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LISA LU as LADY PRECIOUS STREAM

In THE REUNION – A PEKING OPERA

K.S. CHEN as Hsueh Ping-Kue

AN INTRODUCTION TO CHINESE OPERA

There are many forms of theatrical performances on the Chinese stage. It is unquestionable that the Peking opera has been the most popular of them all. The mention of its origin will evoke controversy. However, it is safe to say that the contemporary Peking opera as we know it today was fully developed in the Ching Dynasty, and its development reached its acme in the last part of the dynasty.

The Chinese theatre is highly abstract and conventional because the stage is void of décor. The intuitive imagination of the audience is demanded to comprehend what is in progress of the stage. The floor of the curtainless stage is a magic space which carries the actors with no change of scenery from Peking to Chang An where a market place is transformed into a majestic palace, or a horrifying battlefield into a moonlit romantic garden. All these are accomplished by the coordination of the performer's gestures and the dialogues with the help of music by the orchestra.

Symbolically, the lifting of the foot one after another indicates the crossing of a doorsill. To open a door, the actor/actress raises both hands and makes the pantomime of moving a bolt and pushing a door. When a general ascends a hill he simply steps on a chair or a table. A performer is understood to be on horseback if he/she brandishes a tasseled whip in the right hand. Conventions dominate the Chinese stage.

Roughly, there are five roles in the Peking opera, namely: Sheng, Tan, Chin, Mo, and Chou. Whereas there are subdivisions under each role, Shen means male, Tan means female, CHing means male with painted face, Mo means male role of less importance and Chou means clowns. As a general rule, the characters of the Ching type are manifested by the color and design of the painting on the face. Ordinarily, the black faced represents the brave just character, the red-face indicates the faithful and righteous, and the white-face type denotes the sly and crooked character.

With regard to costumes they are very colorful and beautifully designed. They are mainly based on ancient models. The predominance of yellow indicates the royal family. Honourable people wear red. The virtuous and kind wear blue. The brusque and straightforward are symbolized by black. However, since symbolism is the theme of the Chinese stage, no attempt should be made to require historical accuracy in the costumes.

One particular point has to be brought to the reader's attention, viz.: the relation between the movements on the stage and the music. Every movement on the stage is accentuated by the music of a specific instrument or the combination of several. We may sum up by saying that the Chinese opera is a composite theatrical art.

Synopsis of "Wu Chia Po" or "The Reunion"

An excerpt from the Peking Opera "Lady Precious Stream"

Hsueh Ping-Kuei, a former gardener at the home of Prime Minister Wang Yun, was by good fortune warmly received into the heart of the Prime Minister's third daughter, Wang Pao Chauan (Lady Precious Stream), and later married her. Her high-ranking father and rich relatives were so infuriated by this that she and her gardener-husband were ignored and insulted. She resolved to leave her father's magnificent mansion in order to live with Hsueh Ping-Kuei in a cold, desolate cave. She vowed that she would never set foot in the house of her parents again until one day she became powerful and rich.

Meanwhile a neighboring state in the west rebelled against the Imperial Government. In order to get rid of him, his father-in-law recommended Hsueh Ping-Kuei as the herald for the army. He was captured in battle by the Princess of the Western Kingdom. Instead of beheading him, the king, perceiving that his daughter was in love with him, gave her to him in marriage.

Upon the death of the king, Hsueh Ping-Kuei ascended the throne as the Prince Consort to the newly crowned Queen. After eighteen years he finally learned that his precious wife, Wang Pao-Chuan, was living in a cave in great poverty. He decided then to return and find her. When meeting her at the hillside, Hsueh suddenly became suspicious. He pretended to be Hsueh's comrade, bringing her a letter from her husband. Actually, it was only a ruse to test her loyalty. In spite of much flirtation and temptation Lady Precious Stream failed to succumb to his blandishments. Finally, Hsueh revealed his true identity and begged her forgiveness. After a separation of 18 years they were happily reunited.

LISA LU

Lisa Lu, born in Peking, comes of an illustrious family. Her mother, Li Kuei-fen, is renowned in China for her voice and dramatic ability in the Chinese opera. In addition to receiving the tutelage of her talented mother, Lisa Lu had the great privilege as a young girl of living for ten years under the same roof with her godfather, the celebrated Mr. Mei Lan-fang, the foremost Peking Opera singer who toured the U.S. in 1928 and Russia the following year. This association, especially at an early age, probably had something to do with her predilection for the opera and her special talents as a performer.

On leaving China, Lisa Lu spent a few years in Hawaii where she completed her education. Before making her debut as an actress on stage, in cinema and television here in America, she taught Chinese to military students at the School of Languages in Monterey, California. She is known, incidentally, for her superb command of Amandarin.

Last year she was given the Kin Ma award, as the best actress of the year in Taiwan, for her sensitive and restrained performance of "the virtuous widow" in the Chinese film "The Arch." This film, which enjoyed an unusual run in Paris, received unanimous praise from the leading French film critics.

Lisa Lu spent six months in Hong Kong last year working in the leading role of a spectacular Shaw Brothers' film called "The Fourteen Amazons," based on a legendary historical drama. Of late she has begun adapting a series of Chinese operas in a manner suitable for presentation as plays in the Western theatre. These adaptations will probably appear later this year in book form and also on stage on the West Coast.

Because of the scarcity of Oriental roles in Western theatre and film, and the reluctance of American producers to engage Oriental actors and actresses for these roles,

Lisa Lu has never really had the opportunity to reveal the scope of her varied talents to an American audience. Our renewed relations with China, particularly on the cultural level, may soon alter this unhappy situation. In which case our "Lady Precious Stream" will come forth in her own right.

Henry Miller

Celebrated author of

The Tropic of Cancer and The Colossus of Maroussi

K.S. CHEN

K.S. Chen was born into a family of scholars and artists. His father Chun-mou Chen was the foremost opera singer and an authority on Chinese opera. At the age of seventy he was appointed as the Peking Opera's Research Scholar for the national Dramatic Institute. He has revised many Chinese operas and recorded much in writing of what was formerly only transmitted from mouth to mouth.

By the age of fifteen Mr. K.S. Chen was already an accomplished musician, accompanying his father with the Ching Hu, the Chinese violin. He plays many other Chinese instruments equally well. He has such a sensitive ear that he is able to repeat whatever melody he hears, whether vocal or instrumental. Due to his father's influence, he is a master in the art of intonations, which is a very important element in Chinese

opera. His repertoire is one of the largest known.

CHARACTERS

Lady Precious Stream, Wang Pao-Chuan, the third daughter of Prime Minister Wang

Hsueh Ping-kuei, husband of Lady Precious Stream

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