TAN DUN
MARTIAL ARTS TRILOGY
FRIDAY 1 AND SATURDAY 2
MARCH AT 8PM
ARTS CENTRE MELBOURNE
HAMER HALL

MELBOURNE SYMPHONY
ORCHESTRA
TAN DUN conductor
RYU GOTO violin
TAN WEI erhu
YINGDI SUN piano

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Tan Dun conductor
Ryu Goto violin
Tan Wei erhu
Yingdi Sun piano

Music composed and conducted by Tan Dun

39 REASONS WHY MELBOURNE IS THE ARTS CAPITAL

The City of Melbourne Triennial program supports 39 major festivals and arts companies, large and small. This is just one way that Melbourne remains home to Australia’s most vibrant and diverse arts scene.

melbourne.vic.gov.au/grantsandsponsorship
Hero (Ying Xiong, 2002)

Director: Zhang Yimou

Cast: Jet Li (Nameless), Tony Leung Chiu-Wai (Broken Sword), Maggie Cheung Man-Yuk (Flying Snow), Zhang Ziyi (Moon), Daoming Chen (Qin Emperor), Donnie Yen (Sky)

SYNOPSIS:

227 BCE: During the Period of the Warring States in pre-unified China, a nameless swordsman (Jet Li) is called before the Emperor of Qin (Daoming Chen) to be rewarded for having disposed of three notorious would-be assassins of the Emperor. ‘Nameless’ tells the king of his successes in duels with Sky (Donnie Yen), Broken Sword (Tony Leung Chiu-Wai) and Flying Snow (Maggie Cheung Man-Yuk), but the Emperor disbelieves him.

INTERVAL 20 MINUTES
Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon (Wo Hu Cang Long, 2000)

**Director:** Ang Lee

**Cast:** Yun-Fat Chow (Li Mu Bai), Michelle Yeoh (Yu Shi Lien), Zhang Ziyi (Jen Yu, Manchurian princess), Chen Chang (Lo ‘Dark Cloud’), Pei-pei Cheng (Jade Fox)

**Synopsis:**
1779 CE: Famous martial arts master Li Mu Bai wants to sheath his magic sword for good, but he feels compelled to honour his pledge to avenge the murder of his master. He is also troubled that the pledge distracts him from his affection for his lifelong friend Yu. The beautiful Manchurian princess Jen (Zhang Ziyi) and a mysterious assassin (Pei-pei Ching) enter the scene, the sword is stolen and Li Mu Bai is forced to act when Jen is wooed by the Uyghur bandit leader Lo ‘Dark Cloud’ (Chen Chang).

The Banquet (Ye Yan, 2006)

**Director:** Feng Xiaogang

**Cast:** Zhang Ziyi (Empress Wan), Ge You (Emperor Li), Daniel Wu (Prince Wu Luan)

**Synopsis:**
907 CE: During the period of the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms, an emperor marries the noblewoman Wan (Zhang Ziyi), beloved of his son, the Crown Prince Wu Luan (Daniel Wu). The Crown Prince seeks solace in a remote artistic retreat, and barely escapes death when his father’s brother (Ge You) murders the emperor and sends assassins to the retreat to kill Wu Luan to prevent him from ascending the throne, because he intends to take the throne himself and confirm Wan as his empress. Wu Luan returns to the court and, when he learns that his father was poisoned by his uncle, stages a play to re-enact the murder.
Upon its release in 2000, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* became the highest-earning foreign-language film ever to be shown in the USA. It has won over 40 awards, including Academy Awards for Best Foreign Language Film and Best Original Score, and provoked a renewed public interest in Chinese martial arts cinema. Not unexpectedly, it also inspired a move towards big-budget period co-productions with China, involving the most important directors, casts and crews with experience in any genre. Two of these, *Hero* (2002) and *The Banquet* (2006), have themselves gone on to break records at home and abroad, and the latest, Wong Kar-Wai’s *The Grandmaster*, was chosen to open the Berlin International Film Festival in February 2013.

