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## China rising: Music of Chinese composers increasingly heard in U.S.

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A scene from "Paradise Interrupted," one of two operas produced by Spoleto Festival USA this year. JULIA LYNN PHOTOGRAPHY

Despite its name, Spoleto Festival USA is consistently international in its scope, presenting music every year in a variety of languages and from different periods.

But some years pay closer attention to one particular language or region. This year, for example, will showcase a string of productions by Chinese-born artists. These include the world premiere of the opera "Paradise Interrupted" as well as several smaller works by composer Huang Ruo; Shen Wei's modern dance company; and Tan Dun's Concerto for Orchestra, which will be performed during one of the Spoleto Festival Orchestra concerts.

Some contemporary Chinese works require that Western orchestras augment their musical resources.

"We occasionally have musical instruments that are not typically played for operas in this day and age," said Nigel Redden, the festival's general director. "In 'Paradise Interrupted,' we have some Chinese traditional instruments, like the pipa, as parts of an instrumental ensemble and have the opera sung in Mandarin. So I believe it's something that's going to intrigue our audience."

“Paradise Interrupted” is a Western opera inspired by Kunqu, one of the oldest forms of Chinese opera.

“It’s an aesthetic and an evolving genre that we want to be a part of,” said John Kennedy, conductor of “Paradise Interrupted” and the festival’s director of orchestral activities.

Jennifer Wen Ma’s set design, a form of installation art, is another highlight of “Paradise Interrupted.” The creative team has been able to wrap the seating at Memminger Auditorium around the stage in such a way that “audiences will have the same experience as the singers,” according to Huang Ruo. “I really appreciate Spoleto Festival for being open-minded to innovation and giving us huge freedom.”

Another Huang Ruo work, “The Lost Garden,” was presented in the festival’s Music in Time series. Kennedy, who conducted that 2002 piece as well, said he wanted to do “The Lost Garden” because it has the same theme as “Paradise Interrupted” — a garden — and because it represents the composer’s wide-ranging background.

“Through his musical language, Huang Ruo is representing a change in today’s world and artistic influences and impulses of now that take us into the future,” Kennedy said. “His work has a kind of cultural fusion, which is the manner of the world today.”

Bruce Hodges, a columnist for the Juilliard Journal and the Strad magazine, said music by Chinese composers likely will be heard more and more at Spoleto and throughout the U.S.

“As China’s influence grows, and more Chinese-born composers study in the United States, their music will reach a wider audience,” Hodges said. “Audiences, especially those interested in contemporary music, are naturally curious to experience new works by composers who represent new cultural influences. And contemporary music from other cultures, like France or Italy, has been available for a longer period of time. So perhaps China is playing catch-up.”

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