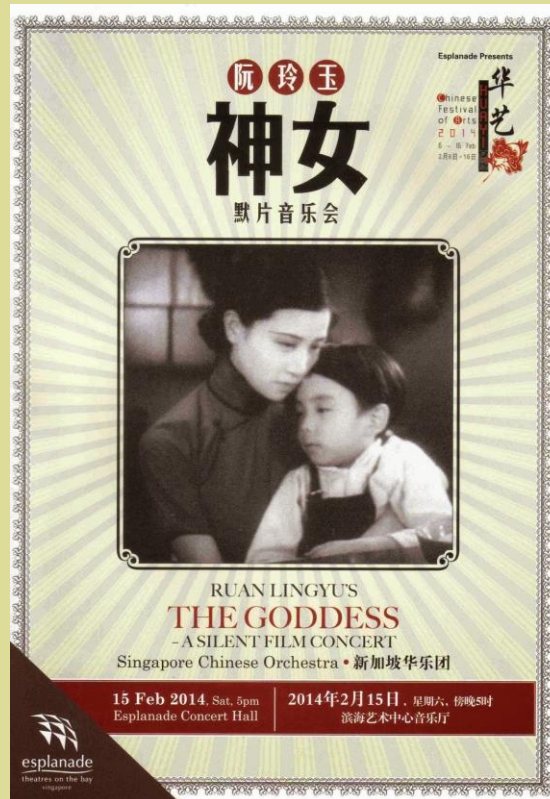


MONDAY, 17 FEBRUARY 2014

THE GODDESS / Singapore Chinese Orchestra @ Huayi Chinese Festival of Arts 2014 / Review



**THE GODDESS
A SILENT FILM CONCERT
Singapore Chinese Orchestra
Huayi Chinese Festival of Arts 2014
Esplanade Concert Hall
Saturday (15 February 2014)**

**This review was published in *The Straits Times* on
17 February 2014 with the title "*SCO brings out
tender moments*".**

Concerts with a live orchestra accompanying a screened movie are not new here. The first was the Singapore Symphony Orchestra playing Prokofiev's soundtrack to Sergei Eisenstein's war classic *Alexander Nevsky* in 2001. Then came those best-selling Arts Festival presentations with the Singapore Festival Orchestra, and more recently the Metropolitan Festival Orchestra in *The Fellowship Of The Ring*.

This concert by the Singapore Chinese Orchestra conducted by Yeh Tsung at Esplanade's Huayi Festival had a major difference. New music for Chinese instruments was commissioned to accompany the 1934 Shanghai silent movie *The Goddess* (*Shen Nü*) written and directed by Wu Yonggang, and starring screen siren Ruan Lingyu.

阮玲玉
神女
默片音乐会

“*Shen Nu (The Goddess)* could be considered the best film made in the 1930s. I really love that movie... you can see in it the real meaning of life”
— Renowned film director, Chen Kaige, 2005

RUAN LINGYU'S
THE GODDESS
A SILENT FILM CONCERT
Singapore Chinese Orchestra
新加坡华乐团

15 Feb, Sat
Esplanade Concert Hall
2月15日, 星期六
滨海艺术中心音乐厅

The poster features a central portrait of Ruan Lingyu in a classic 1930s style, with a film strip graphic at the bottom. It includes a quote from director Chen Kaige and the concert details.

The story of the 72-minute long film may seem oversimplistic for today's sensibilities, but the emotions it engenders are real and palpable. Its protagonist is a single mother who reluctantly turns to prostitution in order to support her infant son. The boy even gets to go to school but when her life savings are stolen by a hoodlum, she sacrifices herself to guarantee his future.

The actual movie was preceded by a jazzy overture, with the kind of "hot music" played at the lounges of Shanghai's Paramount and Cathay Hotels, to accompany a short feature on the history of the city's film industry and Ruan's short, meteoric but tragic life. She was the 1930s Joan Chen, one who used a plethora of facial expressions when words and conversations could not be employed.

The music, co-written by SCO composer-in-residence Law Wai Lun and Hong Kong film composer Lincoln Lo, did not conform to the idioms or pentatonic clichés of Chinese music. Instead they employed themes and motifs that were appropriate to portray the narrative, moods and emotions. At points, the melodic content was reminiscent of music from ballets of Khachaturian and Russian composers.



It was the instruments that conveyed the sense of Chinese-ness, even if the emotions were universal. Tender moments between mother and son brought out some of the best music, with Zhao Jianhua's *serhu* and Han Lei's *guanzi* carrying the melodies, and the additional luxury of Clarence Lee's grand piano adding that final bit of gloss.

On witnessing her son's recitation in a school concert, a heartrending orchestral crescendo represented the pride swelling up in her heart. Slashing sounds on the *guzheng* signalled moments of suspense, while a drum-set beat out the unrelenting pulse of the heartless metropolis. Even when viewed in black and white, the dazzling neon of Nanjing Lu for all its glitz became synonymous with vice and squalor.

The standing ovation that greeted this production should be sufficient inducement for more classic movies to be screened with orchestral accompaniment. When the

feature film is worth reliving, the medium of music will follow suit.



Conductor Yeh Tsung and the two composers
Law Wai Lun and Lincoln Lo acknowledge the applause.