

VICTORIAN  
OPERA



# The Butterfly Lovers

## Education Resource





## Contents

<b>About this resource</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>About the work</b>	
Synopsis	4
Creative team	5
Cast, characters and voice types	6
The legend of <i>The Butterfly Lovers</i>	8
<b>The Arts – Music</b>	
What is opera?	9
Where did opera come from?	9
Voice types and singing styles	10
Interview with a singer, Cathy-Di Zhang	11
About the composer – Richard Mills	14
Interview with the composer and conductor	14
Orchestration	17
Activities	18
<b>The Arts – Drama &amp; Theatre Studies</b>	
About the librettist – Joel Tan	20
Interview with the librettist	20
About the director – Ivan Heng	23
Interview with the director	23
Activities	25
<b>The Arts – Visual Arts &amp; Design</b>	
Interview with the multimedia/set designer, Brian Gothong Tan	27
Set design renderings	29
Interview with the costume designer, Max Tan	31
Costume design renderings	33
Activities	35
<b>Appendix A</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>Appendix B</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>Appendix C</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Glossary</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>45</b>



## About this resource

This resource is designed for school students in Years 10-12. Activities can be used in the classroom alongside or separate to Victorian Opera's production of *The Butterfly Lovers*.

The activities provided in this resource align with the below Australian Curriculum Learning Areas:

- Music
- Drama
- Visual Arts

The table below outlines how the activities designed around each Learning Area align to the Australian Curriculum General Capabilities.

CAPABILITIES	Literacy	Numeracy	ICT	Critical and Creative Thinking	Personal and Social	Ethical Understanding	Intercultural Understanding
<b>Music</b>							
Activity 1	✓	✓		✓			
Activity 2	✓	✓		✓			
Activity 3	✓			✓	✓		
Activity 4	✓	✓		✓			
Activity 5	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
<b>Drama</b>							
Activity 1	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Activity 2	✓			✓	✓		✓
Activity 3	✓			✓	✓		✓
Activity 4	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓
Activity 5	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓
<b>Visual Arts</b>							
Activity 1	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓
Activity 2	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Activity 3	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Activity 4	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓

Activities for Years 11 and 12 have been done so in accordance with the Victorian Certificate of Education Study Design for:

- Music
- Theatre Studies
- Drama



## About the work

### Synopsis

A chorus of Divinity Spirits sets the scene for a story of desire and tragedy.

Zhu emerges into a powerful storm regretting his decision to allow his daughter, Zhu Yingtai to study at the Academy. Yingtai, dressed as a man, pleads with her Father to let her go. As the storm abates and sunrise beckons, Yingtai's Father blesses her departure with one condition - when he calls her, she must come back in haste.

Yingtai departs for the Academy. The journey is long. On her travels, she meets a fellow scholar, Liang Shanbo at a bridge by the crossroads. There is an instant attraction to one another. Welcoming each other's company, they agree to journey together to the Academy.

After many months of travel, the fellow scholars arrive at the Master's Academy. Shanbo and Yingtai greet the Master with recommendations from their respective Fathers to join the Academy. The Master questions Yingtai's anxious nature. Both Yingtai and Shanbo worry that the Master may not accept Yingtai into the Academy. Shanbo speaks up for Yingtai, telling the Master of Yingtai's great mind and desire for knowledge. The Master accepts Yingtai's Father's seal as her guarantee.

The two students are shown to their chamber where they share a bed. They swear brotherly love. As the seasons change, the students continue their learning under the Master's strict guidance. On a beautiful spring day, Yingtai and Shanbo play truant by the river. Under the heady spell of spring, the two begin flirting and declare their desire for one another's bodies before being interrupted by fellow students. On their return to the Academy, the Master intercepts Yingtai and tells her he has uncovered her secret. As Yingtai's spirit and intellect is rare, the Master agrees to allow her to continue her studies with a warning that she must not succumb to her feelings for Liang Shanbo. He reminds her that the academy is a place of learning, and that her duty is to her father and her future husband.





At Yingtai's family home, a rich merchant Ma Wencai, asks Zhu for his daughter's hand in marriage. Zhu agrees to the union and sends for his daughter.

As summer folds into autumn, Shanbo is confused as he struggles with his feelings for Yingtai. Yingtai is cold to him so as not to fail her Master's wishes; and she has kept up her disguise by washing and redressing as a man each night when Shanbo is asleep.

A Messenger arrives at the Academy to seek the return of Yingtai as the auspicious day approaches. The Master breaks the news to Yingtai that her Father has summoned her. The following morning, she leaves to return home. Grief stricken, Shanbo accompanies her to the bridge at the crossroads where they first met. Here, Yingtai insists they part.

Upon Yingtai's return to her Father's home, Ma Wencai attends the blessing of the union by the Fortune Teller. As the wedding is declared a perfect union, Yingtai feels trapped, gasping for air.

Shanbo arrives in the courtyard of the Zhu household, searching for his sworn brother Yingtai. He has travelled for weeks and seeing Yingtai, now dressed as a woman, asks her whether she is the twin sister. Yingtai tells him that her brother is away. As he turns to leave, Yingtai unveils her true identity to Shanbo. She tells him she is to be married and that they cannot be together. Yingtai begs him to leave.

Shanbo leaves, and returning to the crossroads, is overcome with grief and dies.

Yingtai and Ma Wencai's wedding day arrives. On the way to the ceremony, Yingtai sees the tomb of Shanbo. A terrible storm erupts as Yingtai breaks free from the procession, calling on the Heavens for Shanbo's grave to open and bury her.

As the storm abates, the two lovers are reunited, their souls transformed and whispered into the air. In the Divine realm, beyond this world and all suffering, they can forever be together.



## Creative Team



**Richard Mills**  
Composer &  
Conductor



**Joel Tan**  
Librettist



**Ivan Heng**  
Director / Set  
Designer



**Brian Gothong Tan**  
Multimedia / Set  
Designer



**Max Tan**  
Costume Design



**Jim Atkins**  
Sound Design

## Characters, cast and voice types



**Cathy-Di Zhang**  
Zhu Yingtai  
Soprano



**Meili Li**  
Liang Shanbo  
Countertenor



**Haotian Qi**  
Master / Father  
Baritone

## Chorus



**Kate Amos**  
Soprano



**Elizabeth Barrow**  
Soprano



**Sharkira Dugan**  
Mezzo Soprano



**Syrah Torii**  
Mezzo Soprano



**Shanul Sharma**  
Tenor



**Michael Dimovski**  
Tenor



**James Emerson**  
Baritone



**Stephen Marsh**  
Baritone

## The legend of *The Butterfly Lovers*

Even today, *The Butterfly Lovers* is one of the most well-known and popular stories around Asia. The story, more commonly known as *Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai* or *Liang Zhu*, most likely emerged as a local legend in Southeast China at the end of the first millennium and was passed down from generation to generation through oral tradition. The first written account appeared in around 700AD during the reign of Empress Wu Zetian in the Tang Dynasty. It was found in a volume of works that recorded the landscape and local cults of the Chinese Empire of the time. The legend appears as a short entry and only mentions the lovers' names and that they were buried together.

Because of its popularity it was often featured in regional drama adaptations and storytelling and each adaptation varied in plot line, role of the subsidiary characters and central meaning. As a result, these adaptations, which required a happy ending because of the social function of plays at the time, made lasting developments to the legend and changed how it is known today.

A longer version, featuring most of the story as it is now known appeared in the ninth century, with an emphasis on Zhu Yingtai's loyalty to her family and bravery. However the metamorphosis of the main characters into butterflies did not appear until the Ming Dynasty (1368 to 1644).

In 1920, it was selected as one of the four 'Great Folktales' during the rise of the Folklore movement, alongside *Meng Jiangnu*, *Buffalo Boy and Weaving Maiden* and *The White Snake*. As part of this process, a single version of each story was chosen and interpreted so that it would support the nation-building project being developed in China at the time.

In more modern times, the legend was subject to rewritings to relate to a modern audience and provide a contemporary meaning. It focused more on the characters of Zhu Yingtai and Liang Shanbo and the impact of the patriarchal system on love relationships.

The legend has been adapted and shared in a variety of forms both written and performed, including ballads, songs, tales and opera dramas. It has also been adapted for film, first in 1926, again in 1954 by the People's Republic of China and then in 1963 by the Shaw Brothers Studio in Hong Kong. The latter was the most successful motion picture and was reissued a number of times due to popular demand. In addition to these, a number of modern novels and television dramas based on the love story have also been developed.

*The Butterfly Lovers' Chinese Violin Concerto* is one of the most famous Chinese works of orchestral music. It was written in 1959 by two Chinese composers, He Zhanhao and Chen Gang while they were both studying at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music.

Victorian Opera's production of this work explores themes around the suppression of women under the patriarchal system and their familial obligation despite their personal desires in life. Zhu Yingtai is clearly a strong, intellectual woman who finds a way to receive education despite not being allowed to because of her gender.

The relationship she develops with Liang Shanbo while disguised as a man and the love they develop for each other is another theme explored in this production. This legend is a celebration of love between two people regardless of their gender or class and the transformation into butterflies at the end of the story represents how love finds a way.



## The Arts – Music

### What is opera?

Opera as a European art form has been in existence since the 1600s, and became especially popular in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Today there are many styles of opera performance, but they all have one thing in common – an opera is a play that is sung.

The predominant languages of opera are Italian, French, German and English.

The main difference between opera and music theatre is amplification: music theatre is usually amplified while opera is not. In addition, music theatre usually includes spoken dialogue as well as music and dance. Opera, on the other hand, uses recitative – a singing style designed to imitate natural speech.

### Where did opera come from?

The origin of opera can be traced back to the Ancient Greeks, who lived over 2,000 years ago. The advances in society that this sophisticated civilisation developed included the invention of a city-state (*polis*) resulting in a golden age of culture, music, art, poetry and drama, including beautiful sculpture, remarkable architecture and the creation of classical poetry such as the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* of Homer. Ancient Greece had a profound influence on the discovery and advancement of science, physics, maths, astronomy and geometry, producing the influential philosophers Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and Cicero, who approached the big questions of life often in a genuine scientific way, daring to question and challenge traditional conventions and prejudices of their age. The Ancient Greeks also loved the theatre, with playwrights including Sophocles, Aeschylus and Euripides writing enduring works that informed the future dramatic structures of playwriting.

In the following thousand years, much of the knowledge and skills established by the Ancient Greeks were lost, particularly in the sciences and arts. For example, the art in what we refer to the Middle Ages had lost some of the scientific application that had made Greek art and sculpture so lifelike. From about the 1300s, Italian scholars set out to rediscover many of the Ancient Greeks' innovations. This period was called the Renaissance, which translates literally as 'rebirth'. Founded in Florence, it marked a period of enlightenment and the rediscovery and study of culture, philosophy, art, architecture and science. During this era, highly influential artists contributed a vast wealth of knowledge. Some of which include musicians, philosophers, writers and mathematicians such as Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Botticelli, Raphael, Donatello, Galileo, Shakespeare, Erasmus and Copernicus. One art form the Renaissance scholars were particularly interested in was Greek theatre. The texts had survived time, but the performance practice indications had been lost. Scholars knew from writings by philosophers such as Aristotle and Plato that the plays were accompanied by music, and that this helped raise the emotional impact of the works. But how? What did the music do? How were the lines sung?

