

Contralto's 'Pause to Notice'

By HSIN BAICHENG & HELENA ZHU
Epoch Times Staff

In the cold winter wind, I hand you true information, but it's as if you don't see me, oblivious and unaware.

Ms. Yang graduated from China's prestigious Central Conservatory of Music and was a member of the Central Philharmonic Orchestra of China. Later she studied with various renowned Italian opera masters, including Baritone Gino Becki and Basso Nicola Rossi-Lemeni. She decided to remain in Europe and has lived in Germany since 1994.

Since the launch of Shen Yun Performing Arts 2009 World Tour in Atlanta, Ms. Yang has performed across the United States, South Korea, Japan, and is currently in Taiwan.

The lyrics of "Pause to Notice" talk about practitioners of Falun Gong, a traditional Chinese spiritual practice, handing out flyers on the streets in the hot summers and cold winters to tell passers-by about the Chinese Communist Party's persecution of the group. Yet some people refuse the leaflets as they believe in the "Party's lies."

Ms. Yang said that she composed the melody of the song herself. When she first saw the lyrics, an image of Falun Gong practitioners spreading truth flyers day

and night appeared in her mind.

"Every time I sing this song, this image always pops up over and over again," said Ms. Yang, who began to practice Falun Gong herself in 1999, the year of the Chinese regime's crackdown on the spiritual discipline began.

Ms. Yang has had many admirers. Among who have watched Ms. Yang perform was Norio Isogai of Japan. In the 19th century, when music boxes, the "automatic music instruments," were first invented in Europe, they became luxurious treasures for many collectors. Nowadays, arguably only a few people in the world are capable of repairing and restoring these antiques. Among the experts is Norio Isogai.

After watching the show at Aichi Prefectural Art Theatre Concert Hall in Nagoya on Feb. 13, he said, "The songs, both the technique and volume, are very high-level. The last alto [Jiansheng Yang] has a very low voice for a woman. Her range is in between a man's and a woman's."

Upon watching the show in Taichung, Taiwan, Dr. Chuang Bihua, who has a doctorate in choir conducting at University of Maryland, said, "I think her ability to temper her voice was perfect. It was very steady, and I could see that her foundation is very strong. When she was singing in the lower range, wow! It's unusual to hear such a beautiful voice—an



Shen Yun Performing Arts International Company alto Yang Jiansheng. THE EPOCH TIMES

absolutely flawless alto. She's very admirable."

As the show traveled to Tokyo on the country's National Foundation Day,

Feb. 11, to Hitomi Memorial Auditorium of Showa Woman's University, a theatre where the Japanese imperial family often watched public shows, Ryou Shouji, a respected and renowned lyricist was in the full house. Ryou Shouji has written lyrics for over 4,000 songs.

He said that from what he had witnessed in his 30 years of experience in the musical field, Yang was top-notch.

"As a lyricist, the most moving parts for me were the songs and lyrics. Especially Guan Guimin and Yang Jiansheng; they were absolutely touching. Another vocalist came with me. Both of us think that their voices are incomparable. I cannot understand Chinese, but that's not important, because their songs were conveyed to the deepest part of my heart. I don't need any translation. I am already deeply moved."

Also in Taichung was Lin Po-jun, senior advisor to the president of Taiwan. He said that the vocalist seemed to call us to something higher than "the hustle and bustle of everyday, mundane life repeated again and again."

Ms. Yang received the silver prize at China's National Youth Singing Competition and is now listed as one of the seven worldwide best altos by Wikipedia, being the only Chinese on the list.

"Singing is not for listeners to get very crazy and wild from the entertainment—this is evidence of the decline of the arts.

It should resonate something in the heart to uplift one spiritually—the purpose of arts. Shen Yun is doing this right now. Mankind's culture nowadays is extremely degenerated," she said.

"Actually the path of singing is not easy. Practice is required every day, yet [one is] never satisfied.

"If a vocalist just thinks about himself or herself on stage, the best compliment he or she can receive is something like 'this person's skill is pretty good,' nothing more. Audience members spend lots of money to go to the theatre, yet they forget about that singer after a few days—this is a low evaluation. The genuine high evaluation is when the audience can remember the song rather than the vocalist. Take the audience to the realm of your song, and let them rethink their lives, become encouraged and uplifted. Otherwise, it's useless for a vocalist to sing.

