



Yi-Shin Taiwanese Opera Troupe

A Maze of Mirth and Mirage

2025.6.7 Sat. 14:30

2025.6.8 Sun. 14:30

Weiwuying Playhouse

Duration is 170 minutes with a 20-minute intermission.

Performed in Taiwanese with both Mandarin and English surtitles.

Age guidance 6+

Co-presenter:

一心戲園
Yi-Shin Taiwanese Opera Troupe



National Kaohsiung
CENTER for the ARTS

WEI WU YING

衛武營 國家藝術文化中心
國家表演藝術中心 National Performing Arts Center

Synopsis

The plot revolves around a father who demands absolute obedience from his son, causing his son to flee the house. Nevertheless, the father has a strong bond with his son, his flesh and blood. The father turns to a powerful celestial master and, through a series of illusions, witnesses his son's odd fate as if it were his own. The narrative progresses through episodes of joy, grief, wit, and bravery, culminating in a near-death experience. The father has long forgotten his son's disobedience and wants the master to save his son's life. Unbeknownst to him, the entire ordeal is a labyrinth of twists and turns.

Yi-Shin Taiwanese Opera Troupe joined forces with European director Lukas HEMLEB to create the magnificent show *Hazardous Games Around Hearts and Arrows* at the 2017 Taipei Arts Festival. This production fused Eastern and Western cultural elements, creating a performance that was both "traditional and innovative." In 2024, they will collaborate again to adapt CORNEILLE's 17th-century French classical masterpiece *L'illusion comique* at the National Kaohsiung Center for Arts (Weiwuying). This play will highlight the dramatic allure of Baroque-style Taiwanese opera, showcasing its unique aesthetics through a maze of twists and turns.

About the Creative Team

Yi-Shin Taiwanese Opera Troupe

The Yi-Shin Taiwanese Opera Troupe, named after the phrase “united we stand,” has been performing for over 30 years. The group is dedicated to its grand ambitions and quest for perfection. It has produced numerous famous plays and received accolades for its distinct directorial style and great dramatic tension in intimate theatrical settings. The founder, SUN Rong-hui, continues to play on stage, while the second generation, led by SUN Fu-Rui, now manages the troupe's affairs and performances.

Producer & Playwright | SUN Fu-rui

SUN Fu-rui graduated from the Department of Philosophy at Soochow University. Since taking over the troupe, he has consistently experimenting with new genres and desiring to produce cross-disciplinary works.

His works are notable for their philosophical insights. The collaboration with renowned Taiwanese author Amanda ZHANG, *The Lotus Song* has been hailed as "The New Romanticism of Taiwanese Opera." In 2017, he co-directed *Hazardous Games around Hearts and Arrows* with German-French director Lukas HEMLEB, marking the first collaboration between Taiwanese opera and a foreign director. His latest work, *A Maze of Mirth and Mirage*, released in 2024, has been nominated for the 23rd Taishin Arts Awards. Many of his productions have also received nominations for the Golden Melody Awards for Traditional Arts and Music.

Director | Lukas HEMLEB

Director Lukas HEMLEB, born in Frankfurt, Germany, won the 23rd Taiwan-France Cultural Award in 2020. With a background in theatre and music, he began his career in the mid-1980s, specializing in contemporary music and opera. Passionate about drama, he has worked in various locations including Berlin, Germany, Italy, the Republic of Cameroon, Nigeria, and Paris, France.

Lukas is known for his high standards, resistance to trends, and determination to establish links between words and music. Many theaters in France and Switzerland

have supported his work, the most prominent being the Comédie-Française. He is the first German to direct a comedy by Molière at the 400-year-old National Theater founded by Molière himself—an extraordinary achievement in a country renowned for its cultural heritage.

Playwright | XU Bo-ang

XU Bo-ang holds a master's degree in film directing from the National Academy of Chinese Theatre Arts and a bachelor's degree in drama from the National Taiwan University of Arts. He is a member of the Chinese Opera Director Association and was a student in the Department of Chinese Opera at the National Kuo Kuang Academy of Arts.

