

LISTINGS

THEATRE/ARTS & MUSIC

GRAND CANAL THEATRE

*Shen Yun*, classical Chinese dance and music on March 28th. Sunday Matinee at 2.30p.m. Evening Show at 7.30p.m. *Shen Yun Performing Arts*, offers an exhilarating world-class production that celebrates the excellence and grandeur of classical Chinese dance and music. It draws inspiration from the legends, values, and spirit that defined traditional Chinese culture for centuries. Grand Canal Square, Docklands, Dublin 2. Tickets on sale now: €49, €59, €79 & €99. Contact Ticketmaster on: 0818 719 377 or check web for list of outlets. For group bookings call: 353 (0)1 677 7770.

ABBEY THEATRE

Little Gem until February 27th. *Mental Health Matters (Talk)*: Thomas Kilroy, February 23rd. Dr Maureen Gaffney, March 9th. *An Appointment with Mr Yeats*, March 15th–20th. *Macbeth*, March 30th - May 15th. Call: 01 878 7222.

BEWLEYS CAFE (LUNCHTIME) THEATRE

*Sticks and Stones*, February 22nd - March 13th. *The Tinker's Curse*, March 15th - April 3rd. Call: 01 868 784001.

CIVIC THEATRE

*L.T.Tallaght Drama Society* presents three plays, *The-Sound of Silence*, *Poor Clara* and *Struck Down* from Monday to Thursday with a full length production of *Funny Pages* on Friday and Saturday. February 15th–20th. *Waiting for Ikea*, February 16th–20th. Civic Theatre, Tallaght, Dublin 24. Call: 01 462 7477.

DRAIOCHT ARTS CENTRE

*Artist's Proof*, in association with Graphic Studio Dublin and Chester Beatty Library, exhibition by 24 Irish and international fine art printmaking artists until March 27th. *A Retrospective 2001 to 2009, 350 Artists /101 Exhibitions /17 Studio Residences*. Current and Past Exhibitions in Draiocht's two Galleries and Artists who have had residencies in Draiocht's Artists Studio. The Blanchardstown Centre, Dublin 15. Call: 01 885 2622.

RUA RED

*Art-Open Arts Studio*, enables people from the community to access an arts facility where they can practice arts at their leisure. Every Thursday 7.00p.m. - 9.00p.m. (10 euro). Call: 01 451 5860

GAIEITY THEATRE

*Romeo et Juliette (Gounod)* on February 27th and March 1st, 3rd and 5th. *I Capuleti e I Montecchi (Bellini)*, March 4th and 6th. *Philadelphia Here I Come*, March 9th - April 10th. Call: 01 677 1717.

GATE THEATRE

*Faith Healer*, until February 20th. *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, until April 17th. Call: 01 874 4085/874 4368.

SEAMUS ENNIS CULTURAL CENTRE

Creative writing, art exhibition, film club, live drawing, workshops, theatre and restaurant. The Naul, Fingal, Co Dublin. Call: 01 802 0898/01 802 0899.

SOLSTICE ARTS CENTRE

Tuesdays-*Noah's Ark Toddler Group*, Thursdays-Jo Jingles *Jamboree Group* and Saturdays *The Gaiety School of Acting*. Local arts, music, film and exhibitions. Call: 046 909 2300.

GALLERIES/LIBRARIES/MUSEUMS

DUBLIN WRITERS MUSEUM

Features the lives and works of Dublin's literary celebrities: Swift and Sheridan, Shaw and Wilde, Yeats, Joyce and Beckett, presented through their books, letters and portraits in a restored Georgian house. 18 Parnell Sq. North, D. 1. Open Monday-Saturday from 10.00a.m. to 5.00p.m. Call: 01 872 2077.

TRINITY COLLEGE

*Science Gallery, LoveLab 2010*, until March 12th. Shop and Cafe open weekdays 8.00a.m. to 5.00p.m. Pearse St, D 2. Call: 01 8964091. *The Zoological Museum* first floor of the Zoology Building (Department of Zoology) call 01 896 1679. *The Old Library*, call: 01 896 2320.

