

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.



Photo by Alex Cao

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# Bright Sheng

## OPERAS & THEATER WORKS

*Madame Mao (2003), The Silver River (1997), The Song of Majnun (1992), may i feel, said he. (1996)*



## Madame Mao an opera in two acts (2003)



Libretto in English by Colin Graham

Duration: 2 hours

World Premiere: July 26, 2003. Santa Fe Opera

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

### cast

JIANG CHING I (Madame Mao): *Dramatic Mezzo-soprano*

JINAG CHING II (also LIU JINDING & Madame Mao in her 20s): *High Soprano*

ZHIZEN, Mao's Previous Wife (also Yang Paifeng & 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, & members of the politburo): *2 Soprano, 2 Tenor, 2 Baritone, 2 Bass*

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

### 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.

## The Silver River a musical theater work (1997)

Duration: 1 hr 15 min

Libretto (English) by David Henry Hwang

Premiere: July 27, 1997, Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival

Cast & 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.

## The Song of Majnun a one-act opera (1992)

Duration: 90 min

Libretto (English) by Andrew Porter, based on "Layla & Majnun" by Nizami

Premiere: April 9, 1992, Lyric Opera of Chicago

Cast & 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.

## may i feel, said he. a chamber opera (1996)

Duration: 7 minutes

Text in English by e. e. cummings

Premiere: May 11, 1996, New York Festival of Song

Instrumentation: S, T; pf 4-hands