

Inheritance, Innovation, and Integration - Thoughts on the Success of the National Opera 'August 1st Uprising'

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ABSTRACT

The original national opera "August 1st Uprising" premiered at the beginning of the new year in 2024, integrates various forms of art in the form of opera, uses the latest era technology, and reproduces the great revolutionary movement and historical events that occurred in Jiangxi. In 2024, which marks the 100th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China and the 75th anniversary of the founding of the country, it has fired the "first shot that breaks through the earth". The success of "The August 1st Uprising" is due to its response to the needs of the times, catering to the trend of the times, and completing the modernization, artistic, and technological reshaping of major revolutionary themes in the concept of "inheritance, innovation, and integration". The venue was packed and left a lasting impression. This article will analyze and evaluate "The August 1st Uprising" from the three elements of "inheritance, innovation, and integration" based on post viewing observations, in order to reveal the reasons for the success of this opera.

KEYWORDS

original; Ethnic opera; The August 1st Uprising; Inheritance; Innovation; blend

On August 1, 1927, a gunshot from the city of Nanchang opened the curtain on the armed resistance of the Communist Party of China against the reactionary Kuomintang. Like a lightning bolt piercing the night sky, it gave the Chinese people hope for revolution in the darkness and strength to rise up in adversity, "said Xi Jinping, General Secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, President of the People's Republic of China, and Chairman of the Central Military Commission, at the celebration of the 90th anniversary of the founding of the Chinese People's Liberation Army.

The August 1st Uprising embodies the spirit and strength, beliefs and responsibilities of Communist Party members, forging their "August 1st Spirit" and "Army Building Spirit", and making Nanchang a truly heroic city.

From January 26 to 29, 2024, the national opera "August 1 Uprising", created by Jiangxi Song and Dance Theater, Nanchang Culture and Art Center, and jointly performed by Nanchang Symphony Orchestra and Nanchang Normal University School of Music and Dance, reinterprets the "spirit of building the army" and the "August 1 spirit", so that this great event in the history of the CPC, the history of the Chinese revolution, and the history of the development of the Chinese nation returns to the public's view, so that the extraordinary years and the flames of war nearly a century ago have "passed through" so far, so that the audience can look back to the years full of revolutionary feelings, and let history leave this masterpiece full of interpretation of the times.

1 One the Inheritance of the August 1st Uprising

Compared with the previous national operas such as *Yimeng Mountain*, *Tongxin Tie*, *Half Red Army* quilt and so on, the *August 1st Uprising* still focuses on major historical themes and classic red stories in the context of the times, completes the great revolution with tortuous and arduous efforts and common insistence, and achieves brilliant victory, which conforms to the Chinese people's national historical cognition and artistic aesthetic habits. This opera also deeply explores and vividly shapes the little-known plot and character images before the uprising, making the entire opera not only have the contrast between the enemy and us, but also the different levels of contrast between generals, soldiers, and civilians, as well as the emotional contrast between couples and comrades. It strikes the audience's empathy points from different perspectives, obtaining the widest emotional resonance and spiritual shock.