ROYAL IRISH ACADEMY

*Is thinking really good for us?* Celebrating Thinking panel discussion, March 2nd. *What's wrong with dumbing down?* March 6th. *The Decline of Intimacy*, March 23rd. Free-advance registration required. Lunchtime lectures from 1.00p.m-2.00p.m. Call: 01 676 2570.

NATIONAL GALLERY OF IRELAND

*Recent Acquisitions*-A decade of acquisitions at the Gallery will be showcased in an exhibition reflecting the different areas of the Collection from March 15th - July 25th. *Gabriel Metsu, (1629-1667)*, from September 4th - December 2010. *Poetry Readings*, Wednesdays, 1.05p.m. Call: 01 661 5133.

NATIONAL LIBRARY OF IRELAND

*Shemus Cartoons*, until end February. *Yeats: The Life and Works of William Butler Yeats. Witness to War: the War of Independence and Civil War through the lens of WD Hogan*, showing at the National Photographic Archive in Temple Bar, Meeting Hse Square. Call: 01 603 02 00.

CHESTER BEATTY LIBRARY

*Arts of the Book*, ancient books including love poems by C. Beatty. Guided tours Wednesdays at 1.00p.m. Sundays at 3.00p.m. & 4.00p.m. Call: 01 407 0750.

DUBLIN CITY GALLERY THE HUGH LANE

The Sundays @ Noon Concert Series, (free). Half-hour Coffee Lectures (5 euro). Public guided tours Sundays @ 1.30p.m. Call: 01 222 5564/01 222 5550.

GALLERY OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Artists Talks/Seminars, Free Gallery and Exhibition Tours, Courses/workshops, portraiture. Meeting House Sq, Temple Bar, Dublin 2. Call: 01 671 4654.

IRISH FILM INSTITUTE

*IFI Family*: Family film on February 28th classic Oscar-winning French film *The Red Balloon*. *Wild Strawberries Club*: for the over 55s, on last Wednesday and Friday of the month at 11.00a.m. *Archive at Lunchtime*: lunchtime screenings of short films, *Water Wisdom* and *Irish Gossamer* until February 22nd. 6 Eustace St, D 2. Call: 01 679 3477.

JAMES JOYCE MUSEUM

Situated in the Martello Tower, first and rare editions, letters and photographs, and material relating to the city and people described in his books. Open from February 28th. Sandycove, Co Dublin Call: 01 280 9265.

THE PEARSE MUSEUM

Former home and school of Patrick Pearse. St Enda's Park, Grange Road, Rathfarnham, Dublin 16. Open February 10.00a.m.-5.00p.m. Call: 01 493 4208

GEORGIAN HOUSE MUSEUM

Guided tours, cafe/shop. 29 Fitzwilliam Street Lower, D 1. Tuesday to Saturday, 10a.m. to 5p.m. Sunday 12p.m. to 5p.m. Closed Mondays, including Bank Holiday Mondays. Call: 01 702 6165.

THE IRISH JEWISH MUSEUM

Memorabilia relating to the commercial and social life of Jewish communities of Belfast, Cork, Derry, Drogheda, Dublin, Limerick & Waterford over 150 years. Sundays only, 10.30a.m. - 2.30p.m. 3/4 Walworth Road (near Victoria, Lennox & Harrington Street), South Circular Road, D 8. Call: 085 706 7357

NATIONAL PRINT MUSEUM

Artefacts relating to the hot metal industry of printing, early computers, Exhibitions, lectures, workshops, family days and guided tours. Haddington Rd, D 4. Call: 1 660 3770 .

# Singers, advisers, and servants: role of eunuchs from a historical context

BY FRANK YU

Admiral Zheng He, was one of the most accomplished explorers in Chinese history. Born in 1371 during the Ming Dynasty, He led a fleet of Chinese merchant vessels on seven expeditions to South Asia, trading goods and developing relations with India, Siam (present-day Thailand), Indonesia, Persia, and East Africa.

The son of a Chinese Muslim family, Zheng He was nicknamed “san bao,” or “three treasures” for his expeditions and service to the emperor.

Yet, Zheng He also was a “taijian,” or eunuch in the Chinese imperial court.

