

For Immediate Release

Asia Society Hong Kong Center Launches World Premiere of Chamber Opera “Mila”

Unique contemporary opera that focuses on Hong Kong’s cultural and social character

(Hong Kong, January 11, 2018) – Asia Society Hong Kong Center (ASHK) today announces that the world premiere of its chamber opera **Mila** will open on January 18, 2018. Three years in its making, Mila brings to light the richness and complexity in Hong Kong’s cultural composition – in both its team of creative and performing artists and its story line, which focuses on some of the unique and contemporary characteristics and issues of Hong Kong’s social fabric.

“**Mila**’s world premiere represents the fruition of three years of intensive creative planning and production. Its creative commission reflects our commitment to embrace diversity in ideas as much as in the social and cultural diversity in Hong Kong, and is in fact a continuation of The Rising Stars of Asia series with support from Mr. & Mrs. Robert Miller that we launched in 2012 to promote artistic development and collaboration between talents in Hong Kong and the region. To that end, we were inspired by the late Mr. Daniel Ng, founder of the Octavian Society who commissioned *Hong Kong Epilogue (Here Are The Years That Walk Between)* – a multi-media aria by Hong Kong composer Aeon Loo for our opening at our new home at the former explosive magazine in 2012. We are also grateful for the support of the Hong Kong Arts Development Council to promote the performance to audiences in Hong Kong and beyond,” said S. Alice Mong, Executive Director of Asia Society Hong Kong Center.

“This original chamber opera is part of our mission to provide a platform for local talents to collaborate with seasoned international artists in creating new and innovative works. It celebrates the coming of age of Hong Kong’s growing pool of creative talents on the one hand, while it also examines and raises awareness of some of the unique social issues in Hong Kong,” she added.

Named after the protagonist in the story, **Mila** explores the tensions and relationships within a Hong Kong family. A hardworking and patient domestic helper from the Philippines, Mila is hired to work for a family of three in Hong Kong, including a couple in cross-racial marriage and their young son. Mila quickly becomes greatly concerned over her little master’s suicidal inclination – a situation that touches an old wound from her past. Meanwhile, there is growing distance and distrust from her employers, two driven working professionals who are too self-occupied and focused on finding faults and placing blame on others for their own affairs. Mila is the only one left aware of the boy’s precarious mental state and his need for help and protection.

Throughout the 60-minute performance, the opera tells of the high pressure and high stress environment that Hong Kong fosters amongst students and in the workplace, the work culture and all-consuming school rigor that distract the family from having the time and space for happiness. It also brings to light issues of trust and communication within the family dynamic, problems that Mila’s status in the home as a helper garners only limited opportunity for her to help.

Mila is a four-scene chamber opera with original music and libretto, live vocal and instrumental musicians. Its creative team features well-known talents in Hong Kong and internationally, including American-born composer Eli Marshall, award-winning and sought-after Hong Kong playwright Candace Chong, award-winning theater veteran Chu Hei Chan as director, and Neal Goren, Founder, Artistic Director and Conductor of the Gotham Chamber Opera in New York City as its music director. The performance will be sung in English, Cantonese and Tagalog by a cast of artists from Hong Kong, the Philippines and the USA.

The launch of **Mila's** world premiere is well timed to commemorate the 6th anniversary of ASHK at the former Explosives Magazine of the old Victoria Barracks in Admiralty. The production is also dedicated to the late Mr. Washington SyCip, a former Honorary Life Trustee of Asia Society and Founding Chair of Asia Society Philippines, whose support has helped to make this commission possible. Performances will run from January 18-21, 2018, and will include a post-performance talk with the creative team in the first evening. The project is supported by the Hong Kong Arts Development Council in terms of promotion and media outreach. Other sponsors and partners include United Airlines, Ovolo Hotels, Tom Lee Music, Tom Lee Engineering, Parsons Music, Yangtze River and the Hong Kong New Music Ensemble.

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About the performance schedule

Thursday to Saturday, January 18-20, 2018

Performance begins at 7:00 pm

Post-performance talk with creative team on January 18, 2018

Sunday, January 21, 2018

Performance begins at 3:00pm

About the creative team

Eli Marshall, Music

American Eli Marshall moved to China in 2003 on a Fulbright Fellowship. His orchestral works have been performed in seven countries; other works premiered at the German Parliament, South Korea's Gak-won temple, and the Smithsonian Institution. His original film music for Ann Hui's *The Golden Era* featured Wu Tong as soloist with the London Symphony Orchestra; he contributed to the score for Wong Kar-wai's *Ashes of Time — Redux*, featuring Yo-Yo Ma. Awarded the Douglas Moore Fellowship for American Opera, ASCAP's Kaplan Award, and previously artistic director of the Beijing New Music Ensemble, he holds a visiting faculty position at Cornell University, and has resided in Hong Kong since 2011.

