



Chinese soprano Huang Hong Ying has been named the Teresa Teng of Guangzhou. PHOTO: COURTESY OF HUANG HONG YING

Singing Hakka melodies aloud

Olivia Ho

Hakka Ladies Love To Sing is the title of Huang Hong Ying's favourite folk song. It also effectively sums up her life.

"I started singing when I was on my mother's lap," the soprano says in Mandarin on the telephone from her home in Huizhou, in Guangdong province, China.

She grew up in a farming community. She and her parents loved to sing Hakka melodies as they worked in the fields.

"I was a tiny child," says Huang. "But I would sing so loudly that the veins would bulge in my neck."

She will be in town to lend those powerful vocals to Tunes Of Hakka, a concert by the Singapore Chinese Orchestra (SCO) on Sept 14 and 15. The gig will bring together Hakka artists from China, Taiwan and Singapore.

Huang will share the stage with Taiwanese composer and singer Huang Lien-yu, local pianist Clarence Lee and the Nanyang Khek Community Guild Choir.

She will sing traditional Hakka songs, including Welcoming You To Huizhou, Olive Tree Olive Flower, and of course, Hakka Ladies Love To Sing.

Dubbed by the media as the "Teresa Teng of Guangzhou", she has previously performed twice with the orchestra.

In 2005, she was invited to sing with the orchestra in a tribute to Mandopop legend Teng, as well as a gala fund-raising dinner.

She is returning at the invitation of SCO music director, Yeh Tsung.

Maestro Yeh, 62, said in an e-mail: "Huang is a versatile singer who is at home with Hakka folk songs and popular songs. She always sings with passion and rich flavour. I am delighted to have her back."

Huang started singing professionally from the age of 14, after being discovered by and joining a cultural performance troupe from her hometown.

Asked how she felt about leaving home at a young age, she says: "I felt gloriously happy. My parents rejoiced for me too, as they knew that I loved to perform."

For four years, she performed with the troupe across Guangdong. After that, she studied folk music at Guangzhou's Xinghai Conservatory of Music.

When she graduated two years later, she returned to the troupe in Huizhou as a headlining performer.

Today, she has about 10 albums to her name, including Tasting Loneliness For The First Time (2002), A September Story (2003) and Hakka Ladies (2006).

She says she has performed in as many countries as she has albums, including the United States, Britain, Russia and the Philippines.

"The mountain songs of the Hakka are unique," says Huang, who is married with a daughter, now in her 20s.

"I hope Singaporeans will enjoy our show and that we can share our love for the Hakka culture with them."

Book it

TUNES OF HAKKA BY SCO

Where: SCO Concert Hall, 7 Shenton Way

When: Sept 14 and 15, 8pm

Admission: \$25, \$35, \$45 and \$55

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