

CHINESE OPERA



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If you want to watch a music performance that combines song, dance, and striking design, just forget about the latest pop video. Take a look at a truly original style of musical performance: Chinese opera. Last month I was on a trip in Shanghai. I was staying with my Chinese friend Mai-Li. She insisted that we go to the Chinese opera and I have to admit the experience was amazing from beginning to end.



We arrived at the theatre just before the lights went down. As the **curtain** rose, the **actors** came on stage in their beautiful **costumes**; the fiery reds and ribbons of gold and silver were like a kaleidoscope of colour! The costumes go all the way back to the street show days, when the actors used to wear bright colours to **stand out** in the dark.



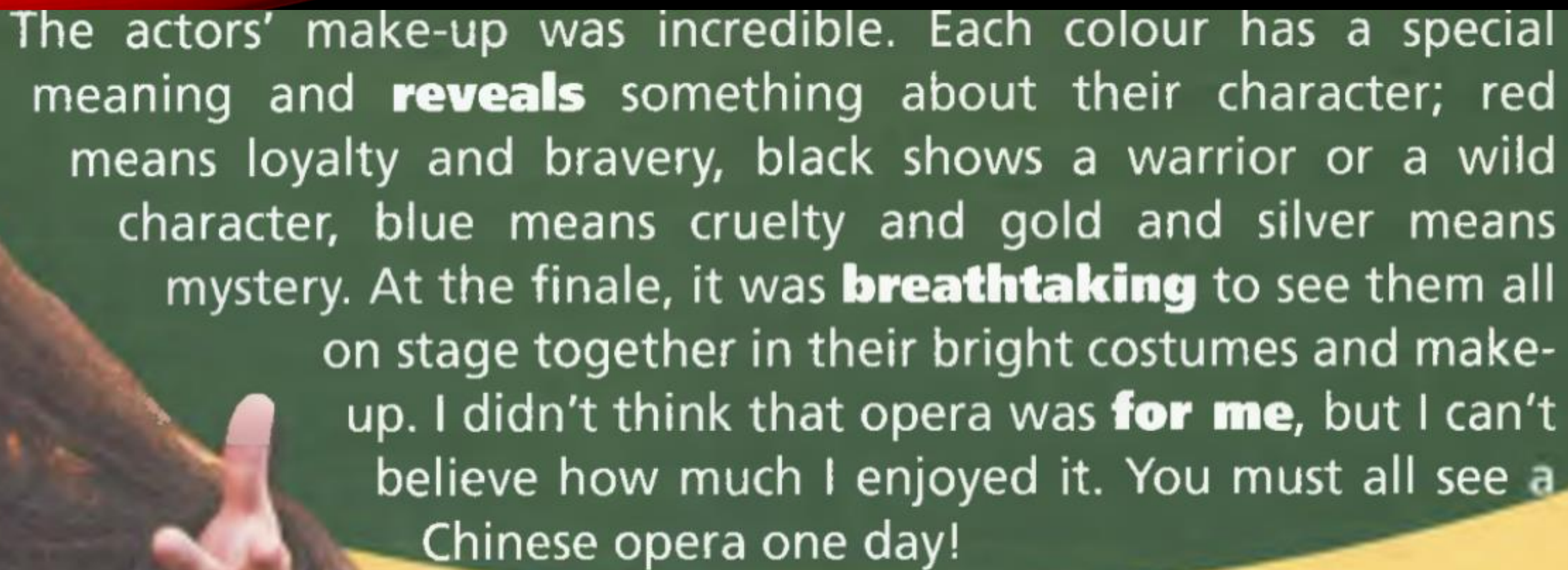
The singing was quite strange – very sharp and high-pitched. Just like the costumes, the singing style was really ancient. The street performers used to sing that way so that their voices could **carry** over the crowds who gathered to watch.



The opera we saw was 'Lady White Snake'; a classic Chinese folk tale. A white snake changes into a beautiful girl, and then falls in love with a human. But the actors didn't only tell the story through song; the dancing and acrobatics were fantastic, too. The actors used not only their faces but also their whole bodies to act out the story and show their emotions.



These actors train very hard at opera schools for years from about the age of 7 or 8. There weren't a lot of **stage** props or **scenery** because the actors use a lot of symbols to help tell the story. An actor galloping with a whip, for example, means they are riding a horse. Doing somersaults from a table or a pile of chairs means they are running down a mountain.

A hand with a pink finger pointing upwards is visible on the left side of the image. The background is a vibrant, abstract design with curved bands of color including red, orange, yellow, green, and blue. The text is overlaid on a dark green rectangular area.

The actors' make-up was incredible. Each colour has a special meaning and **reveals** something about their character; red means loyalty and bravery, black shows a warrior or a wild character, blue means cruelty and gold and silver means mystery. At the finale, it was **breathhtaking** to see them all on stage together in their bright costumes and make-up. I didn't think that opera was **for me**, but I can't believe how much I enjoyed it. You must all see a Chinese opera one day!



Learn new vocabulary

- Fill in the gaps with: out out out down down in at with over
 - 1) fall love a human
 - 2) stand in the dark
 - 3) run a mountain
 - 4) start in ancient times
 - 5) the lights go
 - 6) arrive
 - 7) carry the crowd
 - 8) act the story

● Label the pictures

ribbon sharp acrobatics emotion somersault warrior wild cruelty



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Match the words

ancient

hanging

fiery

high-pitched

temporary

grand

crowd

gallop with

reveal

art

a whip

lanterns

times

loyalty and bravery

kaleidoscope

voice

gathering

stages

• **True or False**

1. The speaker persuaded her friend Mai-Li to go to the theatre.
True False
2. Chinese opera is the latest genre of musical performance.
True False
3. At first, the speaker didn't enjoy the experience but then she found it amazing.
True False
4. In ancient times lanterns were the only source of light on stages.
True False
5. Bright colours helped actors to be visible in the dark.
True False
6. Both costumes and a manner of singing were influenced by modern arts.
True False
7. The story of the tale tells about the girl who falls in love with a white snake.
True False
8. Children under 10 start training at opera schools.
True False
9. The stage at Chinese theatres is cramped with props.
True False
10. Faces and bodies help actors tell the story.
True False
11. The colours used by actors are symbolic.
True False
12. Though the speaker enjoyed the performance greatly, she doesn't recommend others to see it.
True False

Answer the questions

- 1) What is a difference between modern and ancient Chinese opera?
- 2) How do actors on the stage behave?
- 3) What do actors use instead of props and scenery?

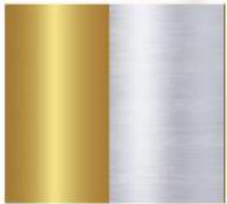
Write what each colour means in Chinese theatre

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