Liu Kang

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Siew, Sara and Kang Liu.
musicians are of average standard and the music performed comprises mainly of foreign melodies. Thus, they cannot represent the local ethos. This is caused by a lack of truly soulful composers.

The situation for drama and dance is no different when compared to that of music. Invariably, what is seen in the theatre are the works of Anton Chekhov, Henrik Johan Ibsen or Cao Yu (曹禺); on the dance stage, Swan Lake, Picking Tea Leaves and Chasing Butterflies (采茶扑蝶) and Indian Deity Dance (印度神舞) are performed in turn — a completely local set of programmes do not exist.

We do not know the direction in which our creative arts are heading. If we knew, then our arts scene will no longer be vibrant. Nevertheless, in view of our historical tradition and geographical environment, it would not be difficult to conclude that the basic conditions that would help us move along a uniquely creative path already exist. From now on, let our art practitioners continue to engage in theoretical study and discussion, and to make new discoveries in their creative work.

ENDNOTES

1 Most likely the first part of The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci by Jean Paul Richter, which contains ten chapters on painting.
2
Liu Kang believed that sketching is of paramount importance to the artist.

3
Liu Kang felt that nature is one of the artist’s greatest teachers. He is pictured here with his painting materials, most probably on an outdoor painting session.

4
16-year-old Liu Kang in the Shanghai countryside, 9 September 1927.
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16-year-old Liu Kang in the Shanghai countryside, 9 September 1927.
At the Paul Landowski studio in Paris, 1930. Liu Kang is standing rightmost. Next to him is Fu Lei, followed by Liu Haisu.

Liu Kang stands in front of his Morrow Studio at Dhoby Ghaut, where he lived and worked in his early years in Singapore. The identity of the man on the left could not be confirmed at the time of print.

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Liu Kang is pictured rightmost; Chen Jen Hao stands next to him, followed by Liu Haisu and Liu Haisu’s wife. Liu Kang recalled of his trip and, more importantly, his mentor: “I was intoxicated by the beauty of the clear lakes and refreshing mountains of Switzerland, and immersed in the compelling personality of Teacher Haisu. Unknowingly, they shaped my consciousness as a person and my work as an artist.” (*Liu Haisu and Contemporary Chinese Art*, 153–163)

Standing leftmost, Liu Kang is accompanied by friend and future brother-in-law Chen Jen Hao, whom he travelled to Europe with in 1928. The identities of the woman and boy could not be confirmed at the time of print.

This photograph was taken during Liu Kang’s visit to Lake Léman, Switzerland in 1929.
At the Paul Landowski studio in Paris, 1930. Liu Kang is standing rightmost. Next to him is Fu Lei, followed by Liu Haisu.

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This photograph was taken during Liu Kang’s visit to Lake Léman, Switzerland in 1929.
Philanthropist Lee Kong Chian writing calligraphy at the Society of Chinese Artists’ annual exhibition in 1974. Liu Kang, who is standing leftmost in the photograph, was president of the society for 12 years. Standing next to him is Wu Tsai Yen.

With Malcolm MacDonald, the British Commissioner-General to Southeast Asia, and close friend Lien Shih Sheng at Morrow Studio, 1954.
Philanthropist Lee Kong Chian writing calligraphy at the Society of Chinese Artists’ annual exhibition in 1974. Liu Kang, who is standing leftmost in the photograph, was president of the society for 12 years. Standing next to him is Wu Tsai Yen.

On a visit to Jean-François Millet's house and atelier.
12


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14

With Chen Wen Hsi in 1987.
Liu Kang believed that travelling “broadens the mind so that one can eventually express boundless artistic concepts within the physical limits of one’s canvas.” Turkey, as pictured here, was one of the many countries from which he sought inspiration.

Liu Kang was assiduous in journaling while on his travels, and would often also write letters and postcards back to his family.

Liu Kang painting in his studio at home.

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At the Kröller-Müller Museum in Holland.

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Liu Kang toured Borneo in 1968. In this letter, he describes in considerable detail the sights and sounds encountered on the visit.

This notebook records the dates, titles and ticket prices of the concerts Liu Kang attended with Chua Soo Pong in London, and which he reminisces about in This is Chua Soo Pong (220–222).

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Fu Lei (傅雷) is the father of Fu Ts’ong (傅聪).

Fu Ts’ong is now an internationally renowned young pianist. His skills are improving by the day and he has a bright future. Fu Lei is well known in Chinese society for he has contributed greatly to China’s culture in recent decades. In particular, his moral steadfastness, behaviour towards others, and serious work ethic as a cultural practitioner sets an example for the next generation.

Without Fu Lei there would be no Fu Ts’ong — this is true not just biologically, but also in terms of spiritual education. Part of Fu Ts’ong’s achievements today are the fruits of his hard work, and part are due to the influence of Fu Lei’s character and the teaching he instilled in his son. Fu Lei led Fu Ts’ong into the world of music and taught him the wisdom of East and West, emphasising the humanities and art. Thus, Fu Ts’ong can, at any time, recite poems and literary quotes by famous people in Chinese history. This is evidently important to him, given that he has chosen music as his lifelong career. Many audiences in the West often ask why a Chinese is able to perform Western music so superbly and eloquently. They do not know that apart from his skilful technique, Fu Ts’ong has had a rich artistic education combined with the unique disposition of an Oriental. These were all cultivated by his father, Fu Lei.

Fu Lei once said, “Only when one has truly understood the outstanding traditional spirit of his own people and embodied its soul can one completely understand the outstanding traditions of other races and be suffused with their soul.” To reiterate, the most outstanding characteristics of the Chinese arts — from poems and paintings to operas — are joy without wantonness, sadness without despair, balance, elegance and naturalness; it is not pretentious or decadent, nor is it about meaningless ostentation. These are the universal qualities of a higher order of art.

To express the spirit of a piece of music, one would first need to understand the life and times of the composer and have a thorough comprehension of the style and meaning of every other type of work. Otherwise, one would only be scratching the surface, hearing only mixed noises, striking the keys chaotically and getting nowhere. This is why Fu