段落以普通話演唱（這是三藩市歌劇院舞台上，103個演出季以來首次出現中文唱詞）。

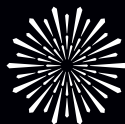


TRUE LOVE IS JUST A HAIRCUT AWAY.

The Barber of Seville

BY GIOACHINO ROSSINI

MAY 28; JUNE 3, 5, 6, 9, 12, 13, 20, 21, 2026



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All performances feature English supertitles. All dates, prices, programs, artists, and productions subject to change. Tickets subject to availability. Illustration by Brian Stauffer.

WELCOME FROM THE BOARD OF SAN FRANCISCO OPERA

Welcome to the world premiere of *The Monkey King* 《猴王悟空》! This is one of the most exciting moments in recent San Francisco Opera history, and we're thrilled that you are here for the birth of something very special. San Francisco Opera has long been a leader in commissioning new works and adding enduring new operas to the repertoire. *The Monkey King* continues our celebration of great Chinese literature that we began with *Dream of the Red Chamber* 《紅樓夢》 in 2016 and its later performances in China in 2017.

Bringing to life any world premiere is an epic undertaking, but when the subject matter is itself an epic, it calls on every aspect of our creative community to make this possible. As you will see in the theater, this production brings together so many layers of artistry to create the magical realms of the Monkey's journey. The production showcases the extraordinary creativity of our artists, artisans, and technicians in so many different disciplines, and they have been working intensively with the creative team to realize this fantastical storytelling.

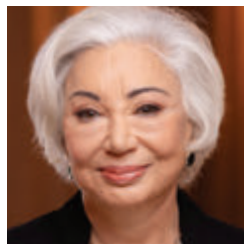
The Monkey King has also inspired phenomenal participation from the community both in the demand for tickets and in the breadth of philanthropic partnership. This brand-new opera is outpacing our sold-out run of *Carmen* last fall, including selling almost 1,000 Dolby tickets in less than 30 minutes! And we are deeply grateful for all those who have joined The Monkey King Committee with honorary chairs Jensen and Lori Huang, co-chairs Doreen Woo Ho, Jerry Dodson, and Soo Venkatesan, and the commissioning support of the Chinese Heritage Foundation in Minneapolis. The Monkey King Committee has already raised over \$3M in donations from both America and Asia, and the committee members have worked tirelessly to make the launch of this new opera a moment of intense pride on both sides of the Pacific.

You can read about the enduring currency and relevance of the Monkey King in our program book articles. For over 400 years he has captivated hearts with his superhero prowess, his irreverent mischief, and his loyalty to the monkey nation. This opera marks the latest telling of his story, and we are so proud to become part of the great tradition of this epic Chinese novel and so happy to welcome you all into this epic journey with us.

With gratitude,



Barbara A. Wolfe
Chair of the Board
San Francisco Opera Association



Jack Calhoun
President
San Francisco Opera Association





The Monkey King puppet in the Company's costume studio.
MATTHEW WASHBURN

The Monkey King Free Community Events

San Francisco Opera and community partners celebrate the world premiere of *The Monkey King*

Join us for an array of events through November 30 including discussions with composer Huang Ruo and librettist David Henry Hwang; interactive puppetry workshops at the Asian Art Museum, San Francisco Public Library branches and Minnesota Street Project; film screenings, including a special encore presentation of our November 18 *The Monkey King* livestream at SFPL's Ortega branch; an outdoor public marketplace celebrating San Francisco's vibrant Chinatown; and more! All events are free. Visit sfopera.com/monkey-king-events for more information.

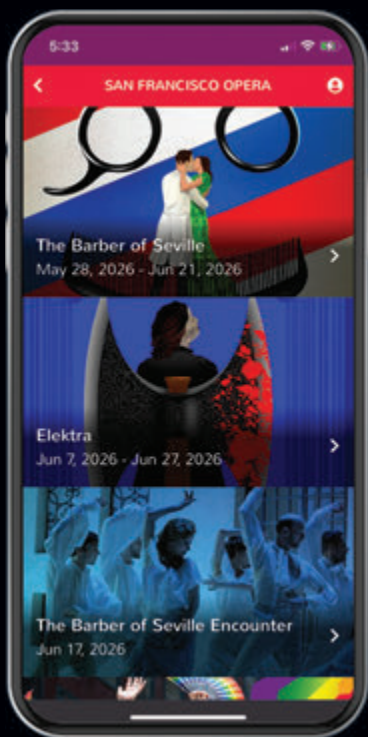
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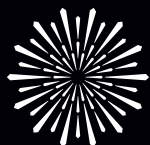
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- Turn off all electronic devices during the performance, including digital watches and cell phones. We ask this out of respect for the artists and everyone in the theater enjoying a live, in-the-moment experience.
- Take photos before or after the performance, during intermission, and during the bows. Leave cameras and recording devices off during performances.
- Enjoy food and drinks, purchased onsite pre-show and during intermission, before entering the theater. You may bring purchased drinks into the theater, but please be mindful of your fellow patrons.
- As a courtesy to those who may have fragrance allergies, please avoid wearing perfume or cologne.
- Get to know and enjoy this wonderful community of opera lovers. Say hello to one another pre-show, at intermission, or leaving the theater.

The Opera reserves the right to remove any patron creating a disturbance.

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Our First Aid Station is located on the South Lower Level. In case of emergency, please ask the nearest usher to assist you.

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San Francisco Opera is committed to providing easy access for all of our patrons. If you need assistance for a future performance, please contact the Opera Box Office prior to your visit so that we can ensure your comfort.

FOR PATRONS USING WHEELCHAIRS: San Francisco Opera offers wheelchair-accessible seats at a range of prices. All entrances at the War Memorial Opera House are wheelchair accessible. Wheelchair-accessible stalls in restrooms can be found on all floors (except the Main Lobby and 5th floor Balcony levels). Accessible drinking fountains are located on all floors except the Balcony Level. We are unable to provide patrons a wheelchair nor personal assistance. If you arrive with a caregiver, they will be granted unseated entry to assist you and invited to wait in the lobby until the performance concludes.

LARGE-PRINT CAST SHEETS AND SYNOPSES

Visit the North Lobby coat check for large-print versions.

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Assistive listening devices are available at the North Lobby coat check. ID deposit required.

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Headsets that provide a spoken version of the supertitles are available at the North Lobby coat check.

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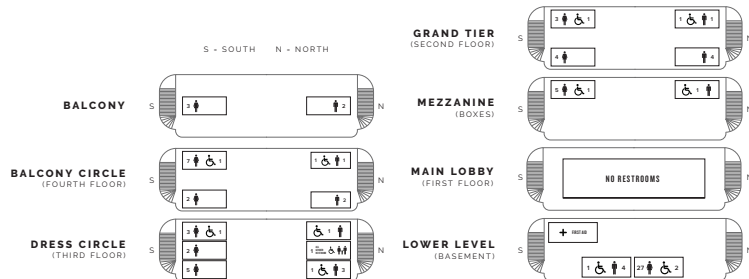
See the action up close and rent a pair of opera glasses for \$5 at the North Lobby coat check. ID deposit is requested. Credit card only.

LOST AND FOUND

Items may be turned in or claimed at the North coat check during the performance. All unclaimed items are delivered to the War Memorial Performing Arts Center at 401 Van Ness Ave., Room 110, (415) 621-6600 (8 a.m.–5 p.m., Monday–Friday).

RESTROOMS

Restrooms are located on all levels of the Opera House except on the Orchestra Level (Main Lobby).



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Meet Your Civic Center Ambassadors!

As you leave the theater, be on the lookout for friendly community ambassadors in orange vests or coats on the front steps of the War Memorial Opera House. These ambassadors are there to assist you.



WALKING GROUPS

Civic Center Ambassadors lead walking groups to BART and the Civic Center & UC Law SF garages after evening performances. They will be holding signs on the Opera House steps facing Van Ness once the performance concludes.

RIDESHARE

Rideshare services pick-up and drop-off at the white loading zone at 301 Van Ness Avenue (located in front of the Opera House).

TAXI SERVICE

Patrons desiring a taxi after a performance should come to the Grove Street Taxi Ramp located on the south side of the Opera House. Taxis cannot be guaranteed as service is based on availability of licensed taxis. Please note the Taxi Ramp is not staffed.

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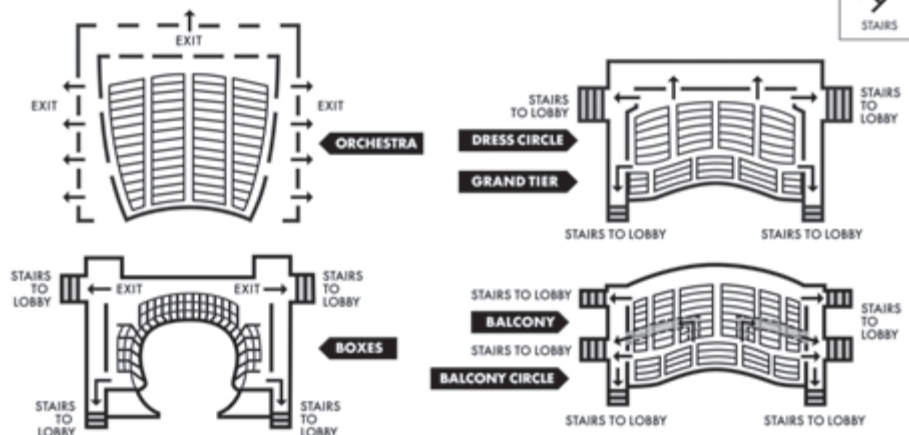
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The San Francisco War Memorial acknowledges that we are on the unceded ancestral homeland of the Ramaytush Ohlone who are the original inhabitants of the San Francisco Peninsula. As guests, we recognize that we benefit from living and working on their traditional homeland. We wish to pay our respects by acknowledging the ancestors, elders, and relatives of the Ramaytush Community and by affirming their sovereign rights as First Peoples.

Chinese Heritage Foundation

Commissioning Sponsor, *The Monkey King*



CHINESE HERITAGE FOUNDATION

傳龍基金

www.chfmn.org

Based in Minneapolis, Minnesota, the Chinese Heritage Foundation supports the preservation and promotion of Chinese history, culture, and heritage and encourages innovation in the arts. Through our grant awards and outreach programs, we actively seek common ground in which to build mutual understanding and trust among all peoples. In funding the commission of a 21st-century operatic treatment of *Journey to the West*, *The Monkey King*, one of the best known and most beloved stories in Chinese literature, we wish to engage the contemporary audience, win resonance for our heroic story, and deepen the understanding of our cultural heritage. We applaud San Francisco Opera and its General Director Matthew Shilvock for supporting our goals and creating a sumptuous and stupendous new production that will have a lasting influence well beyond the opera world. “It is such a privilege to partner with the Chinese Heritage Foundation, once again, after our hugely successful operatic *Dream of the Red Chamber* (2016 world premiere and 2022 revival),” says Matthew Shilvock. “They believe passionately in connecting cultures through art, and I am thrilled that they are joining us again for *The Monkey King*.”

Leadership support for this commissioning came from the Dr. M. F. Tchou Fund of the Chinese Heritage Foundation, John and Yvonne Ho, Benjamin Y. H. Liu and Amanda Liu Olson, Stanley and Marvel Chong Foundation, Yin and Scott Simpson, Margaret Wong, Kent Lee, Steve Tsai and Margaret Simpson, Jacqueline Ngo, Chiu-Ping Wong and Ruey-Yun Chern, Pat Hui and Paul Kwok, SK and Sing Lo, Richard and Gail Chang Bohr, Jack Ouyang, Ida Lano, Jim and Sonja Tilbury, Meiling Sander, the Robert and Jean Chang Fund, and the Choi-Chiu and King-Wo Lam Family Fund of the Chinese Heritage Foundation.

Marieke & Jeff Rothschild

Production Sponsors, *The Monkey King*



NOAH BERGER

“**T**he central theme of our philanthropy has been to have a positive impact on the lives of others who have not had the opportunities and good fortune we have enjoyed,” note Marieke and Jeff Rothschild. As new champions of San Francisco Opera, they are doing precisely that.

“Marieke and I were raised with the expectation that one should participate in philanthropy, and we feel very fortunate to be able to engage at the scale, scope, and impact that our success has enabled,” remarks Jeff. “We are attracted to projects that have the potential for meaningful and enduring social impact.”

The Rothschilds’ philanthropic investments span health care, education, economic development, and land preservation. They are equally passionate about art. “Great art is something that you need to have a good life,” reflects Marieke. “You could live without beauty, but why would you?”

Live performance is especially close to their hearts. “We come together, taking time out of our busy lives, for

this shared experience,” Marieke explains. “The lights go down, there is a hush. Talented people work in harmony to create something extraordinary for us. By the end, we are all changed. Live music is life affirming.”

The Rothschilds’ commitment to San Francisco Opera comes at a critical moment of inflection for the Company. “Marieke and Jeff are propelling forward the Opera, allowing us to remain bold and courageous in our programming, our innovations, and our community engagement,” observes General Director Matthew Shilvock. “Their philanthropy is a wonderful exemplar of a soaring vision that uplifts the Bay Area. I am profoundly grateful for the trust they are placing in us to produce art that showcases the creative vitality of San Francisco on the global stage.”

“San Francisco Opera is at an interesting crossroads,” Marieke concludes. “I like that they are willing to take chances, to think outside of the box. To adapt this old art form to the modern world requires new audiences and new directions, and we find those here.”

John A. & Cynthia Fry Gunn

Production Sponsors, *The Monkey King*



TERRENCE MCCARTHY

San Francisco Opera shines as a beacon of innovation, both on and off the stage, driven by the visionary leadership of John and Cynthia Gunn. Their unwavering dedication to creative and cultural initiatives ensures that San Francisco Opera remains one of the world's premier stages. Their philanthropic leadership to the Opera includes a historic contribution in 2008, believed at that time to be the most significant gift ever made by individuals to an American opera company.

A Bay Area native, John's love for opera began in high school through his friendship with Ronald Adler, son of the former General Director of San Francisco Opera Kurt Herbert Adler. John would attend dress rehearsals with Ronald, sitting in the General Director's box. After graduating from Stanford, John began a distinguished career at investment company, Dodge & Cox. There, his belief in long-term investing, empowering management style, and down-to-earth sensibility became benchmarks in the field. John joined the Opera Board in 2002, becoming Chair in 2008, a position he held for sixteen years, during which he made an extraordinary impact on the Company's creative vitality and organizational

stability. In 2024, he assumed the role of Chair Emeritus.

Cynthia Gunn, also an alum of Stanford, began her career as editor and director of the highly regarded *Portable Stanford* series, in which she edited nearly thirty volumes by some of the university's most brilliant minds. Cynthia's philanthropic leadership in the Bay Area includes serving as a Trustee of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, as well as a number of other boards spanning philanthropy, health, education, and the arts.

John and Cynthia's dedication to the Opera reflects their shared belief that a great city deserves a world-class opera company that leads the art form and takes bold risks to advance society. Their philanthropic leadership has enabled some of the most significant artistic projects on the San Francisco stage for over two decades, ensuring vital investments in the Company's infrastructure, including the automation and rigging system, as well as the Opera's media suite.

