

香港劇場年鑑 2016

舞蹈・戲曲・戲劇

HONG
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YEARBOOK

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Xiqu

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小劇場粵劇《霸王別姬》 ——不一樣的學習體驗

黎耀威

二〇一六年七月，「西九文化區管理局」與上海戲曲藝術中心簽訂合作協議，加強包括藝術發展及場地經營等範疇的交流，頭炮就是八月率領交流團前往上海，了解上海戲曲藝術中心轄下各院團和場地的的工作，以及上海市政府戲曲藝術政策等；緊接之前的實地考察，西九文化區戲曲中心在二〇一七年十二月參與「上海小劇場戲曲節」並製作新編作品，期望藉此促進人才交流、滋養創作。

由西九文化區戲曲中心主辦及製作的小劇場粵劇《霸王別姬》就是在這個環境下孕育出來。小劇場，顧名思義與我們直接接觸的劇場有很多不同的地方：環境細小、劇場配置不同、觀眾席數少、與觀眾距離近、演時較短等；而小劇場粵劇《霸王別姬》就是為了參加第二屆「上海小劇場戲曲節」，由我與黃寶萱聯合編、導、演，配合一班年青的樂師，更包括監製、舞台、音響、燈光、服裝設計等團隊成員，攜手協力打造出來的。

小劇場戲曲到底是甚麼？我們應該選演甚麼劇目？如何凸顯廣東粵劇的特色？如何克服小劇場的限製？這個演出帶給我以至整個團隊不少的問題。我一直對《霸王別姬》這個故事有情意結。霸王項羽揭竿起義、破釜沉舟，七十戰而無一敗，卻於九里山陷於十面埋伏、四面楚歌之際，虞姬自刎營前，及至項羽敗走烏江，自愧再無顏面對江東父老，

西楚霸王最終烏江自刎，楚漢之爭隨之結束。這個家傳戶曉的故事在中國戲曲界享負盛名，特別是在京劇，謂之「國劇代表」絕不為過。

重演經典，困難重重，重演經典中的經典，無異是兵行險著，其實在開始籌備的時候，我真的沒太多考慮。我相信大部分的上海觀眾對廣東粵劇深感興趣，透過一個家傳戶曉的經典，展現我們廣東粵劇獨特色彩，是我選擇《霸王別姬》最主要的原因。

在我有限的認識裡，除了京劇的版本以外，廣東粵劇粵曲界中，有一首《霸王別姬》的南音，有麥炳榮先生及鳳凰女小姐的唱曲本，有葉紹德先生編寫的版本，近年仍有一首《新霸王別姬》的粵曲，更有一套我偶然在電視看到的彩色粵劇《楚漢爭》，其他的就只有文字上的史料。儘管版本及資料來源各異，但整個故事流程也極為相近。我相信內地觀眾對這個故事極為熟悉，在這個前提下，去展現粵劇特色最好不過。在劇本編排上，我將故事分為四節：〈回營〉、〈楚歌〉、〈烏騅〉和〈烏江自刎〉。

第一節：〈回營〉

此節全以古老粵劇唱腔「中州韻」，亦即是「官話」演唱。粵劇在一百年前全都以「官話」演唱，後來先輩薛覺先為了將戲曲貼近



《霸王別姬》(2016)
照片由作者提供



《霸王別姬》(2016)
照片由作者提供

觀眾，改以廣東話演繹。但「官話」依然是學習粵劇「唱、唸」的基礎，是不可或缺的。

在演繹方面，項羽一出場的套路稱為「跳大架」，及後的表演稱為「走四門」，虞姬的上場唱段「中板」及大鑼鼓的運用，都充滿傳統粵劇的特色。

第二節：〈楚歌〉

當項羽與虞姬坐下後，便來到〈楚歌〉。這一節我們希望表演當代粵劇的特色，因此在語言上由「官話」轉變為「廣東話」。在曲牌上，不單只有傳統的梆簧，更有虞姬所唱的小曲〈落花天〉與及將士所唱的南音，展現粵劇曲牌上靈活多變的特色。

