

## SCO News 新加坡华乐团讯息

Source: The Straits Times, 4 February 2014, Tuesday

HUAYI - CHINESE FESTIVAL OF ARTS

# New voice for silent film

Singapore Chinese Orchestra accompanies 1934 movie *The Goddess* with fresh soundtrack

Akshita Nanda

**T**he Singapore Chinese Orchestra plans to breathe new life into an 80-year-old silent film classic from Shanghai for the Esplanade's annual Huayi - Chinese Festival of Arts.

The ensemble led by music director Yeh Tsung plays an all-new original soundtrack to the 73-minute movie *The Goddess*, starring the late Ruan Lingyu, at the Esplanade Concert Hall on Feb 15.

The screening, with English subtitles and no intermission, will be preceded by a 10-minute overture over a photo montage showing the development of Shanghai and its early film industry. The music for the overture and film is composed by the Singapore Chinese Orchestra's composer-in-residence Law Wai Lun and Hong Kong-based film composer Lincoln Lo.

"We've done several things with movies but never a silent movie with a full orchestra and new music," says Yeh, 64, who has led the Singapore Chinese Orchestra in performing existing soundtracks for local short films such as director Anthony Chen's *The Reunion Dinner* in 2011 and Royston Tan's *The Little Note* in 2012.

Such pairings of film and live music are very popular with audiences, adds Yeh. He also gets his American ensemble, the South Bend Symphony Orchestra, to play live soundtracks for screenings of Western silent films, starting three years



**The Goddess (above) will be accompanied by an original soundtrack performed by the Singapore Chinese Orchestra. PHOTOS: ESPLANADE**

ago with Lon Chaney's 1925 *The Phantom Of The Opera* in Michigan.

*The Goddess* is a tragedy about a woman who works as a prostitute to care for her young son. Directed by Wu Yonggang, the 1934 film is considered a classic of the Chinese silent film industry and was a break-out role for Ruan. Barely a year after the movie was released, the actress killed herself at age 24 by taking drugs.

Yeh and composer Law began talks about composing all-new music for a silent movie two years ago. Last year, they watched about 20 films from China's National Film Archive in Beijing, before deciding on *The Goddess* for its artistic quality and iconic lead actress.

"I grew up hearing her story. She's like Marilyn Monroe in China - or maybe I should say Marilyn Monroe is the Ruan Lingyu of the US," says the Shanghai-born Yeh, referring to the American actress who died in 1962 at age 36.

In an e-mail interview in Chinese, Law, 70, endorses Ruan's appeal and



adds: "This is a classic work from the early period of Chinese film, and in terms of cinematography and directing, it has many fine points, such as the lively rhythm of the film's pacing, the way the camera lens captures that rich layer of meaning in every scene, definitely a powerhouse in that era."

However, he did find the project challenging. "Because there's no dialogue or sound to pair with a variety of other elements, the images on the screen and the plot are all heavily dependent on this sole element of music, and this led to a great deal of struggle in terms of conceptualising the composition."

Hong Kong-based Lo created the initial electronic files of the score, which Law then "adjusted" for performance.

Lo has composed dozens of film scores, including for Hong Kong producer Manfred Wong's 1996 film, *Feel 100%*,

and says in an e-mail interview that he leapt at the chance to do a silent film.

"Films today have a lot of dialogue and the score ends up playing a supporting role," he writes in a mixture of English and Chinese. "So when I first heard that we would be scoring a silent film, my reaction was: Awesome!"

But it was a difficult task, he adds, comparing it to the work of writing a full-length symphony. "We are talking about 73 minutes of non-stop orchestra music which needs to be synchronised visually with a movie, live."

Yeh, too, finds the project challenging. He says: "When you conduct a concert, you are pretty much your own boss, sometimes you can be fast, sometimes slow. Each concert can be slightly different. But this one, we need to be very strict on time, otherwise the movie and music can't fit each other."

Still, he takes special joy in this pairing of silent movie and music. "The plan is not just for the music to explain the movie, we also try to make it a dialogue between movie and music. New music and old movie meet after 80 years. Isn't that magical?"

✉ akshitan@sph.com.sg

## Book it

### RUAN LINGYU'S THE GODDESS - A SILENT FILM CONCERT

**Where:** Esplanade Concert Hall  
**When:** Feb 15, 5pm  
**Admission:** \$38, \$48 and \$68 from Sistic (go to [www.sistic.com.sg](http://www.sistic.com.sg) or call 6348-5555)  
**Info:** [www.huayifestival.com](http://www.huayifestival.com)

## DREAM OF THE RED MANSION CONCERT

The Singapore Chinese Orchestra presents *Spring Dreams Of The Red Mansion*, a concert which features a

rearrangement of music from the 1987 television series adaptation of the classic Chinese novel, *Dream Of The Red Mansion*.

The orchestra will be playing six parts of the suite, composed by Wang Li Ping, and be accompanied by a vocalist from Shanghai, Chen Si, who will be using the vocal techniques and styles of folk singing to perform the songs. The orchestra will be conducted by guest conductor chair Ku Pao-wen.

**Where:** Singapore Chinese Orchestra Concert Hall, 7 Shenton Way

**When:** Feb 28 and March 1, 8pm

**Admission:** \$25, \$35, \$45 and \$55 from Sistic. Call 6348-5555 or go to [www.sistic.com.sg](http://www.sistic.com.sg)