The Florentine Camerata, a group of thinkers and musicians from Florence, met regularly to determine how the musical accompaniment might have sounded and supported the text. They invented a new art form in which the dialogue in a play would be sung. They decided to call the new art form 'opera', which simply meant 'a work'. The first truly successful opera was called *L'Orfeo*. It was composed by Claudio Monteverdi and is still performed today.

Following the great success of this work, opera became popular all over Europe and then the world. The style of opera, and the way it was performed, developed over the centuries to reflect the culture of the time. At its height in the 1800s, opera was performed regularly in theatres in every major city.

## Voice types and singing styles

There are seven voice types in opera, each of which is defined by the range of notes they can sing and their vocal quality.

There are three female operatic voice types, although most operas only have soprano and mezzo-soprano roles.

- Soprano – the highest sounding female voice, with a vocal range from middle C up to the C two octaves above.
- Mezzo-soprano – slightly lower than the soprano, with a vocal range from the G below middle C to the A two octaves above.
- Contralto – the lowest sounding female voice and rarely used in opera today. The vocal range for this voice type is from the F below middle C to a high F one octave above.

There are four male voice types, although the countertenor voice is mainly used in operas from the Baroque period (1600-1750).

- Countertenor – the highest sounding male voice, with almost the same vocal range as a mezzo-soprano; the G below middle C to a high F one octave above.
- Tenor – a high sounding male voice, that usually takes the leading male role. The vocal range for this type is roughly from the C below middle C to the C above.
- Baritone – the middle sounding male voice with a vocal range from the second G below middle C up to the G above.
- Bass – the lowest sounding male voice, which has a vocal range from the E above middle C to the E two octaves below; however, some bass singers can sing lower.

This diagram illustrates where each voice type sits on a music stave.



There are further categories of voice, defining the kind of voice quality and the type of music they can sing. The composer will consider voice types to highlight the different characters – for example, to differentiate between a King and a Servant, or a Princess and a Witch.

A few of these are:

- Coloratura – a very high range with the ability to sing complicated parts with agility
- Dramatic – a heavy sounding, powerful voice
- Lyric – an average sized voice with the ability to sing long, beautiful phrases
- Heldentenor – the ‘heroic tenor’, a very big role that requires a powerful sound

Follow the links below to hear examples of what these voices sound like:

Classical female voices – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AIPFAww8X-U>

Classical male voices – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gRL7shs23Wc>



## Interview with a singer, Cathy-Di Zhang

### How long have you been a singer and what made you want to pursue singing as a career?

I would say that the start of my professional development began about fifteen years ago. I don't come from a musical family or a musical upbringing but I always loved singing and I wanted to take singing lessons. My high school singing teacher was Wendy Dixon, who used to be an opera singer at Opera Australia, and even though I wanted to be singing Britney Spears and musical theatre, she sort of forced me to sing a little bit of Australian art song and French melody. Because I was in high school, I had no idea and I just did what she said. Then she said, 'Look, Cathy, you've got a good voice for opera maybe you should go into that', so she really initiated my love for opera. But I then went on and pursued a degree in Finance and had a job as an auditor before studying singing. But yeah, I would say it's almost fifteen years now.

### What made you go back to singing after becoming an auditor?

I think I always wanted to do singing but I thought because I hadn't done it as a child it was probably too late, and it's too foreign, and my parents didn't let me. They were like, 'Get a real degree first, and if you still want to do it,' (which I did), 'you can do that later'. I'm really grateful to have that other degree up my sleeve as well.

### Were you familiar with *The Butterfly Lovers* story before being asked to perform in Victorian Opera's production?

I was but I didn't know it was called *The Butterfly Lovers*, I knew the Chinese name, *Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai*. And of course, growing up, my mum was playing *The Butterfly Lovers Violin Concerto* in the house all the time, which is so famous in China. So when I auditioned for it, I didn't know it was *The Butterfly Lovers* because I didn't know the English name for it. But yes, I think everyone in China is pretty familiar with the legend and definitely the violin concerto.

### You have been cast as Zhu Yingtai in this production. Can you tell us a little bit about your character?

I guess it's a kind of like a Chinese *Romeo and Juliet* story but at a time where women weren't allowed to have an education. Zhu Yingtai is from a family and she cannot enrol in education so she disguises herself as a boy and her dad gives her permission to go and study. So she's very thirsty for knowledge, for experience, for opportunity, but unfortunately, she also has a huge sense of duty to her family and for traditions. So in the end, that kind of takes over I think. But definitely ahead of her time in her search for wisdom.

### How do you think this work will resonate with today's audience?

I think we are taking a modern twist on it. I don't know Ivan's [Heng, the director] exact vision but I have heard a little bit about what his thoughts are and part of that is also focusing on the part of the story of the complex nature of human sexuality and gender. Because Zhu Yingtai disguises herself as a boy and she meets this boy, Liang Shanbo, on the way to the school and they form a very strong connection. It's described as a brotherhood but it develops into something more and so I guess we can explore things like sapiosexuality or falling in love with someone because of their mind or their personality regardless of gender. He doesn't know at that time that she's a woman, but they definitely have some sort of love connection. That'll be really interesting and I think originally in the legend, I don't think people thought of it in that sense, it was just a beautiful love story and going against social norms or the patriarchal society. But now there are all of these other questions that we can hopefully explore in the time that we have.

### How do you prepare for a role you're going to play? Take us through your process.

Well you know, ideally I normally go through the text first, the libretto, and if it's in a foreign language I will translate it all, the entire libretto, not just my part. In the first read through of the libretto lots of things will jump out instinctively and I think that's a really good base to spark some ideas before I look at or listen to any recordings. After I look at the text, I'll go and look at the notes, the music. Once it's in a good place, I normally take it to someone, a trusted coach or teacher and I vocally organise the role, musically and technically so I know what to do singing wise.

Then comes the characterisation and I think, being a modern young singer, we all have a very strong emphasis on the acting and the stagecraft. So thinking about how would this character inhabit her being physically? I

think that's a big thing. How does she walk? How does she blink? How does she interact with other people? Because I think it's really, really hard. Natural instinct is to look at a character and think, 'Oh, how would I feel, or how would I say that line, what would I think?', but it's not me, and when you do fall into that trap, every role that you do is the same because you're just playing yourself. So I try my best to really think of her as separate and try and be someone completely different. I think that's what takes the most time, is to just sit on it and think about the really, really small details of character work everyday.

Then of course getting into the room and putting it together with other people and getting ideas from the creative team. I have to say, I do listen to a lot of recordings and watch a lot of productions after I've learnt it just to get some sort of idea of what people have done already.

That's ideally the process but if you have time constraints, you're often jumping in and you just cram.

**Have you worked with any of the cast or creatives working on this production before?**

Yeah, I've worked with the rest of the cast. Qi Haotian who's singing the role of the father and also the Master, he's on tour with me now and last year we were on tour for *Carmen* so we know each other really well which is great. Also Li Meili who is playing Liang Shanbo, we've studied together since 2011 and we both studied at the Royal Academy of Music in London. That's when we were both at the very beginning of our professional journeys, well we were still students. It's really nice to work with people that you already know and old classmates. I don't know where they found him, out of all the people in the world, it's an ex-classmate of mine, very random, so I'm really looking forward to that. But I haven't worked with any of the creatives and it's my first time with Victorian Opera so that'll be nice.

**You've had some great opportunities studying overseas in London. Can you talk about this experience and how it's shaped you as a singer?**

Look, it was hard, but I think every young singer will go through that process. Also, because I didn't come from a musical background, I played the piano but I didn't do a Bachelor of singing or anything, so I was extremely behind on technical development, languages and stagecraft and all that, so it was a big eyeopener and a lot of playing catch ups. And cramming a lot into five years of study in London, but it was fantastic. I mean, it's so close to Europe and it really pushes you because you're doing auditions and competitions all the time. The Royal Academy of Music was fantastic. We would put on operas and The Times would come and review and it was just the most incredible place for a young musician learning and also teaching you how to deal with pressure. On all of my summers I went to Europe and studied in summer programs, in France, Italy and Germany and learnt parts of their culture and how things work in the opera world in those places. But yeah it was fantastic. I came back because of COVID, but it's actually really, really great to be back and all of that experience helped me get to where I'm at. But it was not easy.

**What advice would you give to any young singers looking to pursue a performance career? Is there anything you didn't know when you were younger that you wish you did?**

I didn't know how hard it was going to be.

**Would you have done it if you had known?**

No! So I'm glad I didn't know in a way. When I got to London, I was like 'Oh crap! But I'm enrolled now, I can't quit. This is really hard, I'm out of my depth.' It is really hard work and the hard work never stops as well. You've gotta be prepared to work really hard and without anyone telling you to because you're not going into an office 9-5, practically. You've gotta have the discipline to practice, to work, to do all of those things. But I think, to be honest, any young singer should just go out and live life. You know, travel, go to Europe and see where all these composers came from and what ignited their imaginations to write all these operas and experience different cultures. Languages are quite important, try to learn one of the European languages at least. Fall in love, fall out of love, go to that street party that someone random has invited you to. Any experience that you can have can only help you interpret music later on in life.

I think the other thing I wished I knew a bit earlier is that the goal is not to be a good student. I think I was always good at studying and I thought I excelled in an institution and all those structures, but that's really missing the point of being a singer or a performer later on in life. You can from quite early on say, 'This is what I wanna say, and this is what I wanna do', and it should be different to what everyone else is doing even though everyone will tell you that you should do things in a certain way. I think all young singers have to take control of their own careers at some point and what they want to do with it. And that's what will give you a career at

the end of the day, is always having something to say. But that does mean though that it is hard work, that you have to live and breathe it and there's no instruction manual, but just go out there and be yourself. Of course that also comes with age and experience, that sort of confidence in what you have to give to the public. But you can start doing that and developing that as early as possible really, you don't have to apologise for being yourself.



## About the composer – Richard Mills

Internationally recognised composer Richard Mills, AM, pursues a diverse career as composer, conductor and artistic director, with an extensive discography of orchestral works including his own compositions.

Currently Artistic Director of Victorian Opera, and Senior Fellow, Faculty of Music, University of Melbourne, Richard has been Artistic Director of the Adelaide Chamber Orchestra and West Australian Opera, Director of the Australian Music Project for Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra and Musica Viva's Composer of the Year. His recording of the film music of Franz Waxman with the QSO was awarded the *Preis der Deutschen Schallplatten Kritik* in 1992.

This year Richard conducts *Elektra*, *The Butterfly Lovers* and *La Cenerentola* for Victorian Opera, and *Voss* for State Opera South Australia.

Recent highlights include the world premiere of his Christmas oratorio *Nativity* with Adelaide Symphony Orchestra, *The Pearlfishers* and *Parrwang Lifts the Sky* for Victorian Opera, the ASO at Adelaide Festival and *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* for State Opera South Australia.