Currently, he is the founder and leader of Po-You Set, working to develop a distinctive, Taiwan-specific method of theatrical expression. His pieces *Solo Performances* (2013) and *Youth Z* (2016) earned him nominations for the 12th and 15th Taishin Arts Awards. He was previously hailed by the New Press as the "Monkey King of Chinese Opera in Taiwan" for his unconventional approach to production and his skill at portraying monkeys in his youth.

About the Actors

SUN Shi-pei as Lâu Sun-tsô

With deep roots in Taiwanese opera and versatile talent, SUN Shi-pei excels in both civil and martial roles across roles. A rare all-around performer of her generation, she was nominated for Best New Performer at the 27th Golden Melody Awards for Traditional Arts and Music.

SUN Shi-yong as Lữ Hồng-tê

A theater prodigy from a family of performers, SUN Shi-yong began acting at ten. Her nuanced, heartfelt portrayals leave a lasting impression and earned her a Best New Performer nomination at the 25th Golden Melody Awards for Traditional Arts and Music.

ZHENG Zi-yun as Kiêu Sa-tse

Trained in Taiwanese opera at the Taiwanese Opera Club of National I-Lan Commercial Vocational Senior High School and the National Taiwan College of Performing Arts, ZHENG was a member of the Dadaocheng Taiwanese Opera Troupe for Youth, supported by the Taipei City Arts Promotion Office, as well as the Tang Mei Yun Taiwanese Opera Company. She is an apprentice to National Living Treasure WANG Jin-ying. In 2024, she won Best Young Performer at the 35th Golden Melody Awards for Traditional Arts and Music for her performance in *Red Beard Girl Love*, presented by the Untouchable Peach Theatre Company.

LIN Guan-fei as Liok Hing & Commander-in-Chief Tsu

LIN began her training at the National Taiwan College of Performing Arts at age 12, specializing in male roles. She later earned a degree from the Department of Chinese Drama at Chinese Culture University. Since joining the troupe in 2008, she has been a core member of Yi-Shin Taiwanese Opera Troupe. Her powerful voice and polished stage presence have earned her widespread recognition and admiration.

KE Jin-long as Kòo Tàt

KE has been passionate about traditional Chinese operas since childhood. A graduate of the Department of Taiwanese Opera at the National Taiwan College of Performing Arts, he is a longtime member of Yi-Shin and a direct protégé of founding director SUN Rong-hui. Acclaimed for his broad range—from commanding martial roles to charming comic characters—he continues to expand his artistry through outdoor performances and directing.

SUN Li-ya as Tshun-hue

The second daughter of director SUN Rong-hui, SUN brings a vibrant range and spontaneity to the stage. A natural crowd-pleaser both on and off stage, she continually surprises audiences with her playful versatility—something even director Lukas eagerly anticipates. She also serves as lead vocalist behind the scenes.

ZHAI Luo-an as Elder Kiâu

A graduate of the National Taiwan College of Performing Arts, ZHAI joined Yi-Shin in 2017. Dedicated and hardworking, he has steadily refined his craft through both formal training and grassroots performances. His growing stage presence brings depth and splashes to every production.

Underlined parts are pronounced in Taiwanese Hokkien.

Program Notes

Finally Discovering What's at the End of the Maze

Interview with performers SUN Shi-pei and KE Jin-long

Written by Anniel HAO

"Actually it's not just with *A Maze of Mirth and Mirage*. When we first started rehearsing with director Lukas HEMLEB, we all felt that we had fallen into a maze," says SUN Shi-pei, a member of Yi-Shin Taiwanese Opera Troupe who plays the *xiaosheng* (young man) role. Next to her, performer and physical movement guide KE Jin-long nods vehemently.

Having HEMLEB, a European, direct a Taiwanese opera was quite intriguing for fans and even more so for the performers. While rehearsing, the language barrier was quite often not an issue; the cultural understanding in both directions was what really needed work. Finding a balanced consensus between Western boldness and Eastern reserve was often the question.

