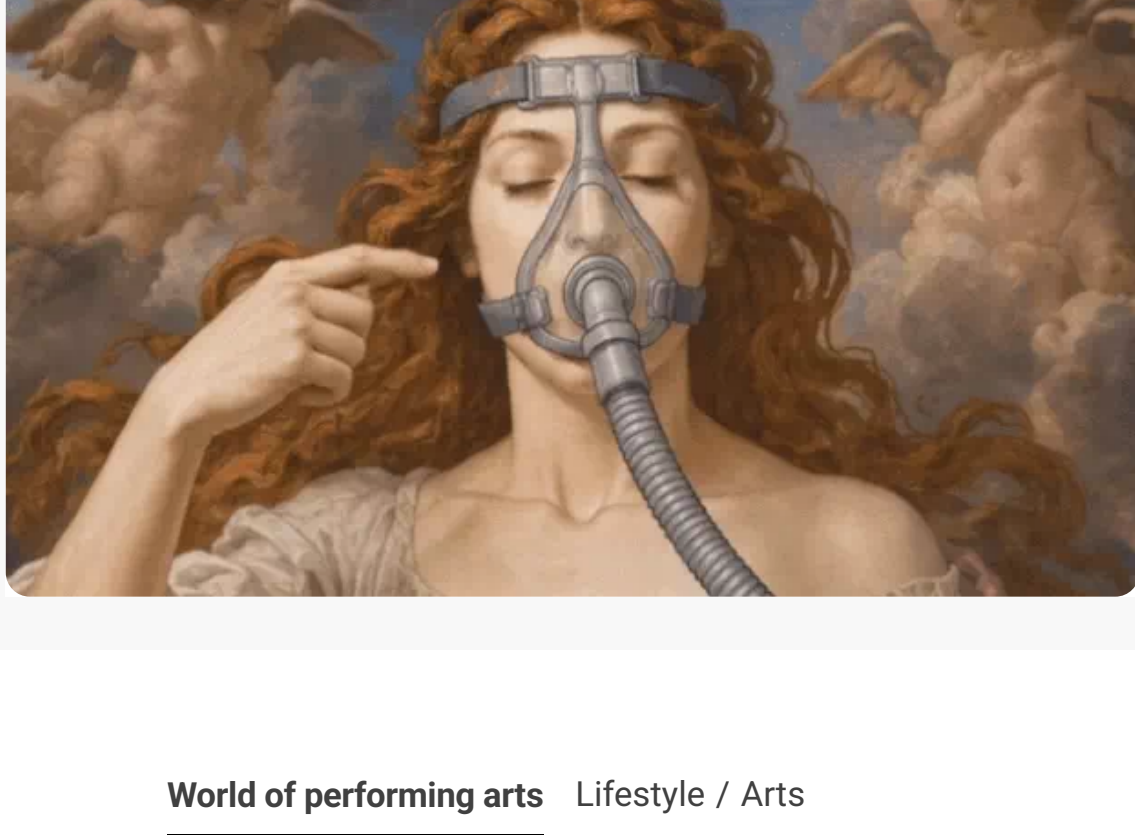




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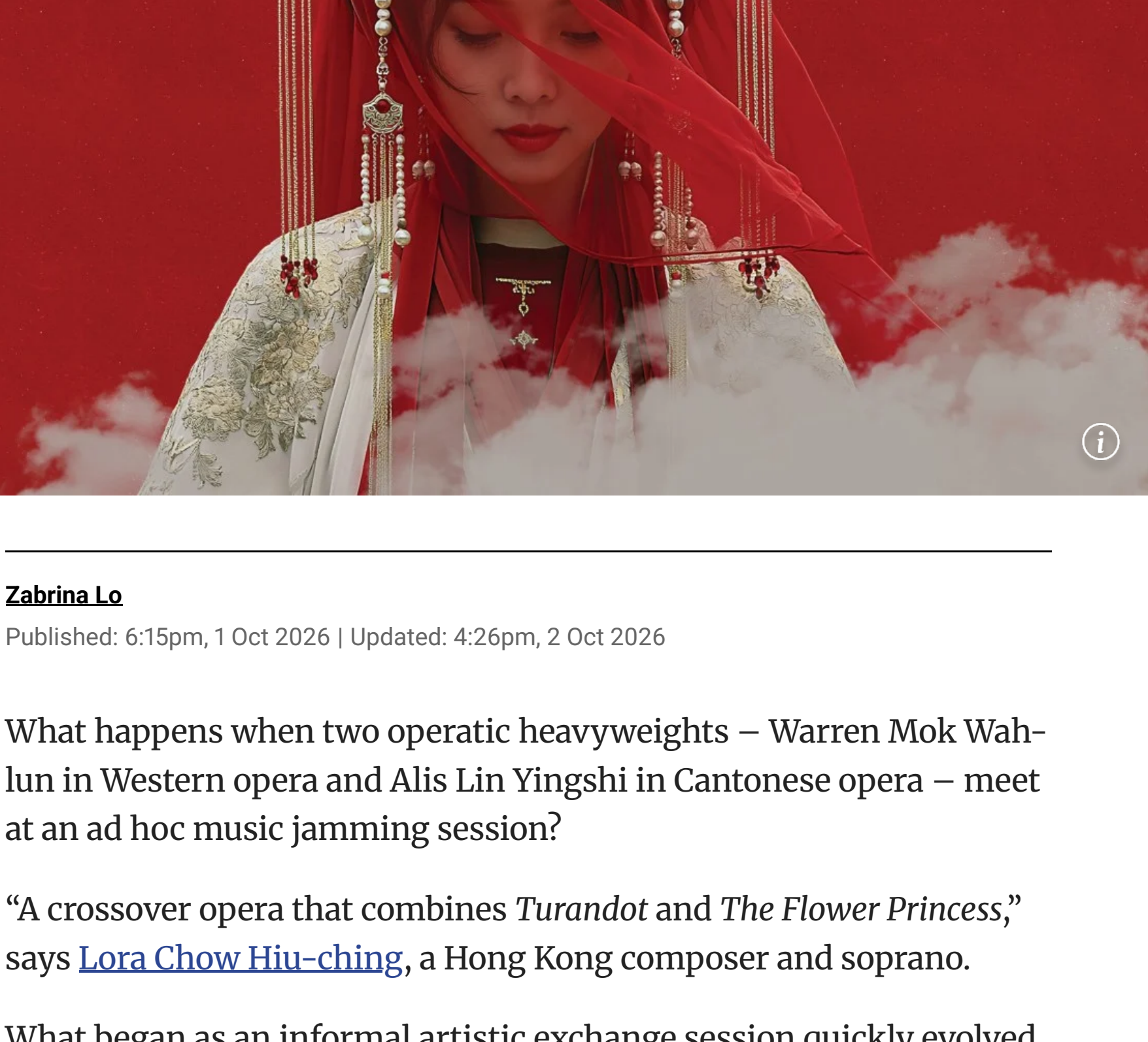
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How Westernised Cantonese opera Sleepless Moon marries Turandot and The Flower Princess

Hong Kong composer and soprano Lora Chow adapts The Flower Princess into a Western-infused production to make the genre more accessible