第三節：〈烏騾〉

由將士透過戲曲身段表達聽到楚歌後楚營軍心大亂、三軍懼怕的情況，劇情便來到第三節。除了保留傳統大鑼鼓的「水介」，將氣氛推高，也保留粵劇運用「京鑼鼓」的特色。

此外，我們亦嘗試在當代粵劇上再推進一點，新編的〈垓下歌〉與虞姬的新曲便是在傳統旋律上的推進，以及刪去虞姬舞劍與改動虞姬的自刎，這都是在傳統骨幹上大膽的調整，希望從另外的角度凸顯人物特色。

第四節：〈烏江自刎〉

最後一節是我輩對粵劇持續發展的一些設想。在轉場期間，擊樂領導陳定邦設計了一段敲擊，營造萬馬千軍的畫面。如項羽上場的「鑼邊花」，破格地以抽象的形式，糅合霸王殺出重圍的感覺，我與飾演將士的吳立熙以一段「隔空對打」的手法，希望做出一變二、二變四，令觀眾投入沙場殺戮的感覺當中。

全節均以新曲為骨幹，以配合霸王敗走烏江之際的心理掙扎，虞姬與將士均代表霸王的心魔，跳脫的表演風格展示項羽如何最終選擇自刎。在劇場設置方面，佈景、燈光及音響也特定地、聚焦地投放在整個氛圍中，表達傳統戲曲一種創新的感覺。

我嘗試透過《霸王別姬》，把粵劇由古到今，由現在到未來，不論表演風格、劇場佈置、服裝、鑼鼓、語言、音樂、燈光，觀眾所能看到、聽到的，作「承」與「傳」的嘗試，希望藉此帶給上海觀眾一個更全面的粵劇體驗。終於，在二〇一六年十二月八日晚上七時三十分，小劇場粵劇《霸王別姬》在上海話劇藝術中心正式演出。

那天晚上，我真的有點緊張。畢竟第一次參演國內的戲曲節，亦是第一次參演小劇場戲曲的演出，也是第一次將自己的粵劇作品帶

到上海，更有上海戲曲界不少前輩、老師光臨指導。身為香港粵劇演員，當然希望內地觀眾感受到香港粵劇的精彩與特色，亦不枉整個團隊差不多用了九個月時間去籌備這一個小時的節目。

演出後，有很多上海戲曲界前輩向我們提出相當寶貴的意見。令我印象尤深的是「上海戲劇家協會」副主席羅懷臻老師說我們「守正」，我們「堅守正道」的方向總算正確，「道」不在於古今新舊，而在於正確，羅老師的鼓勵不單只在於這個戲，更在於我們日後的藝途。

二〇一七年第二屆「上海小劇場戲曲節」，一連兩個星期，除了我們之外，還有「上海崑劇團」、「福建省梨園戲實驗劇團」及「北京市河北梆子劇團」等多個戲曲團體，輪流上演具實驗性的小劇場節目，促進各地切磋探索。我們藉此機會欣賞了其他劇種的演出，發現「小劇場戲曲」在內地發展非常蓬勃，不論劇種、題材等，新舊並存、百花齊放。這令我反思香港粵劇的前瞻性——「小劇場粵劇」，有為嗎？

我會認為有相當的難度！香港大部分粵劇演出都是商業主導，兩者有著密不可分的關係。內地的劇團體制與香港可謂天淵之別，

所以他們更具備發展小劇場戲曲的條件。一個二百座位左右的小劇場，若以平均約二百元一張門票來計算，也未必足夠抵銷一晚演出的開支。加上小劇場戲曲的風氣尚未盛行，香港觀眾一般接受是三個小時長的節目，演時相對較短的小劇場節目能否獲得傳統觀眾的支持？內地發展小劇場戲曲已經不是三年五載的事，除了配置專屬的小劇場之外，舉辦「小劇場戲曲節」、籌備小劇場節目、訓練專屬人才等，都更具規模及富有經驗，很值得香港借鏡。從藝術的角度來說，小劇場簡約的體制提供不同的創作環境，無論是劇場配置、規模、故事題材、互動性等，都有著與大劇場不能並論的優點。空間雖小卻是年青演員發展無限可能的地方。

