

Toby Simkin  
*presents*



*Book, Lyrics & Music by*  
**Kenneth Clarke & Richard Daniels**

*Directed by*  
**Bobby Garcia**

## STORY SUMMARY

### ACT ONE

#### **Modern Day Huaqing**

In modern day Huaqing, where traffic noise contrasts with the frozen stillness of Tang history within, tourists are admiring a large white statue of the beautiful Lady Yang. In the background actors portray the Emperor of China and Yang herself: he is mesmerised as she performs the graceful rainbow and feather dance. As she spins round and round, we are transported back through the centuries to the moment when Lady Yang's life is about to change forever.

#### **Yang is exiled by husband Prince Shou**

Yang is being forcibly removed from their mansion by her adulterous husband Prince Shou, eighteenth son of the Emperor, and forced to live an austere life in a Taoist monastery.

#### **The Emperor is captivated by Yang's dance**

Yang faces an uncertain future but her fortunes change dramatically when the Emperor visits the monastery. He is captivated by Yang when he sees her dancing with the other nuns. Yang is invited to dance at the Imperial Palace, much to the annoyance of the Emperor's favourite concubine Lady Plum Blossom. The Emperor is determined to have Yang for himself, but is shocked to learn that she is his former daughter-in-law. Yang refuses to go to the Emperor's bed, fearing that he, like Shou, will discard her once she has succumbed to him.

### **The Emperor neglects affairs of state**

The Emperor's ministers and generals raise concerns about increased attacks from barbarian tribes. The infatuated Emperor however is preoccupied with Lady Yang and delegates the running of state affairs to his ambitious but corrupt chief minister, Li Linfu.

### **The barbarian soldier An Lushan is spared by Chief Minister Li Linfu**

The colossal barbarian soldier An Lushan is arrested on the northern border and brought to General Fushou to be executed. Li Linfu believes that he can use An to spy for China and spares him. When Fushou accuses Li of betraying China, Li murders him.

### **Yang returns to the monastery**

Determined to undermine Yang's position, the rejected Lady Plum Blossom sends Yang an anonymous letter which claims that the Emperor is still spending his nights with her. The angry Yang leaves the palace for the monastery. The Emperor visits her, and, touched by the gift of a golden hairpin, Yang returns.

### **Yang is finally convinced of the Emperor's love**

Yang is now treated like an empress at the palace, and the besotted Emperor dismisses concerns that An Lushan is secretly plotting a rebellion. Anxious to protect his own position, Li Linfu arranges for An Lushan to visit the Emperor. An arrives with the heads of six barbarian warriors to prove his loyalty and impresses the Emperor and Yang when he dances the barbarian whirl. The Emperor rewards An Lushan by making him governor of three key provinces. When Lady Plum Blossom warns the Emperor that Yang will be the cause of China's downfall, she is banished from the palace. Finally convinced of the Emperor's love, Yang goes to his bed, believing she has found true happiness.



## ACT TWO

### **Yang and the Emperor flee the palace after An Lushan rebels**

While Yang enjoys all the privileges of her new status, the Emperor's position as head of state starts to crumble. Li Linfu's hold on An Lushan is weakening, and An, having amassed a huge army, no longer fears his former master and is ready to rebel. Despite the mounting threat and the growing voices of discontent around him, the Emperor shuts himself away with Yang at Huaqing Palace. Their idyllic existence is shattered when news of the rebellion breaks, and they have to escape to the countryside. Li disguises himself as a refugee, knowing he faces arrest and the death penalty for sparing An Lushan.

### **Li Linfu convinces the Imperial Guards that Yang is to blame for the rebellion**

Lady Plum Blossom viciously attacks Yang in a frantic fit of jealousy. Li Linfu intervenes, and the Emperor spares him for saving Yang's life. This does not stop Li from inciting mutiny among the Imperial Guards who are escorting the Emperor to safety. Li convinces them that it is not he, but Yang, who is to blame for the rebellion.

### **The guards mutiny and demand the death of Yang**

The Emperor's exhausted convoy stops at the deserted Mawei Station. News arrives that the capital has fallen to the rebels, which is the last straw for the disgruntled guards. They revolt and refuse to guarantee the Emperor's safety unless Yang is executed. The Emperor refuses to hand Yang over to them but Yang sees that all is lost. She tells the Emperor that she must sacrifice herself to save him and preserve the dynasty.

### **Yang makes the ultimate sacrifice to save the man she loves**

As the guards lead Yang to an orchard, Lady Plum Blossom tries to console the Emperor. When he rejects her, she plunges Yang's discarded hairpin into her own heart. The Emperor can only stand and watch as Yang's lifeless body swings from a tree. It is the last dance she will perform for him.

### **History remembers Yang as the woman who saved China**

Back in modern day Huaqing, the tourists and guides are still gathered round Yang's statue. As Yang dances again for the captivated Emperor, she is now revered as the woman who made the ultimate sacrifice to save both the empire and the man she loved.

- curtain -