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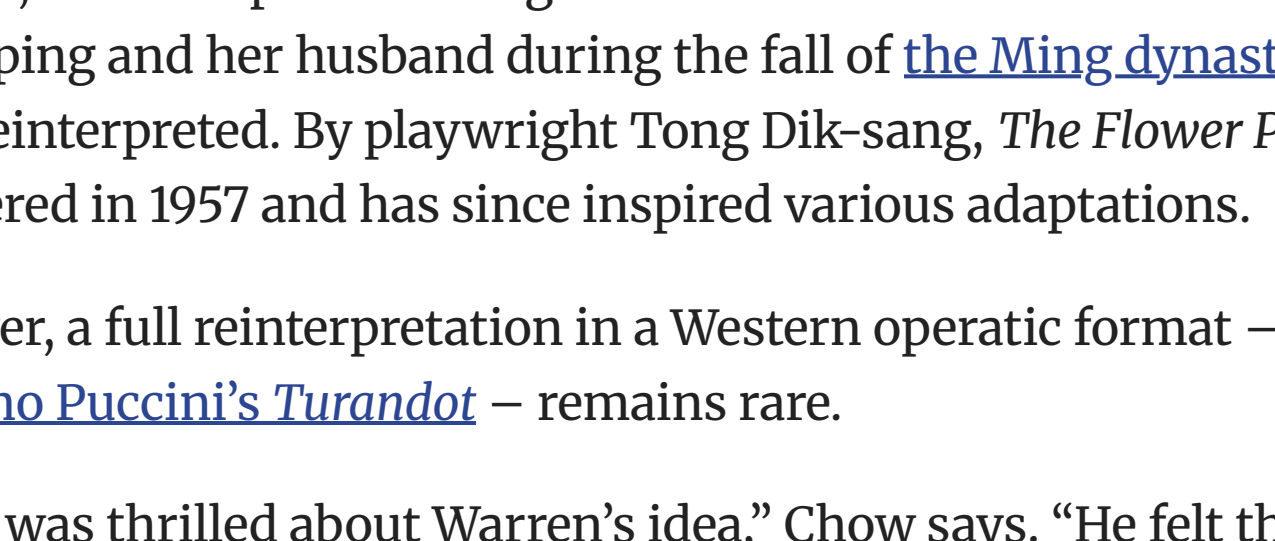
Zabrina Lo

Published: 6:15pm, 1 Oct 2026 | Updated: 4:26pm, 2 Oct 2026

What happens when two operatic heavyweights – Warren Mok Wah-lun in Western opera and Alis Lin Yingshi in Cantonese opera – meet at an ad hoc music jamming session?

“A crossover opera that combines *Turandot* and *The Flower Princess*,” says [Lora Chow Hiu-ching](#), a Hong Kong composer and soprano.