Today, eunuchs—and castration—are almost taboo, delineated by modern works as confused, anomalous, or oft-troubled individuals. But eunuchs held a variety of functions in society—in the imperial court, as singers, guardians of women, religious servants, and military commanders.

The term eunuch derives from the Greek words eune (bed) and ekhein (to keep), or together, a “bed keeper.” Such individuals were thought to be more docile, domesticated, and trustworthy.

For the ancients, castration was a medium for exercising control. Eunuchs kept a life of focused dedication, or sometimes used their positions to gain power, fame, and fortune. For certain classes of males, it was a way to circumvent the paradigm that existed among those seeking such away of life—to forcibly eliminate the constant struggle between desires and duty, domination and sacrifice.

## Role in religion

According to the Book of Matthew, Jesus said that there were eunuchs made of men, who had made themselves by their fathers to be that way for heaven's sake, and if they have received such a procedure, then let them keep it. Jesus referred to castration as an infallible way to achieve celibacy. And records of Christian history indicate that many Christian religious figures were castrated.

One such individual is St Ignatius, Archbishop of Constantinople from 847 to 858. The son of Emperor Michael I, Ignatius was forcibly castrated by Emperor Leo V—who deposed Michael I—as a way to prevent him from succeeding the throne (a male who could not produce an offspring was seen as unfit to be king). Ignatius became Patriarch of Constantinople on two separate occasions and is regarded as a saint by both

the Eastern Orthodox and the Roman Catholic faiths.

## In the Chinese imperial court

Keeping taijian (eunuchs) in Chinese courts is ancient tradition, and records suggest that the practice of keeping castrated servants dated as far back as the eighth century BC.

Outside of the emperor's family, taijian were the only males allowed inside the Chinese imperial court. They served as guardians of the emperor's harems, consorts, and concubines, whose chastity must be closely guarded. If an emperor's queen failed to produce a living male heir, the son of the highest-ranking consort succeeded the throne. The ubiquity of taijian thereby served a dual purpose: to keep a watchful eye over the emperor's concubines and consorts—often numbering in the hundreds—and to ensure that every child born within the palace's gilded walls is sired by the emperor.

In Chinese tradition, an emperor is decreed by Heaven, which sanctions his right to rule the realm and in turn he is charged with nurturing the harmonious balance between Heaven and Earth.

“Since it was believed that this Heaven-sent mandate could be rescinded if the emperor misgoverned or conducted himself improperly, the personal life of the Son of Heaven was carefully shielded from ordinary mortals lest they observe any human failings. Only the ‘effeminate, cringing eunuchs,’ slavishly dependent upon the emperor for their very lives, were considered cowed enough to be silent witnesses to his private foibles and weaknesses,” Mary M. Anderson wrote in *Hidden Power: The Palace Eunuchs of Imperial China*.

An emperor's enduring trust in taijian comes from the traditional Confucian thought of paternity. A castrated man cannot produce offspring, and it is in this belief that taijian would never actively covet political power to pass onto his son. It is due to this belief that emperors—whose mere countenance was forbidden to be casually seen by the common man—permitted taijian unfettered access to his royal palace.

“All countries large and small suffer one defect in common, the surrounding of the ruler with unworthy personnel... Those who would control rulers first discover their secret fears and wishes,” wrote Han Fei Tzu, ancient Chinese philosopher during the Warring States

Period and pioneer

of legalism. Indeed, a taijian's unique role within the imperial palace affords him immense power. Taijian could take sides in the rivalries and jealousies of competing clans of concubines and harems to influ-

ence the emperor's disposition toward certain male heirs—altering the course of history for his dynasty.

As time passed, the thirst for power, wealth, and influence corrupted many taijian—and their motives became insincere—which was especially apparent during the latter periods of the Ming and Qing dynasties.

Much like how families gave away their daughters as concubines, fathers forcibly castrated sons as a method to send a son to the palace with the hope of some day gaining influence over the emperor and bringing honour to the family.

## During the Byzantine Empire

Byzantium, the late Eastern Roman Empire, reserved special administrative posts for castrated males.