### Interview with the composer and conductor

#### How did *The Butterfly Lovers* come to be part of Victorian Opera's 2022 season?

Well, it's a long story. I first became aware of Ivan Heng in the late '90s at a Melbourne Festival in which he played Emily in *Emily of Emerald Hill*. I thought he was the most remarkable practitioner of theatre. Several years later, Jeff Street who was running the Festival on the Bay in Singapore phoned me for some advice and I said, 'Oh do you know Ivan Heng? I thought he was a remarkable artist. I'd really like to meet him', and as it happened Ivan was in Melbourne on business sometime in the fairly near future and we managed to meet. So he invited me to come up to Singapore which I duly did. We met and we talked about the possibility of working together with our two companies and this was the result, it was Ivan's suggestion and Joel Tan was Ivan's suggestion as a librettist. Joel's done a wonderful job.

#### Were you familiar with the legend before the idea to stage it was discussed?

Well not really except it's a story on the Willow patterned plates. You see the bridge and the two butterflies, or the two birds as they become. So it's sort of familiar.

#### Can you talk about the working relationship you have with the librettist? As the composer, what do you need the librettist to consider so that you're set up properly when you begin to compose?

Well Joel had never written a libretto before but I got him reading the Giacosa and Illica libretto from *La Bohème*, the Hofmannsthal libretti for Strauss, and he's a very, very skilled writer. He soon cottoned on to what was necessary, was really good to work with and very helpful, and so he came up with a really beautiful text. It's a very fine poem.

#### What sort of atmosphere or sound have you tried to create for *The Butterfly Lovers* and what type of compositional techniques have you used to do so?

The basic, if you like. The compositional technique that's most important is harmony because the notes all have to mean something. They have to be part of the musical argument because there's a very small orchestra and it's got the two Chinese instruments, the pipa and the dizi, so every note in the score has to really earn its place. There's a lot of harmonic subtext, a lot of procedures. There's a lot of use of the pentatonic scale but not in a really obvious way, it's subsumed into a more complex harmonic language. There's another chord that's built from layers of fifths which opens the work, I call it the 'Earth and Heaven' chord, and of course, that's very important. It's got to do with the idea of vastness, of the horizon, of the union of earth and heavens, but also transformation because the fifths generate transformation. That music is at the very beginning with the storm that opens the opera and it comes back later when the storm recurs and the whole metamorphosis occurs of the two lovers. So it's there subliminally all the time.

As I say, there's a lot of subtext and the play out of the relationship is enacted through a lot of harmonic flux, which becomes quite complicated.

**In this work, you've composed for two Chinese instruments, the dizi and pipa, which I believe you've never composed for before. Can you tell us a little bit about the two instruments, what you learnt composing for them and why you wanted to include them in the orchestration?**

Well Ivan wanted them. I found it very difficult, I have to say. So the way I solved my problem with them is I treated them as a character, the image of ancestral authority, and that's the way they're used. They're very limited instruments, I mean they've got their own beauty, but you've got to really limit what you do for them because they're very pure and they do certain things very beautifully.

**Did you have to build your orchestration around them?**

Sort of, well I mean, they're easy to overpower so you've got to be careful where you use them. One interesting thing about them is that really pure sound, you can use a lot of bitonal elements. For example, at the beginning of scene four, you've got a situation where it's a recurrence of winter again and so you have this kind of pentatonic sound in the orchestra. So you're using quite simple harmonies but you've got a polymode, the pipa in one mode and the dizi in another mode, which produces a kind of tension which you then pick notes common to the mode to resolve it.

**Can you talk us through your composition process?**

Well you start at the beginning with first ideas. The first idea I got was that chord, which comes from the fourths in the pipa and the layered fourths and the opera kind of erupts from that.

The opera has a lot to do with shifting. The story is about the suppression of women, about the commodification of women, it's a plea for the dignity of women, women to be treated as people with their own right and their own agency, and they're own capacity for destiny and how that must be respected. And so, in this hideous patriarchal society, where women are simply controlled like cattle, I mean they're commodities, Yingtai wants to be educated, she wants knowledge, she wants to learn. She achieves that, she's in the academy, but of course she meets Shanbo on the way. They become friends and then not lovers in a physical sense because the relationship as man and man is never consummated, and they find it very confronting and very difficult to understand. Then, when the relationship can be consummated, where Shanbo travels to Yingtai's ancestral home where she's summoned home from the academy to an arranged marriage, because of the Confucian order and Yingtai's familial party, she has to dismiss Shanbo who dies, who is swallowed up by the earth. Then she breaks out of this repressed thing of being dressed up with make up and finery, and throws herself into his grave and then of course they are transmuted into butterflies.

**What does the role of the conductor entail within the context of an opera?**

Well it depends on the conductor. A conductor is a teacher, a mentor, a guide, and has to engineer the performance. But a conductor has to have an intellectual and artistic authority. Keeping the performance together is the last, that's the tip of the iceberg. The whole shape, the whole musicality, the whole rhetoric, every part of speech, every aspect of the language, musical and verbal, is the conductor's business. And balance.

**What do you do to prepare when you're conducting an opera?**

Just study, that's all you do. Study, study, study.

**Is there anything you look for in the score?**

No, you just learn the score at the piano and then if it's really complicated, like *Elektra*, you have to actually go through it in real time to get the rhythms. There are subliminal rhythms in every opera, I mean in *Elektra* it's a broad two, which is inexorable though the opera, I mean it manifests in different ways, and the same with *The Butterfly Lovers*, is really this fast-moving mercurial pace that opens the opera which is there being transformed the whole time.

**Why did you want to become a composer and what did you do to get there?**

It just was an appetite I guess, it's just like you want food. I just felt the need to do it. I wanted to do it, I had music inside me and it wanted to come out. I don't know. I'd advise anyone against it, it's a terrible life.

**What would you have done if you didn't do music?**

Oh anything. I mean, music's a very hard life and writing music is one of the hardest of all. It's the physical labour of writing any long piece is enormous. It just takes time, I mean, hours at the desk actually physically

putting the notes on paper. It takes time. And for a piece that is ninety-five minutes long, there are a lot of notes, even though it is a small orchestra. In a way I found this even harder than writing a conventional opera with a conventional opera orchestra. Because every note has to earn its place and it's very tricky.

**Finally, what advice would you give to any aspiring composers or/and conductors?**

Study your craft. Conductors should be able to play an instrument very well, preferably at a professional standard, and a keyboard as well. They should be able to play an orchestral instrument as well as the keyboard at a level. I was an orchestral principal and I played piano certainly well enough to coach professionally and not do concerts anymore.

Then you need to be able to arrange, you need to have a complete working knowledge of the orchestra. Then you have to have knowledge of historical performance practice; an understanding of structure, of architecture; an understanding of musical cultures and of national styles; an understanding of program building; an understanding of opera, of languages, and all the secrets of the human voice. There is much to know. I mean there is a formidable amount to know and my advice to anyone who wants to work as a conductor is to become involved with opera because opera is the mother of conductors, it has always been so, because it deals with breath and the human voice. It deals with pacing, it deals with balance, it deals with shaping, drama, everything, so it's the mother of conductors, so that's where, if you want to become a conductor you should work in opera.

## Orchestration

The orchestration for *The Butterfly Lovers* consists of twenty musicians and is made up of the instruments listed below.

Instrumental family	Instrument	
Woodwind	Clarinet in Bb Clarinet in A Dizi	
Strings	Violin Viola Cello Contrabass Harp Pipa	
Keyboard	Piano Celeste Synthesizer	
Percussion	Xylophone Vibraphone Marimba Glockenspiel Piccolo side drum Temple blocks Woodblocks	Large bell tree Suspended cymbals Chinese cymbals Gongs Tom toms Bass drum Tam tam

Included in this orchestra are two traditional Chinese instruments: the dizi and the pipa.

The dizi is a bamboo flute, originally called the *hengchui* (literally ‘horizontal blow’). It was renamed as the *hengdi* (‘horizontal flute’) before finally being named the dizi. The dizi has been around for over 2,000 years and is one of China’s oldest and most well-known instruments possessing a very clear and resonant sound. It was often used to accompany folk music and also featured in musicals and operas. It is traditionally made of bamboo and has six finger holes, a hole to blow the air through as well as one hole for the dimo, a thin membrane from the interior of a particular bamboo variety which creates the instrument’s distinctive buzzing sound.

The pipa is a plucked string instrument and is one of the most common instruments found in a Chinese orchestra. During the Sui and Han dynasties the term pipa referred to any instrument that required strings to be plucked. The term pipa is made up of two Chinese characters - pi and pa - that describe how the instrument is sounded. The right hand plucks the string towards the front, creating the pi sound, while plucking the string toward the back creates the pa sound. While it is a permanent fixture in Chinese orchestras, it was established in Asia Minor over 2,000 years ago which is why counterparts of the instrument, such as the mandolin and lute, can be found in Central and Western Asia.



Image 1: Dizi  
(on left)  
Image 2: Pipa  
(on right)





## Music – Activities

### Activity one: Rhythmic dictation

Clap the below rhythm from the Violin 1 part from *The Butterfly Lovers* orchestral score to your students and ask them to dictate the rhythm only. Give your students the first note value. Students can have up to four listens.



### Activity two: Melodic dictation

Play the below melodies from the *The Butterfly Lovers* orchestral score to your students and ask them to dictate the melody only.

Give your students the time signature and first note and note value. Students can have up to six listens per melody.

#### Melody 1

Time signature: 4/4



#### Melody 2

Time signature: 3/4



### Activity three: Post-performance discussion

After watching a performance of Victorian Opera's *The Butterfly Lovers*, have a class discussion considering the below questions:

- How would you describe the style of the music in this opera?
- How did the composer utilise the different elements of music across the vocal and orchestral parts in this work?
- Before watching the performance, did you have any idea of what the music might sound like and if so, did what you hear match your expectations? If not, how was it different?
- The action in the opera takes place across the different seasons. Do you think the music score represented the seasons? If so, describe some of the characteristics that jumped out.
- What did you like and dislike about the music and why?





## Music – Activities

### Activity four: Analyse the score

*The Butterfly Lovers* opens with a storm.

Look at the excerpt of the orchestral score found in Appendix A on pages 36-37 of this resource and list some of the characteristics and elements of music the composer has used to depict the storm.

### Activity five: Compose a melody

Compose a 16-32 bar melody to accompany the action on stage at the beginning of scene five.

The libretto for this scene is provided in Appendix B on pages 38-39 of this resource. The melody can be for any instrument and you can choose the time and key signatures that you prefer.

Then, play your melody to your classmates and describe how the libretto inspired your musical ideas, if at all.

## The Arts – Drama & Theatre Studies

### About the librettist – Joel Tan

Joel Tan is a Singaporean playwright based in London and Singapore.