小劇場粵劇《霸王別姬》在西九文化區戲曲中心的支持下，給予整個製作團隊很大的創作空間。在劇本的磨合上，我與擊樂領導陳定邦和音樂領導劉楓英，與其他樂師們反覆討論鑼鼓、音樂的配置，除了展現粵劇的獨特風格之外，也要克服小劇場的某些限制，例如鑼鼓的聲浪。我們進行多次音樂總綵排，與黃寶萱和吳立熙反覆仔細討論可以改進的地方，邀請前輩排練、指導，這除了是資源的許可之外，我認為最重要還是每個崗位成員的認真、專業與投入——這種熱誠是我在今次演出中的最大得著。

我聽說，有人討論我們去上海演出《霸王別姬》，是旁人眼中的「不自量力」，這也並非空穴來風，但我認為就是要量一量自己的「力」。無可厚非，觀眾著眼於演員台前的表現，可是身為專業演員，眼界終得要闊，台前幕後、人情世態、一事一物，有所感則經驗日深，無所感則安穩度日，我就是這種喜歡跌跌碰碰、膽大妄為的初生之犢。我想令每個崗位的成員知道，他們對於整個演出都是很重要的——絕對不只是台前的主角——所有演員、音樂、佈景、燈光、舞台監督、前期的宣傳、策劃等，都主宰整個演出的成敗。透過這次演出，我希望他們將這種精神帶到平日的粵劇演出去，推己及人，令粵劇發展更專業、參與創作者更有熱誠。

二〇一七年九月及十一月，我們分別在香港及北京再次演出《霸王別姬》，使我們的「霸王精神」再一次洗禮，希望在未來的日子，可以將這套香港製造的小劇場粵劇《霸王別姬》，不論地域或藝術上，帶到更遠、更高。我要特別多謝一眾前輩對我們的指導，使我們更為「守正」的走下去。每當我觸及自己光頭的時候（因霸王這個角色的造型要開面，所以演員每次演出均要剃頭），永遠不忘這種學習精神。

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黎耀威

名伶文千歲與音樂名家潘細倫入室弟子。畢業於香港城市大學中文系。曾跟隨文禮鳳、韓燕明習藝。參演各大劇團演出，演出不同行當，增進演出經驗。亦曾到星馬、加拿大等地演出。黎耀威在二〇一〇年奪得由「香港八和會館」與香港電台第五台合辦「粵劇青年演員飛躍進步獎金獎（生角）」，在二〇一一年榮獲香港藝術發展局頒發「藝術新秀獎（戲曲界別）」，並於同年創立「吾識大戲」，以新鮮形象推廣粵劇。近年編寫多部粵劇作品，包括《青蛇》、《瀛台泣血》、《覆水難收》、《八千里路雲和月》和《三姑六婆賀新春》等，亦曾將莎士比亞名著《仲夏夜之夢》及《哈姆雷特》，分別改編成《一夢南柯》及《王子復仇記》，二〇一六年以新編粵劇《霸王別姬》參演第二屆上海小劇場戲曲節，二〇一七年參與第四十五屆香港藝術節編寫粵劇《漢武東方》。

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***Farewell My Concubine* in the Small Theatre — An Unusual Learning Experience**

Keith Lai

In July 2016, the West Kowloon Cultural District Authority (WKDA) signed a partnership agreement with the Shanghai Center of Chinese Operas (SCCO) to step up exchange in areas such as artistic development and venue operation. The first step was a study tour to Shanghai in August to look into the work of theatre troupes and performing venues under the SCCO, as well as Xiqu policies of the Shanghai Municipal Government. As a follow-up to this field trip, in December 2016 the Xiqu Centre of the West Kowloon Cultural District (WKCD) brought a new Cantonese opera to the Shanghai Experimental Xiqu Festival, as part of a long-term effort to foster talent exchange and artistic creation.