San Francisco Opera is privileged to have the leadership of John and Cynthia, a partnership that began with a high school visit to dress rehearsals and that has blossomed into one of the most defining philanthropic partnerships in American cultural history.

Donor Spotlight



Jan Shrem & Maria Manetti Shrem (Production Sponsor, *The Monkey King*)

Jan and Maria Manetti Shrem each cultivated an appreciation for opera from a young age, even though they grew up continents apart. Before establishing Clos Pegase Winery in Napa Valley Jan Shrem worked in Japanese and European publishing. Maria Manetti Shrem achieved international recognition in the fashion industry, notably introducing luxury brands such as Gucci and Fendi to American retailers.

Their individual journeys eventually converged in San Francisco, where opera further intertwined their lives. After marrying in 2012, their shared passion for the arts led them to be committed Company Sponsors of San Francisco Opera for more than ten years. Jan and Maria have established four significant philanthropic funds: the Conductors Fund, supporting notable conductors in the orchestra pit; the Great Interpreters of Italian Opera Fund, which brings distinguished artists in Italian repertoire to local stages; the Emerging Stars Fund, dedicated to rising talent; and the Luminaries Concert Fund, which makes special concerts featuring legendary performers possible. Additionally, the Manetti Shrem couple had focused on philanthropic causes that advance education, the performing and visual arts, and medicine.

San Francisco Opera recognized Maria with The Spirit of the Opera Award in December 2022, and she received the 2023 UC Davis Medal for her outstanding commitments to the arts and education, where she made history with the largest donation ever to protect the arts and humanities in perpetuity by creating an Art District in January 2025. Jan Shrem, revered for his generosity and vision, passed away in September 2024 at the age of 94. Jan is remembered for his philanthropic spirit, and Maria carries the torch into San Francisco Opera's future.



Koret Foundation (Production Sponsor, *The Monkey King*)

San Francisco Opera is deeply grateful to Koret Foundation for its support of *The Monkey King*. This funding is part of the Foundation's generous three-year grant supporting new works which began with sold-out performances of *El último sueño de Frida y Diego* and continued with *Omar*. "Koret is excited to bring new voices and stories to the opera stage," says Jeffrey A. Farber, Koret Foundation

CEO. Koret has been a longtime supporter of San Francisco Opera's transformational stage productions, as well as education and community programs. "We are honored by Koret's longstanding partnership which helps us bring the best quality opera to the broadest audiences in ways that are reflective of and relevant to our community," says General Director Matthew Shilvock.

Donor Spotlight



DREW ALTIZER PHOTOGRAPHY

Jerome & Thao Dodson (Production Sponsor, *The Monkey King*)

“A fiery horse with the speed of light, a cloud of dust, and a hearty, ‘Hi-Yo, Silver!’” Those words, accompanied by the galloping excitement of Rossini’s William Tell Overture, transfixed a young Jerry Dodson as he listened to *The Lone Ranger* on the family radio in Oak Park, Illinois. Just as Bugs Bunny’s *Rabbit of Seville* had done for many, a lighthearted entertainment sparked a future operatic devotion.

That little boy grew up to attend Berkeley in the '60s, serve with the American Embassy in Vietnam where he and Thao met, and attend Harvard Business School. Eventually, the couple married, settled in the Bay Area, and raised a family. In the 1980s, Jerry was a pioneer in the field of socially responsible investing with little interest in opera. But in 1992, when San Francisco Opera decided to celebrate Rossini’s bicentennial with the rarely performed *Guillaume Tell*, Thao, already an opera lover, suggested to Jerry that they go.

Tell was praised for its striking Mansouri production, and the Dodsons began attending regularly. They became season ticket holders in 1999 and supporters, “in a small way,” as Jerry puts it. A friendship with David Gockley, which endures to this day, led to a larger role as Company Sponsors. “I so admired what he did for the opera, but it was not very good for my pocketbook,” Jerry laughs. Jerry also lends his financial expertise to the audit committee.

In 2016, Dodson considered the import of Gockley’s departure. He met with Matthew Shilvock and joined the Board that year. “We hit it off right away!” Jerry says. He felt a similar affinity with Keith Geeslin, then President of the San Francisco Opera Association. Eager to continue support, the Dodsons see this as a perfect time to revitalize and energize the Company within the San Francisco community. The initial fire ignited by *William Tell* continues to burn brightly.



DREW ALTIZER PHOTOGRAPHY

Louise Gund (Production Sponsor, *The Monkey King*)

Louise Gund is an accomplished theater producer with a wide range of artistic talents. She has produced 12 Broadway plays and musicals, winning a Tony Award and Drama Desk Award for *All the Way*, and receiving three additional Tony Award nominations. A subscriber to San Francisco Opera since 2010, Louise has served on the Opera’s Board of Directors since 2013. She has also served on the boards of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Cal Performances, Earthjustice, and the Berkeley Community Chorus and Orchestra. In addition to her major support of these organizations, she is an environmental activist and a staunch advocate on behalf of women’s and children’s issues. She was awarded the San Francisco Opera Spirit of the Opera Award in 2019 for devoted service to the Company and

was the inspiration behind the Opera’s Producers Circle. In the Fall of 2023, Louise had the vision to found the Opera’s Sixth Opera Fund and she will ensure the Company continues to produce at least six operas each year. Louise is passionate about enabling creativity to flourish, telling stories of meaning, and ensuring a vibrant future for the arts.

Donor Spotlight



EA PHOTOGRAPHY

Carol Franc Buck Foundation (Production Sponsor, *The Monkey King*)

The Carol Franc Buck Foundation has generously supported the arts for more than forty years. With a mission to support the visual and performing arts in the western region of the country, the Carol Franc Buck Foundation was created in 1979, providing major underwriting and production grants to the opera companies of San Francisco, Houston, Portland, Nevada, and Arizona, as well as many others. Ms. Buck, who passed away in April 2022, was the youngest child of Frank and Eva Buck, a well-known agricultural, entrepreneurial, and political family in California history, from whom she learned the values associated with contributing to and working in one's community. Born in San Francisco, Ms. Buck grew up in and around Vacaville at a time when it was a small rural ranching area. She attended Stanford University, graduating cum laude with a degree in history. She served as the president of the Carol Franc Buck Foundation since its inception, and was an original director of the Frank and Eva Buck Foundation. Ms. Buck was a valued board member of San Francisco Opera from 1981–2022. *The Monkey King* is the 11th production sponsored by the Carol Franc Buck Foundation. San Francisco Opera is indebted to the Foundation for its extraordinarily generous and steadfast support.



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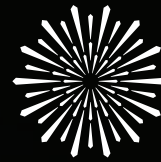


THE MONKEY KING COMMITTEE SPOTLIGHT

Doreen Woo Ho

San Francisco Opera celebrates Doreen Woo Ho for her extraordinary leadership and vision in championing the world premiere of *The Monkey King*. As co-chair of the committee and a dedicated member of the Board or Directors since 1993, Doreen has united an incredible group of supporters and helped raise more than \$3 million to bring this groundbreaking new production to life. Her passion for sharing stories that reflect the richness of Chinese culture builds on her pivotal role in the Company's 2016 world premiere of *Dream of the Red Chamber*. A dedicated civic leader and proud San Franciscan, Doreen continues to strengthen the cultural fabric of the Bay Area through her steadfast commitment to the arts and community.

To join The Monkey King Circle, visit sfopera.com/monkey-king-circle
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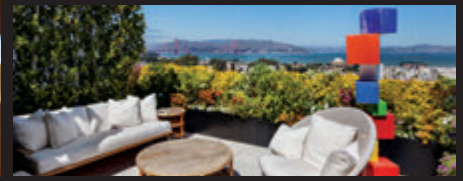
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The Monkey King

猴王悟空

BY HUANG RUO AND DAVID HENRY HWANG

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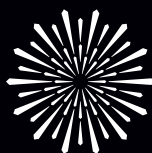
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NOVEMBER 14, 16, 18, 20, 22, 25, 28, 30, 2025



SAN FRANCISCO
OPERA

The Monkey King

ACT ONE

Prologue: Guanyin and Bodhisattvas chant Buddhist sutras. Guanyin, the Goddess of Mercy, will watch over this story. We discover the Monkey King, imprisoned beneath the Five-Element Mountain. He's been trapped here for nearly 500 years. How can he gain his freedom?

Scene One: Monkey recalls his birth, bursting from a stone. He discovers a tribe of Monkeys, threatened by enemies on all sides. After he finds them a home where they can live in safety, the Monkeys enthusiastically declare him their leader.

Scene Two: Monkey sets out to learn the secret of eternal life, to deliver his children from death. He finds a teacher, Master Subhuti, and becomes his pupil. Other Disciples scoff that a monkey could gain enlightenment, but Subhuti gives him a new name—Sun Wukong—and teaches him the secret of the 72 Transformations. But when he discovers Sun showing off to the other Disciples, Subhuti warns Monkey that “power alone is not enough.” He must master his spirit, or Heaven will rain down catastrophe and destroy him. Sending Monkey away, Subhuti commands him never to reveal that he was his student.

Scene Three: In search of a weapon, Sun travels beneath the seas to the Dragon Palace of the Eastern Sea, where he meets King Ao Guang, seeking the heaviest weapon in his arsenal. Nothing Ao Guang offers satisfies Monkey, and the Dragon King fears his Palace will be destroyed. Then Sun notices an enormous pillar holding up the seas. Hoping to get rid of Monkey, Ao Guang offers a deal: If he can lift the pillar, it is his. Monkey shrinks the pillar to the size of a needle, which he tucks behind his ear. He zips off with his magical cudgel as Ao Guang's Palace collapses.

Scene Four: In Heaven, where the gods have grown hedonistic and corrupt, Ao Guang files a complaint with the Jade Emperor, who orders Monkey arrested. His chief counsellor, Supreme Sage Laojun, proposes a more Machiavellian plan: lure the inferior creature with flattery up to Heaven, where he can be assimilated to serve the Emperor and become a model inferior.

Scene Five: Venus Star brings Monkey to Heaven, where he is given a fancy but meaningless title: Master of the Stables. Upon finding the Heavenly Horses in a sad and dispirited condition, he allows them to run at will through the clouds. Lord Erlang, the Jade Emperor's nephew,

reveals to Monkey that his new position means nothing. Furious that the gods refuse to accept him, Monkey frees the horses and storms off, stealing and eating the Queen Mother's peaches of immortality before heading back to his Monkey Nation. Venus Star declares Monkey a menace that must be stopped!

ACT TWO

Scene One: Monkey presents the stolen peaches to his subjects and gives himself a new title: “The Great Sage, Equal to Heaven!” The Jade Emperor sends a hundred thousand soldiers, led by Erlang, to apprehend him. In a dramatic battle sequence, Monkey defeats one Heavenly King after another, each with a unique weapon. Fearing for his own power, the Jade Emperor prays to Guanyin to save his Kingdom. Finally, the Supreme Sage Laojun apprehends Monkey with his magical golden bands.

Scene Two: Sun is brought to Heaven, where Laojun plans to roast him alive in his Furnace of Eight Trigrams. But after 49 days, Laojun opens the oven to find Monkey bursting forth, more powerful than ever! Wielding his cudgel, the fiery-eyed Sun destroys Heaven, sending Gods and Nobles fleeing in panic. The Jade Emperor begs Guanyin for help, admitting his corruption and promising to change his ways. She replies that the only One who can stop Monkey is the same One who started him on his path.

Scene Three: Buddha appears and orders Monkey to stand down. Sun accepts a wager: If he can jump out of Buddha's hand, he will become the new Emperor of Heaven. If he fails, he'll face greater hardships. Jumping from Buddha's palm, Sun flies farther than ever before. He finds himself in the Land of Bliss, where peace fills his heart. After determining he will return some day, he pees on a rock to show he was here. Then he hears Buddha's voice and realizes he's still in the deity's palm: he only peed on Buddha's thumb. Slowly, the hand closes and turns to stone, imprisoning Monkey beneath Five-Element Mountain. Hearing the words of his teacher—“power alone is not enough”—he realizes that Subhuti and Buddha have always been one.

We return to Monkey's present. Guanyin asks, “For 500 years, you've heard the sutras. But have you really listened? Have you opened your heart?” Monkey realizes he held on to power and refused to be touched. As he finally joins the Buddhist chanting, his five-finger prison opens, freeing him at last. Guanyin and Buddha have been guiding him all along. Monkey will now go forth in a spirit of caring, to help all beings reach the Land of Bliss.

《猴王悟空》

第一幕

序幕：觀音與眾菩薩一起誦經。整個故事的發展都有觀音看守著。猴王悟空被關押於五行山下已經五百年了。牠還要等多久才可重獲自由？

第一場：牠回想自己從石裏生出來，遇上一群猴子。在森林裏步步為營，往往被野獸當作獵物。替猴子們找到了安身的花果山水簾洞之後，牠被眾猴封為猴王。

第二場：為了讓猴子猴孫們可以逃過閻羅王的死亡關，猴王誓要找出長生不老的秘密，於是拜師菩提。雖然其他弟子嘲笑一隻猴子可否有悟性，菩提祖師為牠起名孫悟空並教牠七十二般地煞變化。悟空在眾弟子面前賣弄工夫，演變化耍子時受到祖師的責備：「單靠蠻力不成事」。悟空必須修行，否則天庭會讓牠遭殃。菩提祖師把牠逐出去時，不許悟空說曾是他的徒弟。

第三場：孫悟空到訪東海龍宮，遇上龍王敖廣，希望從他的兵器庫中索取一件合適的來用，但全部都被悟空拒絕，龍宮快要被鬧翻了。忽然間，悟空看到宮裏金光閃閃的定海神針。於是，敖廣就這樣打發悟空：倘若牠能挑起這支大柱，便可歸牠所有。悟空施法令神針縮小至一根綉花針兒，並摀在耳朵後。牠拿著這件神奇兵器奔出去時，東海龍宮便塌下來。

第四場：天庭諸神只顧享樂，道德崩壞。敖廣向玉皇大帝告狀，玉帝傳令擒拿收伏。太上老君提出一個更狡詐的方案：不如把牠宣來上界，授牠一個低偽官職，與牠籍名在錄，以示下等眾物。玉帝傳旨，授予悟空弼馬溫一職，管理御馬。

第五場：太白金星把悟空帶上天庭履職。悟空發現那些御馬都被關了起來，牠們納悶沮喪，便讓牠們在雲端中自由飛翔。二郎神告訴悟空，弼馬溫這個官銜只是個虛名。悟空知悉天庭諸神這樣蔑視牠，一怒之下把御馬全都放走。偷吃了王母娘娘的蟠桃後，牠打出天門，回到花果山。太白金星怒喊，猴子是個禍害，諸神必須滅此妖孽！

第二幕

第一場：猴王把偷來的蟠桃分給猴子猴孫，更自封誇稱「齊天大聖」！玉帝調遣二郎神帶領十萬天兵天將，佈下天羅地網，定收伏那廝處治。殺勾多時，各持獨門兵器的四大天王都敗陣而逃。玉帝冀望觀音可保天庭平安。最終，太上老君用銀鋼搏練的金剛套收伏猴王。