Recent work in the UK includes *No Particular Order* at Theatre503; *When The Daffodils* at the Orange Tree Theatre; *Living Archive* at the Royal Court; *Ghosts in the Blood* for Audible UK; *Overheard*, and *Augmented Chinatown* with Chinese Arts Now. He is under commission with the Royal Court, Headlong Theatre, and the Almeida Theatre.

In Singapore, his plays have been produced by leading theatre companies like Checkpoint Theatre, Wild Rice, and Pandemonium, and several are available in a collection, *Joel Tan Plays Volume 1*, published by Checkpoint Theatre. He is a Creative Associate with Centre 42's New Writing Development Programme, and runs its Professional Development Residency for playwrights.

Upcoming work includes the opera *The Butterfly Lovers* at Victorian Opera, Melbourne in October 2022, and a new commission at the Royal Court Theatre, London.

His play *Love in the Time of the Ancients* was a finalist for the 2019 Papatango Prize, and *No Particular Order* was shortlisted for Theatre 503's 2018 Playwriting Award. Joel was one of the 503 Five in residence at Theatre 503, and was part of the 2020-2021 Royal Court Writers Group. He was an Associate Artist with London's Chinese Arts Now and Singapore's Checkpoint Theatre.

Joel also works inter-disciplinarily, and has collaborated with visual artists, poets, musicians and dancers as a writer, director and dramaturg.



### Interview with the librettist

#### **You're a playwright by trade. Have you written an opera libretto before?**

No, this is my first libretto. But I have written lyrics for musicals, and Wild Rice, which is the company that Ivan Heng runs, has got me to do a bunch of pantomimes before so I'm familiar with working with music and writing lyrics and characters that break into song. But there's something about the libretto, it's quite different to that. I think the poetic and lyrical intensity of the libretto is a pretty fresh experience and I was really excited to do it.

#### **Would you do it again?**

I think so, yeah, it was fun. When I was much younger I started writing poetry before I ever got into writing plays and I think there's something here about the merging of those two forms I find quite satisfying and exciting. I'm also a classically trained musician so I really enjoy classical music. I think what was very exciting about this was relinquishing a lot of the dramaturgical thinking to Richard, the composer. In a play, on a line-by-line level, you have so much control over time and space as a playwright, particularly time I think, and how time unfolds in the work. But in the libretto all of that is determined by the composer. The shape, the arc, the tempo and the drama of the thing is determined by the composer. I've always just thought of the librettist as creating a dramatic structure for the work on a literary level, providing some of the key literary images and sounds. I think that provides kindle I suppose for the composer to explore the story musically. But I really enjoyed that because it means writing with more economy and writing poetry really more than writing a play. That was a really satisfying experience.

#### **So where did you start then? Did you build the story first with how you wanted to portray it and then fill it in?**

It's that thing of how this story, *The Butterfly Lovers*, is a relatively well-known story. I definitely knew versions of it and even before I started work, Ivan, Richard and I had talked roughly about aspects of the story that excited them and us the most. So, the broad strokes of the story were pretty much already there. Richard and I met a couple of times when he was in Singapore, I think in 2016 or 2017, just to hammer out what we found most moving and exciting about the story, which arcs we wanted to draw out and which scenes from the original story we thought were most compelling. Bits that we needed to fill in to sort of make it more coherent or give it a more operatic shape. Then I went away to write it and Richard reviewed a couple of drafts of the

libretto, gave some notes, and then you know, we repeated that process a couple of times and we ended up with the libretto. But it was a pretty close working relationship with Richard.

**Did you do any research before beginning on the libretto?**

Yeah I wanted to find some of the earlier printed versions of it. This was a long time ago so I don't remember what I specifically did, but I definitely sought out a bunch of early versions of the story. The thing about this is that the story was mostly passed down orally I think and written versions are all relatively recent and there are slight variations in each one. But that was the bulk of the research I did, just reading some of the earliest published versions of the story.

Beyond that, I think a lot of the research was sort of emotional I guess. Just getting into the head of these characters, Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai who are both so constrained and confined in their own ways by social mores and conventions. That's a big theme in the libretto and obviously something I relate to as a queer person living in Singapore. So, I think, once I started writing, it felt like I was just researching aspects of my own life a little bit.

**So you've spoken a little bit about how you worked with Richard [the composer]. How closely did you work with Ivan [the director] throughout the development of the libretto?**

Ivan was there at the earliest stages to give a sense of what inspired him about the story and we had a couple of meetings very early in the process where we just talked through some stage images that we thought were pretty compelling. Some stage ideas that we knew we wanted in the libretto before I even started writing it. That helped with how I shaped the libretto by really making me think about the theatricality of it and how it would live on stage, which is pretty important because you get so caught up writing all this compressed lyric, I had to remind myself that this needed to be theatrical in nature and to create opportunities for theatrical storytelling as well. So I ended up putting on a bunch of different hats doing this libretto.

**You mentioned before that when you write plays you have more space and time to play with and when you read a libretto the words are set out in a really certain way. Is that to do with the rhythm that it might be set to in the music? Do you have to think about that? How do you come up with the line?**

That's such a good question! I think when I was writing it I definitely had a sort of, I wouldn't say there was a rhythm in my head, but that's the sort of stanchion to it. I think I was writing primarily in a kind of free verse and the only sort of structure I knew to give it was, 'Ok, this is an aria, this is a duet, this is a recitative', and those sorts of big structures help. But on a line level, I think I would have written it if I were writing a dramatic monologue in free verse I guess, and that's how it ended up being set on the page. Rather than conventional dialogue, which is how I would have done it if I were writing a play.

**The thought behind that process and how you go about it is so interesting because it's not something you would necessarily think about if you don't have any experience in writing plays or librettos. But then, I guess that relationship between you as the librettist writing the text and then what the composer will do with it is important.**

Yeah, I mean to be fair, Richard did come back in some of the earlier drafts and said, 'This is too long', which is to be expected I guess. A lot of the process was me learning, 'Oh, ok, yeah actually this line literally only needs to be two words long.' And that was quite liberating in a way, to know that I don't actually have to do all the story telling and that you can trust the composer. I think learning to trust that the music will do so much of that work and with a composer as brilliant as Richard, as it's turned out, that faith is not misplaced.

**How long have you been a playwright for and how did you get into it?**

I guess I've been writing plays for about eleven years now. I started when I was at university, in the third or last year of my university degree here in Singapore and I took a playwrighting course with a playwright called Huzir Sulaiman, who later went on to become a mentor and a collaborator. But at the end of that course, the play I'd written, he sent it onto to Wild Rice as it turns out and then they put it on which was my professional debut in 2011. Since then, I've just been hustling, you know and I've been doing it for eleven years now but that's how it started.

**Did you always have an interest in plays and theatre as a younger person?**

No! It's so bazaar. I can count on one hand the number of plays I'd seen before I took that course, which is strange I think. You know, I was never bought up with theatre and I rarely went to see it but then when I was

taught the form, something about it really excited me. I think I've always enjoyed writing dialogue and creating characters. That was the starting point for me, just really enjoying that aspect, the craft of it. It's grown to mean different things to me now but I think when I met the form I was so electrified by it that I thought, 'Oh this is the thing', and it turns out it was true.

**What advice would you give to anyone considering a career as a playwright?**

I think it would be to not be afraid of the theatre and the form. I think there's something about it that can feel very intimidating but the theatre should not feel intimidating or out of reach. I think it's primarily a community form no matter how posh it gets. I think the thing people sometimes forget is that a big part of the theatre depends on the impulses and desires of playwrights. So I think my biggest advice for anyone who wants to start out is to know what about the theatre you're seeing you find somehow dissatisfying or lacking and in that gap I think you'll find the kind of place that satisfies you and that you would then want to write. I think it's to draw on that satisfaction, to draw on the things that excite and energise you and obviously the stories that you want to tell. And to believe that they deserve space on that stage. I think that belief is really important.

## About the director – Ivan Heng

Ivan Heng is one of Singapore's most prominent and dynamic creative personalities. In a pioneering career spanning three decades, Ivan has directed, acted and designed many landmark Singapore theatre productions, which have been performed in more than twenty cities around the world.

Ivan founded Wild Rice in 2000. Under his leadership, the company has reached out to an audience of more than a million people, and is today at the vanguard of creating theatre with a distinctive Singaporean voice.

In 2013, Ivan was awarded the Cultural Medallion, Singapore's highest cultural honour. He has a law degree from the National University of Singapore, and trained at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (RSAMD).



### Interview with the director

**In my interview with Richard Mills, he mentioned that you chose the story of *The Butterfly Lovers* for this collaboration. Why did you want to stage this story?**

Richard and I have been talking about collaborating with each other for years – way back in 2015, he gave me carte blanche to direct any opera of my choosing with Victorian Opera. I very quickly decided against staging an existing opera in the Western canon. I thought it would be more meaningful for us to create something new together, to collaborate on a truly intercultural production that would speak to both our audiences in Singapore and in Melbourne.

I selected *The Butterfly Lovers* because it is one of the four great folktales of China, as popular and beloved as *Romeo and Juliet*. For centuries, this story has inspired artists across Asia, who have created multiple films, Chinese operas and concertos centred on the love story between Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai. To my knowledge, this iconic romance has not been adapted into an English-language opera – until now!

**What are some of the themes that will be explored in this production of the work?**

This story has been told for over 1,300 years – it is a folk tale whose earliest written record can be traced to the late Tang Dynasty, around 700AD. Great stories survive because they remain relevant even as society changes and evolves over the centuries, and *The Butterfly Lovers* is no different.

The themes it explores still resonate today: from feminism and the rights of women to be educated and valued on the same level as men, to how love can transcend barriers like gender, class, family and societal expectations. Ultimately, the love between Shanbo and Yingtai transcends even the physical limitations of their bodies, approaching something far more profound and spiritual.

For all these reasons and more, this story has stood the test of time, and I think audiences in Melbourne – whether this is a story they have known all their lives, or this is the first time they will be encountering it – will identify with our protagonists, their inner struggles and the ways they try to survive and defy the society in which they live.

***The Butterfly Lovers* is a story centuries old and some of the themes that it originally dealt with are not as prominent, particularly for Australian audiences. Will you modernise the action on stage to make it more relevant to modern day audiences and if so, in what way?**

As I've just explained, I believe this age-old story has, in and of itself, always been relevant to modern-day audiences. But, in our version, we do want to push its narrative implications further as well, to explore what exists largely as subtext in more conventional adaptations of this epic romance.

In the original folktale, Yingtai must disguise herself as a man to pursue higher education – and it is in the guise of a man that she meets Shanbo, an impoverished scholar who never doubts her gender identity or presentation in all their years of studying together. Almost all versions of this story depict Shanbo as obtuse when it comes to romance; Yingtai drops many hints that she is female and has fallen in love with him, but he has no idea and only realises he reciprocates her love when the truth is plainly revealed.

We thought it would be more interesting to explore this story by actually confronting the concepts of gender and sexuality raised by the central romance – instead of shying away from its implications that, on some level, Shanbo must have been falling in love with Yingtai all along, despite believing that she was a man. This is not a



simplistic heteronormative love story; it dwells in the grey areas between hetero- and homosexual relationships, between physical attraction and spiritual love.

