**Peking Opera—Bel Canto in Chinese: Introducing its Training Methodology**


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**Book cover and Preface:**

Peking Opera, a national treasure with a history of over two hundred years, is a highly regarded art form in China. It synthesizes singing and dancing, actions and acrobatics, and instrumental music. The art form is impressively entertaining and fascinating, even to people who do not understand the Chinese language. This book aims to provide a solid knowledge of Peking Opera in terms of its historical development and legendary artists and to present reliable information on its vocal training methodology. It is hoped that this book can serve as a channel for English speaking people who wish to reach out to the traditional Chinese art form and become knowledgeable of its performing style.

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PREFACE

Peking Opera, a national treasure with a history of over 200 years, is widely regarded as the most refined expression of Chinese culture. As a traditional art form, it synthesizes singing, dancing, actions, acrobatics, and instrumental music in highly entertaining and fascinating performances. With unique sound tonality and singing style, Peking Opera has been acclaimed the highest level of singing in China as well as in other Mandarin speaking regions in Asia. It is also known as one of the three main theatrical systems in the world alongside the Roman and Sanskrit theatre. In 2010, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization declared Peking Opera, an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

During the Culture Revolution (1960-1970) in China, the traditional art form was deemed feudalistic and reactionary and its reputation was severely damaged. In the late 1970s, China began opening-up to Western world; Chinese culture, including Peking Opera, started to attract Western society. Many foreigners visited China and wished to learn the art form from its legends. Likewise, Peking Opera also made excellent contributions to the cultural exchanges in the West. Since 2013, the Chinese government has been espousing a Peking Opera Festival touring European countries and the United States to perform traditional repertoires and newly created productions. Oscar-winning Chinese composer Tan Dun adapted a great deal of Peking Opera elements to his new opera *The First Emperor*, which made a successful premiere at the Metropolitan Opera in 2006, featuring Western opera legend Placido Domingo in the leading role of the Chinese Emperor.

Due to the lack of well-written documents in English on Peking Opera’s artistic value, singing style, and training methodology, it has been left unreachable to the people who do not understand the Chinese language but have a strong desire to learn the art form. This book aims to provide solid knowledge of Peking Opera in terms of its historic development and legendary artists. The purpose is to present reliable information on its vocal training process and offer a user-friendly guide to its foreign fans; in order that they may better grasp its vocal conceptions, the text refers them to these traditional vocalizations as Italian *Bel Canto*—the most popular classical singing style in Western opera. It is hoped that this book can serve as a channel for English speaking people who wish to reach out to the traditional Chinese art form and become knowledgeable of its performing style. The more they know about Peking Opera, the more they will love it.
An Infusion of Eastern and Western Music Styles into Art Song: Introducing Two Sets of Art Song for Mezzo-Soprano by Chen Yi

LAMBERT Academic Publishing, Germany (April 2015)

This book is available at:

- http://network.bepress.com/explore/arts-and-humanities/music/other-music/?facet=institution_title%3A%22University%2C+Las+Vegas%22

Book cover and Preface:

Chen Yi, a renowned female Asian composer of contemporary music today, has become a prominent figure in music circles in the United States and China. This research book introduces two sets of her art songs written for mezzo-soprano voice, reviewing the features of these compositions that represent the unique style of her music, which is influenced by Chinese folk music, stimuli and Western modern music elements. It is anticipated that research into the compositional values of Chen's vocal works and promotion of her art songs will spark new explorations of contemporary women composers' works. By offering musical analyses and performing strategies on Chen's art songs, a new variety of contemporary vocal repertoire for mezzo-soprano voice will become available to professional singers, singing students, and voice teachers for their further studies. Therefore, many of these individuals will make renewed contributions to continuing the tradition of art song and developing its artistry through their performing and teaching practices.
Chinese-American composer Chen Yi has been praised as “the most internationally renowned female Asian composer of contemporary music today,” and she “has in particular become a prominent figure in music circles in the United States and China.” Besides her successes in writing orchestral and chamber music, Chen Yi has also written numerous vocal compositions including some art songs. This research book aims to introduce two sets of Chen’s art songs written for mezzo-soprano voice, *Meditation* and *Bright Moonlight*, and review the features of these compositions that represent the unique style of her music, which is influenced by Chinese folk music idioms and Western modern music elements.

Chen Yi grew up in both the traditional China before the mid-1960s and the reformed China after the mid-1970s. She took her journey of music study a long way from the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing to Columbia University in New York City. She is a Western-trained musician and has launched a successful career of teaching Western music in higher education in America. This research book reveals Chen’s bicultural background, strengthens the link between her cultural uniqueness and her musical creativity, and elaborates on how her bicultural background has influenced her compositional style.

