San Francisco Opera today announced additional details for the Company’s world premiere commission *Dream of the Red Chamber* by renowned Chinese-American composer Bright Sheng, opening at the War Memorial Opera House on September 10, 2016. Based on the book *Dream of the Red Chamber* (also known as *The Story of the Stone*) by 18th-century Qing Dynasty writer Cao Xueqin—considered one of the four great classical novels of Chinese literature—the opera in two acts features an English-language libretto by the composer and acclaimed playwright David Henry Hwang, winner of the 1988 Broadway Tony Award for Best Play for *M. Butterfly*.

Iconic Taiwanese stage director Stan Lai, one of the most celebrated playwright/directors in Asia, makes his Company debut with this adaptation for the opera stage. Academy Award-winning art director and designer Tim Yip joins the creative team as production designer. Yip received the Oscar for his art direction...
of Ang Lee’s *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000), as well as a British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) award for the film’s costume design. American maestro George Manahan, acclaimed for his advocacy of new works, will conduct the San Francisco Opera Orchestra and Chorus for the six performances running September 10–29.

Bright Sheng, Stan Lai and Tim Yip joined San Francisco Opera General Director David Gockley to share artistic and production design details of the new work at a press conference held today at the War Memorial Opera House.

The *Dream of the Red Chamber* cast was also announced today. An array of established and rising Asian singers will star in the world premiere, including Chinese tenor Yijie Shi (in the role of Bao Yu); South Korean soprano Pureum Jo (Dai Yu); Chinese mezzo-soprano and current San Francisco Opera Adler Fellow Nian Wang (Bao Chai); in her U.S. debut, Chinese contralto Qiulin Zhang (Granny Jia); South Korean mezzo-soprano Hyona Kim (Lady Wang); Taiwanese soprano and Merola Opera Program alumna Karen Chia-Ling Ho (Princess Jia); and Chinese-American mezzo-soprano and San Francisco Opera veteran from 1990 to 1993, Yanyu Guo (Aunt Xue).

Cao Xueqin’s novel, a masterpiece of Chinese fiction, is a detailed, episodic record of the lives of the members of the Jia Clan, whose good fortune is assured when one of its daughters becomes an imperial concubine, and then declines after her downfall. The story centers on a love triangle consisting of the main character, Bao Yu, his beautiful cousin Dai Yu, and his future wife, another beautiful cousin named Bao Chai. Bright Sheng and David Henry Hwang have adapted the novel with a focus on eight central characters to tell the tale of the illustrious Jia Clan and trace the Jias' fall from the height of their prestige. Xueqin’s original story, often considered semi-autobiographical, is framed by Sheng and Hwang with a prologue and epilogue led by The Monk, who may be the author himself.

The commission of *Dream of the Red Chamber* was initiated and funded by the Chinese Heritage Foundation Friends of Minnesota, with leadership support from the Dr. M. F. Tchou Memorial Fund of the Chinese Heritage Foundation, Benjamin Y. H. and Helen C. Liu, and Ruth Stricker and the late Bruce Dayton.
San Francisco Opera General Director David Gockley commented: “A while back, the idea of producing an opera on the great Chinese novel *Dream of the Red Chamber* had been suggested to me by Kevin Smith, formerly with Minnesota Opera, and Pearl Bergad of the Minneapolis-based Chinese Heritage Foundation. I was very interested from the start and after familiarizing myself with this great episodic story, I agreed. Over twenty years ago in Houston, I worked with Bright Sheng on the creation of a new work and have followed his career ever since. Asking him to create this new opera seemed to me to be the logical and right choice. In conversations with Bright, I asked that *Dream of the Red Chamber* be composed in a beautifully lyrical style, nostalgic and retain aspects of a traditional Chinese soundscape. I’m very pleased to say that he has indeed succeeded in these efforts. We have cast a remarkable all-Asian cast and I’m confident that we have assembled a very innovative creative team to bring this new work to the stage.”

Pearl Bergad, Executive Director of the Chinese Heritage Foundation, stated: "The Chinese Heritage Foundation initiated this project in order to fulfill its mission to showcase the best in Chinese literature and, at the same time, to encourage innovation in the arts. Partnering with San Francisco Opera, with vast resources at its disposal, has led to the creation of a first-rate 21st-century treatment of an 18th-century novel. This opera will definitely attract and engage a new audience to this timeless Chinese love story.”

In anticipation of the upcoming premiere, David Gockley has invited Bay Area civic leaders Gorretti Lo Lui and Doreen Woo Ho to collaborate with the Company to develop community partnerships and fundraising initiatives in support of this new opera. Among several distinguished community supporters, San Francisco Opera gratefully recognizes the participation of San Francisco Mayor Ed Lee and First Lady Lee, in addition to author Amy Tan, Asian Art Museum Board President Timothy Kahn and Kathy Cheng of YMCA of San Francisco.

*Dream of the Red Chamber* marks David Gockley’s 43rd career world premiere and eighth commission for the Company to date, including 2008’s *The Bonesetter’s Daughter* by Stewart Wallace, based on Amy Tan’s novel and featuring a libretto by Tan. Gockley is currently in his tenth and final season as San Francisco Opera’s General Director; he retires at the conclusion of the current season, capping an internationally acclaimed and award-winning career spanning 44 years as one of America’s most prominent opera impresarios.
San Francisco Opera will present *Dream of the Red Chamber* as part of the Company’s 2016–17 Season. Tickets will go on sale to new and renewing San Francisco Opera subscribers on January 12 at the San Francisco Opera Box Office by calling (415) 864-3330 or online at sfopera.com. Single (non-subscription) tickets will go on sale beginning June 27.

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This production is made possible, in part, by Company Sponsors John A. & Cynthia Fry Gunn, the Edmund W. and Jeannik Méquet Littlefield Fund, United Airlines, grants from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts and funding from OPERA America’s Opera Fund.

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**DREAM OF THE RED CHAMBER** by Bright Sheng*

*WORLD PREMIERE*

**September 10** (7:30 p.m.), **13** (7:30 p.m.), **18** (2 p.m.), **23** (7:30 p.m.), **27** (7:30 p.m.), **29** (7:30 pm), **2016**

Libretto by David Henry Hwang* and Bright Sheng*

Based on the book by Cao Xueqin

Commissioned by San Francisco Opera

Approximate running time: 3 hours including one intermission

Sung in English with English supertitles

**Cast:**

* Dai Yu — Pureum Jo*
  * Bao Yu — Yijie Shi*
  * Bao Chai — Nian Wang†
  * Granny Jia — Qiulin Zhang*
  * Lady Wang — Hyona Kim*
  * Princess Jia — Karen Chia-Ling Ho*
  * Aunt Xue — Yanyu Guo

**Production Team:**

* Conductor — George Manahan
  * Director — Stan Lai*
  * Production Designer — Tim Yip*
Lighting Designer  Gary Marder
Projection Designer  John Wong*
Chorus Director  Ian Robertson
Choreographer  Fang-Yi Sheu*

San Francisco Opera Orchestra, San Francisco Opera Chorus and San Francisco Opera Dance Corps

* San Francisco Opera debut † Current Adler Fellow

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