With *A Maze of Mirth and Mirage*, they seem to have found the solution, although the journey was quite long.

Eliminating established mental programming and superfluity

KE recalls how stunned he was upon first meeting HEMLEB.

"For instance, SUN was playing the part of a son who was hit and shoved while his hands were tied. In our mental programming for traditional opera, there are established modes of hitting and shoving, and we exchanged several movements. HEMLEB didn't approve, though, and came over to personally demonstrate how he wanted it done. Only then did we realize that he wanted it to truly look like a beating to death." KE couldn't help but laugh at this point. Usually, the *xiaosheng* is supposed to maintain a look of elegance even while subject to a beating. But HEMLEB wanted it to look as real as possible to put the son's plight and pain on full display.

Isn't that too much of a violation of the rules of traditional opera? Actually, it's not. We can use a more straightforward approach. KE says, "We later realized that HEMLEB wanted that straightforward feel of outdoor theater. By holding back on the aspect of "beauty,"

the performers could go a bit bolder with their emotions, which helped them connect better with the audience.”

HEMLEB’s opera removes superfluity to leave only genuine simplicity. Many of the props are no longer needed and are replaced by performance skill, lighting, and a few smaller props. KE adds, “So the stage is quite empty, just a table and two chairs. I play the father, and while thinking about my son, I look at the pellet drum, which is a projection of my son—that’s it, there are no related hints. Speaking of that, though I play the *laosheng* (dignified, elderly man) role, HEMLEB would not let me shake my hands to express anger or excitement—but traditionally, that role must shake his hands in those situations! Not on HEMLEB’s watch. He viewed even that as too much.”

He kept getting rid of things like that. The performers occasionally worried about whether the audience would even know what is going on, but these doubts were often suppressed by their focus during rehearsals, and by the end, it was too late to question him. So all they could do was put their trust in each other as they took the stage.

Scumbags don’t view themselves as scumbags

With HEMLEB’s influence, SUN also expanded her concept for the *xiaosheng* role: “The more I work with HEMLEB, the more I think the performers should be able to act in different ways.”

“Mental programming” in traditional opera refers to the established movements and symbols passed down through generations. “But if you go back to their origins, weren’t they created to communicate with the audience? In light of this, Sun is open to modifying her programming and incorporating new techniques for audiences in the modern day.

“It’s not only about how we move physically; HEMLEB is very thorough in the aspect of psychological analysis,” says SUN. For example, in the past, she would have to perform her *xiaosheng* roles with a set formula of masculinity, such as in her posture and a charming, handsome look. “But in *A Maze of Mirth and Mirage*, HEMLEB wants realism. A man in real life sometimes exhibits childlike innocence, while he must bear massive burdens at other times. Childishness and ambition can indeed exist in the same person, as can weakness and courage.”

When her character is portrayed as a womanizer, she fully embraces the role, often depicting him as a scumbag. However, her performance in *A Maze of Mirth and Mirage*, which includes involvement in multiple relationships, offers a strikingly different interpretation. She explains, "In traditional opera, a womanizer is always shown as a villain. But while working on this piece, I realized that scumbags don't see themselves that way. They genuinely want to care for each of the women in their lives; they just happen to love themselves the most. That's the essence of it."

Whether it's KE's difficulty with the empty stage or SUN's struggle as the xiaosheng, they must concentrate on their roles and not worry about every detail during their performance. Sometimes while rehearsing, they couldn't help but ask themselves: is this really going to work, having to rely solely on imagination with such an empty stage? Will the audience understand what's going on? To be honest, before the first show, the performers couldn't be sure whether they'd make it out of this maze.

But SUN remarks, "I remember the debut. At the end, I was standing on the edge of the stage, so I couldn't see what was going on behind me, though I could vaguely sense that some sort of mechanism was moving back there. And then...the applause came, and I could even hear some people sobbing." She couldn't turn around to look, and in front of her, all she could see was the black mass of the audience as the light shined on her. But waves of sighs carrying surprise, admiration, and heartfelt emotion gently came towards her.

