

ON STAGE

'White Snake'

SLITHERS INTO NEVADA THEATER

By Jeannie Wood
Special to Prospector

"The White Snake," a Chinese mythical and magical tale on eternal love with original music and pageantry, opens tonight through May 6 at the Nevada Theatre.

The play, by Mary Zimmerman, and presented by Community Asian Theatre of the Sierra, re-imagines an ancient Chinese legend in which a snake spirit transforms herself into a beautiful woman in order to experience the human world.

Venturing down the mountainside with her companion, Green Snake, White Snake meets and falls in love with a humble and virtuous man. She decides to stay human until a wicked monk discovers her true identity and vows to destroy her.

"The White Snake" is an extravaganza, a tapestry of inter-weaving elements that become a breathtaking work of art. It has comedic and serious moments and choreographed and stylized movements. It has poetic prose echoed in choruses and solos. It has special effects, life-size puppets, a simple but elegant set, a hundred props, numerous theatrical tricks, shades of opera, and exquisite Tang dynasty-era inspired costumes, all synchronized to transport the audience into ancient China and into another realm of fantasy.

LONG PREPARATION

Our directors and designers have been working on this show for a long time.

Carolyn Howarth, Director, was extremely moved upon reading the script a year ago and began visually creating the intricacies for *The White Snake*. Not only is the story beautiful in nature, but also in collaborating with her team of designers and 12 actors have created a production, with all its complexities and shared input, a powerful collective masterpiece.

Tynowyn Woolman, music director and composer, who specializes in early world and ethnic music, began binge researching a year ago on this classic story. An avid fan of Mary Zimmerman and stories of epic journeys and transformation, she immersed herself deeply into the "culture and emotional soundscape" of *The White Snake*, searching for just the right combination of notes and chords, and the right instruments to use, in order to ultimately create 40 pieces of ambient music. Tynowyn won an Elly Award for Best Sound Designer for CATS' production of Mary Zimmerman's *Journey to the West*.

Tynowyn is joined by long-time friend and colleague Lisa Stine on the harp, who was also a member of the music ensemble of *Journey*. Musician and percussionist Andjru Werderitsch rounds out our trio. Andjru will add his expertise on the didgeridu.

COSTUMES, HAIR, MAKEUP

One cannot help but notice the exquisite costumes by our costume designer, Jill Kelly. The legend of *White Snake* dates back to the eighth or ninth century,



PHOTO BY DAVID G. WONG

A scene from *The White Snake*, opening tonight at Nevada Theatre.

so she chose the Tang dynasty as her "loose" inspiration. The play's costumes were built almost entirely from CATS' extensive collection. In addition to the costumes created for previous productions, there are dozens and dozens of beautiful pieces of Asian clothing that have been donated to CATS from our generous community. These are special pieces that appear to have been heirlooms gathered through lifetimes of work and travel to exotic places. Thus, she has had a particularly lush fabric palette, like silks and brocades, from which to create a rich and lustrous wardrobe. There are "re-purposed" costumes that patrons may recognize from *Journey to the West*, *Turandot*, or *The King and I*.

Adding to the "crowning glory" of that final "look" are the hair and makeup designs by Kay Carrillo Drake. Kay is new to CATS. While working in Los Angeles, she had 25 years experience working in the wigs and make-up departments of the Long Beach Opera and the Los Angeles Opera.

PROPS, PUPPETS, SET

There are about 100 props in this show.

Properties Designer Dennis Duesing is a retired engineer, who is also an artist and visionary and loves to "figure things out." Duesing, who also assisted with props in *Miss Saigon*, is assisted by Artistic Director Lisa Moon and a team of crafters. Although many props have been labor-intensive to build, without them, they would not give "life" to a scene. He also designed the set and props for *Flower Drum Song* and the set for the 2007 production of *Tea*. The puppets in *The White Snake* are designed by award-winning puppeteer, Richard Bay, who has been designing puppets for theatrical productions for over 30 years.

The set is simplistic elegance, giving a "frame" to the story of *The White Snake*. Tim Dugan, the set and lighting designer is a retired professor of scenic and lighting design at California Polytechnic in San Luis Obispo. He has designed for CATS in *Journey to the West*, *Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet*, and *Chinglish*.

See www.catsweb.org for ticket information.

Jeannie Wood is CATS executive director.