第二場：孫悟空被天兵押到天庭。太上老君把牠困在八卦爐裏，以文武慢火鍛煉，讓他身自為灰燼。不覺七七四十九日，老君把爐一開，猴王跳了出來，舉棒就打，威力之猛無一神可擋。金睛火眼的美猴王大鬧天宮，諸神急忙逃命。玉帝再次向觀音求助，誓言必會改過。觀音回答道，只有打從一開始就引領猴子的如來佛祖能夠阻止牠。

第三場：佛祖出場，命令猴王收手。孫悟空答應如來打個賭賽：牠若有本事一筋斗跳出如來掌中，靈霄寶殿就歸牠所有。倘若牠失敗，便將面臨更大的懲罰。猴王翻個筋斗，就飛到遠方。牠來到了極樂淨土，心裏平和，決定將來必定返歸，於是留下記號，在石頭上寫字並撒尿。牠聽到如來的笑聲，才發現自己還在如來掌中。此前，牠在如來的大拇指上撒了尿。如來之手慢慢合起來，然後化掌為石，把美猴王困在五行山下。牠再次聽到祖師的教訓：「單靠蠻力不成事」，終於明白菩提祖師與如來佛祖是同一神明。

回到猴王悟空現在的困境。觀音問道：「你聽了五百年的經文。但你可有用心聆聽？你可有打開心扉？」美猴王明白自己單靠蠻力，高傲自大。於是牠跟菩薩一起誦經，枷鎖頓然解開，猴王悟空終於重獲自由。原來觀音菩薩與如來佛祖一直都在引領牠，讓牠學會慈悲憐憫，懂得怎樣幫助他人尋找極樂淨土。

Conductor

Carolyn Kuan* 關琦安

Director

Diane Paulus* 黛安·保羅斯

Puppetry Director

Basil Twist* 巴塞爾·特維斯特

Choreographer

Ann Yee* 余梅林

Set and Puppetry Designer

Basil Twist* 巴塞爾·特維斯特

Associate Set Designer

Sara C. Walsh* 莎拉·沃爾什

Costume Designer

Anita Yavich 蕭燕

Lighting Designer

Ayumu "Poe" Saegusa* 三枝步

Projection Designer

Hana S. Kim* 김하나 金素妍

Peking Opera Specialist

Jamie Guan* 關鴻鈞

Chorus Director

John Keene 約翰·基恩

Assistant Conductor

Aaron Breid

Prompter

Yang Lin 林楊

Musical Preparation

John Churchwell, Keun-A Lee 이근아 李權娥,

Julian Grabarek†, Fabrizio Corona

Diction

Erie Mills (English), Yang Lin 林楊 (Chinese)

Chinese Supertitles

Joanna C. Lee 李正欣,

Yuen Ching Lam 林婉菁, Huang Ruo 黃若

Assistant Directors

E. Reed Fisher, Dan Wallace Miller

Stage Manager

Darin Burnett

Assistant Stage Managers

Megan Coutts, Collette Berg,

Jonathan S. Campbell, Jennifer Harber

Dance Master

Colm Seery

Technical Supervisors

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SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 22 • 7:30 PM

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 25 • 7:30 PM

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 28 • 7:30 PM

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 30 • 2 PM

The Monkey King

猴王悟空

Opera in two acts by Huang Ruo* 黃若

Libretto by David Henry Hwang 黃哲倫

Inspired by the novel *Journey to the West* 《西遊記》 by Wu Cheng'en 吳承恩

(Sung in English and Mandarin with English and Chinese supertitles)

CAST

(in order of appearance)

Guanyin	Mei Gui Zhang 張玫瑰
Monkey King	Kang Wang* 王亢
Monkey King Dancer	Huiwang Zhang* 張慧望
Master Subhuti/Buddha	Jusung Gabriel Park* 박주성 朴柱成
Dragon King Ao Guang	Joo Won Kang 강주원 姜柱元
Crab General	Hongni Wu 吳虹霓
Venus Star	Hongni Wu 吳虹霓
Jade Emperor	Konu Kim 김건우 金健雨
Supreme Sage Laojun	Peixin Chen 陳佩鑫
Lord Erlang	Joo Won Kang 강주원 姜柱元
Lord Erlang Dancer	Marcos Vedovetto 馬克斯·維多魏托
King of the East	Jonathan Smucker 喬納森·斯馬克
King of the South	Chester Pidduck 切斯特·皮杜克
King of the West	William O'Neill 威廉·奧尼爾
King of the North	Christopher Jackson 克里斯朵夫·傑克遜

Chorus

* San Francisco Opera debut † Current Adler Fellow

PROLOGUE: Five-Element Mountain 五行山

ACT I, SCENE 1: Mountain of Fruits and Flowers/Waterfall 花果山/水簾洞

ACT I, SCENE 2: Cave of the Slanted Moon and Three Stars 斜月三星洞

ACT I, SCENE 3: Dragon Palace of the Eastern Sea 東海龍宮

ACT I, SCENE 4: Jade Emperor's Palace 靈霄寶殿

ACT I, SCENE 5: Heaven/Heavenly Stables/Garden of Immortal Peaches
天庭/御馬監/蟠桃園

—INTERMISSION—

ACT II, SCENE 1: Mountain of Fruits and Flowers/Jade Emperor's Palace
花果山/靈霄寶殿

ACT II, SCENE 2: Furnace of Eight Trigrams/Heaven 八卦爐/天庭

ACT II, SCENE 3: Buddha's Palm/Land of Bliss/Five-Element Mountain
如來之掌/極樂淨土/五行山

The performance will last approximately two hours and twenty minutes, including one intermission.

Latecomers may not be seated during the performance after the lights have dimmed.

Patrons who leave during the performance may not be reseated until intermission.

The use of cameras, cell phones, and any kind of recording equipment is strictly forbidden during the performance. Please turn off and refrain from using all electronic devices.



Sun Wukong, the Pop Culture Chameleon

BY FRANK DJENG 鄭曉霖

There are trickster gods, and then there's Sun Wukong, the Monkey King, who makes Loge, the Norse God of mischief in Wagner's *Das Rheingold* (a.k.a. Loki, in the Marvel Comics Universe) look like a rank amateur. Born from a magic rock and armed with a staff that can grow to skyscraper height or shrink behind his ear, Wukong is always one temper tantrum away from fighting the celestial bureaucrats, making him mythology's ultimate multitasker.

Wu Cheng'en's *Journey to the West* gave us a monkey with personality: rebellious, funny, and surprisingly relatable for someone who once fought an entire Heavenly army with only a stick. But the novel wasn't the final word: Since its publication in 1592, Sun Wukong has leapt into Chinese opera—Peking opera, among other regional styles—to become a stage sensation. Ming- and Qing-dynasty audiences loved watching acrobatic actors in golden headbands leap around like Spider-Man (but with more

backflips) while hurling quips at both friend and demonic foe. By the late 19th century, the Monkey King had become one of the most beloved figures in the stage repertory, often entertaining crowds in temples and festivals. Some stage versions highlighted his clown-like mischief, others like *Jin Qian Bao* (“Gold Coin Leopard”) showcased his loyalty and heroism. The Monkey King was already practicing what pop culture would later perfect: reinvention.

Fast forward to the 20th century and China’s first animated feature film, *Princess Iron Fan* (1941), when producers Wan Guchan and Wan Laiming gave audiences a taste of a new kind of Wukong. Created during the second Sino-Japanese War, the film wasn’t just entertainment but also symbolic defiance, a cheeky monkey resisting demons and overcoming impossible odds. The Wan brothers’ 1965 color follow-up *Havoc in Heaven* sparkled even more with acrobatic fights and a rousing score—a masterpiece of Chinese animation that visually cemented Sun Wukong as a pop icon.

By the 1960s and ’70s, Hong Kong’s Shaw Brothers Studio (the “Oriental Hollywood”) was churning out martial arts epics on an assembly line. Naturally, they couldn’t resist the Monkey King. Director Ho Meng-Hua made not one but four *Journey to the West* films between 1966 and 1968, each blending martial arts action with low-budget charm. Then there’s legendary director Chang Cheh’s *Fantastic Magic Baby* (1975), a filmed version of a staged theatre-like rendition of Sun Wukong’s famous battle with the Red Boy. It’s worth seeking out for what follows the end credits: a 36-minute film condensing two staged Peking opera performances.

Meanwhile in Japan, the Monkey King story inspired the 1970s cult TV series *Saiyūki* (released in English-speaking countries as *Monkey*), with Sun Wukong reimagined with campy humor and a rock-inspired soundtrack, reflecting both a countercultural vibe and the current Japanese TV aesthetics. Naturally, anime also wanted a piece of the Monkey King pie. First, there was Toei’s 73-episode series *Sci-Fi West Saga Starzinger* (1978–79), known in the US as *Spacekeeters*, transplanting *Journey to the West* into space, with Wukong a hot-headed cyborg who along with Princess of the Moon and her two other robot companions must restore the Galaxy Energy in the year 2072. Then came *Dragon Ball Z* (1989) and its numerous spinoffs, introducing anime to an entire generation of kids worldwide. With its hero Son Goku being literally Sun Wukong’s Japanese moniker, *Dragon Ball Z* officially took the character global.

Back in Hong Kong, Sun Wukong continues to be ever-present in both TV and film, albeit initially done in a more

traditional fashion. Ten years after China’s CCTV produced its 1986 TV series, re-establishing the national icon as a small-screen superstar, Hong Kong’s TVB made two Monkey King series (1996–98). A major turning point, however, came when comedian-director Stephen Chow’s two-part *Chinese Odyssey* (1995) reimagined the quest for the sutras as a time-travel romance, complete with Chow’s trademark *mo lei tau* (“makes no sense”) verbal slapstick. These two films became cult classics across Asia, proving that Wukong could work just as well in parody as in earnest heroics and unrequited love. But Chow wasn’t done: In the 2010s, he directed *Journey to the West: Conquering the Demons* (2013) and co-directed its sequel *Journey to the West: The Demons Strike Back* (2017) with celebrated Hong Kong cinema wizard Tsui Hark. These big-budget, effects-heavy fantasy adventures were somewhat darker, though still sprinkled with Chow’s irreverent humor.

By the early 2000s, Hollywood decided it wanted in, with the NBC-produced *Monkey King* (2001), also known as *The Lost Empire*, marking that character’s official entry in America. Then came *The Forbidden Kingdom* (2008). Though not strictly a *Journey to the West* adaptation, the film starred Jackie Chan and Jet Li (the latter playing a variation of the Monkey King), mostly existing to give martial arts fans the Chan-Li martial-arts crossover they’d yearned for. While back in China, Hong Kong director Soi Cheang, who revitalized modern martial-arts cinema in *Twilight of the Warriors: Walled In* (2024), delivered a blockbuster *Journey to the West* trilogy (2014–18) with Wukong played by Donnie Yen in the first film and triple-threat singer/dancer/actor Aaron Kwok in the two sequels. Filled with sweeping digital landscapes and gigantic Kaiju-like monsters, Cheang’s films portrayed the Monkey King as a caped-crusader-caliber superhero. Embracing style over substance, Asia audiences devoured these films like celestial peaches.

American cartoonist Gene Luen Yang brought Sun Wukong into the comic book idiom with his 2006 award-winning graphic novel, *American Born Chinese*, with the Monkey King becoming a metaphor for Asian American identity, grappling with questions of assimilation, self-acceptance, and cultural pride. Witty and heartfelt, it made clear that Wukong’s story isn’t just universal but also adaptable to the personal and political struggles of diaspora communities. Then in 2023, Disney+ released a live-action series adaptation, strutting Wukong into a contemporary teen drama complete with martial arts and dazzling visual effects.

In the digital age of the 21st century, Wukong has also found a natural home in video games, where his agility, combat skills, and magical abilities translate seamlessly into gameplay mechanics. Whether it's *League of Legends*, *Smite*, *Fortnite*, or the Chinese action role-playing game *Black Myth: Wukong*, Sun Wukong continues to provide a canvas for reinterpretation.

So, why do we keep going bananas (pun intended) for the Monkey King? First, he's infinitely adaptable. Trickster, warrior, sage, comic relief—he is all of them. Need a moral allegory? He's there. Need a superhero? He's already got the staff. Second, he's relatable. As a magical monkey who once punched the Celestial Emperor in the face, Wukong embodies the full range of human contradictions: rebellious yet loyal, arrogant yet vulnerable, divine yet mischievously human. He is like us on our worst and best days, only furrier. Contradictions like these allow pop culture to reimagine him over and over again.

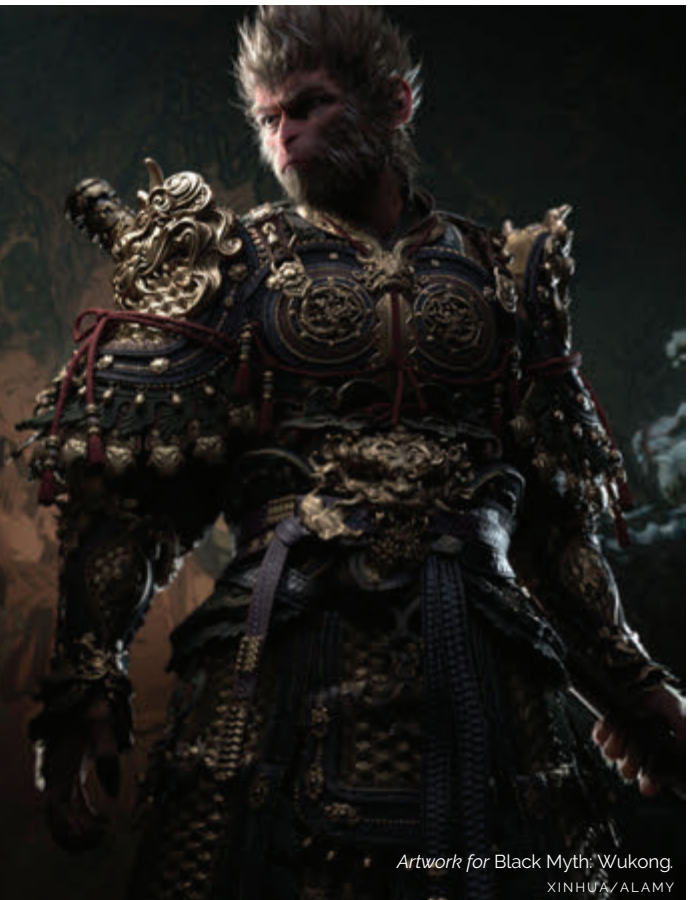
Finally, he's fun. *Journey to the West* might be packed with Buddhist allegory, but Sun Wukong brings chaos to order, comedy to morality, and mischief to mythology. Which is why the Monkey King is so enduring: no character better symbolizes the adaptability of myth in pop culture. Equally at home on stage, in space, in comics,

or in CGI-laden blockbusters, Wukong is the perfect icon for pop culture's ever-changing tastes and technologies. He reminds us that myths aren't dusty relics but rather living stories, ready to transfigure into whatever form we need. Whether he's wowing audiences on a big screen—sometimes in stunning 3D—or letting gamers swing his staff in 4K resolution, the Monkey King never stops reinventing himself. And that, perhaps, is his greatest magic trick of all: never going out of style.

