

L'invitation
au
voyage

A recital by
Zhou Zheng Zhong

Winner of the International
Opera Singing Competition
of Marmande

11
July
2019

7.30 p.m.
Victoria
Concert
Hall

Zhou Zhengzhong

baritone



Zhou Zhengzhong is a professional opera singer. He graduated from the Shanghai Conservatory of Music under the tutelage of professor Zhang Renqing, and teaches at the Wuhan Conservatory of Music. He is the recipient of many prestigious awards, including the First Prize (Opera category) and Second Prize (French art songs category) at the International Opera Singing Competition of Marmande, and the Third Prize at the International Singing Competition of Toulouse. He was also awarded the scholarship from the Centre national d'insertion professionnelle d'artistes lyriques to undergo a two-year internship at Marseilles. Thereafter, he was admitted to the Royal Opera House under the Jette Parker Young Artists Programme before he joined the Deutsche Oper Berlin as an ensemble member.

Zhou Zhengzhong is highly active on the international opera stage, having performed at many leading theatres. He has collaborated with both Chinese and foreign renowned conductors such as Donald Runnicles, Andris Nelsons, Seiji Ozawa, Daniel Oren, Tang Muhai, Lü Jia and Lan Shui, and played the leading role in operas, including *Rigoletto*, *Roméo et Juliette*, *Madama Butterfly*, *Salome*, *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, *La Bohème*, *Faust* and *Le Nozze di Figaro*. In addition, he has participated in the recording of *Werther* on Deutsche Grammophon and *Le portrait de Manon* by Opera Rara. He has also recorded Mark-Anthony Turnage's *Anna Nicole*, *Rigoletto*, *Tosca*, and *Madama Butterfly* by Opus Arte Royal Opera House and so on.

In renowned classical music critic Hugh Canning's commentary on Zhou's performance in *Faust*, he characterised Zhou as the undisputed best interpreter of the character Valentin he has ever encountered, whether in terms of his image, voice, diction, language handling or musical performance. Other critics include Tim Smith from the British magazine, *Opera*, who described his interpretation of an earl to have led *Le Nozze di Figaro* toward a climax and enabled a tightly-knit performance. Chilean newspaper *El Mercurio* lauded him for his "melodious voice and convincing performance". Famous tenor Carlo Bergonzi referred to Zhou Zhengzhong as the "Master of Verdi" after listening to his singing, while British conductor Sir Antonio Pappano characterised him as having an exquisite tonality and perfect cantabile.

Upcoming engagements include Figaro (*Il barbiere di Siviglia*) and Zurga (*Les Pêcheurs de Perles*) at the National Centre of Performing Arts, China, and Valentin (*Faust*) at the Chile National Opera House, and a collaboration with the Hangzhou Philharmonic Orchestra in *Madama Butterfly* and Mahler's Symphony No.8 in E-flat major.

Wen Ming

piano



Wen Ming, a young pianist, is piano artistic director at the Wuhan Conservatory of Music, and an executive director of the Piano Committee of the Hubei Culture and Art Exchange Committee. She studied at the Royal Conservatory of Music in Brussels, the National Conservatory of Music in Cannes, and the Wuhan Conservatory of Music. She received her double master's degree in piano performance, under the tutelage of Associate Professor Tian Yuan, Professor David Levy and Professor Dominique Cornil. During her study abroad, she minored in vocal music and harpsichord, and won the Belgian national scholarship continuously. She also graduated with the highest score for piano performance and chamber music.

She won third place in the Belgian International Youth Piano Competition, first place in the Blüthner International Piano Competition in Belgium, third in the solo group and first in the piano duo group of the Wiesbaden International Piano Competition in Germany, and third place in the Hong Kong Asian Youth Open Competition. She has performed in solo and chamber music concerts in the Grand Concert Hall in Brussels, Leipzig Youth Academy Concert Hall, Nice Acropolis Concert Hall, Gnesin Music Academy in Russia, Wuhan Concert Hall, and Changsha Concert Hall. She has played in concerts with the Royal Belgian Youth Symphony Orchestra, and was invited by the Belgian classical music station Musiq3 to record chamber music.

After she returned to China in 2015, besides her artistic directorship and teaching, she has participated in a series of full rehearsals of operas, such as *Le Nozze di Figaro*, *L'Elisir d'Amore*, *La Bohème*, *Carmen*, *La Traviatta*, *Madama Butterfly*, and *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*. She also served as a judge and piano accompanist at the Shanghai International Youth Piano Competition, Changsha International Piano Open Competition, Huanglong Music Season and other competitions.