This is how *Farewell My Concubine*, a small-theatre Cantonese opera presented and produced by WKCD's Xiqu Centre, came about. A small theatre, as the name suggests, is different from the theatre we are familiar with in many aspects; it has a smaller and different setting, lower seating capacity, greater proximity to the audience, and is designed for shorter performance duration. This small-theatre Cantonese opera version of *Farewell My Concubine* was commissioned for the 2nd Shanghai Experimental Xiqu Festival. It is a collective effort by Janet Wong and I, co-writer-directors and actors, as well as a crew of young musicians, producer,

and stage professionals such as sound, lighting and costume designers.

What is "small-theatre Xiqu"? How should we choose our repertoire? How to foreground the unique flavour of Cantonese opera? And how to go about the limitations of the small theatre? This project posed many questions for me and the entire crew. I have always had a penchant for the story of *Farewell My Concubine*. Warlord Xiang Yu, the formidable Hegemon King of Western Chu, leads the rebel forces against the Qin armies to 70 consecutive victories, until he finds himself ambushed on all fronts in Jiuli Mountain. Unable to turn fate around, Consort Yu, Xiang's beloved concubine, slays herself in front of him. The disheartened overlord flees to Wu River and, too ashamed to see his clansmen again, takes his own life and puts an end to the Chu-Han Contention. One of the best-loved Xiqu stories, especially in Beijing opera, *Farewell My Concubine* can be justly called as "the epitome of national opera".

Restaging the classics is no easy task; restaging the classic of classics is even a perilous task. However, I did not think too much about that when I started planning the production. I figured that most theatregoers in Shanghai have a keen interest in Cantonese opera. The prime reason I picked



Farewell My Concubine (2016)
Photo courtesy: Keith Lai



Farewell My Concubine (2016)
Photo courtesy: Keith Lai

Farewell My Concubine is that a well known classic makes an effective showcase of the unique charm of our art.

As far as I know, other than the Beijing opera version, *Farewell My Concubine* is also found in Minstrel *Naamyam* ("Southern Sound") of Cantonese operatic music. There are many interpretations, such as a sung version by Mak Bing-wing and Fung Wong-nui; a version written by Yip Siu-tak; a Cantonese opera tune titled *Farewell My Concubine: New Rendition* written in recent years; a coloured Cantonese opera film titled *The Chu-Han Contention* which I saw on TV; and other versions that only exist in text. Despite the varying versions and origins, the plot on the whole is very much the same. I believe that the Mainland audience knows this story inside out, thus making it the best option to present the riches of Cantonese opera.

I have divided the story into four segments: *Returning to the Barracks*, *Old Tunes of the Chu State*, *The Warrior Horse*, and *Suicide by Wu River* respectively.

First segment: Returning to the Barracks

This segment is rendered entirely in the authentic Classic Dialect, or in other words, the "Official Language". A hundred years ago, all Cantonese

operas were sung in the Classic Dialect spoken in central China, until the days of maestro Sit Kok-sin, who first performed them in everyday colloquial Cantonese to bring Xiqu closer to modern day audiences. That said, the Classic Dialect is integral nonetheless to the singing and speech in today's Cantonese opera.

As for acting, the action routine performed by Xiang Yu when he makes his stage entrance is called "Jumping the Great Act", which is followed by "Running through the Four Gates". Upon Consort Yu's entrance, her vocal passage in *zhongban* (moderate beat) and the use of large gongs and drums capture the characteristics of traditional Cantonese opera.

Second segment: Old Tunes of the Chu State

This segment begins at the moment Xiang Yu and Consort Yu sit down. We set out to present in this segment the characteristics of contemporary Cantonese opera, so we used vernacular Cantonese instead of the Classic Dialect. In regard to *qupai* (song pattern), in addition to the traditional *Banghuang* Tune, we also had ditties such as Consort Yu's *Falling Petals in the Sky*, as well as Minstrel *Naamyam* sung by the generals. All this reflects the diversity and flexibility in Cantonese operatic music.