Martial arts movies seem, at the moment at least, to be the films most likely to connect with Western viewers. This may have something to do with their shared operatic tradition: alike but still different, and about as old and entrenched in their respective cultures, telling their stories on stage with spectacular effects and grand musical accompaniment. The story of Chinese cinema begins with opera and martial arts. The first Chinese film, *Dingjun Mountain* (1905), was an excerpt from an opera, and contained displays of martial arts as an important part of classical Chinese drama. Audiences who enjoyed dazzling sword-play and acrobatics in opera responded warmly to stories of incorruptible men and women righting wrongs with sword, fist and magic in the cinema. Thus was born a new cinema genre: *wuxia* (literally, ‘martial hero’, after the literary genre). The story of this genre is one of exile and return.

Over 200 *wuxia* films were made before the Nationalist government banned the genre in the early 1930s, forcing the industry’s move to Hong Kong. It reached its peak when director King Hu left Hong Kong to make *Dragon Gate Inn* (1967) in Taiwan. His heightened employment of the operatic style was admired by a young Ang Lee, who eventually directed *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*.

*Kung fu* developed in Hong Kong as a modern version of *wuxia*, dependent on fewer weapons and less ceremony, with Bruce Lee as its most famous exponent. His first film, *The Big Boss* (1971), was a sensation across the Chinese markets, but his dream of breaching the bamboo curtain wasn’t realised until after his death at age 32, with the global release of his final film, *Enter the Dragon*, in 1973.

The next big star was Jackie Chan, a graduate of a Peking Opera school in Hong Kong. In 1978 he played real-life legendary martial artist Wong Fei-Hung in *Drunken Master*, directed by Yuen Woo-ping, thus creating a new sub-genre, *comedy kung fu*, and giving Chan a worldwide audience.

*Wuxia* remained banned in China. The film industry had been almost destroyed by the ‘ten lost years’ of the Cultural Revolution, and the Beijing Film Academy didn’t re-open its doors until 1978, offering entrance places to Zhang Yimou, Chen Kaige and Feng Xiaogang. The first two were to become leaders of the celebrated Fifth Generation, but Feng went into television instead.

Then, in 1982, came the first opening of the ‘door to China’. *The Shaolin Temple*, a China/Hong Kong co-production, was the first *wuxia* movie to be made in China since the 1930s. Its star was the 18-year-old national *wushu* champion, Jet Li. The film and its sequel were huge successes. Li went on to play Wong Fei-Hung in Tsui Hark’s *Once Upon a Time in China I, II and III* (1991-93).

New Chinese cinema reached the international stage in 1988 when Zhang Yimou’s *Red Sorghum* won the Golden Bear at the Berlin International Film Festival, encouraging the production of more Chinese films with global appeal. Zhang and his Fifth Generation colleague Chen Kaige became internationally renowned and in demand to co-produce with the West. Ang Lee secured an international career with his second film, *The Wedding Banquet*, a Taiwan/USA co-production, in 1993.

Feng Xiaogang, meanwhile, had become a household name with a movie genre he invented: the Mainland version of Hong Kong’s *hesui pian*, a comedy designed for annual Lunar New Year release, beginning with *The Dream Factory* in 1997.
None of these three directors had much to do with wuxia cinema before 2000, yet their respective embraces of the genre, resulting in the Martial Arts Trilogy, ensured the triumphant return of wuxia to China. With the help of some of the best creative minds in contemporary Chinese cinema, they chose stories, locations, casts and crews capable of delighting a global audience with their artistry.

Composer/conductor Tan Dun is the person responsible for bringing these three films together in a single musical program. He wrote the musical scores for each film and conducted the soundtrack recordings. He says:

For me, the Martial Arts Trilogy was a preconceived project that…developed into a spiritual drama through three of the most important musicians of our time; Yo Yo Ma (who played cello on the soundtrack of Crouching Tiger), Itzhak Perlman (violin, Hero) and Lang Lang (piano, The Banquet).

The tradition of martial arts was created from Chinese opera in the 19th century. To me, the opera tradition is an ancient form of cinema and cinema is the opera of the future.

Basically, I hate martial arts film music in general. That’s why I turned martial arts film music completely upside-down. Most of my martial arts music was inspired by (19th-century) Peking opera, not 1970s martial arts films.

To the composer, the Trilogy contains ‘three different films as one opera or ballet in three acts’.

The three instruments represent three of the female characters in the films. Each of the three sacrifices her life for love.

In Crouching Tiger the character Jade sacrifices her life for her spiritual love of the wuxia dream. In Hero, the character Snow sacrifices her life for the patriotic love of her country. Lastly in The Banquet, like in Hamlet, Empress Wan sacrifices her life and love for desire and revenge.

