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MING LEE AND THE MAGIC TREE

AURAND HARRIS

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION



**SAMUEL
FRENCH**

FOUNDED 1830

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For
Sara, Polly and George

Performed in the traditional Chinese style with a Chorus, Property Man and honorable actors, MING LEE AND THE MAGIC TREE tells the exciting story of a Prince who, if he can find a happy man, can marry the Princess of the Stars. In his search he gives Ming Lee, a stonecutter, a circle of wishes, each of which Ming Lee thinks will make him happy, but instead he discovers that fine hats do not make a fine head. A flexible cast, colorful characters, humor and action make this imaginative and poetic play a theatrical treat for both the audience and the actors. Different, delightful, dramatic.

CAST

CHORUS

PROPERTY MAN

MING LEE, *a stonecutter*

MOO YUEN, *a prince disguised as a tiger*

SHING NU, *Princess of the Stars*

MEI LING } *Star Maidens*
MEI PING }

KUAN LUNG, *ruler of the valley*

KITE MAKER

SUN GOD, *ruler of the sky*

So Hi }
So Lo } *three fair maidens*
So So }

RAIN GOD, *ruler of the clouds*

BEAR

MONKEY

GOD OF THE MOUNTAIN, *ruler of the mountain peak*

LIN PO, *a young stonecutter*

ATTENDANTS TO KUAN LUNG

WEDDING GUESTS

GONG STRIKER

ORCHESTRA

DESCRIPTION OF CHARACTERS AND COSTUMES

CHORUS: Perfect in manner and in speech. He wears a colorful Chinese robe and carries a large fan.

PROPERTY MAN: Speaks only in mime, obeys quickly, and enjoys his duties. He wears a skullcap with a button on top, jacket and trousers.

MING LEE: Young and handsome. He wears a coolie hat, jacket and trousers.

MOO YUEN: Prince Charming who is disguised as a tiger. He wears a yellow suit with black stripes and a removable tiger mask.

SHING NU: Princess of the Stars. She is beautiful and beautifully dressed in a glittering Chinese robe.

MEI LING, MEI PING: Two Star Maidens. They wear beautiful Chinese robes.

KUAN LUNG: Ruler of the valley. He wears a costly Chinese robe and a tall hat with a large golden badge.

KITE MAKER: Humble workman. He wears a peasant jacket and trousers.

SUN GOD: Powerful and commanding. He wears a rich Chinese robe and carries a staff topped with gold tinsel streamers.

So Hi, So Lo, So So: Three pretty maidens. They wear flowing Chinese robes and colorful flowers in their hair. They each carry a beautiful fan.

RAIN GOD: Strong and mighty. He wears a rich Chinese robe and carries a staff with silver tinsel streamers.

BEAR: Lumbering and with a deep voice. He wears a Chinese costume and a colorful animal mask.

MONKEY: Small, quick, and chattery. He wears a Chinese costume and a monkey mask.

GOD OF MOUNTAIN: Ancient and majestic. He wears a Chinese robe, has a long stringy beard, and his hat is the peak of the painted mountain top.

LIN PO: Youthful and energetic. He wears a coolie hat, jacket and trousers.

ATTENDANTS, WEDDING GUESTS, GONG STRIKER, ORCHESTRA: All wear appropriate Chinese costumes.

Ming Lee and The Magic Tree

As in the traditional Chinese theatre, there is no stage setting. The back and sides of the stage are masked with curtains. There is an entrance at R. and one at L.

As the play begins, the members of the ORCHESTRA and the GONG STRIKER enter and take their places on one side. On the other side there is a box for the PROPERTY MAN. The MUSICIANS wear traditional black or blue Chinese pajamas with long tops, and they carry various instruments: bells, drums, recorders, cymbals. The ORCHESTRA plays briefly and loudly. GONG STRIKER strikes the gong. CHORUS enters, wearing a colorful Chinese robe and carrying a fan. He is followed by the PROPERTY MAN, wearing a skullcap with a button on top, jacket, and trousers. He stands at the side of CHORUS.

CHORUS. I am the Chorus. I bow and say welcome to most honorable audience. (*He bows. PROPERTY MAN also bows and keeps bowing until a frown from CHORUS stops him. CHORUS points with fan at PROPERTY MAN.*) He is the Property Man. He will set the stage and help our illustrious actors. (*PROPERTY MAN grins and bows.*) Although he is visible, and you will see him walk about in full view, please pretend he is— (*Snaps fan open and holds it in front of PROPERTY MAN's face.*) invisible to you. I bow again and again. (*CHORUS bows to R. and L. PROPERTY MAN imitates him.*) Our most unworthy play will begin. (*GONG STRIKER strikes gong.*) In the Valley

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of a Hundred Flowers there lives a poor but honest stonecutter. (MING LEE *enters, wearing a coolie hat, jacket and trousers.*) Every morning at the hour of the dragon—(MING LEE *looks at sky.*) he leaves his hut of mud and straw and climbs the mountain to cut stones for the royal palace.