Ancient Chinese poetry and Peking Opera singing style have inspired Chen’s art songwriting tremendously. By reviewing the poetic literature of *Tang Shi* and *Song Ci* and the performing practice of Peking Opera, this book will give comprehensive interpretations of Chen’s musical approaches for her *Meditation* and *Bright Moonlight* that use the two sources effectively.

The scope of this research book covers a wide collection of Chen’s biographical and educational information, as well as her published vocal compositions and the reviews of her musical works. Some relevant references are gathered from research articles to support the thesis of this research book. The theoretical approaches to analyzing Chen’s art songs emphasize her music expressions that mirror her poetic choices and compositional methods, paying attention to her creative ways of combining Chinese music practices with Western compositional devices. The purpose of publishing this research book is to promote Chen’s solo vocal works and spark contemporary women composers’ musical creativities. It is hoped that professional singers and voice teachers will consider including Chen’s art songs in their contemporary repertoires, making substantial contributions to the tradition of art song within their teaching and performing practices.
In today’s music world, Chinese singers are often found singing leading roles on the stages of well-known opera houses. In addition, it is not uncommon to hear Chinese singers garnering top prizes in prestigious singing competitions. What has made those Chinese singers sing Italian bel canto style so successfully in the Western music world? To find some convincing answers to this question, I did my research while visiting and teaching in two well-established music institutions in China from fall 2012 to spring 2013. Through personal interviews with a group of Chinese voice teachers and observation of their studio teachings, I discovered how the educational system and teaching methods for training Chinese bel canto singers differed from Western vocal music education. While overcoming cultural diversities and aesthetic differences between Italian bel canto and Chinese national singing styles, Chinese vocal music educators have created a unique teaching methodology that has been used effectively in their instructional practices.

**BEL CANTO IN CHINA**

Italian bel canto was introduced to China about a century ago, when in 1920s the first generation of western trained Chinese musicians returned to Mainland China from Europe. Since then, Western singing style has had a significant influence on the performance of Chinese vocal art and the education of Chinese vocal music, which went through an early experiment in 1930s and a quick growth in 1950s, leading to a fully-developed singing style by 1970s, when all the higher educational music institutions in China successfully established a voice department and enrolled students in a 4-year educational program for earning a bachelor degree of vocal music.

During the Reform movement in 1980s, China underwent enormous changes in politics and economics as well as in music culture, which created new opportunities for exchange studies between Chinese and the West. Many famous Italian bel canto singers and renowned vocal music educators visited China to give performances and lectures. At the same time, numerous Chinese
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Introducing its vocal training process

Wen Zhang

INTRODUCING PEKING OPERA

PEKING OPERA, a Chinese cultural treasure with a history of over 200 years, is a synthesis of singing, dancing, acting, and acrobatics, as well as instrumental music. A widely regarded expression of Chinese culture, Peking Opera includes many historic events and legends in its rich and large repertoire, and it features a great variety of dramatic gestures, artistic face-painting, and elaborate costumes in its performances. It is a highly entertaining and fascinating art form, even to people who do not understand Chinese.¹

During the ten-year "Cultural Revolution" (1966–1976), there were eight Revolutionary Opera that dominated theaters and media throughout China; the rest of Peking Opera repertoires were dismissed as the legacy of feudalism. Those eight operas were promoted for ideological reasons to meet Chairman Mao’s and his wife Madam Jiang’s political intentions. Most Chinese in that generation could sing quite a few songs from the eight operas. The phenomenon was historically famous as “800 million people with eight operas.”²

In the late 1970s, as China began its openness to the Western world, Chinese people were newly exposed to modern Western music. Likewise, Chinese culture started to attract Western society; foreigners visited China and wished to learn Peking Opera from its legends. Since then, the national treasure has made excellent contributions to cultural exchange. Oscar awarded Chinese composer Tan Dun adapted a great deal of Peking Opera style to his new opera, The First Emperor, which had a successful world premiere at the Metropolitan Opera in 2006; it featured Western opera legend Placido Domingo singing the leading role of the Chinese Emperor in ten performances.

In recent years, Peking Opera has faced the same challenges troubling Western opera: reduced audiences and lack of newcomers. Instead of offering discount tickets and free lectures to young generations (as is the case with American opera houses), the Chinese Ministry of Education recently announced a pilot program of teaching Peking Opera in elementary and high schools. Fifteen well selected Peking Opera repertoires have been added to the music curricula of 200 schools in ten provinces throughout China. This move immediately drew public attention, and the educational approach has spawned diverse opinion. A survey by Netease (news portal in China) shows that twenty

¹The population of China at that time