An important aspect of Tan Dun’s film scores is their use of traditional Chinese and Asian instruments.

The GuQin is a seven-stringed unfretted zither most often associated with Confucius and, ever since, the intelligentsia at court. Tan Dun’s inspired choice of it as both a diegetic and exegetic (that is, part of the action and part of the soundtrack) element in the sequence ‘In the Chess Court’ of Hero places the martial aspect of the film at an elevated level. In Hero, Nameless pays a blind GuQin player to accompany his duel with Sky. The music draws a connection between chess – where more time is spent in thought than in action – and swordplay, and underlines the suspicion that some deception is being worked here.

The Erhu is a two-stringed bowed fiddle, an 18th-century descendant of the Huqin (‘barbarian fiddle’) imported into China in about the tenth century. It is now one of the most popular traditional concert instruments, and occupies the second fiddle desk at a Peking Opera performance. Tan Dun has chosen the Erhu as his solo instrument for his Crouching Tiger Concerto, to which it imparts an extraordinary yearning tone to the story of unrequited love.

Also in Crouching Tiger is the Bawu/Dizi wooden flute pairing (the Dizi being the higher-pitched of the two), offering an exquisite consonance of image and sound when Li Mu Bai duels with Jen ‘Through the Bamboo Forest’. Most of the accompaniment is a mournful flute line played over softly repeated eight- or 12-note string figures; very sparse and restrained, as if to emphasise the spiritual, rather than the physical, significance of a fight to the death. It is quite unusual in its treatment of a sword fight.

Percussion instruments play a prominent part in Chinese opera, especially in the martial arts sequences. In the brief ‘Sword Dance’ sequence in The Banquet, the piano shares percussive duties with rototoms (drums which are tuned by rotating and have no shell), pairs of stones, timpani, suspended and crash cymbal, bass drum, brake drum, tam tam, vibraphone and triangle, before the orchestra swells to lyrical mode at the end of the dance.

Also in The Banquet, there’s a delightfully playful Baroque-style version of the main theme for strings (that is, ‘traditional European instruments’) in the cue ‘Desire’, which leads to revelations of the Empress’ intention to usurp the Emperor, as if to suggest that what went on in China was no better or worse than in Imperial Europe!

Rod Webb © 2013 © 2001

Rod Webb is a former director of the Sydney Film Festival, and head of programming at SBS Television and Australia Network Television. He is now a freelance programming consultant in film and television.
TAN DUN conductor and composer

Tan Dun has made an indelible mark on the world’s music scene with a creative repertoire that spans the boundaries of classical music, multimedia performance, and Eastern and Western traditions. As a composer/conductor, he has led the world’s most renowned orchestras, including the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra; London Symphony Orchestra; Philadelphia Orchestra; Orchestre National de France; BBC Symphony Orchestra; Filarmonica della Scala; the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia; and the New York, Berlin, and Munich Philharmonic Orchestras, among others.

His compositions include Internet Symphony No. 1; Organic Music Trilogy (Water Concerto, Paper Concerto and Earth Concerto); Orchestral Theatre: The Gate; and The Map, premiered by Yo Yo Ma and the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Other recent compositions include Four Secret Roads of Marco Polo; the piano concerto The Fire; and the percussion concerto The Tears of Nature. His operatic creations include Marco Polo, commissioned by the Edinburgh Festival; The First Emperor, commissioned by the Metropolitan Opera of New York; Tea: A Mirror of Soul, premiered at Japan’s Suntory Hall; and Peony Pavilion, directed by Peter Sellars, which has had over 50 performances at major festivals in Vienna, Paris, London and Rome.

Tan Dun is the winner of the Grammy Award, Oscar/Academy Award, Grawemeyer Award for music composition, Musical America’s Composer of The Year, Bach Prize of the City of Hamburg, and Moscow’s Shostakovich Award. He was commissioned by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to write the Logo Music and Award Ceremony Music for the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games. He records for Sony Classical, Deutsche Grammophon, Naxos, EMI and Opus Arte.