Four centuries after Wu Cheng'en tucked him into his novel, Sun Wukong has leapt beyond the written page and somersaulted across all media. Wukong doesn't just survive new media revolutions—he thrives in them. To borrow his own party trick, he can clone himself into 72 different forms, and pop culture has willingly embraced his transformation, granting the simian diva (well, he did disguise himself as a woman to fight the White Bone Spirit) his multiple detours. And—spoiler alert!—he has no plans to slow down. 🍌

Frank Djeng (鄭曉霖) is a Hong Kong Cinema historian who has recorded hundreds of audio commentaries for Blu-rays of Hong Kong films from prestigious labels such as Criterion, Arrow, Eureka, and 88 Films. He is also a lifelong opera enthusiast, a passion first sparked at age 11 when he heard Georg Solti's recording of Parsifal.

***“[Monkey King]
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Artwork for *Black Myth: Wukong*.
XINHUA/ALAMY

Tradition, Transformation, and Cultural Imagination

BY HENRY SHIU 邵頌雄



A woodblock print showing the monkey nation from Li Zhuowu's literary criticism of *Journey to the West* by Li Zhi, created shortly after the novel's first publication in 1592.

Whenever the Monkey King is depicted in Western media, the character is often disjointed, distorted, and incomplete—a representation not only of residual “Orientalism” but also of cultural projection. Western preconceptions have long reduced Chinese culture into exotic caricatures, but Chinese creators themselves have also played their part, transforming the Monkey King to match their expectations of what would appeal to the West. Two recent examples vividly illustrate this trend: the action role-playing video game *Black Myth: Wukong* (portraying a martial master torn between obedience and rebellion) and the Disney+ show *American Born Chinese* (depicting a stern father struggling between heavenly duties and daily parental challenges). These adaptations pose a provocative, yet potentially uncomfortable, question: Does introducing the Monkey King to the West honor his Chinese heritage or downgrade his presence to a cultural stereotype?

Officially named Sun Wukong, the Monkey King is depicted most famously in Wu Cheng'en's Ming dynasty novel *Journey to the West*, often cited as one of Chinese literature's “Four Great Classical Novels.” His origins, however, are believed to be older and more extensive, possibly inspired by Hanumān, the monkey general of the Indian epic *Rāmāyana*. The fabled Silk Road, in addition to the textiles that inspired its name, also represented a marketplace of ideas encompassing Buddhist texts, Daoist scriptures, and Indian narratives. These exchanges found fertile ground in adapting characters and ideas into new languages and cultural idioms, mixed and remodeled by local imagination. Hanumān, a faithful servant of Rāma honored in India for his strength and agility, became a

different character entirely in China, symbolizing a Daoist immortality where Buddhist doctrines of liberation from attachments were projected onto the cosmic order.

The Sun Wukong of *Journey to the West* carries a magical staff that can shrink to the size of a needle or extend to the height of a mountain; he can jump on the clouds and traverse long distances in a single leap; he can turn into many forms at will. But those powers are counterbalanced by his many flaws: arrogance, restlessness, and rebelliousness, as well as a very hot temper. Figuratively, they are bound by the tight-fillet crown on his head that can only be unbound when he learns about discipline, obedience, and self-control. In the novel, his powers find purpose in a greater cause: assisting a Buddhist monk known as Xuanzang on a nearly impossible quest, traversing vast distances of China and

embodies both the uncompromising will and the purity of intention in search for truth. His white horse, in turn, signifies meekness and disciplined desire, as well as both the carrying of the Dharma and the hidden power of change. Taken as a whole, the group represents the human condition: Xuanzang is the conscious will or higher self, the white horse symbolizing endurance toward a higher purpose, and the disciples representing the inner poisons that must be controlled and transformed in order to be liberated.

This moral and symbolic order was not built out of thin air. The tale of Xuanzang's real-life pilgrimage during the Tang dynasty (618–907) was recounted long before Wu Cheng'en (c. 1506–1582)—not least by Xuanzang himself in his *Great Tang Records of the Western Regions*, a travelogue of the geography and hardships of his journey. Later



Director Chang Cheh's 1975 film, *Fantastic Magic Baby*, details one of Sun Wukong's famous adventures.

India across mountains and deserts (a total of 10,000 miles) to retrieve sacred Buddhist scriptures.

In the novel, the real protagonist is Xuanzang; the Monkey King is only one of three disciples, including Zhu Bajie (often translated as “Piggy”), a half-pig, half-human former general whose flaws are gluttony and lust) and Sha Wujing (or “Sandy”), another heavenly general bound to his wrongs, described as slow and plodding. Taken together, the three disciples can be interpreted as the “three poisons” of greed, hatred, and delusion in Buddhist doctrine: Piggy’s endless cravings embodying greed, Monkey’s violence and arrogance representing hatred, and Sandy’s indifference and inactivity symbolizing delusion. Xuanzang, in contrast,

dramatized in *zaju*, a type of Chinese opera with comic and allegorical episodes from the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368), the story already included a rebellious monkey character. Another Yuan-era poetic account, preserved at Kōzan-ji in Japan after being lost in China and rediscovered in the 19th century through the work of Luo Zhenyu and Wang Guowei, recounts the pilgrimage in verse, with the monkey playing a far less prominent role. Scholars see these works as bridges connecting Xuanzang’s historical account with the more imaginative Ming novel. Throughout the centuries, Xuanzang’s journeys were transformed into hagiography, followed by drama and poetry, eventually evolving into an epic novel. The Monkey King, initially a



A scene of Lakshmana consulting the heads of the monkey armies from Ramayana, the Indian epic which may be an early source for the Monkey King. ARCHIVES CHARMET/BRIDGEMAN IMAGES

supporting role, gradually became the most interesting character. His subversiveness, his comic vitality and pure magnetism captured the imagination of audiences.

Ultimately, Sun Wukong transcended literature to become a cultural icon, worshipped in temples and family shrines, particularly in southern China and throughout Southeast Asia. He was not, however, the only fictional character to be deified and worshipped. Ne Zha, the fierce kid-hero of the Ming novel *Investiture of the Gods*, not only remains adored to this day but also became a box-office champion in a recent franchise of animated films. Likewise, incorruptible magistrates would become immortalized as Chenghuang, the “City Gods” who would guard towns in popular dramas (also depicted as “door gods” in Lunar New Year art, guarding Chinese homes). These cults were not mere superstitions; they echoed highly valued principles of righteousness and courage. But the cult of the Monkey King truly stood apart. His altars included not only incense and offerings but also a strange glass vase known as the ping-pong cup. When the vase rang with a sudden ping, usually due to temperature changes or resonance, the worshippers took this as a mischievous gesture from the Monkey King.

In the novel *Journey to the West*, Sun Wukong is not merely a rebellious prankster and brave fighter. He develops as a character of change: He is greatly respectful of his instructor Xuanzang, demonstrates smart adaptability when faced with perilous circumstances, remains righteous and

faithful to Pigsy and Sandy, and, most significantly, undergoes a spiritual transformation. By the end of the story, his untamed arrogance is converted into the controlled devotion of a disciplined Buddhist practitioner. The Monkey King is a symbol of values inherent in the Chinese imagination itself: tenacity, faith, flexibility, self-control, and the pursuit of spiritual enlightenment.

Cultural values, however, are rarely constant. In the West, depictions of the Monkey King frequently lose their roots, often echoing the experiences of Chinese immigrants in showing alienation and adaptation to new cultures. It is particularly vital to restore the original settings of the story, where Buddhist, Daoist, and Confucian principles are interwoven into layers of meaning lost in subsequent interpretations. Returning to these sources, readers will be able to rediscover the significance of the Monkey King, which has long been forgotten. For Chinese viewers throughout the world, this rediscovery brings cultural and spiritual heritage closer together. To the West, it provides a window into the values and imagination of Chinese civilization through one of the world’s most successful and enduring tricksters. 🌀

Dr. Henry Shiu (邵頌雄) is the Shi Wu De Assistant Professor of Chinese Buddhist Studies at Emmanuel College of Victoria University in The University of Toronto. He has published widely on Buddhism and Western classical music including *Music of the Times* 《禮崩樂不壞》 published by Oxford University Press in Hong Kong.



Monkey Tale

**THE ORIGINAL TEXT THAT INTRODUCED THE MONKEY KING
HAS CAPTIVATED AUDIENCES FOR CENTURIES**

BY ANN WALTNER

Huang Ruo and David Henry Hwang's opera *The Monkey King* is based on the opening chapters of the hundred-chapter novel *Xiyou ji* (*Journey to the West*), the earliest surviving edition of which was published in Nanjing in 1592. *Journey to the*

West is one of the great Chinese novels from the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1911) dynasties. Beyond *Sanguo zhi* (*Romance of the Three Kingdoms*), *Shuihu zhuan* (*Water Margin*), and *Honglou meng* (*Dream of the Red Chamber*) are non-canonic epics like *Jin ping mei* (*Plum in*

the Golden Vase) and *Rulin wai shi* (*The Scholars*). Opera fans will recall that the San Francisco Opera produced an opera based on *Dream of the Red Chamber* in 2016. *Monkey King* is a continuation of the San Francisco Opera's work framing venerable Chinese novels in new contexts.

Drama flourished alongside fiction in Ming and Qing dynasty China. Many plays were based on novels. Plays were performed in private homes of the wealthy, in temples, teahouses, and outdoor festivals. Much of the population was illiterate; watching plays was how they became familiar with the great novels. A painting attributed to Qiu Ying (1494–1552) shows an episode from *Journey to the West* being performed as part of a festival.

The first chapters of the novel, which form the basis of the opera's story, is a sequence which is often

Buddhism. Others suggest that by the end of the novel Monkey has awakened to the truths of Buddhism, and his mischievous days are over. The fact that the novel supports both interpretations is one source of its richness and one of the primary reasons why people have been talking about the novel for the last five hundred years.

While *Journey to the West* is five centuries old, the story that inspired it is much older. Images of Xuanzong and a monkey companion appear in Buddhist cave paintings along the Silk Road as early as the twelfth century. It is not clear how a monkey with magical powers became a companion to the monk, though one can certainly understand that if one were to walk from China to India having a companion who can perform magical feats would be a great advantage.

***“While Journey to the West
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the story that inspired it
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Images of Xuanzong
and a monkey companion
appear in Buddhist cave paintings
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referred to as “Havoc in Heaven.” The resolution in the opera shows that Monkey has realized the truth of the teachings of the Buddha. In subsequent chapters of *Journey to the West*, not presented in the opera, Guanyin recruits Monkey to assist the monk Xuanzang on his journey to India to obtain Buddhist scriptures. They are joined by a pig and a sand demon, who each have magical powers even if they are no match for Monkey. The trip to India is full of treacherous demons and other obstacles; Monkey's magical powers prove essential to the success of the journey.

The novel is venerable, but the character of Monkey is full of mischief. Some interpretations of the novel show him as a heroic rebel against all forms of authority, even

Illustrations of the monkey and his traveling party were included in the published novel, as fiction in the Ming dynasty was often published with illustrations. The technology used for printing—carved woodblocks—was the same for images as it was for text, which facilitated the use of illustrations.

But the story of the Monkey King is not simply a story to be read and enjoyed on the page; it is a story to be performed. Enjoy the show! 🌟

Ann Waltner is professor of history at the University of Minnesota where she writes on gender and kinship in Chinese and world history. She has been an associate dean, director of the Institute for Advanced Study at Minnesota, and editor of the Journal of Asian Studies.



Composer Huang Ruo, Director Diane Paulus, and Librettist David Henry Hwang, at the first day of rehearsals in October 2025. / MATTHEW WASHBURN

Origin Story: The Monkey King

BY KEN SMITH 司馬勤

Some of this may sound familiar. Much like *Dream of the Red Chamber*, which San Francisco Opera brought to the stage first in 2016 and again in 2022 (with a pioneering tour of China in-between), *The Monkey King* has its roots in a classic novel beloved by billions of Chinese readers over centuries, yet little read in the rest of the world. But mentioning *Red Chamber*, a

domestic drama about a highly literate Chinese family, in the same breath as *Journey to the West*, an epic adventure freely mixing spiritual allegory with fantasy and martial arts, is like comparing a book club to a circus.

A key difference lies in a single character: a humanoid monkey, arguably the most fallible figure in Asian literature, who freely leapt beyond the novel. Where many Chinese

audiences have encountered the Monkey King's exploits through traditional opera and film adaptations, many Western viewers today have also discovered the character through the Disney+ series *American Born Chinese* and the role-playing video game *Black Myth: Wukong*.

Bringing the Monkey King's origin story to the stage gains from having several perspectives, and the opera's creative team came to the tale from notably different directions. In their previous operatic collaborations, composer Huang Ruo (born in China in 1976) and librettist David Henry Hwang (born in Los Angeles in 1957) have honed their differences in age and background into a thoughtful examination of Chinese culture and its interaction with the West. Director Diane Paulus, born in New York to a Japanese mother and an American father, has fashioned an illustrious theatre career from her early multitiered training in classical music and dance, with a professional track record of finding new ways to tell established stories. Their Monkey King may come from ancient China, but he offers lessons for audiences today.

You all came from Asian households—in Diane's case, a half-Asian household—so what was your introduction to the Monkey King and what does he mean to you?

David Henry Hwang: I was born in Los Angeles, and we didn't have a lot of Chinese influences in my home because our parents really wanted us to assimilate. I didn't discover *Journey to the West* until I was in my 20s, when I found the early translation by Anthony Yu. Later, I was given a set of graphic novels, which was my real introduction. I find it interesting that the Monkey King is revered by so many people, even Mao Zedong. Monkey is a revolutionary figure, which goes against this notion of Chinese people being a collective and not standing out as individuals. I think that's one reason Monkey is so beloved not just in China but throughout Asia. He represents a totally different side of the Chinese character.

Huang Ruo: The first thing that really stuck in my mind was the hour-long cartoon by the Shanghai Animation Film Studio from the 1960s, which is based on the first chapters of the novel. I saw it several times when I was 6 or 7. We didn't have access to much animation growing up, so as a kid what really struck me was his playfulness. Also, his contradictions—both his hate and love—are so clearly defined. He makes mistakes, but he means well

and gains knowledge. This to me is very Chinese. In fact, there's a little bit of Monkey in all of us!

Diane Paulus: Growing up, I wasn't aware of the Monkey King as a cultural figure. Huang Ruo introduced me. He told me that his kids dressed up for Halloween as Spider-Man and the Disney Princess from *Frozen*, and he wished they could know more Chinese figures from popular culture. That really stuck with me, his urge to bring the Monkey King to a modern audience. There are so many versions, but he sent me to the 1960s animation. So I watched this amazing character fly on clouds, blow on a hair, and become a hundred versions of himself, thinking as a director, "This is impossible to put on stage." But I do like a challenge.

