

Marco Polo's adventures come to life on stage in a world-premiere opera by composer Stella Sung.

# Operatic Odyssey

BY SANDRA CARR

**G**et ready to travel back in time to Asia during the Middle Ages and experience royalty, love and adventure on the high seas when a new opera by award-winning composer Dr. Stella Sung makes its world premiere.



JACQUE BRUND

*The Red Silk Thread: An Epic Tale of Marco Polo* is being produced by the University of Florida Opera Theatre program and debuts this April at The Curtis M. Phillips Center for the Performing Arts at the University of Florida.

An accomplished pianist in her own right, Sung, 54, has a Doctor of Musical Arts degree in piano performance from the University of Texas at Austin. She was part of the University of Central Florida's music department for 18 years and currently serves as the director of the college's Center for Research and Education in Arts, Technology and Entertainment (CREATE). She has written nearly 100 compositions, but this is her first full-scale opera.

Composed with librettist Ernest Hilbert, *The Red Silk Thread* took eight months to complete and is a product of Sung's desire to tell a classic story based on an Asian proverb. She felt that Italian explorer Marco Polo was a good fit after she conducted research about his travels to China and his friendship with the Emperor Kublai Khan and his daughter, Princess Cocachin. It was a story she felt needed to be told.

"The proverb about a red thread connecting people throughout their whole lives is the basis for the opera," explains Sung. "The story is about fate and destiny and the connection that people have with each other."

Sung has been using visual projections in her work for the past 10 years, but took it a step further for the opera by replacing physical sets with virtual ones. She teamed up with Winter Springs based Ninjaneer Studios, which researched the era and created six virtual sets with 3-D projection mapping and a floor-to-ceiling screen. "3-D projection mapping is taking a wall or side of a building



NINJANEER STUDIOS

**COMPOSER STELLA SUNG (UPPER LEFT)** is the driving force behind a new, full-length opera. *The Red Silk Thread* debuts on April 17 and features virtual sets created by Ninjaneer Studios.

and giving the impression that it's being broken open, changed or morphed into something else," explains Ninjaneer Studios Artistic Director Heather Knott. "This unforgettable eye candy is bringing fantastical elements and more magic to the opera, compared to physical sets, than ever before."

Performances of *The Red Silk Thread: An Epic Tale of Marco Polo* will take place April 17 and April 19 at 7:30 p.m.; tickets are \$23 to \$38. Call 800.905.2787 or visit [theredsilkthreaduf.com](http://theredsilkthreaduf.com) for more information. **oam**

Freelance writer Sandra Carr is a regular contributor to Orlando Arts Magazine.