

Coronavirus stole the spotlight, creative artists are winning it back



“The Game — Falling into Darkness” — Ti Gong

Ma Yue

Coronavirus has been the villain on the stage of the performing arts for three years, but the show must go on even if it's a struggle to regain the limelight.

In the first three months of this year alone, an estimated 9,000 performances were canceled in China, according to the China Association of Performing Arts. Shanghai theaters suspended operations from March through June, regional COVID outbreaks have disrupted shows, and many scheduled overseas productions have been thwarted by travel restrictions.

With erratic revenue streams, the road to recovery has been fraught.

However, as Einstein once famously said, “in the middle of adversity, there is great opportunity.” And lest there be any doubt about the wisdom of those words, here are a few examples of creative concepts that show the promise of better times ahead.



Ballad singer Zhang Weiwei performs at a concert staged at Shanghai Culture Square. — Ti Gong



A venue best known for staging international musicals, Shanghai Culture Square broke tradition with a concert of ballads. — Ma Yue

Shanghai Culture Square balladeer

BALLAD singers Zhang Weiwei and Guo Long staged a concert at Shanghai Culture Square on November 8 to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the birth of their iconic album “Baiyin Hotel.”

It was the first time Culture Square, a venue best known for staging international musicals, turned its stage over to a ballad concert. It followed the limitation of 75 percent seating capacity; tickets were sold out in minutes.

It was the first time Zhang and Guo appeared in a theater hall after a string of performances in clubs or open-air music festivals.

“When performing in a live house, communication, interaction and even physical contact between performers and audiences are important,” said Zhang. “Among all music genres, the ballad is probably

the one that suits the theater environment best.”

He explained: “Narrative, or the ability to tell stories, is the most important quality of the ballad. Compared with other music genres, the ballad is more like a drama, and a theater stage can enlarge its storytelling power.”

Zhang and Guo are Gansu Province natives who began their musical collaboration at the relatively late age of 35. During the Shanghai concert, they performed songs from the “Baiyin Hotel” album, which is based on stories from their hometown and can be performed with guitar and accordion accompaniment.

The duo also performed songs from a new album they are working on, involving an orchestra, electronic music and a synthesizer.

“Electronic music and the