"In the last line of the song, I reach the range of a baritone. The voice in the higher range can pierce through, while the voice in the lower range can penetrate and be absorbed—this power can go straight to the heart."

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Ballet in New York may be losing artistic integrity

Metropolitan Repertory Ballet fights the trend

By JOHNATHAN WEEKS
Epoch Times Staff

NEW YORK—Despite waning attendance, the Metropolitan Repertory Ballet Company still strives to exhibit innovation while preserving the traditional side of ballet dancing.

"Ballet is the lowest attended stage art right now, but we can't blame the loss of attendance on the Internet and television," said Leonora Volpe, president of the Metropolitan Repertory Ballet. "In the '50s, people were glued to the screen but ballet was at a high point; people were scalping tickets for a thousand dollars.

"Over the years, there has been a major disconnect between the producers and the audience," said Ms. Volpe, who believes that changes can be made to classical ballets but they must not detract from the author's intent or change the original idea in any negative way. "They take something that is tried and true and they change it. You get directors that come in and want to re-invent the wheel," she said.

Ballet groups perform classic ballets with little change to the original dance, create completely new ballets, or take a traditional ballet set in

a different time frame. According to Volpe, "Faust" set in the bayous of 1800s Louisiana was amazing. "Cinderella" set in the '20s was horrible. Instead of the wonderful Baroque ball gowns and the loose flowing shirts the men would wear, they had tail coats and big medals and the women had flapper-type dresses on.

As a dance lover, I can verify what Volpe is saying. When I saw an excerpt from "La Traviatta" Grand Salon style, it was in such an intimate setting that I could see the dancers' effort to execute the precise steps and movements. The performers not only danced with purity, but, more than

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—Leonora Volpe, president of the Metropolitan Repertory Ballet

that, they acted out each character's story. They conveyed a character's emotion—the pain, the joy, and the rage, evident through the dancer's movements and facial expressions—to the audience a few feet away. This is what ballet is all about, not just the technical aspect of it. The passion the performers feel for the story they are

telling translates into either a heartfelt performance or a bland one.

"The ballets are about people, and what is lost in strictly following only technique is the human emotion that made it so popular in the past," Volpe said.

Art proliferated in New York City in the 1920s and '30s, which led to many small ballet groups being established. This, in turn, led to the opening of many new venues and created competition among the groups. As a consequence, the ballet groups exhibited much ingenuity as each established its unique voice in order to draw an audience. There was no room to abase the art, which Volpe feels is happening today.

Now groups have to rent their venues and funding is difficult to find. In addition, many venues have closed since the early 1970s. New York boasts only a few ballet groups now, and one of them is usually touring in Europe where the market is better.

The Metropolitan Repertory Ballet has 10 full-time dancers, but has hired as many as 80 depending on funding and need. Volpe finds extra dancers through word-of-mouth and auditions. She is known to pay well but has high standards for those hired.

Ms. Volpe knew how hard it was to be a young dancer and not get paid well, so she wanted to make sure dancers were paid what she thought they were worth even if she didn't get paid that well, Jonathan Kness, tenor and musical director for the Metropolitan Repertory Ballet explained.

The Metropolitan Repertory Ballet may be one of the few safe havens for working, serious ballet dancers in New York.



Canada's legendary poet/singer, Leonard Cohen. GETTY IMAGES

Leonard Cohen leaves Vancouver audience spellbound

The magic is as strong as ever

By RYAN MOFFATT
Epoch Times Staff

Not many performers command a standing ovation before they play a single note. Leonard Cohen is one of the exceptions. As he walked onstage in a grey suit and fedora, the sold out crowd at Vancouver's General Motors Place took to their feet to welcome the 74 year old singer/poet.

Backed by a nine piece band of virtuoso musicians, Leonard Cohen opened his three hour set with "Dance me to the end of Love". Radiating a surprising passion and energy the enigmatic poet seemed to be enjoying his time onstage and the unexpected adoration he has experienced on his latest tour. His gravelly voice a few octaves deeper than it was the last time he toured added an aged beauty and wisdom to his songs.

