

# THE BUSINESS TIMES

## A feast for the mind and senses

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By Helmi Yusof



PARADISE Interrupted, now playing at Drama Centre Theatre, takes its title from Milton's Paradise Lost, the lengthy 17th epic poem centred on the biblical story of the Fall of Man and the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden.

Hot young Chinese composer Huang Ruo has taken the story and spliced it with kunqu opera Peony Pavilion, also a lengthy epic work about young maiden Du Liniang who falls in love with a man she sees in her dream.

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The result is a virtuosic work that combines exquisite poetry and contemporary opera music - albeit compressed into just 80 stylised minutes.

It follows an unnamed female character (a cross between Eve and Du Liniang) who wakes from a dream of an enchanted romance. She is drawn to a garden filled with lush vegetation, a metaphor for her desires. But as she attempts to fulfil them, she reaches a painful realisation.

Director and visual artist Jennifer Wen Ma, famous for designing the visual effects for the 2008 Beijing Olympics, has created an extraordinary setting for the opera, filled with massive flowerbeds made out of paper that can be folded or expanded like origami.

Indeed, the visuals alone may be worth the price of admission - especially since the kunqu style of singing is alluring but opaque to those unaccustomed to it.

The central character is played by Qian Yi, whose kunqu opera performances are renowned in China. Her high-pitched, tremulous voice is excellently supported by bass-baritone Ao Li, countertenor John Holiday, baritone Joo Won Kang and tenor Yi Li.

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