The novel's history is rooted in an actual 16-year journey of a Tang-dynasty monk named Xuanzang who wrote about his travels. A millennium later, that austere spiritual experience had morphed into a sprawling martial arts fantasy (the most famous version having 100 chapters) focusing on the monk's sidekicks. How difficult was this to distill into two and a half hours?

DHH: I already had experience with San Francisco Opera adapting *Dream of the Red Chamber* into two acts, and that book is much longer than *Journey to the West*. When Huang Ruo first approached me, however, I complained that I didn't know how to adapt this story. The novel begins with a big chunk, "Monkey Creates Havoc in Heaven," which is pretty self-contained but doesn't end well for Monkey. Then the rest of the book is like network television in the old days, with episodes in no obvious order. There's probably a reason for the sequence of the chapters, but a casual reader could be forgiven for thinking the novel just bounces from incident to incident. Fortunately, Huang Ruo had a very spiritual, philosophical notion for how to tell that opening section and end it in an emotionally satisfying way.

HR: That first segment has it all: drama, happiness, sadness, even revenge. It's full of operatic gestures, and we can convey the sense of spiritual transformation in musical and theatrical terms. Though it mixes in some Taoism and Confucianism, the novel is really about the teachings of Buddha. The historical Xuanzang translated the *Heart Sutra* and the *Diamond Sutra*, so our opera has Guanyin,

Note: This discussion originated as part of the Works & Process series at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York on March 9, 2025.



Monkey King discussion at the Guggenheim Museum's Works in Process, featuring moderator Ken Smith (left) with Diane Paulus, Huang Ruo, and David Henry Hwang, March 9, 2025. / ELYSE MERTZ

the Goddess of Mercy, chanting the *Diamond Sutra* to Monkey. Of course, he doesn't listen—not until the end, after he's captured and trapped under the Mountain of Five Elements. We spent hours trying to figure out how to end the opera. In the original story, Monkey is released by Guanyin basically in a hostage exchange: He gets out only after promising to travel with the Monk on a pilgrimage to bring the sutras to China from India. But that's not a satisfying resolution for an opera.

DHH: It's certainly not a happy ending for Monkey. We should also probably mention that this opening section tells how this incredibly powerful creature Sun Wukong—the Monkey King—feels he deserves a position in Heaven, but the Jade Emperor and his court don't take him seriously because he's undisciplined and, well, a monkey. So he raises a banner declaring himself "The Great Sage, Equal to Heaven," which really pisses off the Jade Emperor and sets off a big war. They eventually capture Monkey and try to kill him, but they can't. So he smashes up the joint and can only be stopped by Buddha himself. In our version, the Jade Emperor is pretty corrupt, and

Heaven has become a place where everyone protects themselves and their own status. It's fascinating that figures like Confucius and Lao Tzu appear in the original novel, but they're kind of the bad guys.

DP: I love how corrupt Heaven is in this story, with everyone so materialistic and power hungry. Getting back to the Five-Element Mountain, when the Monkey King thinks he deserves to be King of Heaven, Master Subhuti (or Buddha) tells him that if he can jump out of his hand into the Land of Bliss he can earn the title. So he jumps, thinking he's in the Land of Bliss but then realizes that the Five-Element Mountain is actually Buddha's hand. The fingers close around him, and he's trapped for 500 years. He has to learn his lesson. All this happens at the beginning of the opera, and from there the rest is really a flashback.

Chinese novels usually alternate between prose and verse, but the poetry works in different ways. In *The Three Kingdoms* (another of the great Chinese novels), it's like a Greek chorus, giving you the big picture. *Dream of the Red Chamber* is exactly the opposite, with

poetry revealing the inner thoughts of the characters (several are the poets themselves). But *Journey to the West* alternates very prosaic writing with elevated texts saying essentially the same thing, but often the poetic version drives the story forward. Did that duality work for opera, which alternates between recitatives and arias, or did you have to find contrasts somewhere else?

HR: Basically, the opera is framed by Monkey's imprisonment and the singing of sutras, then we tell his story in flashback, starting with his birth. At the end of the opera, Guanyin and the Bodhisattva chorus chant the *Diamond Sutra* to teach Monkey to let go of all attachments and make room in his heart for compassion. Through this transformation, he is able to release himself from his confinement, which becomes his happy ending.

DHH: Throughout the opera, Guanyin watches over Monkey, trying to support and guide him in his growth. We've interspersed our story with the actual text of the *Diamond Sutra*, which is the only part of the opera in Chinese. The rest of the libretto is in English because, well, it was written by me.

So how does all this finally get to the stage?

DP: We have an amazing visual design by Basil Twist and gorgeous costumes by Anita Yavich, who has a genius for taking inspiration from ancient sources like Peking opera and adding a personal twist. Huang Ruo can better explain some of the ingenious things she did with Chinese characters.

HR: I still remember Anita was excited about using a 3-D printer! She started with the Chinese character "hou" (猴), meaning Monkey. She was also inspired by graffiti art, so she played with that ideograph, sometimes turning it in reverse, to come up with a beautiful image. Personally, because I also grew up watching *Transformers*, it also looks to me like the mask of a Transformer. This became the inspiration for the Monkey King's costume, which also incorporates the headdress from traditional Chinese opera.

DP: The main problem is to figure out how to tell the story, so easily presented in animation, in a theatrical way onstage. Basil is not only a set designer but also a puppet designer, so when the Monkey King learns how to fly, how to multiply himself, how to spin in the air with martial

arts, we have the options of a singer Monkey King, a dancer Monkey King, and a puppet Monkey King.

HR: In purely practical terms, it's very hard to find a singer at a high operatic level who also practices kung fu! Once we establish Monkey as a three-in-one being, we have Monkey doing a flip or flying in the sky done through puppetry. When Monkey is fighting the god Erlang, we utilize two dancers. And of course, when Monkey sings, we use our singer. This is actually a great Asian tradition you sometimes see in Noh as well, where the person singing is not the one moving.

DP: We have an entire scene underwater, which was both challenging and delightful to conceive. Basil often works with silk and fabrics—his signature piece *Symphonie Fantastique* is mostly fabric floating in water—so when he first asked me, "What are you thinking?" I immediately mentioned silk: What if the visuals are all about silk, and the silk keeps changing? It's a profound challenge to have a story about action that really operates on a spiritual level, and silk for me embodies the opera's theme of impermanence. Silk makes shapes that completely disappear. The opera quotes the *Diamond Sutra*: You have to let go of self, accept the impermanence of life. There's something about the use of fabrics that makes form meet content. We spent five days workshoping various fabrics, along with prototypes of puppets.

Considering that this story comes from a novel called *Journey to the West*, this opera never gets around to the actual journey. *The Monkey King* is just one big prologue, set partly underwater with lots of corrupt gods running around. It sounds a bit like another operatic epic we all know.

DP: Huang Ruo says this is the beginning of his *Ring* cycle.

Are you thinking about further commissions already? Where will the story go in future chapters?

HR: Well, let's just say, the store is open, and we're looking for buyers. 🌀

Critic and journalist Ken Smith (司馬勤) has covered music on five continents for a wide range of print, broadcast, and internet media. Winner of the ASCAP/Deems Taylor Award and the 2020 SOPA Award for arts and culture reporting, he is the author of Fate, Luck, Chance ... the Making of "The Bonesetter's Daughter" Opera.

Creating Monkey's World

The Monkey King transports us between fantastical worlds, from the underwater kingdom of the Dragon King to the heavens where the Jade Emperor presides. Here is a sampling of the brilliant design work of *The Monkey King's* costume designer Anita Yavich and set and puppetry designer Basil Twist which helped bring the adventures of Sun Wukong to life on the opera stage.



Costume design for the *Monkey King*. / ANITA YAVICH



The *Monkey King* costume designer Anita Yavich.
MATTHEW WASHBURN



The *Monkey King* set and puppetry designer Basil Twist.
MATTHEW WASHBURN

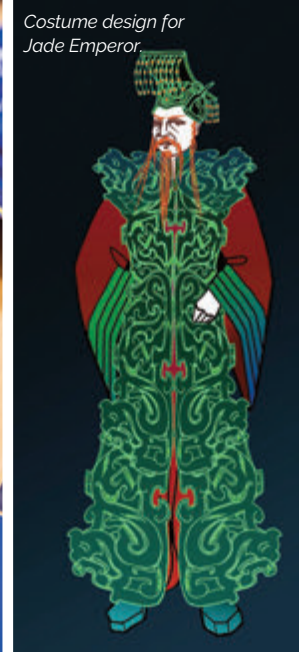


Costume designs for Lord Erlang and the gods. / ANITA YAVICH

Costume designs for The Monkey King.



Costume design for Jade Emperor.



Costume design for Dragon King Ao Guang.



Set design for The Peach Tree in Act I, Scene 5. / BASIL TWIST



Set design for Dragon Palace of the Eastern Sea in Act I, Scene 3.



Artist Profiles

* San Francisco Opera Debut † Current Adler Fellow ◇ Adler Fellowship Graduate • Merola Opera Program Graduate



HUANG RUO*

黃若

(Hainan Island, China)

Composer

Recent and Upcoming: *M. Butterfly*

(London's Barbican Centre, Santa Fe Opera);

The Wedding Banquet (Metropolitan Opera,

Seattle Opera); *An American Soldier* (Boston Lyric Opera, Opera Theatre of Saint Louis, New York's Perelman Performing Arts Center); *Book of Mountains and Seas* (Edinburgh International Festival, LA Opera); *Angel Island* (BAM Next Wave Festival/Prototype Festival, Singapore International Festival of Arts); *City of Floating Sounds* (Beijing Music Festival, Factory International/MIF, Lincoln Center, London's Southbank Centre); Works for opera, orchestra, chamber music, theater, film, and dance in addition to sound and architectural installations; creates multidisciplinary, boundaries-breaking, and multicultural works using a compositional technique called "Dimensionalism"

Composition faculty at the Mannes School of Music in New York

Published by

Schott/EAM (schott-music.com/en/person/huang-ruo)

Writer of 14 opera libretti

Writer/Consulting Producer for *The Affair* (tv series)

Tony Award: Best Play for *M. Butterfly* (1988)

Grammy Award: Best Opera Recording and Best Classical Contemporary Composition for Osvaldo Golijov's *Ainadamar* (2006)



CAROLYN KUAN*

關琦安

(Hartford, Connecticut)

Conductor

Recent and Upcoming: Huang Ruo's

M. Butterfly (Santa Fe Opera, BBC

Symphony Orchestra at London's Barbican

Centre); Huang Ruo's *An American Soldier* (American Composers Orchestra at New York's Perelman Performing Arts Center); selections from Terence Blanchard's *Fire Shut Up in My Bones* (Hartford Symphony); engagements with Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Edmonton Symphony Orchestra, Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra in Katowice, Rheinische Philharmonie, Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, Toronto Symphony Orchestra, New York City Ballet, Singapore Symphony Orchestra, Borusan Istanbul Philharmonic Orchestra; Stewart Wallace's *Harvey Milk* (Opera Theatre of Saint Louis); Philip Glass' *Satyagraha* (English National Opera); Iain Bell's *Stonewall* (New York City Opera); *La Cenerentola* (Portland Opera)
Music Director of the Hartford Symphony Orchestra
Website: carolynkuan.com
Facebook: @carolynkuan



DAVID HENRY HWANG

黃哲倫

(Los Angeles, California)

Librettist

San Francisco Opera Highlights:

Bright Sheng's *Dream of the Red Chamber*

Recent and Upcoming: *Yellow Face*

(Broadway, Great Performances, Audible audioplay);

M. Butterfly (Broadway); Osvaldo Golijov's *Ainadamar*

(Metropolitan Opera); Huang Ruo's *An American Soldier* (New

York's Perelman Performing Arts Center); Anna May Wong

biopic (Working Title Films); *Billion Dollar Whale* (SK Global)

WITH GRATITUDE

Susan & Philip Marineau, Mike & Sarasina Tuchen, The Eden8 Foundation
supporting Diane Paulus

Donna Dubinsky & Leonard Shustek supporting Basil Twist

James & Doreen Ho supporting Anita Yavich

Elizabeth H. Tsai Living Trust supporting Ayumu "Poe" Saegusa



KANG WANG*

王亢

Tenor

(Harbin, China)

Monkey King

Recent and Upcoming: Rodolfo in *La Bohème* (Sydney's Opera Australia,

Naples' Teatro di San Carlo, Canadian Opera Company, Florence's Teatro del Maggio); *Rigoletto* (Sydney); *Lucia di Lammermoor* (Tiroler Festspiele); *Nabucco* (Munich's Bavarian State Opera); title role of *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* (Florentine Opera, Palm Beach Opera); Alfredo in *La Traviata* (Metropolitan Opera, Seiji Ozawa Music Academy, Tiroler Festspiele, Naples); *Gianni Schicchi* (Vienna State Opera); Macduff in *Macbeth* (Washington National Opera); Roméo in *Roméo et Juliette* (Semperoper Dresden); Don Ottavio in *Don Giovanni* (Houston Grand Opera); Italian Singer in *Der Rosenkavalier* (Metropolitan Opera)



MEI GUI ZHANG*

張玫瑰

Soprano

(Chongqing, China)

Guanyin

San Francisco Opera Highlights: Dai Yu in Bright Sheng and David Henry Hwang's

Dream of the Red Chamber; Eurydice in *Orpheus and Eurydice*; Oscar in *Un Ballo in Maschera*; *In Song*; Mei Gui Zhang

Recent and Upcoming: Concert of French arias (Paris Philharmonic); Beethoven's Ninth Symphony and *Ah! Perfido* (Minnesota Orchestra); Qigang Chen's *Iris Unveiled* (Seattle Symphony); Mozart Requiem (New Jersey Symphony, North Carolina Symphony); Mozart's Mass in C Minor (North Carolina); Barbarina in *Le Nozze di Figaro* (Metropolitan Opera, Verbier Festival); Pamina in *Die Zauberflöte* (Atlanta Opera, Verbier Festival); Susanna in *Le Nozze di Figaro* (Beijing's National Centre for the Performing Arts); C.P.E. Bach's *Die Auferstehung und Himmelfahrt Jesu* (American Symphony Orchestra at Carnegie Hall); Mahler's Fourth Symphony (Allentown Symphony Orchestra); Zerlina in *Don Giovanni* (Atlanta, LA Opera); Despina in *Così fan tutte* (Boston Symphony Orchestra at Tanglewood); Mozart's *Exsultate, jubilate* (New Jersey); John Luther Adams' *Vespers of the Blessed Earth* (Carnegie Hall, Saratoga Performing Arts Center); Fauré's *La Bonne Chanson* (Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center); Canteloube's *Chants d'Auvergne* (Real Orquesta Sinfónica de Sevilla); Musetta in *La Bohème* (Fort Worth Opera); title role of *Roméo et Juliette* (Beijing); Thibault in *Don Carlos* (Metropolitan Opera); *L'Enfant et les Sortilèges*