So, in our version, we have invested more time and energy in trying to understand Shanbo's perspective – to really examine why and how he fell for his best friend and classmate, to explore what this means in terms of the story's relationship with sexuality and gender. This has impacted all of our creative decisions. Richard Mills, who composed the score, struck upon the brilliant idea of casting a counter-tenor as Shanbo, which underscores the very ideas and issues we are tackling.

**What sort of research and preparation do you do in your role as director before you begin rehearsals?**

I watched many existing adaptations of the tale, including Chinese operas and films. I read a couple of academic analyses of the story. And I did some refresher classes with my Chinese Opera teacher, Gordon Choy.

**What role, if any, do you think opera and theatre as art forms play in teaching people about different cultures and customs or even the different lives people lead?**

At the most basic level, making theatre and making opera is about telling stories. Storytelling is an act of empathy – it's how we learn about ourselves and others. It is and always has been one of the most effective ways in which we can make big, difficult, challenging concepts relatable and understandable. So it is critical for us to share our stories with one another, and I am delighted to have this opportunity to work so closely with Victorian Opera and Richard to tell a story that might not be as familiar to audiences in Melbourne.

**How, if at all, does directing an opera differ to directing a theatrical work? Does your process differ?**

My job as a director is to tell a compelling story and, in that context, it's not really all that different. The challenges that we face are less to do with the fact that *The Butterfly Lovers* is an opera, and more because this is a brand-new piece of work. There are no precedents for it, and so we must create them.

On that count, I am thrilled to be working with every member of our creative team to bring our collective vision from the page to the stage. Richard's grand, passionate music pairs so beautifully with the libretto by Joel Tan, one of Singapore's finest young playwrights. Together, they give voice to the journey of the characters. We've had a lot of fun designing this show as well – we're keeping to an essentialist set design, with a largely bare stage rooted in the Chinese opera tradition. Brian Gothong Tan's multimedia design will do more than set the scene; it's another way to provide insight and a counterpoint to what is unfolding on stage.

**What drew you to the world of theatre and to becoming an actor and director?**

I am, first and foremost, a storyteller. I have always enjoyed it, and stepping on stage for the very first time in my youth was when I realised I was truly at home. On a stage, I feel understood, and seen. And in the theatre, I have always found a sense of community and belonging.

**What advice would you give to anyone interested in directing as a career?**

Read. Watch. Observe the world around you. Creating a live show – be it theatre or opera – is one of the most collaborative of all art-forms. The director's job is to bring all the disparate elements together into one cohesive whole. You have to build and inspire a community, so you must always be open, humble and passionate in working with the people who are a part of the village dedicated to creating your show with you.



### Activity one: Opera through the ages

Write a 1,500 word essay that analyses the role of opera and the function it served society as a performing art form.

Pick an era to research and write your essay on and consider how opera was relevant to audiences during this time. Then select two operas from this era to analyse in your written work.

Study the librettos of the operas you choose to identify their major themes. Then find a recording of the opera and discuss how the production you chose explores the themes on stage and whether or not it challenges its audiences.

Finally, if you choose to look at operas from before the twenty first century, discuss how they might or might not still be relevant to modern day audiences.

### Activity two: Stage a scene

Use the scene from *The Butterfly Lovers* libretto, provided in Appendix C on pages 40-42 of this resource for this activity.

Divide your class into groups of seven, assign one of the roles listed below to each group member and ask your students to stage the scene, performing it to the rest of the class.

- Director
- Zhu
- Ma
- Yingtai
- Divinity
- Shanbo
- Entourage

Each group should also give a post-performance presentation where they explain how they employed some of the dramatic elements in their performance, their concept and how they worked together as an artistic team to prepare their scene.

For context, read the synopsis on pages 4-5 of this resource before beginning work on your scene.

### Activity three: Prepare a monologue

Choose one of the characters below and write and perform a five minute monologue for your class.

Before you begin to write your monologue, read the synopsis and 'The legend of *The Butterfly Lovers*' sections on pages 4-5 and 8 of this resource, respectively, and make note of some of the themes in the work.

Your monologue should consider how the themes effect your character and influence your characterisation.

- Zhu Yingtai
- Liang Shanbo
- Zhu
- Master
- Ma

You might also like to read the interview with Cathy-Di Zhang on pages 11-13 of this resource and pay particular attention to how she prepares her characterisation of a role that she's playing.

As you write and prepare to perform your monologue, keep a journal that outlines how you built your character and what dramatic elements you employed to present your version of the character. This journal should be handed in as an assignment.

#### **Activity four: Write a short play**

Read the synopsis of *The Butterfly Lovers* provided on pages 4-5 of this resource. Then write a short play based on the legend but present it in a modern context.

Answer the following questions:

- When and where have you set your play?
- Which themes found in the original story have you incorporated into your play and why?

#### **Activity five: Direction concept**

Read the synopsis of *The Butterfly Lovers* provided on pages 4-5 of this resource and come up with a concept for a production of this work as if you were directing it.

Also prepare a rehearsal grid for a four week rehearsal period.



### Interview with the multimedia/set designer, Brian Gothong Tan

**You're a film director by trade. Is this your first foray into creating multimedia for an opera production?**

Actually no, it's not, it's my second one. The first one was with Ivan as well and we did a small one, it was called *La voix humaine* by Poulenc. It was a few years ago and that was my first opera, but we have done musicals, opera not so often.

**Do you find doing multimedia for opera and musicals is different?**

I wouldn't say it's that different. Opera feels like an older art form where musicals come from so the structure and the styles are kind of very similar so the language itself is also quite similar so I didn't find it too different. But I mean I had to get used to the style of music, I'm not so familiar with opera.

**Can you explain what your role entails in the context of this work?**

I was first asked to be the multimedia designer so what I do is design the backdrops and the projections. But this time around, Ivan asked me to co-design the set with him, which we've done a few times as well for other projects. I'm actually more of an artist by trade, so I do a lot of installation art, I've built a lot of sets and stuff like that. But I'm not a trained set designer in the theatre world, I don't really know how to use AutoCAD and software like that.

**Can you talk about the design concept for this production of *The Butterfly Lovers*?**

So we went through a few stages. Of course we looked at the original Peking opera, the Chinese opera which is very simple, you know how Chinese opera is. It's just a performance on a bare stage and a 2D painted backdrop that doesn't change at all, or very minimally. So we looked at that and there were a couple of movie versions of the work which I remember watching as a child so we revisited some of those movies to get some inspiration. Then, of course we started off with a very naturalistic interpretation of *The Butterfly Lovers*, but as we listened to the music, the music is quite contemporary, so we decided to update that so the sensibilities match. So now it's kind of minimal and quite abstract in a sense but there's a lot of projections going on behind to describe the scenes and the moods.

**How do you design and create the multimedia elements for a production? Can you go into the technicalities of it?**

My normal process is, if it's a normal production, I'll of course read the script. So with opera it's the score and the libretto, right. So I study that for the first phase, I'll just read it and of course if there's music, I'll listen to it as much as I can. Then I will start capturing things that pop into my brain, what I'm inspired by or what I'm moved by in the music or in the words. Of course the script will have certain directions which I'll follow, but anything that comes to my mind's eye, I will try to capture it. If something inspires me, I always believe that it might inspire my audience as well so I try to translate the energy or that movement of ideas.

I have a lot of books, so I have a library of images that I can rely on and of course I go on Google or Pinterest and I start collecting images. You know there have been many operas, whether it's *The Butterfly Lovers* or other western opera that has done Asian themes, like *Madame Butterfly*, for example. So I look at what they have done before and I see what might be relevant or what will work in this piece. You know, there are other brilliant designers who have thought of things that I never think of so you know, I'll just steal ideas whenever I can as well.

**So the projections you use in the end product, are they your own original design?**

Of course it's a totally original design, but we all know that art is never truly original, you're always inspired by other artists or things that come before you and you build upon that.

**And then do you draw those projections? How do you put them together?**

I'm trained in 3D animation actually so I do a lot of things on the computer. I use a 3D studio software called 3D Studio Max to design a lot of stuff. But I also use a lot of Photoshop, you know the normal software that most motion designers or animators use.

**Are the projections then incorporated into the lighting cues for the performances?**

I do work with lighting cues but it will be a separate system. I usually have cues based on scenes or movements in the music and then I'll cue it from my computer. I do a lot of 3D mapping as well. For this one, we do have a bit of 3D mapping because it's kind of a bare stage where panels will fly down and demarcate the different spaces, so I'll do some very simple 3D mapping.

**How closely do you have to work with the other people in the creative team and when does that collaboration begin?**

I like to work very closely with the creative team because I always believe it's truly a collaborative process and Ivan likes to work like that as well. So from day one we're always meeting, we're always talking, we have a group chat on WhatsApp and we're always exchanging ideas and sending images. So it's from day one that we really huddle together and create together. But of course I'll go out on my own and do my own research as well.

**Do you have to consider the costume designs in your projection design as well?**

Oh yes, definitely. In terms of hierarchy, it's always the performers and what they're wearing on stage that defines everything. Max, who is the designer, has come up with a brilliant line of ready to wear costumes. They're pretty cool. He's such a brilliant designer and he makes things so fast, I'm so inspired by his stuff. He's taken different elements, it's not pure Ancient China, he's taken a bit of Peranakans culture and mixed it with a montage of different things and created something totally new.

**Once the designs are finalised, what will your role become and how are you involved in the production?**

I will sit in rehearsal and I'll watch how things get staged and created with the bodies. Then I will keep refining my design until we get into the theatre. Then the multimedia operator will take over there, once the cues are set in and we're ready to open.

**How long have you been a an artist and animator for and what drew you to this line of work?**

I've been doing this for twenty years, actually, since I was 22. I'm 42 this year so I've been working on it for quite a long time. I got into it by accident. I have a friend who is a playwright, Alfian Sa'at, he's quite well-known in Singapore. I was still serving the military and he asked me to design one of his plays. I did something small on the TV screen for scene transitions and it kind of launched my career after that.