At that moment, SUN and everyone else felt the fog before them dissipate. The confusion was over as the truth of the plot was revealed. To know the feeling of that journey, you'll have to go and see the play for yourself.

Artistic and Production Team

Co-presenter | Yi-Shin Taiwanese Opera Troupe, National Kaohsiung Center for Arts (Weiwuying)

Production team

Team Leader & Artistic Director | SUN Rong-hui

Chief Executive Officer & Producer | SUN Fu-rui

Original | Pierre CORNEILLE

Playwright | XU Bo-ang, Sun Fu-rui

Director | Lukas HEMLEB

Music Arrangement | CHEN Meng-liang

Choreographic Coach & Martial Arts Director | KE Jin-long

Stage Designer | CHEN Hui

Lighting Designer | WANG Yao-chung

Image Designer | XU Yi-jun

Costume Design | CAI Yu-fen, CHEN Zhen-wang, QIN Jia-ban

Costume Coordinator | HUANG Tzu-en

Makeup Artist | ZHOU Ting-hua

Prop Maker | Yuhao Art Studio

Translator of the Original French Play | JIA Yi-jun

Actor

Koo Ûn- kî & Lâu Sun-tsô | SUN Shi-pei

Lû Hông-tê | SUN Shi-yong

Tshing Thian | SUN Rong-hui (Senior artist)

Kòo Tât | KE Jin-long

Tshun-hue | SUN Li-ya

Kiâu Sa-tse | ZHENG Zi-yun

Liok Hîng & Commander-in-chief Tsu | LIN Guan-fei

Elder Kiâu | ZHAI Luo-an

Postman | LUO Bi-lian

Maid | CHEN Wei-ci

Soldier & Jailer | CHEN Pei-yi, LIN Yuan-xin

Soldier & Servant | CHU You-chen

Soldier | FAN Sheng-zong, ZHENG Yi- jia, LIAN Hao-wei

※ Underlined parts are pronounced in Taiwanese Hokkien.

Orchestra

Leader of String Instruments & Nanhu | CHEN Meng-liang

Flute & Xiao | SHAO Qien-feng

Keyboard | HE Yu-guang
Pipa | WU Xing-rong
Cello | MEI Meng-wei
Hammered Dulcimer | ZHUANG Yi-ran
Suona & Percussion | JIANG Chien-hsing
Guangxian & Nanhu | SHI Chen-xing
Sanxian & Zhongruan | GAO Min-chun
Leader of Percussion & Leader Drum | HE Ting-hao
Percussionist | ZHENG Yu-xiang

Technical team

Stage Manager | WANG Yao-chong
Stage Technical Director | LIAO Shi-xian
Lighting Engineering | StOne Design Company
Lighting Technical Director | SU Jun-bai
Sound Engineering | Fei Yang Lighting and Sound Corporation
Leader of Sounds | CHEN Duo-fu
Subtitle Production and Execution | Qiu Bi-zhen
English Subtitle Translator | KE Dun-you

Administrative team

Executive Producer | LIAO Fang-yi
Promotion and Copywriter | ZENG Yu-chen
Administrative Staff | QIU Yuan-yu, HUANG Xia-ru, HUANG Jie-ping
Costume Management | LIAO Su-e, CHEN Gui-zhu, ZHAI Luo-an, CHU You-chen, SHI Yi-ci
Props Management | ZHENG Yi-jia, LIAN Jie-en

Yi-Shin Taiwanese Opera Troupe Of Special Thanks to

SHIN YEH Restaurant Group, Cosmos Hotel
Ms. LI Xiu-ying, Mr. LI Hong-jun
Ms. HE Su-qhing, Ms. SU Wan-nong
Mr. GENG Yi-wei, Ms. ZHANG Man-juan, Ms. LANG Zu-jun

Assist with performances | National Taiwan College of Performing Arts

The National Center for Traditional Arts supports this 2024 premiere.

Weiwuying Online Questionnaire