As the core standards of Chinese national opera, "populism" and "contemporaneity" require works to be close to the people in content and unique in artistic style. The "*August 1st Uprising*" focuses on the stories that happened before and during the uprising, allowing outstanding representatives of the early party and army who participated in the uprising to be artistically reproduced. It not only portrays the well-known main leaders Zhou Enlai, He Long, Ye Ting, Zhu De, Liu Bochong, but also other ambitious young people who participated in the August 1st Uprising, such as Pengpai, Li Lisan, Yun Daiying, Deng Zhongxia, Ye Jianying, etc. It also showcases the important but lesser known revolutionary comrades who played an important role in promoting the development of the uprising, such as Mao Zedong, Deng Yingchao, Chen Yannian, female soldier Jing Yun, and mute soldiers. The revolutionary beliefs and fearless spirit displayed by each credible and vivid "uprising hero" are constantly arousing people's attention. The audience's deepest love for the party and patriotism accumulates and gathers as the plot develops closely, Until the scene of the successful uprising was unleashed and deafening. In addition to the actors, the Youth Symphony Orchestra and Youth Chorus, composed of contemporary young literary and artistic workers and professional learners, make this opera full of auditory energy and musical enjoyment. Although they are in the music pool and contribute behind the scenes during the official performance, the powerful and floor throwing orchestral and choir sounds ignite emotions, make energy burst, and also imbue this respectful and nostalgic history with the atmosphere of the times, full of youthful power, allowing the "August 1st Spirit" to be passed down from generation to generation through art. The creative team composed of director Huang Dingshan, assistant director Shi Ji, makeup and styling designer Fang Xuling, video designer Hu Shaoxin, stage design Zhou Danlin, and others are all experienced and experienced. They have successfully created ethnic operas such as "*Yimeng Mountain*", "*Half Red Army*", and "*Unity Knot*". I have a keen insight and clear analysis into the grasp of art, character shaping, plot design, music selection, vocal composition, and dialogue. The leading cast team, consisting of actors such as Shi Yijie, Wang Lida, Yang Xiaoyong, and Du Huan, has a strong lineup. Their familiarity and mastery of opera art make the characters they play "stand firm," "look close," and "perform truthfully."

They present their roles on stage in the name of their characters, and present their performances with the logic of their characters. The characters are portrayed in their own bodies and places, and the actors and characters are integrated into one, real and credible, with flesh and blood. The collaborative efforts of departments such as clothing, makeup, props, etc. have also contributed to the stage performance and enriched the stage creativity. In a word, the *August 1 Uprising*, "standing on the shoulders of giants", with an original national opera of the new era, represents the first shot of the independent leadership of the CPC against the Kuomintang reactionaries and the heroic act of creating the people's army. Under the theme and main line of "the spirit of building the army" and "the party command gun", and the indomitable spirit of the revolutionary ancestors, it has

completed a high, thoughtful, and emotional work.

2 The Innovative August 1st Uprising

From Wuhan to Jiujiang and then to Nanchang, the Lushan Mountain, Gantang Lake, and the 20th Army Headquarters of the He Long National Revolutionary Army in Jiujiang, the Huayuanjiao No. 2 Residence in Nanchang, the Jiangxi Grand Hotel (August 1st Uprising Command Headquarters), the former site of August 1st Square, and the Tujiabu Mountain Crossing Railway Bridge from Jiujiang to Nanchang, a large number of locations and scenes have branded this opera with Jiangxi symbols and Nanchang marks. If some suggestions are added, such as the use and embellishment of Jiangxi dialect, such as conversations between Jiangxi soldiers or ordinary people, the local flavor will be more rich and profound, and the Jiangxi elements and flavor will be restored as much as possible from the audio-visual perspective. In terms of the main characters in the drama, in addition to 17 characters with real historical prototypes, there are also 4 characters created through artistic fiction, including Jing Yun and the mute. This young revolutionary couple under He Long's command, from reunion to sacrifice, became a bridge of emotional connection between the audience and the great figures. It is precisely these fictional characters that lowered the elevation of the significant revolutionary history of the August 1st Uprising, brought them closer together, and connected the group. In terms of artistic innovation. As the foundation of opera, whether it is lyrical arias or narrative recitations, the lyrics have the characteristics of being easy to understand and keeping up with the times, and are all created using contemporary vocabulary. For example, in Deng Yingchao's five acts of singing "Every Meeting is a Separation", "Why is it necessary to suffer the cycle of one's own pain? What is lost can always be persistently retrieved" and "With the original heart, walk the farthest path, break and shatter, perfect and perfect"; The duet "Together for a Lifetime", which is also the fifth performance, features phrases such as "Together for a lifetime, cherish this love.