**That's so interesting that it happened by accident. Had you planned to do something else after you came out of the military?**

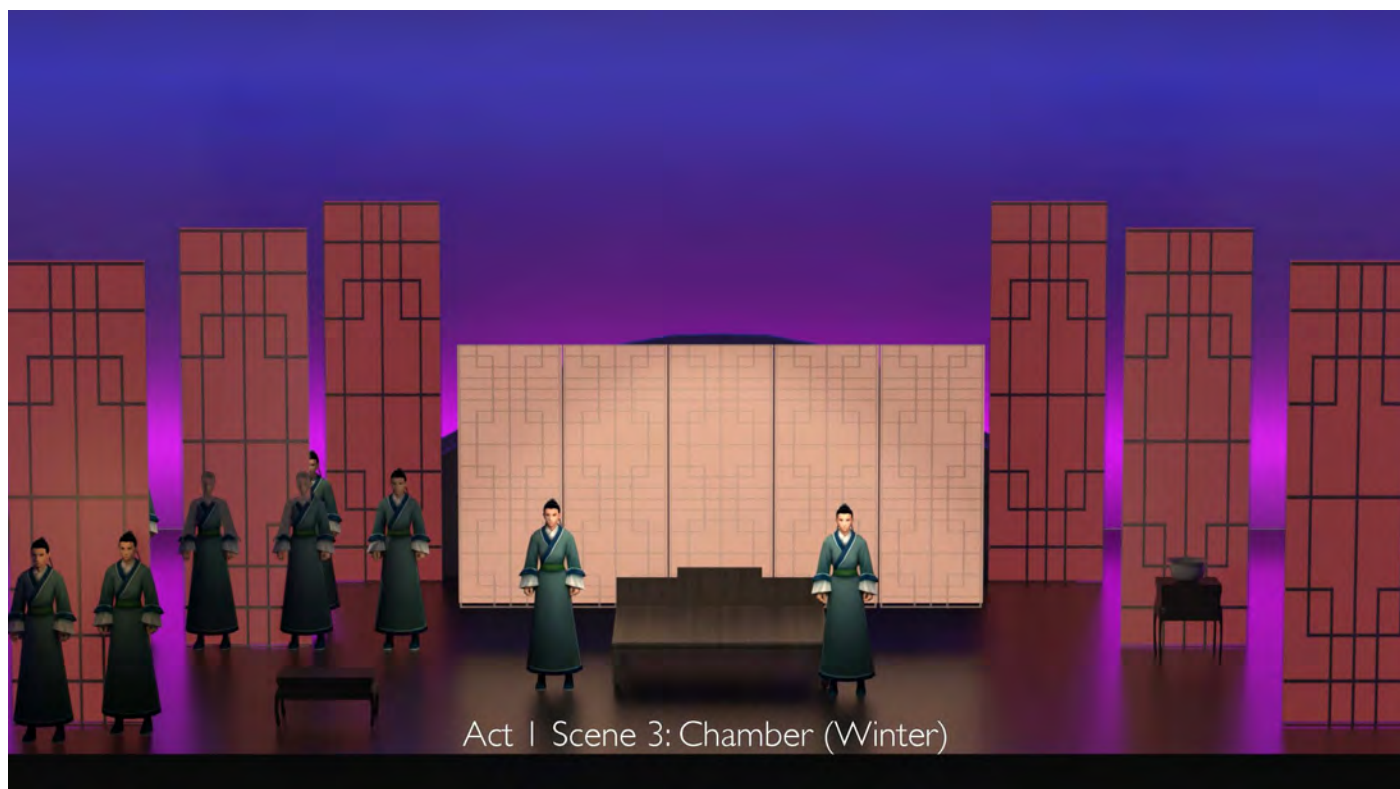
I've always wanted to be an artist but theatre kind of sucked me in. I went overseas to study animation, at CalArts in LA. My dream was to be a Disney animator but when I was there I changed my mind and decided to do my own thing.

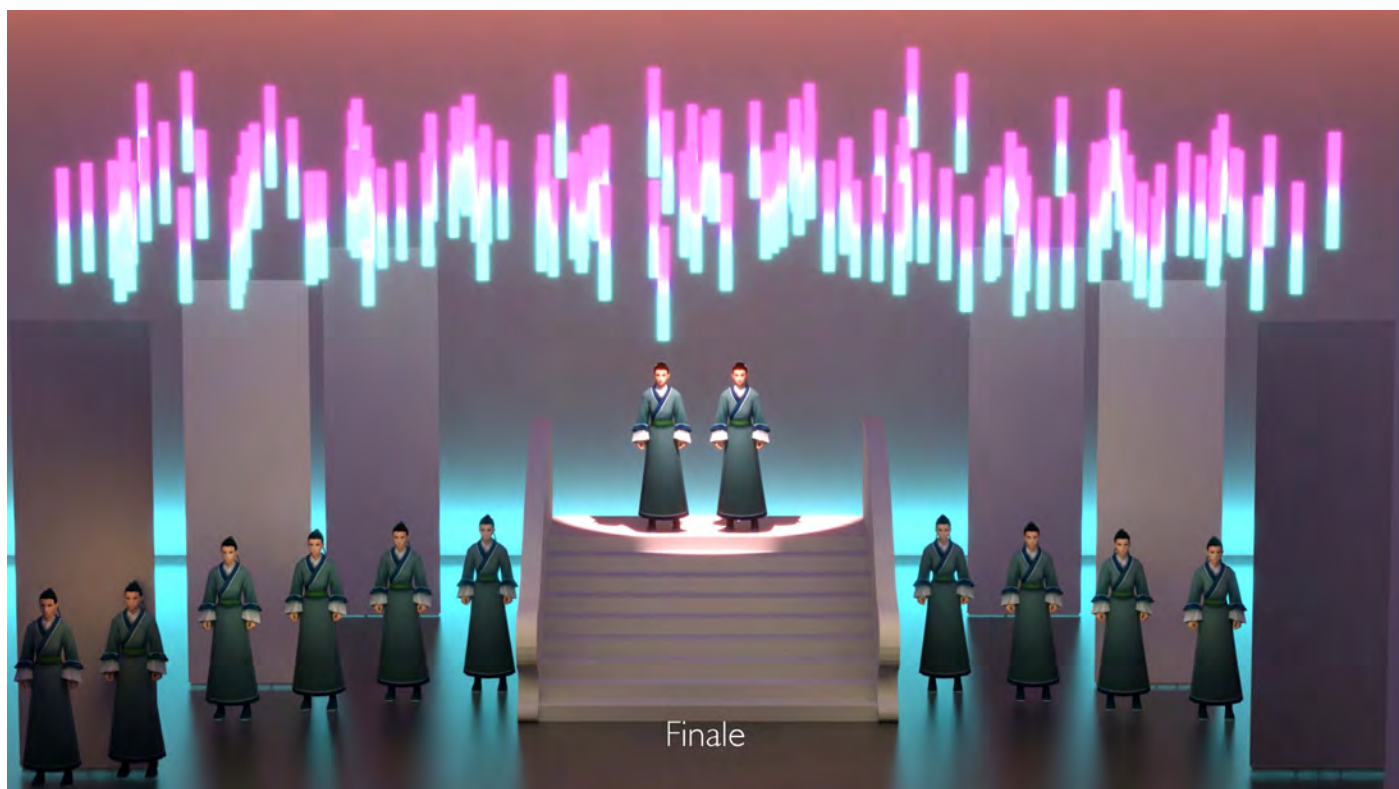
**Have you got any advice for secondary school students interested in pursuing a career in film and multimedia?**

For me, I got into it just by looking at other artists. I was quite late to it, and Singapore was not exactly the cultural centre of the world when I was 21. When I went to New York for the first time when I was 22, I was just mind blown at the exhibitions and the artists that I saw. I saw Bill Viola and these massive projections in the museum, they just inspired me and took my breath away and I just really wanted to do that. I saw so many different artists that really inspired me and I thought, 'Hey this is interesting and fun and important work that I want to do'. Just see and get inspired as much as you can.



## Set design renderings







## Interview with the costume designer, Max Tan

### What is a costume designer's role within the context of an opera production?

I think a costume designer's role within the context of an opera production is similar to how I would approach costume designing for any other stage productions. Besides making sure the costumes match the period, style, cultural references and director's vision for the piece, the costumes do need to be practical for the performer.

My process as a costume designer is as individual as how a singer might approach learning a new role. I begin with the opera's libretto, having creative meetings with the director [Ivan Heng] making careful notes of any mentions of specific costumes and props, noting any quick changes, and charting out different character 'groups'.

### Were you familiar with *The Butterfly Lovers* story before being asked to work on this production?

Yes, the tale of *The Butterfly Lovers* is a well-known classic Chinese tale. Being ethnically Chinese and growing up in Singapore, I remember this tale fondly as a kid. There have been many reiterations of this tale ranging from street Wayang, Chinese operas, movies, tv series to contemporary adaptations of it. I am so thrilled to be working on one of my favourite Chinese tales and am even more excited to see how it will look and sound in the context of an opera!

### Can you tell us about your costume designs for this opera?

Designing Chinese period costumes for me is challenging, yet fulfilling at the same time. I particularly enjoy the precision required, both in the physical work of patterning and stitching an elaborate costume in addition to the research and attention to detail. Though designing within a historical framework might seem restrictive, as Orson Welles famously quipped, 'The enemy of art is the absence of limitations'.

Creative meetings with the director have helped shaped the costume designs. Besides observing a visual collage of clothing styles from the different Han Chinese dynasties, one will also notice hints of influence from other Chinese ethnicity groups like the Straits Chinese (Peranakans). Besides garments, points of reference include Chinese art, interiors, tableware etc.

The garments take you on a journey through the seasons as informed by the script. Starting with dark and earthy tones in Winter, pastels in Spring, translucencies in Summer and Autumn before ending off in an epic wedding scene with elaborate costumes!

### What sort of research did you do to inform your designs?

The historical research is of utmost importance to me. Besides carefully studying the different clothing styles from the different Chinese dynasties, attention is also paid to the different motifs and fabrics used. Learning all this precise information allows me to be imaginative when balancing a fantastical and slightly stylistic design approach with the traditional perimeters.

Besides research, the creative development of the costume designs is important to me. I employ a collage way of designing instead of purely sketching from imagination. I like collaging different tapestries of cultures, silhouettes, time and era and seeing the possibilities of how these collages can be interpreted fascinates me.

### What sort of fabrics will the costumes be made from?

The costumes will be made from combining and clashing a library of fabrics. From traditional brocades, ethereal organza, rich textured jacquards to even batik. Surface treatment such as embroidery are mashed up with embroidered patches that are applied lightly onto the fabrics, resulting in an almost 3D like appearance.

### As the costume designer, do you also make the costumes you design for the production?

I absolutely love the creation process of a costume and my area of interest is pattern making. I enjoy tailoring the costumes and I am thankful to have my assistant designer who assembles the garments while I play close attention to proportions on my 2D drafts. Embroidery is however done by a contracted embroidery studio.

### How did you become a fashion designer and what path did you take to get there?

I went to an arts school (Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts) and graduated in 2006 with a Diploma in Fashion

Design. Upon graduation I found myself working as a costume designer / stylist for our TV station here in Singapore. At any one point, I would be juggling five shows single handedly. While I am thankful for the many opportunities being a stylist has brought, I still love creating fashion. I decided to pursue designing my own line full time in 2009.

**What was it about fashion and design that made you want to pursue it? Do you have anyone who inspired you to become a designer?**

This is interesting because I was never attracted to fashion or design. I love tailoring and I grew up under the influence of my seamstress mum. Before I even knew how to sketch or what fashion entailed, I was helping to cut pockets, ironing seams, using a tailors clapper as a kid. I guess that early exposure to the technical aspect of fashion shaped the way I approach the design of my fashion label.

**You have a fashion brand in Singapore, Max. Tan. Tell us a little bit about the brand and how it came to be?**

I debut my first collection in Spring 2010 where I was lucky to be listed as one of the top 10 collections for Spring Summer 2010 on the now defunct premier fashion forecasting website – stylesight.com, alongside the big names such as Alexander McQueen, Valentino, AF Vandervorst etc. That opened up a lot of opportunities for me.

