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Ambition and Its Echoes

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The famous Shakespeare's work "Macbeth" finds a compelling new setting in "Der Schrei der Seele" ("The Cry of the Soul"), an Anhui-opera production coming to Vienna's MuTh. Transferring its tragedy of ambition to ancient China, the work promises more than a change of scenery. It brings a familiar psychological narrative into dialogue with a different theatrical language.

It is combining traditional Anhui opera with what the programme describes as bold innovation. The resulting proposition is richly suggestive: power may change its outward appearance, but its seductions remain recognisable. The story begins with national emergency. The kingdom of Wei faces destruction after an attack by Xu, until General Ziyin takes command and leads his forces to victory. Returning in triumph, he encounters three witches who predict his elevation to Marquis of Jingbian, his promotion to chancellor and, finally, his accession to the throne. Once the first two predictions come true, disbelief gives way to temptation.

This progression supplies the drama's essential tension. Ziyin does not begin as an obvious villain: his achievement establishes him as a figure of courage and public service. The terrible question is how such distinction becomes an argument for entitlement. Prophecy does not simply announce his future; it offers a way of interpreting success that gradually makes moral restraint appear an obstacle. His downfall becomes disturbing precisely because ambition grows from qualities that initially command admiration.

Wang Yushu appears as Ziyin, with Xiang Wei as his wife, Qijiang. At her urging, the general murders the reigning king and takes the throne. Yet possession brings no security. Husband and wife live in mounting fear, until remorse and the threat of hostile forces drive them towards psychological collapse and self-destruction. For an opera audience, this partnership offers the production's strongest emotional focus. The relationship must carry more than conspiracy: it contains persuasion, complicity and the eventual failure of shared ambition to provide mutual protection. Without anticipating the performers' interpretations, one can recognise the considerable dramatic opportunities.

A change in address, a suspended response or an altered physical relationship could reveal as much about the couple's disintegration as an explicit declaration. Qijiang is particularly important to that structure. Her pressure helps turn desire into action, but the consequences bind both characters. Their tragedy is therefore not merely that they obtain power through murder. They discover that the throne cannot silence the inner

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life they attempted to overrule.

The MuTh description emphasises a meeting of traditional Anhui opera and innovation, with an expressive theatrical approach to the classical material. It does not provide detailed information about instrumentation, musical authorship or the production's individual scenic devices. Those aspects should remain open rather than be supplied through assumptions about Chinese opera generally.

Nevertheless, the announced conception raises an important artistic possibility. Adaptation becomes most rewarding when a performance tradition does not merely illustrate an imported story, but offers its own means of understanding it. Here, the central challenge is to make ambition, terror and remorse theatrically legible while allowing the production's distinctive expressive vocabulary to lead.

Viennese audiences familiar with Shakespeare's tragedy may find recognition useful, but familiarity should not become a restrictive measuring stick. The interesting question is not how closely this production resembles another "Macbeth," but what its chosen theatrical form makes newly perceptible. Organised by the China Opera Research Society and International Culture Cooperations, the performance begins at 19:00 on 11 November. Alongside its leading pair, the announced cast includes Zhang Kai, Du Ming, Wei Xin and Jin Xincheng.

The title's promise is conscience made audible: not simply a cry of suffering, but the return of an ethical awareness that political success cannot extinguish. "Der Schrei der Seele" offers a powerful artistic prospect for that reason. Beneath its royal conflict lies an intimate catastrophe, in which two people acquire everything they desire and lose the capacity to inhabit their own lives. If the performance realises that tension with clarity and expressive conviction, its cross-cultural encounter could prove both illuminating and deeply moving.

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