Candace Chong, Story and Libretto

Candace Chong (playwright) is a recipient of the Best Artist Award (Drama) by the Hong Kong Arts Development Council (2010). She was selected as one of Hong Kong's 25 most inspirational and influential women by South China Morning Post, and she is the winner of five Hong Kong Drama Awards (Best Script). In 2003 she was also awarded Outstanding Young Playwright by the Hong Kong Federation of Drama Societies. In 2004 she was awarded the Lee Hysan Foundation Fellowship by the Asian Cultural Council, which allowed her to spend 12 months in the United States. Candace's plays have been translated and presented in different countries, including *Wild Boar* recently performed in Chicago. Her latest works include *Dr. Sun Yat-sen*, on which she worked as librettist and which was presented in the Santa Fe Opera House, and the Broadway Production *Chinglish*, on which she worked as translator.

Chan Chu Hei, Stage Director

Chu Hei Chan graduated from the School of Drama, Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts in 1991 with a major in Acting and was awarded the Advanced Diploma (Honours) in Performing Arts. After graduation, he furthered his studies in theater at Ecole Philippe Gaulier in London. In 1993, he co-founded Theatre Ensemble and has held various roles including director, playwright and actor. He founded Horizon Theatre Studio in 2004 and Theatre Horizon in 2006. He established the Hong Kong People's Fringe Association in 2012. He is currently Artistic Director of Theatre Horizon and the Chief Coordinator of Hong Kong People's Fringe Festival. He has performed in major theatrical productions for various professional theater troupes in Hong Kong. He has won the best actor and twice the best director for the Hong Kong Drama Awards, and also twice the best director for the Hong Kong Theatre Libre. His recent directed works are *The Black and the Blue of a Man (North-East Village Edition)*, *Century-Old Dreams of a Fishing Harbour Trilogy*, *The Garden Party (North-East Village Version)*, *The Blue Bird*, *The Lu-Tings*, *Skylight* and *The Massage King*.

Neal Goren, Music Director

Neal Goren is the Founder and Artistic Director and Conductor of Gotham Chamber Opera in New York City. In addition, he is a frequent guest conductor active throughout North American and Europe. Notable appearances include *Respighi's La bella dormente nel bosco* for the Lincoln Center Festival and Spoleto Festival USA, New York City Opera conducting their revival of *The Magic Flute*, and with Opera de Nantes and Angers, France for *The Turn of the Screw*. As Artistic Director of Gotham Chamber Opera, he conducted critically acclaimed productions of Haydn's *Il Mondo della Luna*, Mozart's *Il sogno di Scipione*, Milhaud's *Les Malheurs d'Orphée*, Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* (with period instruments) and more. As a recital accompanist, Neil Goren has collaborated with a number of opera's leading singers, including Leontyne Price (as her exclusive musical collaborator), Kathleen Battle, Harolyn Blackwell, Thomas Hampson, Lorraine Hunt Lieberson, Hermann Prey and others. He has been a member of the faculty of the graduate opera department of the Mannes College of Music since 1992, the Accademia Rossiana in Pesaro, Italy and the Harlem School of the Arts. He also served on the Board of Directors of the Richard Tucker Music Foundation from 1991-2003.

About Asia Society Hong Kong Center

Asia Society Hong Kong Center is a locally funded, independent non-government organization that was established in 1990 by a group of Hong Kong community leaders. It is affiliated with Asia Society in New York that was founded in 1956 by John D. Rockefeller III to promote mutual understanding and to strengthen partnerships between Asia and the US in a global context.

Asia Society Hong Kong Center is dedicated to providing educational platforms that present balanced perspectives and promote critical understanding of topics that are relevant to Hong Kong, Asia and the region's role in the world. Across the fields of arts and culture, education, business and policy, it seeks to provide insights, generate ideas and promote collaboration to address present challenges and create a shared future. Its home in Admiralty at the former Explosives Magazine of the old Victoria Barracks, made possible under Private Treaty Grant from the government, was the result of careful conservation, restoration and adaptive re-use which transformed the heritage site into a cultural, artistic and intellectual hub in 2012 to offer a broad variety of cultural and education programs to the community.

Media Enquiry

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