Apart from a little nimble dancing, Cohen sang with his eyes closed, head tilted skyward as if in prayer rather than song. Fitting, since his lyrics; laden with Christian imagery and love, are modern hymns for many of his fans. He didn't say much throughout the performance and he really didn't need to. When your songs carry as much weight as Cohen's does there really isn't much that needs to be said.

With a complete head of gray hair and all the outward signs of age he seemed spry and full of an

energy that defied his 75 years. "It's been fifteen years since I last was here," quipped Cohen. "I was sixty then, just a kid with a crazy dream."

The set list contained classic material like "Bird on a Wire", "Suzanne", "The Future" and "I'm your Man" among many other vintage Cohen songs. His rendition of "Hallelujah", complete with swirling Hammond organ in the background, was the best received and inspired a standing ovation of its own. This Cohen masterpiece has been covered by over 150 artists including Bono, Jeff Buckley and Willie Nelson, but no one can deliver its beautiful lyrics as well as the poet-master himself.

Garnering eighty 5 star reviews, Cohen's tour has taken him to sold out shows across Canada, Europe and America. "It feels so good to be back in Canada," said the Montreal native who has become Canada's unofficial poet laureate to the love generation and beyond.

Since his release of Songs of Leonard Cohen (1967) which included such songs as "Suzanne," "Sisters of Mercy," and "So Long, Marianne", Cohen has charted a unique course that has waxed and waned with the seasons. From critical acclaim, loves lost and gained to becoming an ordained Buddhist monk he has always stood aloof with an old world sense of dignity that has made him timeless and always relevant. "I've spent the last few years in an intensive study of the religions of the world, but cheerfulness kept breaking through," deadpanned Cohen in his self-deprecating, wry

sense of humour.

Cohen embarked on his latest venture partly because of financial difficulties resulting from the alleged embezzlement of his savings by his former manager. If that was the impetus for hitting the road again it seems Cohen is genuinely enjoying the ride.

Much like Johnny Cash in his later years people are drawn to him because he is important and his influence on our modern culture is undeniable. There is nobody like him and there never will be. His songs and poetry are a source of national pride and after all it may be the last time that he will perform them; at least with this much vigour. The last time he took to the stage was 15 years ago and at that rate he will be ninety by the time he heads out on tour again.

It didn't matter that Cohen gave such a fine performance, he could have mumbled a few words and left the stage and the majority of the crowd would have been happy to pay the ticket price all the same. As the audience took to the exits after the fifth encore there was a sense of gratitude that lingered. We got to see Leonard Cohen one last time.

Anthem

*Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack in everything
That's how the light gets in.*

L.C.

Dutch museum could lose masterpiece to JPMorgan

AMSTERDAM—The Netherlands' largest museum risks losing a 17th-century Dutch masterpiece to an American bank which says it is its rightful owner.

The Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam bought Gerrit Adriaensz Berckheyde's "Golden Bend" from Dutch businessman Louis Reijtenbagh last year.

Reijtenbagh has financial troubles, and JPMorgan Chase & Co, seeking repayment of a loan, has lodged a claim in a New York court to try to obtain the painting. It says the 62-year-old businessman should not have sold it to the museum because he was using it as collateral for a loan.

"The bank took possession of Reijtenbagh's art collection earlier this month. This painting was also on the list," Taco Dibbits, director of collections at Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum, said.

Dibbits declined to say how much the Dutch state had paid for the painting.

JPMorgan Chase is seeking the repayment of loans that were backed by millions of dollars worth of artwork held by Monte-Carlo Art SA, a British Virgin Islands-based entity which JPMorgan says is controlled by Reijtenbagh.

It said works by Picasso, Monet,



DUTCH COLLATERAL: JPMorgan Chase & Co. has taken possession of a painting by Gerrit Adriaensz Berckheyde from The Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam as collateral for a loan for Dutch businessman Louis Reijtenbagh. ARTRENEWAL.ORG

and Rembrandt had also been used as collateral and moved illegally out of the United States.

Reijtenbagh, a former doctor, made a fortune through investing and has been described as one of the wealthiest people in the Netherlands. He has declined comment.

"The Golden Bend," a light-colored depiction of an Amsterdam canal and its prized canal houses, is now on display at the National Gallery Museum in Washington. It was insured for \$5.2 million before it came to the Rijksmuseum.