Third segment: *The Warrior Horse*

As the plot unfolds, the Chu generals, after hearing the tunes of their home country, are demoralised amid growing fear of defeat. While keeping intact the traditional “Running Water” percussion sequence to heighten the drama, we also followed the convention of using the gong and drum in Beijing opera for Cantonese opera.

What’s more, we made a conscious effort to take contemporary Cantonese opera another step forward. The all-new *The Song of Gaixia* and the new tunes for Consort Yu are a breakthrough in terms of melody; the removal of Consort Yu’s sword dance and revisions to her suicide scene are also bold moves that depart from traditional fare. We hope these alterations would depict the characters’ inner landscape from more varied perspectives.


Fourth segment: *Suicide by Wu River*

This final segment embodies some of our hopes for the development of Cantonese opera. Percussion Ensemble Leader Chan Ting-pong devised a passage for in between scenes to conjure up a fierce battle fought by thousands. The “Gong Flowers” upon Xiang Yu’s stage entrance, for example, depicts in an abstract, unprecedented way the hegemon king’s futile attempt to break the siege. Ng Lap-hei

in the role of the commander and I engaged in a “combat” that transcends time and space, in the hope of magnifying the number of fighters and, in turn, drawing the viewers to the battle happening before their eyes.

Some new tunes have formed the spine of this segment, playing up the psychological struggles of Xiang Yu as he is forced to retreat to Wu River. Both Consort Yu and the commander point to the devil inside the once dominant hegemon king. The action-packed performing style illuminates the build-up to Xiang Yu’s eventual suicide. The set, lighting and sound effects all serve as atmospherics to add a touch of innovation to traditional Xiqu.

Farewell My Concubine is an endeavour to both inherit and perpetuate the legacy of Cantonese opera from the past to the future, in terms of performing style, theatre setting, wardrobe, percussion, language, music, and lighting — basically everything the audience sees and hears. We hoped that this collective effort would give the audience in Shanghai a fuller taste of our operatic art. At last, at 7:30 pm on December 8, 2016, *Farewell My Concubine* (small-theatre version) opened at the Shanghai Dramatic Arts Center.



That evening, I was indeed a bit nervous. It was, after all, my debut at a Mainland Xiqu festival, my maiden small-theatre Xiqu production, and my first attempt to bring my Cantonese opera to Shanghai for evaluation by veterans and connoisseurs. As a Cantonese opera performer from Hong Kong, I earnestly hoped that the Mainland audience would recognise the riches of our art, so that the nine-month efforts that had gone into this one-hour programme would not be wasted.

After the curtain came down, many Xiqu veterans from Shanghai showered us with valuable comments. What has left the deepest impression is the advice from Master Luo Huaizhen, Vice-chairman of the Shanghai Dramatists Association, who said we are safeguarding the proper way and heading the right direction. The “way”, which can be either old or new, has to be proper. Master Luo’s positive feedback matters not only to *Farewell My Concubine*, but to our artistic practice in the long run.

During the fortnight at the 2nd Shanghai Experimental Xiqu Festival in 2017, we, together with Shanghai Kunqu Opera Troupe, Experimental Theatre of Liyuan Opera of Fujian and Hebei Bangzi Opera Troupe of Beijing, took turns staging experimental small-theatre works to foster exchange between different regions. We took this

opportunity to watch other dramatic genres, from which we realised that “small-theatre Xiqu” has been booming in the Mainland. Old and new, past and present go side by side in an inclusive environment of myriad genres and themes. A question flashed across my mind: Could small-theatre production be a way forward for Cantonese opera in Hong Kong?

I think that would be a challenging mission! Here in Hong Kong, Cantonese opera is largely a business endeavour, as most performances are profit-driven. Mainland theatre troupes have a totally different setup from ours. They are in a much better position to develop small-theatre Xiqu. Take a small theatre with 200 seats as an example; charging HK\$200 per head may not be enough to cover expenses for one evening performance. Moreover, small-theatre Xiqu has yet to become a trend here in Hong Kong, where audiences usually expect a performance of no less than three hours in length. Could small-theatre programmes, which have a shorter running time, possibly win the favour of Cantonese opera fans? It has been some time since small-theatre Xiqu came into existence in the Mainland. In addition to theatres specially designated for such productions, there have been small-theatre Xiqu festivals and related programmes, accompanied by substantial training for talents who specialise in this distinct operatic art. We in Hong Kong have much to learn

from their experience. In terms of art, the pared-down approach of small-theatre productions offers a different creative environment; be it physical setting, performance scale, subject matter and interactivity, there are unparalleled merits which cannot be found in the large theatre. Despite the small size, it nonetheless provides young actors with endless possibilities.

