

# Bright Sheng

## Opera and Theater Works

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Bright Sheng's musical studies began in China at the age of four when his mother taught him piano. After the Cultural Revolution, he moved to New York in 1982 where his teachers included Leonard Bernstein, George Perle, Hugo Weisgall and Jack Beeson. A strong Eastern influence is evident in his music, which often uses traditional tales, folk songs and instruments from China, as well as gestures borrowed from Chinese opera; however it is incorporated into a highly original and assured framework based on a Western tradition. He is much in demand as a composer, pianist, conductor and artistic director for major organizations throughout America and Europe.

### ITEMS FOR SALE

*The Song of Majnun*

Vocal score available from Hal Leonard 50483041

### AVAILABLE RECORDINGS

*The Song of Majnun*

Houston Grand Opera Orchestra and Chorus

Ward Holmquist, conductor

Delos 3211

### PHOTO CREDITS

*Madame Mao*, Santa Fe Opera; *The Silver River*, Spoleto Festival, Charleston; *The Song of Majnun*, Dan Rest, Chicago Lyric Opera; Back Cover, Alex Cao

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**Australia:** G. Schirmer Pty Ltd  
E-mail: [JMakim@Musicsales.com.au](mailto:JMakim@Musicsales.com.au)  
Tel: +61 2 9299 8877

**Germany:** Chester Schirmer Berlin  
E-mail:  
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E-mail: [chesterfrance@musicsales.co.uk](mailto:chesterfrance@musicsales.co.uk)  
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# Bright Sheng

## Opera and Theater Works



# Madame Mao

Opera in Two Acts  
Duration: 2 hours

Libretto in English by Colin Graham

WORLD PREMIERE  
July 26, 2003  
Santa Fe Opera



## SYNOPSIS

As the corpse of Jiang Qing, or Madame Mao, swings in the cell where she has hanged herself, we journey retrospectively through the events of a life that came to this undignified end. Rejected by her father when she was a child, Jiang Qing sees a chance to prove herself when Mao Zedong, leader of the Communist Revolutionaries, throws his wife into an asylum and takes a fancy to her. As Mao's policies fail and he descends into a life of debauchery, Jiang Qing takes control, using the brutality of the Cultural Revolution to take revenge on those that she feels have betrayed her. In the end, Mao also rejects her and she is sent to prison where she takes her own life, in the belief that posterity will eventually vindicate her name.

"*Madame Mao* is a taut, brilliantly constructed drama... his score is as action-packed and varied in mood as Graham's libretto and dazzlingly orchestrated..."

—Hugh Canning, *Opera*

"Sheng and Graham have created a passionate and absorbing work that deserves wide-spread attention."

—Wes Blomster, *Andante.com*

## CAST LIST

Jiang Ching I (Madame Mao)  
*Dramatic Mezzo-soprano*

Jiang Ching II  
(also Liu Jinding and Madame Mao in her 20s)  
*High Soprano*

Zhizen, Mao's previous wife  
(also Yang Paifeng and The Actress)  
*Mezzo-soprano*

Mao Zedong  
*Baritone*

The Actor (also Gao Jun Bao)  
*High Tenor*

The Accusers  
(also other roles, including the Victims,  
Another Man, and members of the politburo)  
*2 Soprano, 2 Tenor, 2 Baritone, 2 Bass*

8 Dancers  
*Non-singing roles (4 men, 4 women)*

## ORCHESTRATION

2(pic).2(ca).2(Ebcl,bcl).2(cbn)/4331/  
timp.4perc/hp/str

# The Silver River

Music Theater Work  
Duration: 1 hour, 15 minutes

Libretto in English by David Henry Hwang

WORLD PREMIERE  
July 27, 1997  
Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival

## CAST AND ORCHESTRATION

African-American Actress (Western style), Asian Male  
Singer (Chinese Opera style), Baritone (Western Opera/  
Music Theater style), Asian Female Dancer, 2 Dancers

fl(pic, afl), cl(bcl, perc), pipa, perc, vn(perc), vc(perc)

Note: the flutist appears onstage as a male cowherd, the pipa player appears onstage as a goddess-weaver.

## SYNOPSIS

According to ancient Chinese legend, Night and Day were created through the ill-fated love between a heavenly being and a mortal. The legend of the Silver River comes alive in a bewitching production populated by Jade Emperors, Goddess Weavers and other celestial beings.

"...a music theater fable of great charm and imagination. *The Silver River* skillfully fuses eastern and western musical impulses, merging song, speech and movement, with tight percussion-laced rhythms. With a sweet simplicity, their chamber opera creates magic before our eyes."

—John von Rhein, *Chicago Tribune*



# The Song of Majnun

Opera in One Act  
Duration: 1 hour

Libretto in English by Andrew Porter, based on  
Nizami's Islamic epic poem "*Layla and Majnun*."

WORLD PREMIERE  
April 9, 1992  
Lyric Opera of Chicago

## CAST AND ORCHESTRATION

S, 3Mz, T, 2Bar, B; chorus  
2(2pic,afl).1(ca).1(bcl).1(cbn)/2110/2[=3]perc/hp.pf/str



## SYNOPSIS

The drama of the opera is rooted in Majnun's ill-fated and unfulfilled love for Layla. After Majnun and Layla fall in love, Layla's parents separate them. Grief drives Majnun to madness while Layla is married to the man of her parents' choice.

"The lyricism is urgent, melodious, vocal... The score catches and describes changing atmospheres, reflects and characterizes the emotion dynamically. That Sheng's first opera should be so telling speaks worlds about his gifts..."

—Robert Commanday, *San Francisco Chronicle*

# may i feel, said he.

An Opera in Seven Minutes

Chamber Opera  
Duration: 7 minutes

Text in English by E. E. Cummings

WORLD PREMIERE  
May 11, 1996; New York Festival of Song

INSTRUMENTATION  
S, T; pf 4-hands