Together for a lifetime, rely on this love", "Wash away the lead and rain, it is surging and peaceful, walk a long way, flowers bloom and wither, it is forever young". The use of long and short sentences and scattered whole sentences, as well as rich rhetorical devices, make the lyrics flexible and increase the expressive power of language. The use of three sentences in the third scene "I Want a Gun", the eighth scene "Pick up a Gun, Go to Battle", and the twelfth scene "Smile in Thunder and Fire" makes emotions concise and clear, and the release of emotions is exhilarating. Combined with the melody of music, emotions are brought in, allowing the audience to quickly immerse themselves in the scene and generate empathy, and so on.

On the basis of not losing philosophical rationality and literary quality, the screenwriters have made the lyrics of this opera approachable and contemporary, which is an exploration and innovation in script creation. Director Huang Dingshan attaches great importance to the diversified performance of music as the main body on stage and the perfect combination of audio-visual art. Therefore, the vocal design and music creation of this work can be described as tailor-made and carefully crafted. As can be seen from the eleven vocal sections and scores that have been released, the melody follows the characters and the leading melody is exercised without any inverted characters. In addition, the melody is accompanied by multi column chords and decomposed chords, which, on the premise of enriching the music color and sound expression, give way to the clear expression of the lyrics to the greatest extent possible.

Coupled with the solid dialogue skills of the actors, make the plot progression and character dialogue clear and concise. The use of tone conversion and beat variation in the vocal section also enriches the melody and makes the characters' emotions full and vivid. The new media technology

that adds color to the opera has also become the innovation point of this play. Modern new media technologies such as video imaging are used to establish the visual image of the opera stage, which can quickly guide the audience and actors to immerse themselves in the story, and also play a transitional role in connecting the play and changing actors. It also adds dynamic vitality to the static beauty of the stage installation. The holographic screen used multiple times clearly explains the background and motivation, the scene lights of different emotions complement each other's color tones and emotions, the environmental sound of the movie scene presents the atmosphere perfectly, the LED animation of the background screen integrates the scene with the characters, and the realistic embellishment props bring history and modernity closer together. It repeatedly creates a realistic effect that immerses the audience. Electric poles and trains The use of props such as bridges also brings a sense of age and realism to the work. The creative team and popular stars have brought numerous fans to this drama. According to news reports after its four-day premiere, music and opera enthusiasts from other cities in Jiangxi, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Shanxi, and other regions gathered in Nanchang to witness vocal giants such as Shi Yijie, Wang Lida, Yang Xiaoyong, and Du Huan leading the singing, to witness Wang Yan, known as the "opera conductor who understands drama best", leading the music pool, and to attract and circle fans with full respect and expectations for director Huang Dingshan, screenwriter Wang Xiaoling, and arranger Luan Kai. Good creators and actors have brought in the "good and popular" flow and popularity of this drama.

3 The Fusion of the August 1st Uprising

Opera art itself is a comprehensive art that integrates literature, music, drama, and art. It is integrated into the literary script, music creation, drama director, lighting and stage design, music and sound, costumes and props, makeup and styling, choir dance, symphony orchestra, and other departments of the national opera "August 1st Uprising". After a three-year creative cycle, more than 300 people worked together to complete this 2-hour and 40 minute work. According to relevant news and reports, it has been found that some of the actors who participated in the "August 1st Uprising" have a "revolutionary background" and a "military background" in their growth. These "unique" life experiences and insights of the actors have made them closer to their characters, more integrated with them, and blended life with drama.

Director Huang Dingshan, who has a military career, said, "Creating works with major historical themes of red can be said to be a kind of emotion for me. This emotion stems from the blood and nourishment brought to me by the red soil in my hometown; Du Huan, the producer of "The August 1st Uprising" and the director of Jiangxi Song and Dance Theater, was born in Anyuan, southern Jiangxi. He is a descendant of the Red Army and has been influenced by his grandfather's revolution and his father's literary and artistic guidance since childhood. His revolutionary background has made Mao Zedong's image deeply ingrained, as well as Huang Xunguo, who played Chen Yannian and had experience in the People's Armed Police Cultural Troupe. The real-life experience has brought the creative team closer to their true colors, giving them a natural affinity for grasping the characters and interpreting the plot. The integration of the three main lines has also become the key to this drama, supporting the development of the entire plot and emotions.