RYU GOTO violin

Japanese-American violinist Ryu Goto has established himself as a significant voice in classical music, with a large and growing public in Asia, North America and Europe. Ryu’s career began at age seven, when he made his debut at the Pacific Music Festival in Sapporo, Japan, playing Paganini’s Violin Concerto No.1. Since then, Ryu has appeared as a soloist with many of the world’s leading orchestras, including the London Philharmonic, European Union Youth Orchestra, Shanghai Symphony Orchestra and Orpheus Chamber Orchestra. He has worked with conductors including Lorin Maazel, Tan Dun, Vladimir Ashkenazy, Fabio Luisi, Myung-Whun Chung and Jonathan Nott.

Ryu has already performed in such prestigious venues as Carnegie Hall, Kennedy Center, Tokyo Suntory Hall, Shanghai Grand Theater and the Musikverein in Vienna.

Ryu’s philanthropic work includes working with student musicians throughout the world, mentoring their development, and conducting master classes in conjunction with the world’s top institutions. Efforts include the “Ryu Goto Excellence In Music Initiative Scholarship” with the NYC Department of Education, as well as collaborations with institutions like the Juilliard School and the Harvard Bach Society Orchestra.

Ryu records for Deutsche Grammophon in collaboration with Universal Classics Japan. In May 2011 he graduated from Harvard University with a BA in Physics.

Ryu performs on the 1715 Stradivarius, known both as the “Ex-Pierre Rode” and the “Duke of Cambridge,” on loan to him from the NPO “Yellow Angel.”
ABOUT THE MUSIC

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Tan Wei
erhu

Winner of the most prestigious award in China, the “Golden Bell Award”, Tan Wei is undoubtedly the most outstanding young erhu performer of her generation. In the 2012-2013 performance season, she will perform with the celebrated Chinese Broadcasting Orchestra, Shanghai National Orchestra, Schleswig Holstein Festival Orchestra, Toledo Symphony Orchestra, New Zealand Symphony Orchestra and Sydney Symphony. Since winning the 2009 National Erhu competition for new works, Tan Wei has become a champion of contemporary works for classical Chinese instruments. She has been invited to participate in a variety of Chinese Central Television live concerts and special events including the opening ceremony of the Italian World Conference on Education, the International Music Festival and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Summit, as well as the Hang Zhou West Lake International Music Festival and the closing ceremony of the third West Lake International Expo.

Tan Wei is also a celebrated recording artist. She was the first erhu soloist to perform with the Xiamen National Orchestra and recorded a number of works with them. Tan Wei has also gained recognition worldwide and has performed in dozens of countries in Europe, Africa and Asia.

Originally from Hunan, Tan Wei was admitted to the Central Conservatory of Music in 1999. She has since won many scholarships, including the Chinese Academy of Music Tan Xiaowei Scholarship and the Folk Instrument Liu Mingyuan Scholarship. She is an active soloist and chamber musician in modern and traditional music in China.

Yingdi Sun
piano

Yingdi Sun was born in 1980. He won First Prize at the prestigious 7th International Franz Liszt Piano Competition in Utrecht in 2005, following which he embarked on an international concert tour. In recent seasons, Yingdi has given numerous performances in the Netherlands, France, Belgium, Germany, Great Britain, Finland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Poland, Russia, Spain, Switzerland, South Korea, Japan, Indonesia, China, New Zealand, Australia, South Africa and the United States.

He has played with many of the world’s leading orchestras including the Rotterdam Philharmonic (conducted by Michel Plasson), the Czech National Symphony Orchestra, the Hong Kong Philharmonic (with Edo de Waart), l’Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France (with Myung-Whun Chung) and the Shanghai Opera Orchestra (with Zoltán Kocsis).

In 2008, Yingdi made his debut in Wigmore Hall and appeared on the stage of World Expo in Zaragoza in Spain. As a champion of contemporary music, Yingdi also works closely with composers such as Tan Dun, Guo Wenjing and Jack Body.

Recently, Yingdi has established a piano trio with his friends violinist Siqing Lu and cellist Li-wei Qin.

Shanghai-born, Yingdi Sun was already winning prizes in his native China at an early age. With support from the Chinese Ministry of Culture and as part of the Oriental Express project he went to New Zealand for a concert tour. In November 2005 he was the guest of the Chinese President Hu Jintao as part of the festivities in honour of the visit of U.S. President George W. Bush to China. Yingdi Sun studied with Professor Sheng Yi-qi at the Conservatory of Music in Shanghai and has participated in the master classes of, amongst others, Philippe Entremont, Xu Zhong and Leslie Howard.
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