



THE HAWAII STATE THEATRE COUNCIL  
presents

# Hitting The Stage



Raquel Palisbo (L), Melisa Orozco Vargas (M), and Donovan Oakleaf (R) in *Fights & Delights*.  
UHM Dept. of Theatre + Dance / Kennedy Theatre

February 16-25, 2018  
PHOTO: Johns Wells

Feb 21

## UHM Definitely Delights

[Staff Reviews](#)

I've been a fan of Chinese Opera or *Jingju* ever since I saw my first production at the University of Hawaii at Manoa titled, *Women Generals of the Yang Family* in their 2005 - 2006 season. This year they offer *Fights & Delights: Three Chinese/Xiqu Comedies*. It does not disappoint.



Company of *Fights & Delights*.  
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First, get there early to catch the pre show. If you're like me and have a little experience with *Jingju*, you'll be entertained as two "seven year-olds" instruct you on what to watch for in a Chinese opera performance and then give the customary curtain speech in a very different yet delightful way. The entrance of the Golden Dragon winding and dancing through the audience and on stage is especially exciting.

As the play begins, the actors' lines are projected on two screens flanking the stage. Even though the actors are speaking *Jingju*-stylized English, the subtitles enable the audience to understand what is being spoken and after a

little while become accustomed to what they're hearing on stage.

The stage is large, open, and beautifully designed by **Michelle Bisbee**. The actors pantomime every action: unlocking unseen doors, walking over invisible thresholds and gliding through intangible corridors. Every

movement is purposeful and intricate, nothing is rushed. There is beauty in everything the audience sees and hears: the percussion and melodic ensembles perfectly accent the onstage action.

*Treasure in the Chest (Gui Zhang Yuan)* is the first comedy offered as Act One. A young daughter is left at home by her mother and brother as they visit an uncle to inquire about a suitor for her. She is told to stay in the house and not let anyone in. Soon, a young scholar, running away from two constables, knocks on her door begging for refuge. She concedes and hides him from the constables who, without delay, also come to the door demanding entrance to look for their runaway.

**Michelle Hunyuh** (Yulian) as the daughter and **Maseeh Ganjali** (Taoqi) as her brother are fun to watch as they play off each other very well.

*Pi Jin Rolls the Lamp (Pi Jin Gun Deng)* tells of a henpecked husband Pi Jin and the lengths that his wife and daughter will go to make him do their bidding. The role of Pi Jin is double-cast with **Donovan Oakleaf** and **Sarah Swilley** sharing the role on alternating evenings. Opening night, Swilley had the audience applauding and shouting “Hao” (it is good) as she deftly moved through every challenge with ease and athletic grace.

*Where Three Roads Meet (San Cha Kou)* finds a two constables escorting General Jiao Zan along a lonely highway. They arrive at an inn and are put up for the night by the innkeeper and his wife. Ren Tanghui, a brave warrior, arrives at the inn to retrieve the general but his identity is mistaken by the couple, as they believe he has come to harm the general. As the brave warrior extinguishes his candle to bed down for the evening, the innkeeper silently enters the darkened room. Okay so it’s not for real dark, because how would we be able to see what was happening right? Well that’s the beauty of *Xiqu*. The brave warrior (**Alston Albarado**) and the innkeeper (**Ganjali**) lead the audience to believe that they are moving through a darkened room, barely missing each other with their drawn swords, jumping on tables (or sometimes under them too). The finesse with which the move through the choreography is part of what makes *Jingju* so enjoyable.

If you’re new to Chinese opera, *Fights & Delights* is a good opportunity to discover this centuries-old Chinese art form. If you’re already a fan, then get your tickets now because there are only three more performances.

*Fights & Delights* plays Friday and Saturday, February 23 and 24 at 7:30 pm and on Sunday February 25 at 2:00 pm at Kennedy Theatre at The University of Hawaii at Manoa. For tickets visit [manoa.hawaii.edu/liveonstage/kennedy-theatre](http://manoa.hawaii.edu/liveonstage/kennedy-theatre). HAO!

[Fights & Delights: Three Chinese Comedies](#), [UH: Kennedy Theatre](#), [Kennedy Theatre](#)

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