MING LEE. (*A painted mountain moves on stage. MING LEE walks to the mountain and stands by it.*) I am Ming Lee, a poor but honest stonecutter. With my mallet—(*Holds up right hand.*) and my chisel—(*Holds up left hand.* PROPERTY MAN *quickly takes mallet and chisel from property box.*) I earn my bowl of rice. My arms are strong. My back is straight. I can lift a stone twice my weight. When I strike the mountain—tap, tap, tap, they hear the echo in the valley—clap, clap, clap.

(PROPERTY MAN *puts chisel and mallet into MING LEE's hands. MING LEE pantomimes hitting the mountain. PROPERTY MAN claps his hands in echo. He grins, clapping louder and faster, enjoying the fun. DRUM beats. MING LEE and PROPERTY MAN stand silently. Loud roaring is heard and TIGER, dressed in yellow with black stripes, jumps onto the stage, looks at audience and roars.*)

CHORUS. A tiger enters.

TIGER. Do not tremble. Do not run. (*Holds up paws.*) For under this tiger's skin I am Moo Yuen, a mortal prince who seeks to wed Shing Nu, the Princess of the Stars. The great Jade Emperor—(*He looks up. DRUMS beat. He bows.*) who knows best, has changed me into a tiger and sent me on a quest. Before I can marry the Princess of the Stars, the great Jade Emperor commands that I must find the answer to a question. I must find—what makes a happy man. Until then I will remain a tiger. I will roar—(*Walks and roars.*) and shake my magic tail. Alas, magic I can make with it for others, but none for me. (*Feels behind for tail which is not*

there.) My magic tail? My tail! MY TAIL! (PROPERTY MAN quickly gets red rope tail from property box and ties it around TIGER's waist.) Quickly I must find the answer to the question: What makes a happy man? Then quickly I may marry the beautiful Princess of the Stars.

(*The music of the PRINCESS is heard, tinkling bells. PRINCESS OF THE STARS enters, followed by MEI LING and MEI PING. They wear beautiful Chinese costumes and walk in a slow, stately walk, swaying the body gently.*)

PRINCESS.

I am the Princess of the Stars,
Shining—shining silver bright—
With my maidens through the night.
Brightly my jewel lantern burns
Waiting—waiting—
Until my Moo Yuen returns.

(PRINCESS looks fondly toward TIGER. *He looks lovingly at her. Music of the bells tinkles as PRINCESS and maidens exit.*)

CHORUS. The sun has now climbed to his height. Ming Lee can tell by his short shadow and his long appetite.

MING LEE. I will rest and eat my cake of rice. (PROPERTY MAN returns mallet and chisel to box.) I will walk and find a tree. I will sit in the shade it makes for me. (*He starts walking in a big circle. PROPERTY MAN places a stool at c., takes from the box a colorful, flowering tree branch, stands by the stool like a tree, and waves the branch.*) Ah, here is a kind peach tree. Thank you, peach tree. Thank you for the shade you have made. (*He bows to tree. PROPERTY MAN returns the bow. MING LEE sits and smiles happily.*) It is a happy time, when you have worked your best, to sit quietly and enjoy a rest.

TIGER. What do I hear? A happy man is near. By my

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magic tail to him I will appear. (*With his hand he swings his tail in a circle behind him. TIGER takes a step toward MING LEE and roars.*)

MING LEE. The wind is roaring like a tiger. (*TIGER takes another step and gives another roar. MING LEE shivers.*) The wind is blowing like a tiger. (*TIGER takes a third step and gives a third roar. MING LEE looks up.*) It is a tiger! (*MING LEE jumps up. TIGER now purrs like a kitten and acts comically shy.*) It is a small tiger. (*TIGER and PROPERTY MAN nod.*) It is a gentle tiger. (*TIGER and PROPERTY MAN nod.*) It is a friendly tiger. He will not hurt me. (*TIGER and PROPERTY MAN shake their heads. TIGER purrs again and holds out hand.*) He is a hungry tiger. (*TIGER and PROPERTY MAN nod.*) I will share my rice cake with him.

(*PROPERTY MAN with his free hand, the other hand still holds the branch, gives MING LEE a small rice cake. MING LEE breaks it in two and gives TIGER half.*)

CHORUS. When honorable one helps another one, then two people enjoy what is done. (*MING LEE and TIGER smile at each other and chew loudly.*) Ming Lee and Tiger eat, as you can see, most politely. Their chewing is loud and clear so the gods will hear and know they are thankful.

(*PROPERTY MAN adds to the sound by chewing loudly and smacking his lips.*)

TIGER. I have found a friendly man. Now, by the twist of my magic tail, I will ask if he is a happy man. (*TIGER swings his tail around.*)

TIGER, CHORUS, AND ORCHESTRA. (*Chanting.*)

O Ming Lee . . . tell me,

Tell me, are you

Hap—py?

MING LEE. The wind is whispering in the tree. (*TIGER,*

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