Praipositos and klarissimos were governmental posts held almost exclusively by eunuchs—as chamberlains to the emperor, or “chief eunuchs,” and they directed court ceremonies in Constantinople.

Eunuchs “acted as ‘masters of ceremonies,’ controlling access to the emperor; as doorkeepers (and) as servants in charge of ... cooking, serving and care of the wardrobe,” wrote K. Ringrose in *Living in the Shadows: Eunuchs and Gender in Byzantium*.

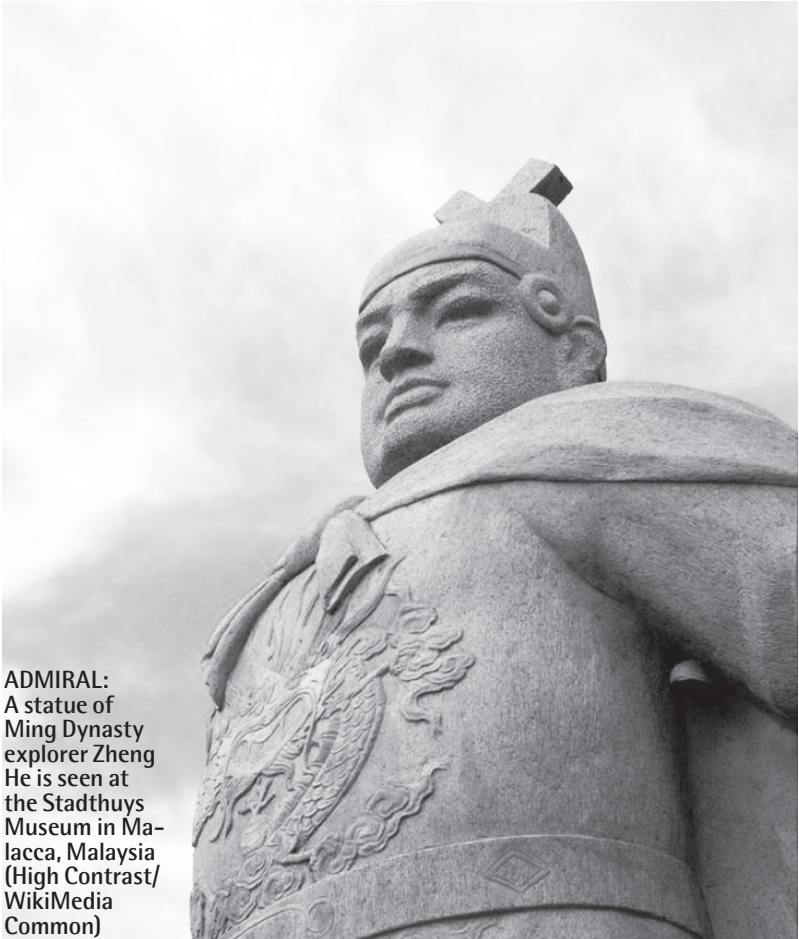
Byzantine eunuchs were castrated at a young age. Their fair, hairless skin and high-pitched voices also lent well to careers as court singers, jesters, and entertainers.

The 5th century double mosaic of Justinian and Theodora at San Vitale in Ravenna famously depicted Emperor Justinian and Empress Theodora flanked by trusted advisers and servants, including eunuchs. In the Justinian mosaic, the man standing to Justinian's left is a bearded man, and directly behind him a beardless eunuch clothed in tunic and chlamys—perhaps the great Byzantine general Narses. In the facing mosaic, Empress Theodora is seen flanked by her ladies of the court on the right side and eunuch court chamberlains to the far right.

## Castrato e castrati

Castrated male singers (castrati; singular: castrato) first appeared in Italy during the mid-16th century and by 1565, they were a staple of the Sistine Chapel choir. About 70 per cent of all Italian operatic singers were castrati during the Baroque Period.

The Catholic Church forbade women



ADMIRAL: A statue of Ming Dynasty explorer Zheng He is seen at the Stadthuys Museum in Malacca, Malaysia (High Contrast/WikiMedia Common)

from performing on stage. Males acted the roles of both sexes and dominated Italian opera during the 17th and 18th centuries. The practice eventually subsided in the late 19th century. In 1870, Italian law prohibited castration for musical purposes and Pope Leo XIII prohibited the usage of castrati by the church in 1878.