(Philadelphia Orchestra); Aaron Zigman and Mark Campbell's *Émigré* (New York Philharmonic, Shanghai Symphony); Beethoven's *Missa solemnis* (Bard College); Bach's *Coffee Cantata* (Music@Menlo Chamber Music Festival); Bloody Child in *Macbeth* (Metropolitan Opera); Anne Trulove in *The Rake's Progress* (Merola) Merola Opera Program: 2018



KONU KIM

김건우 · 金健雨

Tenor

(Seoul, South Korea)

Jade Emperor

San Francisco Opera Highlights: Bao Yu in Bright Sheng and David Henry Hwang's

Dream of the Red Chamber

Recent and Upcoming: Rodolfo in *La Bohème* (Polish National Opera); Fenton in *Falstaff* (Polish National Opera); Count Almaviva in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* (Stockholm's Royal Swedish Opera, London's Royal Ballet and Opera, Deutsche Oper am Rhein, Nouvel Opera Fribourg); Tonio in *La Fille du Régiment* (Deutsche Oper am Rhein); Edoardo di Sanval in Verdi's *Un Giorno di Regno* (Garsington Opera); *Beatrice di Tenda* (Deutsche Oper am Rhein); Almuzir in Donizetti's *Zoraida di Granata* (Fondazione Teatro Donizetti); Duke in *Rigoletto* (Prague's National Theatre); Arnold in *William Tell* (Irish National Opera); Tamino in *Die Zauberflöte* (National Taichung Theater); Ferrando in *Così fan tutte* (Glyndebourne Festival, San Diego Opera); Ernesto in *Don Pasquale* (Glyndebourne, Finnish National Opera); Leone in *L'Ange de Nisida* (Donizetti Festival); Elvino in *La Sonnambula* (Budapest Müpa Palace of Arts) Instagram: @konu_kim.tenor

PROFILES CONTINUED



PEIXIN CHEN

陳佩鑫

Bass

(Katy, Texas)

Supreme Sage Laojun

San Francisco Opera Highlights:

Sparafucile in *Rigoletto*

Recent and Upcoming: Sparafucile in *Rigoletto* (Canadian Opera Company, Madrid's Teatro Real, LA Opera); Timur in *Turandot* (Metropolitan Opera, Atlanta Opera, Washington National Opera, Houston Grand Opera); Beethoven's Ninth Symphony (San Francisco Symphony, New York Philharmonic); Prokofiev's *The Gambler* (Salzburg Festival); *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* (Aix-en-Provence Festival); *Don Carlos* (Lyric Opera of Chicago); *Das Rheingold* (Los Angeles Philharmonic, Seattle Opera, Dallas Opera); *Don Giovanni* (LA Opera, Metropolitan Opera); *La Bohème* (WNO); *Die Zauberflöte* (Metropolitan Opera); *Aida* (Houston); *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* (Houston); *Norma* (Houston); Verdi Requiem (Los Angeles Master Chorale)
@peixinchen



JOO WON KANG

강주원 · 姜柱元

Baritone

(Gunsan, South Korea)

Dragon King Ao Guang/Lord Erlang

San Francisco Opera Highlights:

Ping in *Turandot*; title role of *The Barber of Seville for Families*

Recent and Upcoming: Marcello in *La Bohème* (Metropolitan Opera, Minnesota Opera); Ping in *Turandot* (Metropolitan Opera); Ferdinando Paer's *Leonora* (Chicago Opera Theater); Germont in *La Traviata* (Detroit Opera); Leon's *L'Oracolo* (Wexford Festival)
San Francisco Opera Adler Fellowship Program: 2012, 2013
Merola Opera Program: 2011



HONGNI WU

吳虹霓

Mezzo-Soprano

(Jiangxi, China)

Crab General/Venus Star

San Francisco Opera Highlights: Bao Chai in *Bright Sheng* and David Henry Hwang's

Dream of the Red Chamber

Recent and Upcoming: Rosina in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* (San Francisco Opera, Opera Theatre of Saint Louis); Linea in the Marc Blitzstein's *Parabola and Circula* (Norrköping Symphony Orchestra in Berlin); Cherubino in *Le Nozze di Figaro* (Opera North, Santa Fe Opera); Beethoven's Ninth Symphony (London Philharmonic Orchestra); Ravel's *Shéhérazade* (Chinese National Symphony Orchestra); Siebel in *Faust* (London's Royal Ballet and Opera); Suzuki in *Madama Butterfly* (London); Dorabella in *Così fan tutte* (Pacific Opera Victoria); Angelina in *La Cenerentola* (Opera Maine); Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* (Shanghai Symphony Orchestra, Guangzhou Symphony Orchestra); Mahler's Third Symphony (Philharmonia Orchestra at London's Royal Festival Hall)
Winner of The Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions (2018)



JUSUNG GABRIEL PARK

박주성 · 朴柱成

Bass-Baritone

(Vienna, Austria)

Master Subhuti/Buddha

Recent and Upcoming: Masetto in

Don Giovanni (Vienna State Opera); Wagner in *Faust* (Vienna); Schaunard in *La Bohème* (Vienna); Betto di Signa in *Gianni Schicchi* (Vienna); Harlekin in *Ariadne auf Naxos* (Vienna); Dancaïro in *Carmen* (Vienna); First Mate in *Billy Budd* (Vienna); Argante in *Rinaldo* (Detroit Opera); Mahler's *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* (Amsterdam's Concertgebouw); Beethoven's Ninth Symphony (Seoul Philharmonic Orchestra, Milan Symphony Orchestra on tour in Italy and Switzerland); Mendelssohn's *Elias* (Bayerischer Rundfunk Chor & Orchestra); duo concert with Sumi Jo (Brno Philharmonic Orchestra at Vienna Musikverein); Fenicio in Rossini's *Ermione* (Rossini Festival in Bad Wildbad); Idraote in Rossini's *Armida* (Bad Wildbad); H.K. Gruber's *Frankenstein!!* (TIMF Orchestra in Korea)
Member of the Ensemble of the Vienna State Opera
@jusunggabrielpark



HUIWANG ZHANG*

張慧望

(Jiujiang, Jiangxi Province, China)

Monkey King Dancer

Recent and Upcoming: Dancer in *Doppelganger* (New York's Park Avenue Armory); *The Barber of Seville* (Santa Fe

Opera); *Aida* (Metropolitan Opera); *Still/Here* (Gammage Theater at Arizona State University); *Degrees of Freedom* (Queens' Green Space)

Dancer/Assistant Choreographer in Huang Ruo and David Henry Hwang's *M. Butterfly* (Santa Fe)

Dancer with Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Company



MARCOS VEDOVETTO

馬克斯·維多魏托

(Tupi Paulista, Brazil)

Lord Erlang Dancer

San Francisco Opera Highlights:

Torero in *Carmen*

Recent and Upcoming: Performances

with Dance Theatre of San Francisco, Connecticut Ballet, Santa Clara Ballet Company, Sarah Berges Dance Company
Choreographer for Dance Theatre of San Francisco, Connecticut Ballet, CelloPointe, Santa Clara Ballet Company
Dance filmmaker

Tenured dancer with San Francisco Opera



CHRISTOPHER JACKSON

克里斯朵夫·傑克遜

Tenor

(Buffalo, New York)

King of the North

San Francisco Opera Highlights:

Pony Express Rider in *La Fanciulla del West*;

Giuseppe in *La Traviata*; Uncle Yakuside in *Madama Butterfly*;

Jeppo Liverotto in *Lucrezia Borgia*; Backwoodsman in

Show Boat

Member of San Francisco Opera Regular Chorus



CHESTER PIDDUCK

切斯特·皮杜克

Tenor

(Saint Louis, Missouri)

King of the South

San Francisco Opera Highlights: Mr. Martini in Jake Heggie and Gene Scheer's

It's a Wonderful Life; Waiter in *Arabella*; Parpignol in

La Bohème; Nantucket Sailor in Heggie and Scheer's *Moby-Dick*

Recent and Upcoming: Beppe in *Pagliacci* (Fresno Youth

Orchestra); tenor soloist in *Carmina Burana* (CSU Fresno, San Francisco Symphony, Sacramento Choral Society and

Orchestra); tenor soloist in Mozart Requiem (St. Helena Choral Society); Prince Ramiro in *La Cenerentola* (San Francisco Opera

Guild's Opera Together program); Almaguira in *Il Barbiere di*

Siviglia (Opera San José, Mendocino Music Festival); Nemorino

in *L'Elisir d'Amore* (West Bay Opera); Rodolfo in *La Bohème*

(Opera San Luis Obispo)

Member of San Francisco Opera Regular Chorus



JONATHAN SMUCKER*

喬納森·斯馬克

Tenor

(Zoar, Ohio)

King of the East

San Francisco Opera Highlights: *Orpheus and Eurydice*; Gabriela Lena Frank and Nilo Cruz's

El último sueño de Frida y Diego; Mason Bates and Mark Campbell's

The (R)evolution of Steve Jobs; Kaija Saariaho's *Innocence*

Recent and Upcoming: Witch of Endor in Handel's *Saul*

(Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra & Choral); tenor soloist in

Monteverdi's *Vespers* (American Bach Soloists); Miles in Missy

Mazzoli and Royce Vavrek's *Proving Up* (Pasadena Opera); Father

in Kurt Weill's *The Seven Deadly Sins* (San Francisco Conservatory

of Music Orchestra); engagements with American Bach Cantorei

Voice Faculty at San José State University

Member of San Francisco Opera Regular Chorus



WILLIAM O'NEILL

威廉·奧尼爾

Bass-Baritone

(Providence, Rhode Island)

King of the West

San Francisco Opera Highlights: Ernie in Jake Heggie and Gene Scheer's *It's a*

Wonderful Life; Poul Ruders and Paul Bentley's *The*

Handmaid's Tale; Rhiannon Giddens and Michael Abels' *Omar*;

Sweeney Todd; *Show Boat*; *Manon*; Marco Tutino's *Two Women*

Member of San Francisco Opera Regular Chorus

Creative Team



DIANE PAULUS*

黛安·保羅斯

(New York, New York)

Director

Recent and Upcoming: *Carmen*

(Glyndebourne Festival); *The Magic Flute*

(Canadian Opera Company);

1776 (American Repertory Theater/Broadway); *Jagged Little*

Pill (A.R.T./Broadway); *Waitress* (A.R.T./Broadway);

Masquerade; *N/A* (Lincoln Center); *Gloria: A Life*; *In the Body of*

the World (A.R.T./Off Broadway); *Romeo and Juliet* (A.R.T.);

Becoming a Man (A.R.T.); *The White Card* (A.R.T.);

The Donkey Show; Cirque du Soleil's *Amaluna*

Tony Award: Best Direction of a Musical for *Pippin* (2013)

Terrie and Bradley Bloom Artistic Director of American

Repertory Theater at Harvard University

Professor of the Practice of Theater at Harvard University



BASIL TWIST*

巴塞爾·特維斯特

(San Francisco, California)

Puppetry Director/

Set and Puppetry Designer

Recent and Upcoming: *Symphonie*

Fantastique; *Dogugaeshi*; Jean-Joseph

Cassanéa de Mondonville's *Titon et l'Aurore* (Opera Comique,

Dans les Jardins de William Christie); Huang Ruo's *Book of*

Mountains and Seas (Chicago, New York, Copenhagen); *My*

Neighbor Totoro (London's West End)

Artistic director of the Dream Music Puppetry Program, New

York

Website: basiltwist.com



ANN YEE*

余梅林

(Cincinnati, Ohio)

Choreographer

Recent and Upcoming: Director of

Otherland (Almeida); *The Human Body*

(Donmar Warehouse)

Director and Choreographer of *Rusalka* (London's Royal Ballet and Opera)

Choreographer of *Don Giovanni* (Aix-en-Provence Festival);

Life After (Goodman Theatre, Toronto's Mirvish Theatre);

We Live in Cairo (New York Theatre Workshop); Huang Ruo's

An American Soldier (New York's Perelman Performing Arts

Center); *Carmen* (Metropolitan Opera); *Next to Normal* (West

End, Donmar Warehouse); *The Seven Deadly Sins/Bluebeard's*

Castle (Buenos Aires' Teatro Colon); *South Pacific* (Sadler's

Wells, Chichester Festival Theatre); *La Bohème* (Goteborg

Opera); *Oklahoma!* (Oregon Shakespeare Festival); *Caroline or*

Change (Studio 54 Broadway, Hampstead Theatre, London's

Playhouse); *War Requiem* (English National Opera)



ANITA YAVICH

蕭燕

(Hong Kong)

Costume Designer

San Francisco Opera Highlights:

Tigran Chukhadjian's *Arshak II*; *Aida*

Recent and Upcoming: Costume Designer

for *Floyd Collins* (Broadway); *Yellow Face* (Broadway);

Taylor Mac's *Prosperous Fools* (TFANA); *Galileo* (Berkeley

Repertory Theatre); the *Ring* cycle (Opera Australia);

Fidelio (Washington National Opera)

Puppets and Costume Designer of *The Sound of Music*

(Salzburger Marionetten Theater)

Masks and Puppets Designer for *Megalopolis* film



AYUMU "POE" SAEGUSA*

三枝步

(Brooklyn, New York)

Lighting Designer

Recent and Upcoming: *Eat the Document*

(HERE); *Book of Mountain and Seas*

(Copenhagen); engagements with

NY Fringe Festival and Lincoln Center Festival

Resident Lighting Designer at HERE (here.org)

Founder of Creative Machine Stage Lighting LLC

(creativemachine.lighting)



HANA S. KIM*

김하나·金素妍

(Seoul, South Korea)

Projection Designer

Recent and Upcoming: *The Visitor* (Public

Theater); *Real Women Have Curves*

(Broadway); *Redwood* (Broadway); *The*

Outsiders (Broadway); *Sumo* (Public Theater); *The Old Man and*

the Pool (Lincoln Center Theater); *Summer, 1976* (MTC); *Orfeo*

(Santa Fe Opera); *The Harder They Come* (Public Theater);

Così fan tutte (Detroit Opera); *Sweet Land* (The Industry);

The Anonymous Lover (LA Opera); *Everything Rises* (BAM);

Magdalene (Prototype Festival); art installations (Jordan Downs

Recreation Center, Occidental College)

PROFILES CONTINUED

Tony Award: Best Lighting Design of a Musical for
The Outsiders (2024)
Website: hananow.com
Instagram: @hana.s.kim

PROJECTION DESIGN TEAM

TO HANA S. KIM

Animators: Kelon Cen, Jamie Godwin
Illustration Artists: Choul Lee, Yi Lin Zhao



JAMIE GUAN*

關鴻鈞

(Beijing, China)

Peking Opera Specialist

Recent and Upcoming: *M. Butterfly*;
Flower Drum Song; *The King and I*; *Kung Fu*;
Cookin'; *Last of the Suns*; *Asian Mob* film;

Blush's "Warrior" music video

Instagram: @auroradragOn



SARA C. WALSH*

莎拉·沃爾什

(Seattle, Washington)

Associate Set Designer

Recent and Upcoming: *Your Ghost Body*
(New York's Chocolate Factory);
Kate Soper's *The Romance of the Rose* (New