The small-theatre version of *Farewell My Concubine*, with the backing of WKCD's Xiqu Centre, offered the production crew tremendous room for creative experiment. I had discussed repeatedly with Percussion Ensemble Leader Chan Ting-bong and Ensemble Leader Lau Kwok-ying and other musicians the arrangements for the gong and drum. In our quest to showcase the unique beauty of Cantonese opera, we also had to overcome limitations of the small theatre, such as the sound level of gong and drum. We conducted final rehearsals with the musicians over and over again to examine with Janet Wong and Ng Lap-hei how to perfect our work, and invited experts over for advice. That was made possible not just by the resources we had, but more importantly, the professionalism and devotion of all the crew members. The passion we shared is the greatest gift I got from this project.

I was told that some people think we have overrated our abilities in bringing *Farewell My Concubine* to Shanghai. Such opinions are not entirely ungrounded, and it was exactly my intention to test our abilities. It is perfectly understandable that theatregoers focus their attention on actors' performance on stage. As professional actors, however, we have to open our eyes to the world. Every single encounter on and off stage can be a learning experience — if you feel things deeply, you may deepen your understanding; if you do not, you while your days away easily. I am one of those unabashedly bold greenhorns who do not shy away from all the ups and downs, wins and losses. I want all my teammates, including the cast, musicians, set and lighting designers, stage manager, pre-production publicists and planners, to understand that the success or failure of *Farewell My Concubine* hinges on each and every one of them, not just the protagonists on stage. I hope they would carry this belief with them through all the other Cantonese operas they work on. By igniting your beacon and then many others, let us hope that in the years to come, Cantonese opera would become more professionalised and all practitioners more passionate.



In September and November 2017, *Farewell My Concubine* was rerun in Hong Kong and Beijing respectively to put our “hegemon king belief” to the test once again. In the days ahead, we look forward to bringing this Hong Kong-made small-theatre version of *Farewell My Concubine* to a broader audience and newer heights, both geographically and artistically. My special thanks go to our predecessors, whose guidance cemented our determination to tread the “proper path”. Every time I touch my bald head — the result of my turn as the hegemon king, a “painted-face” character which calls for a shaved head — this belief springs to mind.

(Translated by Elbe Lau)

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Keith Lai

A trusted disciple of Cantonese opera maestro Man Chin-sui and famed musician Poon Sai-lun, Keith Lai also apprenticed under Man Lai-fung and Hon Yan-ming. He actively broadens his experience by performing multiple types of roles with different theatre troupes. His dedication to Cantonese opera has brought him to stages in Singapore, Malaysia, Canada, and more.

In 2010, Lai garnered the Most Promising Cantonese Young Actor Award (*sheng* role) jointly presented by the Chinese Artists Association of Hong Kong and Radio Television Hong Kong Radio 5. In 2011, he won the Award for Young Artist (*Xiqu*) from the Hong Kong Arts Development Council, and founded his own troupe to promote Cantonese opera in a new way. His recent scripts include *Green Snake*, *Son of Heaven*, *Too Late for Regret*, *8,000 Li of Cloud and Moon*, *Busybodies Celebrating the New Year*, among other titles. He has also adapted Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Hamlet* into Cantonese operas, namely *A Dream in Fantasia* and *The Arrant Revenge*. In 2016, he debuted at the 2nd Shanghai Experimental *Xiqu* Festival with a new Cantonese opera, *Farewell My Concubine*. In 2017, he co-scripted *Emperor Wu of Han and His Jester Strategist* for the 45th Hong Kong Arts Festival.

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