GIOACHINO ROSSINI
Largo al Factotum
(from “The Barber of Seville”)

GEORGES BIZET
Votre toast, je peux vous le rendre
(The Toreador Song, from “Carmen”)

ERICH KORNGOLD
Mein Sehnen, mein Wähnen
(Pierrot’s Tanzlied, from “Die tote Stadt”)

CLAUDE DEBUSSY
Clair de lune
(from Suite Bergamasque, L.75)

FRANCIS POULENC
8 Chansons gaillardes, FP 42

- I. La maîtresse volage
- II. Chanson à boire
- III. Madrigal
- IV. Invocation aux Parques
- V. Couplets bachiques
- VI. L’offrande
- VII. La belle jeunesse
- VIII. Sérénade

HENRI DUPARC
L’invitation au voyage
Phidylé

INTERMISSION

RICHARD RODGERS
Oh, What a Beautiful Mornin’
(from “Oklahoma!”)

JOSEPH KOSMA
Les Feuilles Mortes (Autumn Leaves)

FRANZ LEHÁR
Da geh’ ich zu Maxim
(from “The Merry Widow”)

GIUSEPPE VERDI
La morte di Rodrigo
(from “Don Carlo”)

白居易词 黄自曲
花非花 (A Flower in the Haze)

刘半农词 赵元任曲
听雨 (Listening to the Rain)

韦瀚章词 黄自曲
思乡 (Missing Home)

With Compliments

Programme Notes

ALTENBURG ARTS
L'invitation au voyage

Mr & Mrs Poh Choon Ann



Two show-stopping operatic classics for the baritone voice open this recital. *Largo al Factotum* is the perky, boasting aria with which Rossini's Barber of Seville, Figaro, makes his first entrance, declaring how much he loves his job as a barber and go-between, and how it has its perks, especially among the young ladies. Playfulness yields to sheer machismo in the *Toreador Song* from Bizet's "Carmen", victoriously sung by bullfighter Escamillo to the cheering of the crowds.

Korngold's *My Yearning, My Obsession (Pierrot's Dance Song)*, offers a nostalgia-drenched contrast. The singer recalls the happiness he once felt when he danced with a certain beloved under the moon, whose 'sad and beautiful' light is, incidentally, the inspiration of French writer Paul Verlaine's atmospheric poem on which Debussy's famous *Clair de lune* for piano solo is based.

Debussy's sensuously French style appropriately prefaces a selection of French *mélodies*. Poulenc's *Chansons gaillardes* (Ribald Songs), a cycle of eight songs based on anonymous, scabrous texts of the 17th century, were written in 1925-26 in a tone of celebration and alcohol. They demonstrate Poulenc searching for "half-erotic half-elegiac" French roots, without ever lapsing into vulgarity. Duparc's *Invitation to a journey*, composed in 1870, is a setting of two of three verses of the Symbolist poet Beaudelaire's famous poem describing his love of the countryside in Holland, where he imagines he and his beloved inhabiting an exotic and perfect dream world. *Phidylé* is perhaps Duparc's greatest song, a challenge for both singer and pianist: it progressively rises from languid tranquillity to the singer's triumphant climax, accompanied by heavy chords and tremolos in the piano, before a solo postlude for the piano which gradually dies to a pianissimo finish.

The second half of tonight's concert opens with lighter fare. *Oh, What a Beautiful Mornin'*, the opening song from the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical "Oklahoma!" which premiered on Broadway in 1943, is all American sunshine and brimming optimism. Johnny Mercer's *Autumn Leaves* has become an American jazz standard, although its origins were French, its tune written by Joseph Kosma in 1945. The operetta may be considered the Germanic predecessor of the Broadway musical, and its best-known champion, composer Franz Léhar, packed his best-known work "The Merry Widow" with fabulous tunes, including *You'll Find Me at Maxim's*, which will be presented tonight.

We return to serious grand opera in Verdi's "Don Carlo" (in fact, his longest, at about four hours!), with a famous scene in which Rodrigo, mortally wounded, tells Carlo that his intended bride Elisabeth will meet him at the monastery of St. Just and declares he is happy to have sacrificed his life for a man who will become Spain's saviour.

Tonight's closing selection of three famous Chinese songs convey nostalgia and longing: for loved ones and times gone by (*A Flower in the Haze*), and for home (*Listening to the rain*, set against gently pulsating accompaniment said to be reminiscent of Chopin's *Raindrop* Prelude, and *Missing Home*).

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