Jersey's Peak Performances); *Laughs in Spanish* (Seattle Rep);
Sanctuary City (Seattle); *Block Association* (Actors Theatre of
Louisville); *The Magician's Daughter* (Geva Theatre)

Member of New York's Wolf 359

Resident Designer at Wellfleet's Harbor Stage Theatre

Assistant Professor at University of Washington

Instagram: @saracwalsh



JOHN KEENE

約翰·基恩

(Lancaster, Pennsylvania)

Chorus Director

San Francisco Opera Highlights:

Don Giovanni; Bright Sheng and David Henry
Hwang's *Dream of the Red Chamber*;

Eun Sun Kim Conducts Verdi; John Adams' *Antony and Cleopatra*; *Eugene Onegin*; *Dialogues of the Carmelites*; *La Traviata*; *Orpheus and Eurydice*; *Madama Butterfly*; *Die Frau ohne Schatten*; Gabriela Lena Frank and Nilo Cruz's *El último sueño de Frida y Diego*; 100th Anniversary Concert; *Il Trovatore*; Mason Bates and Mark Campbell's *The (R)evolution of Steve Jobs*; *Lohengrin*; Rhiannon Giddens and Michael Abels' *Omar*; *The Elixir of Love*; *The Magic Flute*; Kaija Saariaho's *Innocence*; *Un Ballo in Maschera*; Poul Ruders and Paul Bentley's *The Handmaid's Tale*; *Tristan und Isolde*; Beethoven's Ninth Symphony; *Carmen*; *La Bohème*; *Idomeneo*; *Rigoletto*; Jake Heggie and Terrence McNally's *Dead Man Walking*; *Parsifal*

Recent and Upcoming: *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*; *Elektra*
Metropolitan Opera Laffont Competition and San Francisco
Conservatory of Music Voice Concerto Competition judge
Instagram: @keenejohn

World premiere: San Francisco, California, War Memorial
Opera House; November 14, 2025

Personnel: 13 principals, 45 choristers,
10 dancers/puppeteers; **68 total**

Orchestra: 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns,
2 trumpets, 2 trombones, tuba, 2 percussion, 1 harp, 1 pipa,
34 strings (10 first violins, 8 second violins, 6 violas, 6 celli,
4 basses); **53 total**

In Memoriam

We honor the members of San Francisco Opera who we lost this past year.



COURTESY OF ALLISON B. MEYER

ARTHUR BLOOMFIELD, writer

Deeply knowledgeable about many subjects and possessing equally informed and strongly held opinions about all of them, Arthur Bloomfield was driven by an insatiable urge to explore, learn, and critique. His writings cover residential architecture, cooking, conductors, and, from his tenure as classical music critic for the *San Francisco Examiner*, music. One of his most important publications was *The San Francisco Opera* which chronicled the Company's founding and growth with full repertoire and casts for every season. The book, which Terence McEwen (San Francisco Opera General Director 1982–1988) regularly referred to as “the Company Bible,” was first published in 1961 and expanded by the author for editions in 1972 and 1978. General Director Matthew Shilvock said, “Arthur wrote with precision, care, and devotion. His work stands as an invaluable record of a major company at work, charting the arc of creativity that made this one of the thrilling stages of the world.” Since Bloomfield's passing in July at the age of 94, his family and the Company Archives have begun making plans for the donation and transfer of his extensive collection of San Francisco Opera broadcast tapes and memorabilia, ensuring that future opera lovers will have access to this historic material.



MARGARET NORTON

STUART BURROWS, tenor

Throughout his distinguished career, Welsh tenor Stuart Burrows brought elegant phrasing and an ardent stage presence to his portrayals. He made his San Francisco Opera debut in 1967 as Tamino in Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte*, arguably his greatest role which served as his calling card on the world's leading opera stages. He returned to San Francisco in 1969, 1970, and 1971 in an array of leading roles including Pinkerton in *Madama Butterfly* and the Earl of Leicester in *Maria Stuarda*. Burrows' final portrayal with the Company came in 1981 as Des Grieux in *Manon* where his voice was declared “strong and true as the emotions he depicted” (*San Francisco Chronicle*).



IRA NOWINSKI

JOHN CONKLIN, designer

When news of John Conklin's passing arrived last June, San Francisco Opera General Director Matthew Shilvock recalled, “I had the great pleasure of working for John for a summer at Glimmerglass and will forever be inspired by the collage-like curiosity he brought to the world, always looking for intersections of meaning.” Conklin, one of the art form's mavericks of the past 50 years, was noted throughout the opera world for his imagination, erudition, and theatrical spirit. His decades-long association with San Francisco Opera began in 1966 as a designer for the Company's touring branch, Western Opera Theater. He developed many productions for the mainstage, including *Un Ballo in Maschera* and *La Traviata* which each served the Company for more than three decades. His sets and costumes for the *Ring* cycle presented here in 1985, 1990, and 1999 marked the dawn of a bold, new era for the Company.



ROGER GANS, sound designer

Roger Gans was at the cutting edge of developing sound techniques for San Francisco Opera as the Company's Resident Sound Designer for over 25 years from 1979–2005. He introduced the very concept of sound design to the Company. *Dead Man Walking* was among the most important and lasting sound designs that Gans created. His many sound effects—from the clanking of prison gates to the arresting sound of the lethal injection machine—have become iconic parts of the opera since its 2000 world premiere at the War Memorial Opera House. In recognition of his lasting impact on the art form and as a cherished member of the Company, the opening of the 25th-anniversary presentation of *Dead Man Walking* earlier this season was dedicated to Gans' memory.



DOUGLAS GIANCOLI, philanthropist

Professor Douglas Giancoli was a devoted member of the San Francisco Opera family and a lifelong champion of the art form. Born and raised in Berkeley, he had a distinguished career as a physicist, authoring widely used textbooks and teaching at UC Berkeley. Beyond the classroom, he found joy in hiking, spending weekends exploring the Eastern Sierras and summers in Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy, near the birthplace of both his father and Giacomo Puccini. Giancoli's love of classical music began in junior high with Beethoven's Eighth Symphony and soon developed into an encyclopedic knowledge of Italian operas, conductors, and recordings. His passion for music was later shaped, in part, by his admiration for and friendship with former San Francisco Opera music directors Nicola Luisotti and Donald Runnicles.



CHIP HEATH, usher

Chip Heath was a beloved member of the War Memorial Opera House staff and an integral part of the front-of-house usher team for nearly ten years. Known for his unfailing kindness, quick humor, and winning smile, Chip brought care and warmth to each interaction in the Opera House. He also took special pride in ushering for the Schwabacher Recital Series at the Dianne and Tad Taube Atrium Theater as he liked to stay informed about new and emerging talents within the Bay Area arts community. His deep love of opera informed his seemingly inexhaustible trove of stories about favorite singers and exceptional past performances.



CHRISTIAN HOLDER, dancer and choreographer

Hailing from a Trinidadian family of artists and entertainers, Christian Holder began as a dancer with his father's company in London until a scholarship to study with famed dancer Martha Graham brought him to New York City. In 1966, when Holder was just 16, he was invited to join the Joffrey Ballet. His debut with San Francisco Opera came in 1979 as the Lord of Night in the "Dance of the of the Hours" ballet within Ponchielli's *La Gioconda*, a performance that was telecast worldwide. Holder returned in 1980 and 1981 as a solo dancer. His contribution to the Company expanded to also include choreography as he developed the dance scenes for both the 1981 Company premiere of Lehár's *The Merry Widow* and the 2001 new production of *Aida*.



CATHERINE HOLMAN JOHNSON, philanthropist

Born to Eugene Holman, geologist, chairman and CEO of Standard Oil Company, and Edith Reid Holman, Cathie attended the Brearley School in New York, Vassar College, and Santa Clara University from which she received an MBA. Cathie was a dear and cherished member of the Opera family, and her leadership inspired others to participate in the life and energy of the Company. To see the loving bond that she and Pitch Johnson (Chair of the Opera Board from 1999–2008, and now Chair Emeritus) shared for 71 years was to see the epitome of a partnership that inspired and uplifted so many, from their family to the organizations that they supported with such generosity. Cathie was an early supporter of stem cell research, women's health advocacy, and Alzheimer's research. She was involved with the American Red Cross and with BUILD, an Oakland-based entrepreneurship program. Cathie and Pitch have devoted themselves to this company with such heart and care for decades, investing in the annual operations and the endowment of the Opera. Their kindness and generosity have literally kept San Francisco Opera going through some of its most challenging times.



ALLIE LIGHT, filmmaker

Affectionately known as the Godmother of Bay Area documentary filmmakers, Allie Light inspired creative filmmaking through teaching, mentorship, and the 20 films she created during her five decades behind the camera. *In the Shadow of the Stars*, made with her husband and creative partner, Irving Saraf, is among her powerful films and was awarded the Academy Award for best documentary feature in 1992. The documentary shines a light on the lives and behind-the-scenes dedication of artists in the San Francisco Opera Chorus.



ROBERT CAHEN

PAUL PLISHKA, bass

“My voice was more of the basso cantante—with a lyric kind of sound—not a villain’s voice,” said Paul Plishka when looking back at his distinguished career as one of opera’s premiere basses. From 1967 until his retirement in 2018 after 49 seasons, Plishka was a dedicated member of the Metropolitan Opera with 1,672 performances of 88 roles to his credit. Between 1976 and 2004, the Pennsylvania-born artist performed with San Francisco Opera in many of the Verdi roles he loved to sing, including Zaccaria in *Nabucco* and de Silva in *Ernani*. Likely his most indelible portrait on the War Memorial Opera House stage was Kutuzov in Prokofiev’s *War and Peace*. Plishka’s portrait highlighted the Russian Field Marshal’s wit and valor, a heroic individual within the massive, impersonal scale of war.



KRISTEN LOKEN

TAD TAUBE, philanthropist

A refugee turned real estate entrepreneur, philanthropist, and civic leader, Thaddeus “Tad” Taube channeled his success into carefully targeted philanthropy, advancing healthcare institutions, improving education and research, and enhancing cultural and community-centered organizations in the United States, Israel, and Poland. Tad and his wife Dianne’s deep friendship with San Francisco Opera began under Lotfi Mansouri’s leadership, and they have been devoted partners to the Company ever since. They have been at the forefront of advances that have propelled the Opera out into the world, with transformative investments in infrastructure that have kept the Company a beacon of innovation and access, making the naming investments in the Media Suite, the Atrium Theater, and underwriting the naming of the general director’s position. They have generously underwritten numerous productions that have advanced San Francisco Opera’s connection with new audiences through their support of the simulcasts to the ballpark and other initiatives. San Francisco Opera celebrates the enduring impact of a man who never stopped working to make possible a better world.



GEORGE WENDT/ALAMY

CHRISTOPH VON DOHNÁNYI, conductor

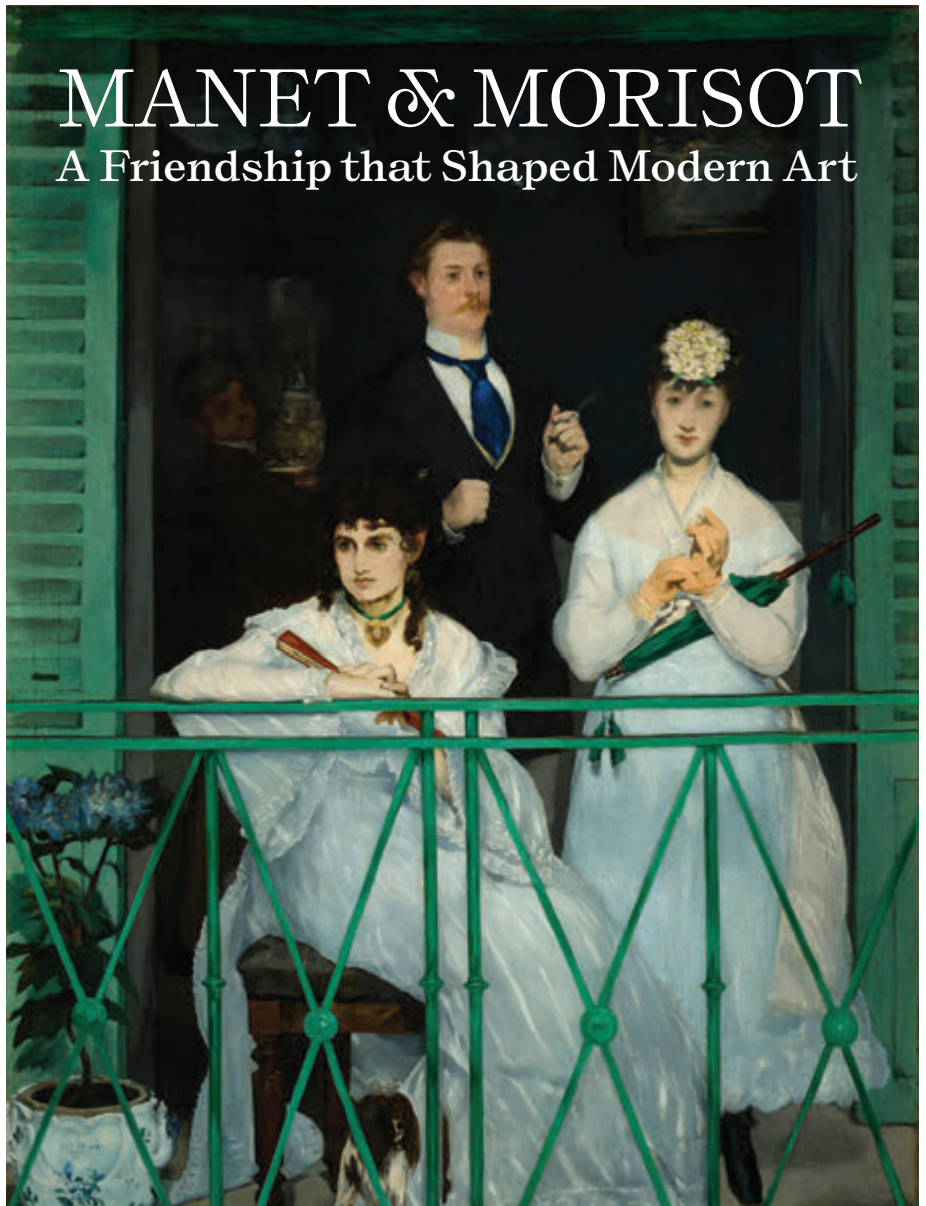
Throughout his career, Christoph von Dohnányi’s perfectionism on the podium sculpted powerful and resplendent performances. The German conductor enjoyed longstanding relationships with many elite orchestras, including the Cleveland Orchestra where he was music director 1984–2002 and London’s Philharmonia Orchestra where he was eventually named Honorary Conductor for Life. Dohnányi’s also formed significant partnerships in the Opera House. He made his 1971 San Francisco Opera debut conducting the early version of Berg’s unfinished *Lulu*, which he also famously recorded with second wife, Anja Silja, in the title role. Dohnányi returned in later seasons to lead works by Janáček and Strauss, including the Company’s 1989 new production of *Die Frau ohne Schatten*.