It is believed that castration prior to reaching puberty hinders the development of the larynx, enabling male castrati to achieve the singing voices of female sopranos, mezzo-sopranos, and contraltos.

With training and lung development, castrati have extremely flexible vocal ranges and some could attain an ultra “A” above “high C” in full voice.

Senesino, born Francesco Bernardi in 1686, was one of the most celebrated Italian castrati. His collaboration with composer George Frideric Handel in

London gained world renown. “Senesino had a powerful, clear, equal and sweet contralto voice, with a perfect intonation and an excellent shake. His manner of singing was masterly and his elocution unrivalled,” the composer Quantz exclaimed after hearing him in Lotti's Teofane in 1719.

During his peak, Senesino was a cultural icon, and earned 3,000 guineas per season performing in London.

But by most historical accounts, consequences of castration such as hormonal deficit and an inability to marry afforded castrati little life outside of music—beyond the opera, many castrati languished in social purgatory.

Due to their physical traits, even some successful castrati—including Senesino—were perceived negatively in the public's eye. Many were documented to be overweight, hot-tempered, and fickle to emotion.

It is the limelight, however, that makes a career.

Although Takeda has made some recordings and does perform concerts, more often the violin virtuoso sits unnoticed in a fine American orchestra.

Takeda deserves a fine career, but fairness is not a perk awarded to those in love with music and the violin. Those of a certain era were not trained in developing their careers; and even those lucky enough to win the big contests are usually forgotten within a year or two.

Getting ahead in the music industry is most often brought about by salesmanship. America is known for salesmanship, but the arts and salesmanship are not usually synonymous (unless one happens to be the great violin maker Jean Baptiste Vuillahume who lived in the 19th century and was world-renowned in his own lifetime.)

Thus, the listener must educate himself and not be manipulated into buying the latest big name with the latest hot critic's endorsement behind him.

The next time you hear a beautiful recording of “Meditation” from “Thais” by Jules Massenet, or “Zigeunerweisen” by Pablo Sarasate on the radio, it might just be Motoi Takeda and not Jascha Heifetz. I dare say many of you would be very surprised.

## Motoi Takeda—A hidden virtuoso

BY ERIC SHUMSKY

In a world where marketing and salesmanship pilot most artistic careers, some of today's greatest talents in classical music are hidden from view. One such hidden gem is Motoi Takeda.

Like a beloved member of our family, Motoi Takeda was often a guest at my mother's gourmet table, where my brother—the Shumsky comedian—held court before and during the meal, and my father, the great violinist Oscar Shumsky, extended his advice and nurture to the talented student. These are splendid memories, indeed.

At the time, Motoi Takeda was a young prodigy from Japan who had come to New York after arduous years at the famous Moscow Conservatory. He had studied with the fabulous Russian violinist, Leonid Kogan, and was recommended to study at the Juilliard School of Music in New York with my father by David Oistrakh. Along the way, Takeda worked with the great Nathan Milstein who was taken by the young artist's violin playing.

Motoi was born in Tokyo in 1952, the only son of Akira, a great painter. Motoi did not attend music school in Japan. He started to study privately with a neighborhood teacher, Mr Motoo Yamaguchi and then with Mr. Saburo Sumi.

But it was Motoi's father who, at an early age, instilled in him the necessity of humility in the face of the music. Akira was very critical of the young prodigy and trained him in such a way as to toughen him for the real world of the arts, where fairness is not an option.

As a child, I always admired Motoi's beautiful form on the violin. It was almost as beautiful to watch him as to listen to him play. His confidence was unerring, and he was a bull in the ring when the curtain rose. There was no mistaking that this fellow would compel you to listen to him.

Takeda, a big violin talent, differs from most of today's players in that he holds music in serious reverence—a throwback to the era of his great teachers who were phenomenal artists.

Moreover, humility was the backbone of Takeda's upbringing, an upbringing which others admire outside of the sphere of the limelight.