The first main line is the story of the "August 1st Uprising", which is full of ups and downs and gripping, and narrates the "beginning, continuation, transformation, and ending" of the uprising along the axis of time; The second main line is the three "appointments" between Zhou Enlai and Mao Zedong, interspersed with the first main line, which includes the farewell at the dock, the obstruction of the uprising, and the victory of the uprising. The first time was a face-to-face discussion of the Chinese Revolution by the Wuhan River, and the latter two times were divided into

urban and rural areas. The two great figures looked from afar, discussed major plans, and went to the light together; The third main line is the three "confessions" between Zhou Enlai and Deng Yingchao, which appear around the main line in the stages of bidding farewell at the dock, resisting the uprising, and waiting for the uprising. The first time was also a face-to-face farewell. According to Deng Yingchao's recollection, Zhou Enlai didn't tell me what he was going to do in Jiujiang until around dinner that night, and we didn't say how long we stayed. We just waved goodbye in silence. The last two "confessions" were made through a distance between us.

Compared with the revolutionary faith demonstrated by communication with Mao Zedong, the communication with Deng Yingchao more showed the love declaration of this war-torn couple "sharing the same robe with their son", just as the lyrics of the duet "Together for a Lifetime" sung three times stated: "Together for a lifetime, cherish this. Love, accompanying for a lifetime, relies solely on this emotion. In fact, there is no need to make too many promises, because everyone understands it in their heart. The cooperation and integration between Jiangxi Song and Dance Theater as a performance unit and Nanchang Normal University as a teaching unit are not commonly seen in the creation and performance of ethnic operas before. The directing team of "August 1st Uprising" invited 108 students majoring in music and dance from the School of Music and Dance at Nanchang Normal University to perform choir and dance.

The students in the ivory tower collaborate with high-level art teams, touching the ceiling while also opening up their horizons and perspectives. They blend choir courses with artistic practice, forming a truly 'classroom ideological and political education'. Since receiving the invitation in September 2023, the teachers and students of the Music and Dance Academy have started a five month long rehearsal. This kind of fusion and performance has left Dean Zhang Dandan of the School of Music and Dance with a lot of emotion: the artistic standards and polishing pressure brought by the top national performance team have put a lot of pressure on the teachers and students of our local colleges, but no matter how hard the process is, the students have never given up their efforts.

Without such pressure, we would never have seen the gap, and there would have been no upward and strong professional pursuit. During the process of sitting and dividing, she placed the teaching of the course "Chorus and Conducting" on the rehearsal field of Chuangyan, deeply integrating theory and practice, ideological and political education, and classroom interaction, allowing students to see the excellent creative teams on the front line striving for excellence in art, making students feel that a perfect work is not easy to refine, allowing students to experience the power of teamwork, and allowing students to deeply understand the entire process of the uprising and receive the baptism and education of revolutionary spirit during their participation in "August 1st Uprising". In the end, the teachers and students of the Music and Dance Academy completed a stage performance that included 13 choral works, achieving both artistic and personal enhancement.

Literature and art are the horn of the progress of the times, the most representative of the style of an era, and the most able to lead the atmosphere of an era. The national opera "August 1st Uprising" has achieved the expression of revolutionary themes in the era through inheritance, innovation, and integration, the artistic exposition of revolutionary stories, the multidimensional shaping of revolutionary great figures, and the tribute to the 75th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China and the 100th anniversary of the founding of the army while praising heroes and the people.

As sung in Zhou Enlai's aria "I am Waiting for This Moment" in the opera: Waiting for this moment, the stars twinkle tonight; Waiting for this moment, opening a new chapter in history; Waiting for this moment, welcoming the magnificent waves.

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