IN MEMORIAM CONTINUED

- **Sergei Aleksashkin**, bass from the Bolshoi Opera who portrayed Mendoza in Prokofiev's *Betrothal in a Monastery* (1998)
- **Roberta Alexander**, soprano, made one of her first American engagements in Conrad Susa's *Transformations* (1980) with San Francisco Opera affiliate Spring Opera Theater
- **George Burrows**, San Francisco Opera's marketing director from 1982–1984
- **Franz Grundheber**, baritone, performed Amfortas in the 2000 production of *Parsifal*, along with Mandryka in *Arabella* (1998) and Scarpia in *Tosca* (2001)
- **David Rendall**, tenor, appeared as Don Ottavio in *Don Giovanni* (1978) and Ernesto in *Don Pasquale* (1980)
- **Peter Seiffert**, heldentenor, sang the title role of Wagner's *Tannhäuser* (2007)
- **Peter Strummer**, bass-baritone, 14 roles between 1975 and 2006, including the dual role of Benoit and Alicindoro in *La Bohème* in three different seasons.

MANET & MORISOT

A Friendship that Shaped Modern Art



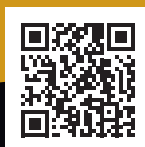
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Edouard Manet, *The Balcony* (detail), 1868–1869, Musée d'Orsay, Paris, Bequest
Gustave Caillebotte, 1894, © RMN-Grand Palais (Musée d'Orsay) / Sylvie Chan-Liat

Legion of Honor
museum

Finally, an email to
look forward to on a
Friday afternoon.

encoreplus.app/tgif

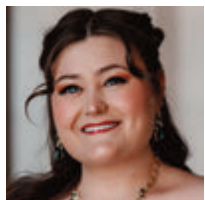


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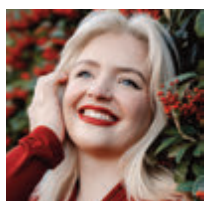
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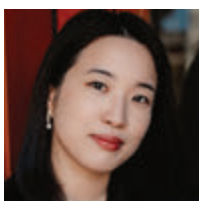
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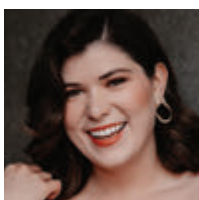
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KEY:

American Debut
* San Francisco Opera
Debut
† Current Adler Fellow
+ Merola Opera Program
Graduate
◇ Adler Fellowship
Graduate
■ Solo Dancer
Cover Artist

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Fabrizio Corona, Associate Chorus Master

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Andrew Thomas PardiniΩ	Crystal Kim
Wilford Kelly	Josephine Lee
Bojan Knezevic+ William O'NeillΩ	Liesl McPherrinΩ
William Pickersgill	Angela Eden Moser
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BASS CLARINET

Junghwan Lee↑

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Shawn Jones↑

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↓ Leave of absence

Σ Principal for one or more

Fall season operas

↑ Season Substitute

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Esther de Monteflores
Jamielyn Duggan↔
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Blanche Hampton↔
Emily Hansel
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Jessica Nguyen

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Marcos Vedovetto↔■
Sid Zhang

↔ Tenured

↓ Tenured Dancer
on Leave of Absence
□ Resident Corps
■ Solo Role

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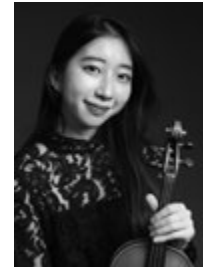
Jennifer Cho
First Violin



Dawn Harms
First Violin



Mariya Borozina
First Violin



Naoko Nakajima
First Violin



Barbara Riccardi
First Violin



Dian Zhang
First Violin



Leonid Igudesman
First Violin



Jennifer Hsieh
First Violin



Asuka Annie Yano
First Violin



Jeremy Preston
Principal
Second Violin



Martha Simonds
Associate Principal
Second Violin



Beni Shinohara
Assistant Principal
Second Violin



Leslie Ludena
Second Violin



Ka-Yeon Lee
Second Violin



Aya Kiyonaga
Second Violin



Craig Reiss
Second Violin



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Viola



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Viola



Stephen Goist
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Viola



Lindan Burns
Viola



Emily Liu
Viola↑



Elizabeth Prior
Viola↑



Thalia Moore
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Cello



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Principal Cello



Emil Miland
Cello



Jung-Hsuan Ko
Cello



Ruth Lane
Cello



Joseph Lescher
Principal
Bass



Jonathan Lancellotti
Associate Principal
Bass



Shinji Eshima
Bass

↑ Season Substitute

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Bass



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Stephanie McNab
Acting Principal
Flute & Piccolo



Susan Kang
Flute↑



Mingjia Liu
Principal
Oboe



Gabriel Young
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Oboe



Benjamin Brogadir
English Horn



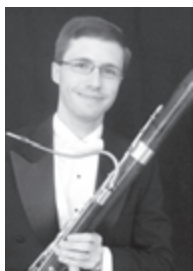
**José González
Granero**
Principal Clarinet



Junghwan Lee
Bass Clarinet↑



Rufus Olivier
Principal
Bassoon



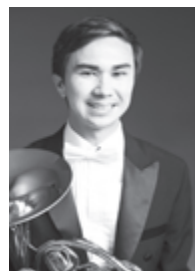
Daniel MacNeill
Bassoon



Shawn Jones
Bassoon/
Contrabassoon↑



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Phillip Palmore
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Logan Bryck
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Adam Luftman
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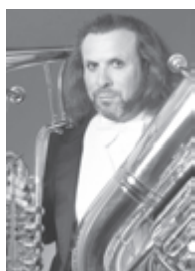
John Pearson
Trumpet



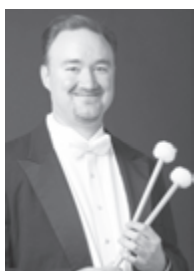
Michael Cox
Acting Principal
Trombone



David Ridge
Principal
Bass Trombone



Zachariah Spellman
Tuba



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Timpani



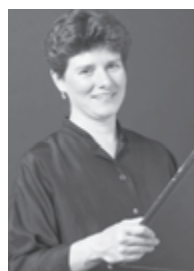
Patricia Niemi
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Percussion



Victor Avdienko
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Not pictured:

Heeguen Song (Second Violin)↑

Sunny Yang (Principal Cello)

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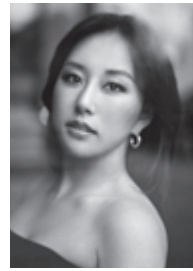
Kathleen Bayler
Soprano



Cheryl Cain
Soprano



Danielle Cheiken
Soprano



Hannah Cho
Soprano



Sara Colburn
Soprano



Crystal Kim
Soprano



Josephine Lee
Soprano



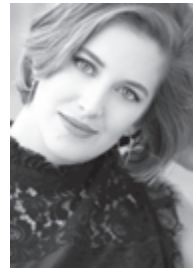
Liesl McPherrin
Soprano



Angela Eden Moser
Soprano



Elisabeth Rom Lucio
Soprano



Jesslyn Thomas
Soprano



Buffy Baggott
Mezzo-Soprano



Janet Campbell
Mezzo-Soprano



Edith Dowd
Mezzo-Soprano



Stella Hannock
Mezzo-Soprano



Silvie Jensen
Mezzo-Soprano



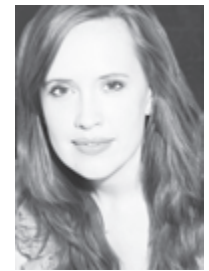
Sally Mouzon
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Sarah Nadreau
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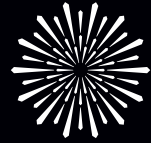
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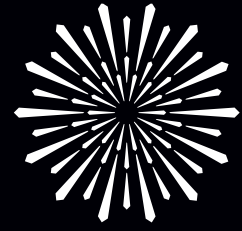
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Connecting Humanity through *The Monkey King*

BY GENERAL DIRECTOR MATTHEW SHILVOCK

At a time when life seems evermore defined by division, places that bring us together are increasingly important and sacred. Nature is one; the theater is another. Places that inspire awe remind us that we are a part of a larger ecosystem defined by the thing that connects us—our humanity.

This hunger for connection is why it is particularly exciting when a work like *The Monkey King* emerges. Not only does it bring us into a sense of shared humanity inside the theater, but its multiple layers of meaning connect us globally. *The Monkey King* is a part of a cultural bridge between Asia and North America that we at San Francisco Opera are proud to reinforce.

The Monkey King has been generating audience and philanthropic interest with an intensity matched only by the *Ring*, and I've been thinking a great deal about why this is so. For those who know *Journey to the West* (the late 16th-century epic from which *The Monkey King* is excerpted), this is a story with often deeply nostalgic roots: comic books and cartoons people grew up with; stories told to them by grandparents. For people new to *Journey to the West*, it is a wonderful joy to get to know this novel blending page-turning heroism with a deeply spiritual core.

I've been struggling to find Western equivalents that resonate across generations with such immediate appeal. *The Odyssey*, *The Lord of the Rings*, and *Harry Potter* all have elements but not quite the same kaleidoscopic appeal. The Monkey King is a character of infinite reinvention. His unique blend of power, irreverence, magic, and spirituality allows us to view him through many lenses. Like one of the 72 Earthly Transformations the Monkey acquires, he has the ability to split into a thousand versions of himself. Each one can mean something different but still be the Monkey.

This resilience of infinite reimagination makes Monkey a perfect operatic character for a global stage. He is at once archetypal myth, relatable rogue, and wise sage. He has the skills to take on gods and monsters, but at his core he is



CODY PICKENS

looking for safety, security, and acceptance. He is the superhero version of us, flaws and all.

We are hopeful that *The Monkey King* will journey west across the Pacific and play in opera houses in Asia, much as *Dream of the Red Chamber* (another of the four classics of Chinese literature) did when it went from San Francisco to Hong Kong, Beijing, Wuhan, and Changsha in 2017.

San Francisco is uniquely positioned to be a bridge of cultural understanding between Asia and the US. Not only are we one of the closest major US cities to Asia, the cultures of both continents are inextricably linked in the identity of this city. That synergy has been deeply felt here at San Francisco Opera over many decades. The first Chinese singer to make an international career, bass-baritone Yi-Kwei Sze (斯義桂), made his US debut in San Francisco as the King in *Aida* in 1950. San Francisco Opera was the first Western opera company to perform in China following the Cultural Revolution, when our affiliate Western Opera Theater toured to China, beginning an important relationship with the Shanghai Conservatory of Music and the legendary head of their Vocal Program, Madame Zhou Xiaoyan (周小燕).

Creating a canon of Asian and American-Asian works at San Francisco Opera is a natural extension of these long and deeply meaningful connections between our two continents: Amy Tan and Stewart Wallace's *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, Bright Sheng and David Henry Hwang's *Dream of the Red Chamber*, and now Huang Ruo and David Henry Hwang's *The Monkey King*.

We have plans for additional works in this vitally important canon, which we hope will continue both to deepen trust that our stage is a place where all in the Bay Area can connect, and introduce new audiences to these classics of world literature. Whether you grew up with Sun Wukong (The Monkey King) or are meeting him for the first time here at the Opera, *The Monkey King* is an opportunity to rise above the things that divide us and embrace the things that we share. 🍌

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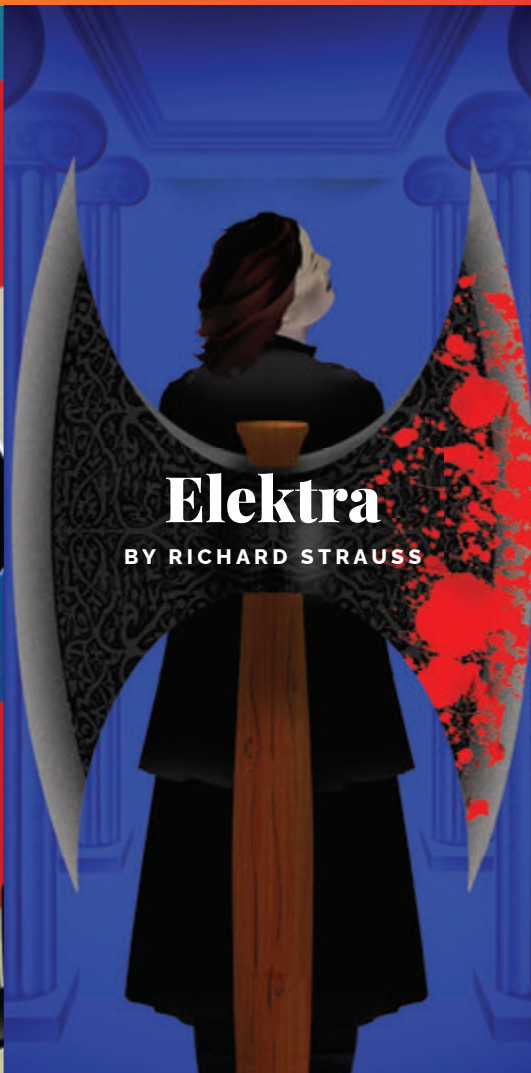
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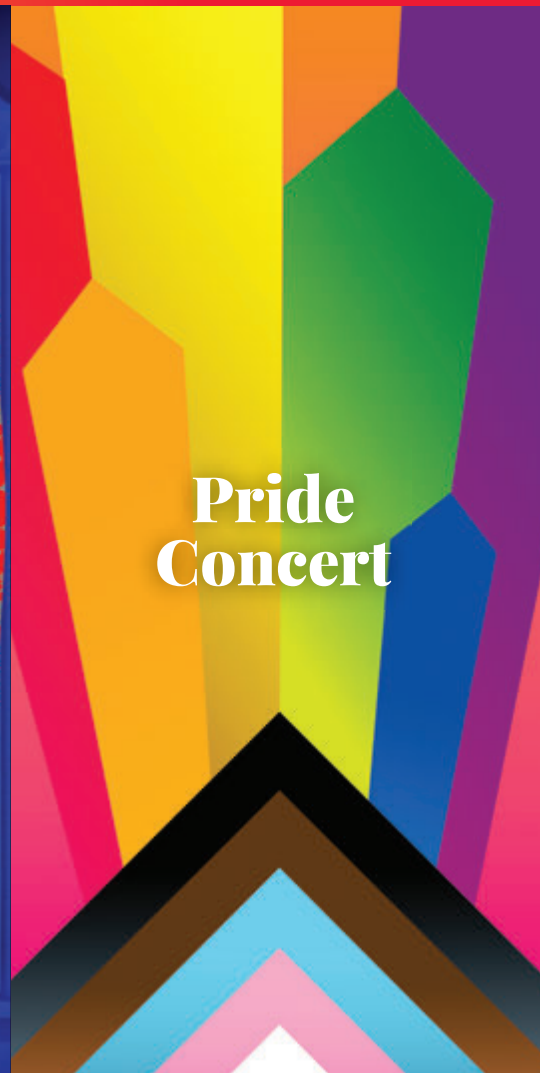
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