## THE ANTIDOTE – Classic poetry for modern living

BY CHRISTOPHER NIELD

### The Scholar

*My days among the dead are passed;  
Around me I behold,  
Where'er these casual eyes are cast,  
The mighty minds of old:  
My never-failing friends are they,  
With whom I converse day by day.*

*With them I take delight in weal  
And seek relief in woe;  
And while I understand and feel  
How much to them I owe,  
My cheeks have often been bedewed  
With tears of thoughtful gratitude.*

*My thoughts are with the dead; with them  
I live in long-past years,  
Their virtues love, their faults condemn,  
Partake their hopes and fears,  
And from their lessons seek and find  
Instruction with an humble mind.*

*My hopes are with the dead: anon  
My place with them will be,  
And I with them shall travel on  
Through all futurity;  
Yet leaving here a name, I trust,  
That will not perish in the dust.*

What is our vision of the scholar? An impractical book-worm who never sees the sun, or a hero devoted to saving the best of the past from the ravages of time?

Southey's speaker confesses, with a certain uncompromising pride, that his “days among the dead are passed”. How are we supposed to react? For all we know, this scholar could be a kind of vampire, standing amid vast tomes as uncompromising and cold as tombstones. Yet, curiously, and wonderfully, he sees himself surrounded not by dusty books – just so much paper and ink – but a living company of “minds”.

Compare this attitude to the academic view today that books are devoid of any author, and thus to be deconstructed to suit the critic's self-serving ideological agenda. Founded on the belief that there is an individual behind the words,

however, the traditional idea of the literary canon invites us to encounter a range of distinct, if not downright eccentric personalities.

When we leaf through the poetry anthology, Sappho, Spenser, Keats, and Dickinson are in the room with us – and they all speak with very different voices. The finest minds who have ever lived can become our friends, with whom we “converse” every day. (Southey stresses this word on the first syllable.)

The opening stanza reminds us of the importance of our environment to our lifelong education. If we are surrounded by trivia, then our “casual eyes” will fall on casual things. Yet if we have the “mighty minds of old” to hand then even a casual look will yield something of lasting matter. We might pick up a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore and read, “To be

or not to be: that is the question” and give it a moment's thought.

The scholar takes “delight in weal”, experiencing the highs and lows of comedy and tragedy. Comedy inspires the tremendous freedom of laughter; tragedy induces a catharsis of pity and fear, a cleansing that leads to emotional healing.

The scholar's sense of indebtedness is not merely intellectual, but personal. His “tears of thoughtful gratitude” suggest the rich complexity of response that is only possible when we have read a poem not once but a hundred times. Oddly, the more we absorb the words, the more they move us.

In the third stanza, we return once more to the “dead” – a motif that becomes more lilting and musical as the poem progresses. Morbidity turns into respectful remembrance and, finally, radiant

aspiration.

Communing with the dead, the scholar lives in “long-past years”. Reading a book we extend our consciousness back through time. We are neither 17 nor 70 – we are 2,800 years old if we open up *The Iliad*, a youthful 600 if it is *The Canterbury Tales*.

Our starting point should always be a sense of “humility” – an expectation that the author knows more than us. Yet as Southey points out, while we “love” their “virtues”, we are not afraid to “condemn” their “faults” either. This closely attentive moral intelligence contrasts with the lazy desire to find nothing but racism, misogyny, or imperialism in the past.

In the concluding stanza, the scholar turns his mind to the future. He aims to make his “name” and not be consigned to dust. Perhaps in every literary endeavour there is a hope

to achieve immortality – to find a phrase so memorable it can never be forgotten.

As well as teaching us how to read, this poem reminds us to seek out the inspirational thinkers who can help us appreciate the “mighty minds of old”. A friend of mine recently bought me a book of essays by the Argentine poet and professor Jorge Luis Borges, a collection that has opened my eyes to Dante, Scheherazade, and the Buddha, so I will give him the final word: “I have taught my students how to love literature, how to see literature as a form of happiness.”

*Robert Southey (1774–1843) was an English poet and scholar of Portuguese and Spanish literature.*

*Christopher Nield is a poet living in London.*