MAX.TAN was invited to showcase at Modefabriek in Amsterdam in 2010 and became the first Asian-based label ever to do so. The A/W 2010-11, collection which debuted in Amsterdam, was subsequently featured by Vogue Paris and went on to win second place at that year's China Fashion Creation Contest. More recently, Vogue Italia also featured Max as a finalist in the inaugural Dubai edition of "Who is On Next?". Today, MAX.TAN is represented by Boon showroom (Paris) where it has started making inroads onto the international fashion design scene.

**Finally, do you have any advice for aspiring designers?**

As cliché as it sounds, learning is a never-ending journey. In my tenth year of practice, I decided to take a break and went back to school to pursue my B.A (hons) in Fashion Design where I was under the tutelage of a veteran costume designer, Mr Anthony Tan. The studio took a R&D approach for the year when I was in school. That year of hiatus helped answer many creative doubts that I had and allowed me to have a fresh take on fashion and costume design.



Costume design renderings

IVAN HENG | max tan | DESIGNS/ ONE:WINTER / 1 & 2 (page 2-6)



Scene description : In Zhu's mansion, Zhu begs Yingtai not to leave.

HAOTIAN / ZHU

- 1 X Jacket
- 1 X Crossover Inner Dress with Attached Skirt
- 1 X Base Costume

Total Sets | 1 Set

Description

Asymmetrical crossover bodice inner Hanfu (dress) with attached hem skirting in contrasting brown brocade. Worn under a robe with exaggerated sleeves fabricated in jacquard.



CATHY / YINGTAI

- 1 X Hanfu
- 1 X Belt
- 1 X Base Costume

Total Sets | 1 Set

Description

Hanfu fabricated in brocade with gold accents outer is attached to inner round neckline robe. Worn crossed over the bodice and fastened with belt.

CHORUS / SERVANTS

- 1 X Inner Square Neck Blouse with Attached Long Vest with Centre Front Embroidery
- 1 X Base Costume

Total Sets | 4 Sets

Description

Inner short robe attached with a long vest fastened on centre front. Worn over divisily.

IVAN HENG | max tan | DESIGNS/ TWO:SPRING / 1 (page 10-11)



Scene description : Master and students in classroom. Shanbo and Yingtai are missing.

HAOTIAN / MASTER

- 1 X Robe
- 1 X Inner Dress - 1 X Belt
- 1 X Base Costume

Total Sets | 1 Set

Description

Round neckline inner Hanfu (dress) worn under a drapery georgette robe with embroidered collar and sleeve cuffs. White embroidered bamboo motifs adorns bodice.

MEI LI / SHANBO

- 1 X Round Neckline Dress
- 1 X Belt
- 1 X Base Costume

Total Sets | 1 Set

Description

Round neck dress with attached skirting on hem fabricated solid tone cotton twill fabric. Contrasting fabrics on skirting and collar. Worn with hat.

CATHY / YING TAI

- 1 X Round Neckline Dress
- 1 X Belt
- 1 X Base Costume

Total Sets | 1 Set

Description

Round neck dress with attached skirting on hem fabricated solid tone cotton twill fabric. Contrasting fabrics on skirting and collar. Worn with hat.

DIVINITY / STUDENTS

- 1 X Jacket With Attached Skirt
- 1 X Base Costume

Total Sets | 8 Sets

Description

Asymmetrical crossover bodice jacket with skirt attached to jacket hem inspired by layerings of the Chinese Hanfu. Painterly ink blot motifs contrasted against brushed strokes on skirt.







Scene description : Scene shifts and Ma and entourage appears.



Scene description : Costumes overview of scene

#### CHORUS / DIVINITY / MA'S ENTOURAGE

1 X Jacket With Attached Skirt  
1 X Base Costume

Total Sets | 7 Sets

##### Description

Asymmetrical crossover bodice jacket with skirt attached to jacket hem inspired by layers of the Chinese Hanfu. Painterly ink blot motifs contrasted against brushed strokes on skirt. Carrying gifts in red and rattan.



#### CHORUS / MA WEN CAI

1 X Round Neckline Dress  
1 X Belt  
1 X Base Costume

Total Sets | 1 Set

##### Description

Round neck dress fabricated in jacquard. Embroidered patches on shoulders in the style of Chinese paper cuttings. Paired with a golden belt.



Scene description :Yingtai gets ready for wedding.



#### CHORUS / SERVANTS

1 X Inner Square Neck Blouse with Attached Long Vest with Centre Front Embroidery  
1 X Red Brocade Skirt  
1 X Base Costume

Total Sets | 4 Sets

##### Description

Inner short robe attached with a long vest fastened on centre front. Wear Elasticised skirt over base costume.

#### CHORUS / SERVANTS

1 X Long Robe  
1 X Belt  
1 X Base Costume

Total Sets | 4 Sets

##### Description

Round neck robe with embroidered border, centre front torso and shoulders. Attached Chinese paper cut collar and belt.





## Visual Arts & Design – Activities

### Activity one: Costume analysis

Read the interview with the costume designer Max Tan on pages 31-32 of this resource. Then look at the costume design renderings provided on pages 33-34 and research the design influences that Max described in his response to question four. How are these influences evident in Max's costume designs?

Finally, compare the designs with the costumes you saw on stage after watching a performance of Victorian Opera's *The Butterfly Lovers*. Did you notice any major changes to Max's original designs?

### Activity two: Design concept and mood board

Read the synopsis of *The Butterfly Lovers* provided on pages 4-5 of this resource.

Then, develop a concept for what you envisage the overall production to look like onstage. Consider the time and place the legend is set in, or an alternate time and place if you prefer, as well as how the set, costume and projections will meld together to bring your concept to life.

Finally, create a mood board that collates any reference images you found and drew inspiration from, colour palettes that feature across the work and first sketches.

### Activity three: Design the costumes

Design the costumes for the following characters:

- Zhu Yingtai
- Liang Shanbo
- Master
- Zhu
- Ma and his entourage
- Divinity

Write a one-page essay that explains your designs, the inspirations you took from the synopsis, any research you did on the legend, and designers that influenced your designs explaining how.

### Activity four: The multimedia element

As Brian Gothong Tan explains in his interview on pages 27-28 of this resource, this production of *The Butterfly Lovers* is going to incorporate a series of projections to describe the scene and the mood.

For this activity, design your own series of projections, one for each of the below scene settings:

- The courtyard at Zhu Yingtai's house in Winter
- The pavilion at the crossroads
- The river bank at the Academy during Spring
- The courtyard at Zhu Yingtai's house when the Ma Entourage arrives
- The crossroads when Shanbo and Yingtai transform into butterflies.

## Appendix A

Full Score in Concert Pitch

### The Butterfly Lovers

Libretto: JOEL TAN

Music: RICHARD MILLS

#### Prelude

*Con moto*  $\text{♩} = 104$

The musical score is written for a full orchestra and includes the following parts:

- Clarinets:** Clarinet 1 (Bb) and Clarinet 2 (Bb). Both parts start with a forte (*ff*) dynamic and feature trills and triplets.
- Harp:** Features a melodic line with triplets and a sustained chord.
- Piano:** Features a complex melodic line with triplets and a sustained chord.
- Synthesizer:** Features a melodic line with triplets and a sustained chord.
- Xylophone:** Features a melodic line with triplets and a sustained chord.
- Dizi:** Features a melodic line with triplets and a sustained chord.
- Pipa:** Features a melodic line with triplets and a sustained chord.
- Violins:** 1st Violin and 2nd Violin. Both parts start with a forte (*ff*) dynamic and feature trills and triplets.
- Viola:** Features a melodic line with triplets and a sustained chord.
- Violoncello:** Features a melodic line with triplets and a sustained chord.
- Contrabass:** Features a melodic line with triplets and a sustained chord.

The score includes various musical notations such as dynamics (*ff*, *p*, *f*, *pp*, *cresc.*), articulation (*trill*, *triplet*), and performance instructions (*Con moto*, *To Vib.*, *Vib.*, *Quidi in D*, *pizz.*, *arco*).

Copyright ©2022 Richard Mills. All rights reserved. Typeset by Glynn Davies [www.youthmusic.com/glynnmusic](http://www.youthmusic.com/glynnmusic)



## Appendix B

5.

*Intermezzo: Spring.*

*A river. A cherry blossom tree in bloom.*

*Divinity appears in the form of spirits.*

<b>Divinity</b>	Milk	
		Green
	Buds	
		Honey
	Sticky	
		Blooms
	Fruit	Heat
	Light	
		Sweat

Trickle      Wet

Nose inhales a lover's neck

Freckle

Finger mischief on the skin

Bamboo shoots through the frost

Cherry blossom, peat and moss.

Snowmelt.

*Shanbo and Yingtai by the river, practising calligraphy.*

*Yingtai has abandoned her scroll, and is relishing the outdoors.*

**Shanbo**      (*a poem*)

Mantis perched on jade green leaf

Poised in prayer, struck with grief.

Spring brings urgent pleasure, birth.

After rapture, back to earth.

*Yingtai moves to tease Shanbo.*

**Yingtai**      The trees blush and here you paint...

**Shanbo**      Steady the hand that holds the brush...

**Yingtai**      these black strokes on paper...



**Shanbo** But freely caress the scroll...

**Yingtai** Can you paint the warmth?

**Shanbo** Each stroke a study in virtue.

**Yingtai** Will you paint me in your poem?

**Shanbo** Clear the mind of all distraction.

**Yingtai** Shanbo you are a fool to ignore  
What is standing right in front of you.  
Look.

*Yingtai pulls Shanbo from the scroll to stand with her by the river.*

**Yingtai** What do you see?

**Shanbo** The river frolics, free from ice,  
like the games of amorous deer.  
Building power as it runs  
towards the explosive sea.

Master says to give order to nature,  
But how do you paint this?  
With brush? With words? With lips?

*They draw very close.*

*A jolt, Yingtai pulls away.*

*Chastened, Shanbo exits.*

**Yingtai** Purge me! Burn it from me!  
Give my love a form I can reject.  
Chains, knives, sickness...  
Anything but the beating of my heart.  
Each day I fall from a higher cliff.  
And death is his face rushing to meet me.  
I want to be free of my body  
To love him in some heavenly place.

==

*Yingtai and Shanbo's bedchamber at the academy. Through a window, the view of the sky, and the tree. A single bed, which the two share. It is night-time.*

*Shanbo studies with the light of a candle as Yingtai slumbers.*

**Shanbo** Strokes on the page, like moths  
around this flame, refuse to settle.

## Appendix C

7.

*The **Zhu** household. A year later. Springtime.*

*A procession of a different sort. An entourage arrives at the household, bearing gifts, finery, and the young master **Ma** in a palanquin.*

**Entourage** We present the young Master Ma,  
journeyed long and far from the South  
to entreat the family Zhu in marriage!

