

# 'The Phantom of the Opera' gets a Chinese adaptation

Ma Yue

**T**he Chinese adaptation of the classic musical "The Phantom of the Opera" will be staged in Shanghai in May.

Popular singers Ayanga, Liu Lingfei and He Liangchen will separately play the principal role of the Phantom in the highly anticipated performances.

With an original score by Andrew Lloyd Webber and lyrics by Charles Hart, the 1986 musical is based on the 1910 French novel of the same name by Gaston Leroux. It tells the story of a beautiful soprano who becomes the obsession of a mysterious, masked musical genius living in the labyrinth beneath the Paris Opera House.

Since its debut in London's West End in 1986, the musical has been staged more than 65,000 times in 183 cities across the globe, attracting over 145 million audiences.

The original English version of "The Phantom of the Opera" was first staged in China at Shanghai Grand Theater in 2004, the only theater on the Chinese mainland at the time that could meet the technical requirements for its entire performance.

"The Phantom of the Opera," "Les Misérables" and "Cats," were among the first Western musicals that Chinese audiences were acquainted with.

"This musical has made three visits to China and has witnessed the fast development of China's musical industry in the past two decades," said Ma Chencheng, president of SMG Performing Arts Group, which is producing the Chinese adaptation.

"With the development and increased maturity of the domestic musical industrial chain, we have the confidence and capability to present a top-level Chinese version of the classic musical."

The early preparation for a Chinese version began in 2018 when a national tour of the original musical was planned, he said. The COVID-19 pandemic dampened the plans, but the casting for the Chinese adaptation began in July.

More than 1,000 actors applied for the roles. The musical's foreign creative team held hundreds of online auditions before deciding on the cast.

"Phantom is always difficult to cast because it's demanding both



Ayanga



Liu Lingfei



He Liangchen

vocally and dramatically," said Rainer Fried, executive director of the Chinese adaptation. "Its emotional complexity requires both skills and experience from an actor."

Ma said he intends to invite the foreign creative team to Shanghai before the Spring Festival to start working on the latest project. Denny Berry will stand in for Gillian Lynne, the original choreographer, and run rehearsals in Shanghai.

"The Chinese version will be the musical's 18th language edition," said Ma. "The costumes and stage setting will be the same as in the original. There will be a live band of dozens of musicians."

Ma expressed his optimism that producing the Chinese version of such a large-scale performance will help enhance the growth of China's musical industry and raise the professional level of industry practitioners.

"The producing process will also be a learning process," he said. "The initial wave of Chinese musical adaptations fostered a number of indigenous musical actors. We are now producing and even creating original musicals."

Singer-actor Ayanga said

Phantom is a dream role for every musical singer. The popular actor not only played the lead part but also produced the Chinese rendition of "The Count of Monte Cristo," which premiered last month at Shanghai Culture Square.

"It will be a dream coming true to play the role of Phantom," said Ayanga. "Given my experience as a producer, I will approach the work from the perspective of a learner, particularly the language translation and lyrics."

For actor Liu, the role is both an opportunity and a challenge.

"The challenge lies in the fact that the musical is a renowned classic, and every audience bears a phantom in mind," said Liu. "But I will try my best to portray the role in the new Chinese version to meet the expectations of the domestic audience."

The Chinese version of "The Phantom of the Opera" will stage about 39 performances in Shanghai from May to June. It will then take a national tour and visit cities such as Shenzhen, Foshan, Guangzhou, Xiamen, Beijing, Jinan and Chengdu. Nearly 200 performances will have been staged by the beginning of 2024.