***Ma** removes himself from the procession, and bows before **Zhu**.*

**Ma** On this fine spring day,  
an auspicious day, the almanac says,  
I, Ma Wencai, come  
bearing treasures from my family,  
see our finery?  
We are a house of immeasurable repute,  
Owners of great farmlands in the South,  
Cotton-fields, silk-farms, and wineries.  
Our men grace the world as generals, poets,  
Philosophers.  
Our women have been composed into song.  
Even our horses are legendary.  
I come seeking a union of our great houses,  
a sharing of our coffers and our honour,  
The hand of the maiden Zhu Yingtai.

**Zhu** Rise, Ma Wencai, you are a guest here.  
I am cheered to see this day.  
There was a time poor health  
Threatened to stand in the way.  
But in this past year, the love and vigilance  
Of my daughter have pulled me back to life.  
And I offer her love and vigilance to you,  
She will make you a fine wife.

**Entourage** The doors part, and breathe fine incense onto the yard.  
A glint of her finery, Zhu Yingtai emerges!

*The gathering is roused as **Yingtai** steps out into the light. She is a vision of fine brocade, silk, and gold, her face veiled by light gossamer.*

**Entourage** Through such cultivated beauty can the mundane seek and find divinity.

**Ma** Zhu Yingtai, you are a song and a painting, bound to flesh.

**Yingtai** Ma Wencai, I am grateful Heaven has sent me such an honorable suitor.

**Zhu** Shall we discuss a wedding day? Bring the almanac!



**Entourage** We search the heavens for signs and omens, bless this union with a favourable date.

*Invoked, Divinity appears.*

**Divinity** By all accounts.  
This is a charmed marriage.  
The stars align, there are no obstacles.

**Yingtai** My dreams have been of drowning.

**Divinity** A fine match of zodiacs.  
The readings are immaculate.

**Yingtai** Chained by the neck, eternal drowning.

**Divinity** The signs of Man foretell a household  
Built on order and piety.

**Yingtai** A black ocean that boils angrily  
Beneath the surface of all things.

**Divinity** (*retreating*) This is how it's written.

**Zhu** Mid-spring.  
It is settled.  
Barely a week.  
We have much to do in preparation.

**Entourage** A perfect union,  
Heaven smiles, heaven smiles.

**Yingtai** And in the darkness, a hand on mine,  
Pulling.  
But always the fingers slip.  
And then the sense of two bodies  
gasping for air.

*The two families retreat from each other, and Yingtai recedes into the house.*

==

*The open road. A weak, pallid Shanbo reaches the crossroads.*

**Shanbo** This tree, this pavilion,  
haunt me in my sleep.  
The setting of that first miracle,  
now a needle in my eye.  
(*he coughs*)  
Bile, scraped from the very  
marrow of my bones.  
Quiet!  
This parliament squabbling in my head

over a thousand missteps and missed  
opportunities,  
jolted like a plaything  
in a cruel puppet's game.  
Don't look south, there lie demons and  
tragedies.  
Let's head east, go home,  
Forget these cursed, unhappy months.

*Shanbo turns in one direction, but a sudden pang pulls him towards the South. He hesitates.*

**Shanbo**     Just to know. Just to see.  
In the South spool the loose threads of my soul.  
Tugging at me, tugging, tugging.  
Longing to be whole again.  
Tugging. Tugging.  
Quiet!

*Shanbo makes for the South.*



## Glossary

**Act** – A component of the total work, consisting of its own partial dramatic arc.

**Aria** – An elaborate composition for solo voice with instrumental accompaniment.

**Arioso** – A recitative of a lyrical and expressive quality.

**Bar** – Also called a measure. The section between two bar lines containing the number of beats as indicated by the time signature.

**Baritone** – The male voice between the tenor and bass.

**Bass** – The lowest male voice.

**Baton** – A white stick used by conductors to direct the musicians and singers, allowing the conductor greater visibility.

**Beat** – The regular pulse of the music.

**Choreographer** – The person who designs and creates the movement of the performance, usually in dance form.

**Chorus** – In opera or music theatre, this refers to a large body of singers.

**Chorus master** – The person responsible for the rehearsal and preparation of the chorus prior to production.

**Composer** – The person who writes the music.

**Conductor** – The person who interprets, directs and cues the orchestra or musical performance, coordinating the performers and keeping the time through the technique of hand movements.

**Designer** – The person who designs the overall look of the production, including the sets, costume, props and lighting.

**Director** – The person who is in charge of the artistic features of the production.

**Dress rehearsal** – Often the final rehearsal of all the component parts of the production in full costume.

**Duet** – A composition for two performers of equal importance.

**Ensemble** – A group of performers performing together.

**Excerpt** – A short extract from a piece of music.

**Finale** – The last movement of a work that contains more than one movement.

**Harmony** – The chordal (vertical) structure of a musical composition, in contrast to the linear (single melody line) structure.

**Interlude** – A section of music between acts.

**Intermission** – A break in the performance that allows the audience to leave the auditorium.

**Key** – The tonal centre around which a composition is based, often indicated by a key signature.

**Leitmotif** – The representation of characters, typical situations and recurring ideas by musical motifs.

**Libretto** – The text of an opera. In music theatre, the libretto is commonly referred to as 'the book'.

**Lighting designer** – A lighting designer works with the creative team to create the lighting, atmosphere, and time of day for the production in response to the book, while keeping in mind issues of visibility, safety, and cost. They also work closely with the stage manager who will queue the system controller during a performance.

**Mezzo-soprano** – The second highest female voice.

**Mise en scène** – The arrangement of the scenery, props, etc., on the stage of a theatrical production.

**Modes** – In music, any of several ways of ordering the notes of a scale according to the intervals they form with the tonic, which then provides a theoretical framework for the melody.

**Music theatre** – A form of theatrical performance that combines songs, spoken dialogue, acting and dance.

**Opera** – A staged drama set to music, comprised of vocal pieces with instrumental accompaniment and usually with orchestral overtures and interludes.

**Opera buffa** – Also known as ‘comic opera’, an opera with a large mixture of music, a light subject and a happy ending, including comic elements.

**Opera seria** – Also known as ‘serious opera’, an opera with dramatic, serious content, often with a tragic ending.

**Orchestra** – A large ensemble of instruments divided into four main sections: strings, woodwind, brass and percussion.

**Orchestration** – Utilisation of the instrumentation of an orchestra in the writing of a composition.

**Overture** – An instrumental introduction to an opera or other musical theatre work.

**Principal** – One of the main characters.

**Pulse** – The underlying beat of a piece of music.

**Proscenium arch** – The part of a stage in front of the curtain that separates the stage from the auditorium and provides the arch that frames it.

**Range** – The range from the lowest to highest notes that are played or sung.

**Rehearsal** – Where the performers and the director establish and refine the dramatic and musical interpretation of the production.

**Rhythm** – The regular and irregular pattern of notes of different length in the music.

**Repetiteur** – A pianist who works as an accompanist and vocal coach for opera.

**Scale model box** – A scale miniature of the set design made from foam core and card.

**Score** – The document where all the parts of a work, both instrumental and vocal are notated.

**Solo** – A piece of music performed by a single performer either alone or with accompaniment.

**Soprano** – The highest female voice.

**Sound Designer** – The person who designs the additional sound used in a production.

**Stage Manager** – The person who manages the running of rehearsals and performances, managing all the components of the production during performance.

**Surtitles** – A translation of the words being sung on stage, projected onto a screen above the stage.

**Synopsis** – A summary of the story.

**Tempo** – The speed of a composition.

**Tenor** – A high male voice.

**Tessitura** – The general range of vocal parts.

**Time signature** – A notation used to specify how many beats in a bar and the note value equivalent to the beat.

**Tone** – The interval of a major second or a sound of definite pitch and duration.

**Tutti** – A marking in a score that indicates the use of the whole orchestra and/or all the vocal parts.

**Vibrato** – A very slight fluctuation of pitch in rapid succession to create warmth in the sound.

**Vocal range** – The human voice falls into a range from the lowest to highest notes they can reach. The normal range is around two octaves and is traditionally broken into seven voice types from highest to lowest: soprano, mezzo-soprano, contralto, countertenor, tenor, baritone and bass.

**Western music** – A musical tradition derived from European cultures spanning the flourishing musical culture of ancient times to the present day.

**Workshop** – An exploration of a new work (production, text, music, design).

## Acknowledgments

This resource was collated and written by Ioanna Salmanidis for Victorian Opera.

Thank you to Richard Mills, Joel Tan, Ivan Heng, Brian Gothong Tan, Max Tan and Cathy-Di Zhang for their contributions to the Music, Drama & Theatre Studies and Visual Arts & Design sections.

Design renderings have been shared with the permission of Max Tan and Brian Gothong Tan.

Sections from the libretto have been shared with the permission of Joel Tan.

## References

Idema, W.L. (2010). *The Butterfly Lovers: The Legend of Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai: Four Versions, with Related Texts*. Retrieved from [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/273809939\\_The\\_Butterfly\\_Lovers\\_The\\_Legend\\_of\\_Liang\\_Shanbo\\_and\\_Zhu\\_Yingtai\\_Four\\_Versions\\_with\\_Related\\_Texts\\_Edited\\_and\\_Translated\\_by\\_Wilt\\_L\\_Idema\\_pp\\_xxxvi\\_220\\_Indianapolis\\_and\\_Cambridge\\_Mass\\_Hackett\\_Publishing\\_2](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/273809939_The_Butterfly_Lovers_The_Legend_of_Liang_Shanbo_and_Zhu_Yingtai_Four_Versions_with_Related_Texts_Edited_and_Translated_by_Wilt_L_Idema_pp_xxxvi_220_Indianapolis_and_Cambridge_Mass_Hackett_Publishing_2)

Idema, W.L. (2012). *Old Tales for New Times: Some Comments on the Cultural Translation of China's Four Great Folktales in the Twentieth Century*. Retrieved from <https://web.archive.org/web/20141006103301/http://www.eastasia.ntu.edu.tw/chinese/data/9-1/9-1-2/9-1-2.pdf>

Su, M (2022). *The Butterfly Lovers: A Classic Chinese Love Story*. Retrieved from <https://www.medievalists.net/2018/02/butterfly-lovers-classic-chinese-love-story/>

Eason Music School (2022). *Dizi - Chinese Woodwind Instrument*. Retrieved from <https://www.easonmusicschool.com/chinese-orchestra-instruments/chinese-woodwind-instruments/dizi/>

Eason Music School (2022). *Pipa - Chinese Plucked String Instrument*. Retrieved from <https://www.easonmusicschool.com/chinese-orchestra-instruments/chinese-plucked-string-instruments/pipa/>

## Images

1. Image of Dizi. Retrieved from [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Dizi\\_%28%E7%AC%9B%E5%AD%90\\_%29\\_MET\\_89.4.61\\_slide.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Dizi_%28%E7%AC%9B%E5%AD%90_%29_MET_89.4.61_slide.jpg)
2. Image of Pipa. Retrieved from [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pipa\\_MET\\_DP216710.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pipa_MET_DP216710.jpg)