What began as an informal artistic exchange session quickly evolved into a serious artistic endeavour. Four years later, Chow is fine-tuning acoustics at the East Kowloon Cultural Centre, where cross-cultural production *Sleepless Moon* will premiere on October 1.



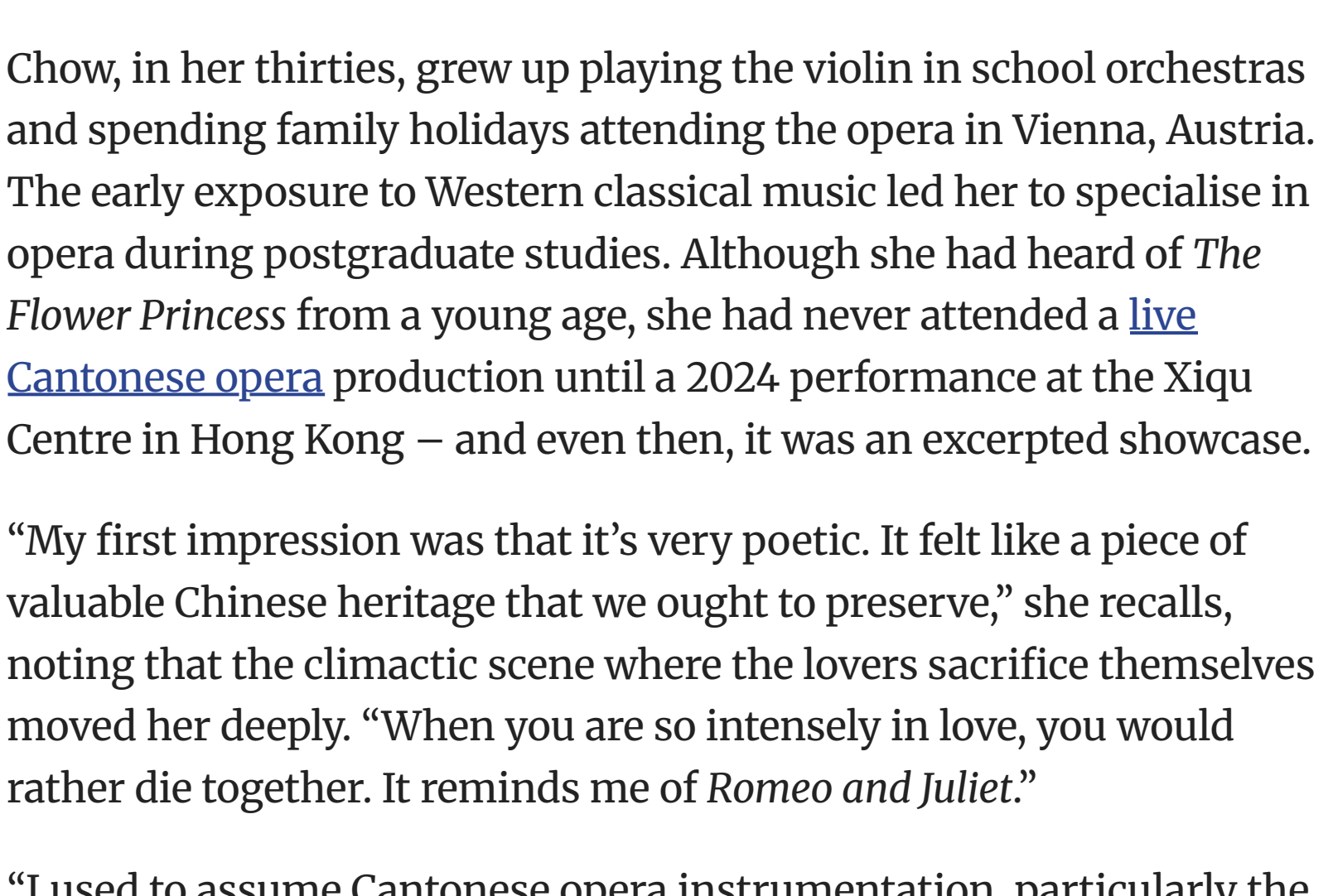
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Chow is one of the lead creators of *Sleepless Moon*, alongside producers Ivy Tse Yan-wah and Eddie Tam Sun-keung, a Cantonese opera performer. Although Chow was not present when Mok proposed a crossover opera, Tam, a guest at the private jam session, put her name forward. Both Chow and Tam are alumni of Yale University, in the US state of Connecticut.

This is not the first time the Cantonese opera classic *The Flower Princess*, which depicts the tragic romance between Princess Changping and her husband during the fall of the [Ming dynasty](#), has been reinterpreted. By playwright Tong Dik-sang, *The Flower Princess* premiered in 1957 and has since inspired various adaptations.

However, a full reinterpretation in a Western operatic format – like [Giacomo Puccini's *Turandot*](#) – remains rare.

“Eddie was thrilled about Warren's idea,” Chow says. “He felt that Westernising Cantonese opera could make the genre more accessible and expand its audience reach.”



Alis Lin Yingshi and Wang Zhiliang in *Sleepless Moon*. Photo: Timeologie

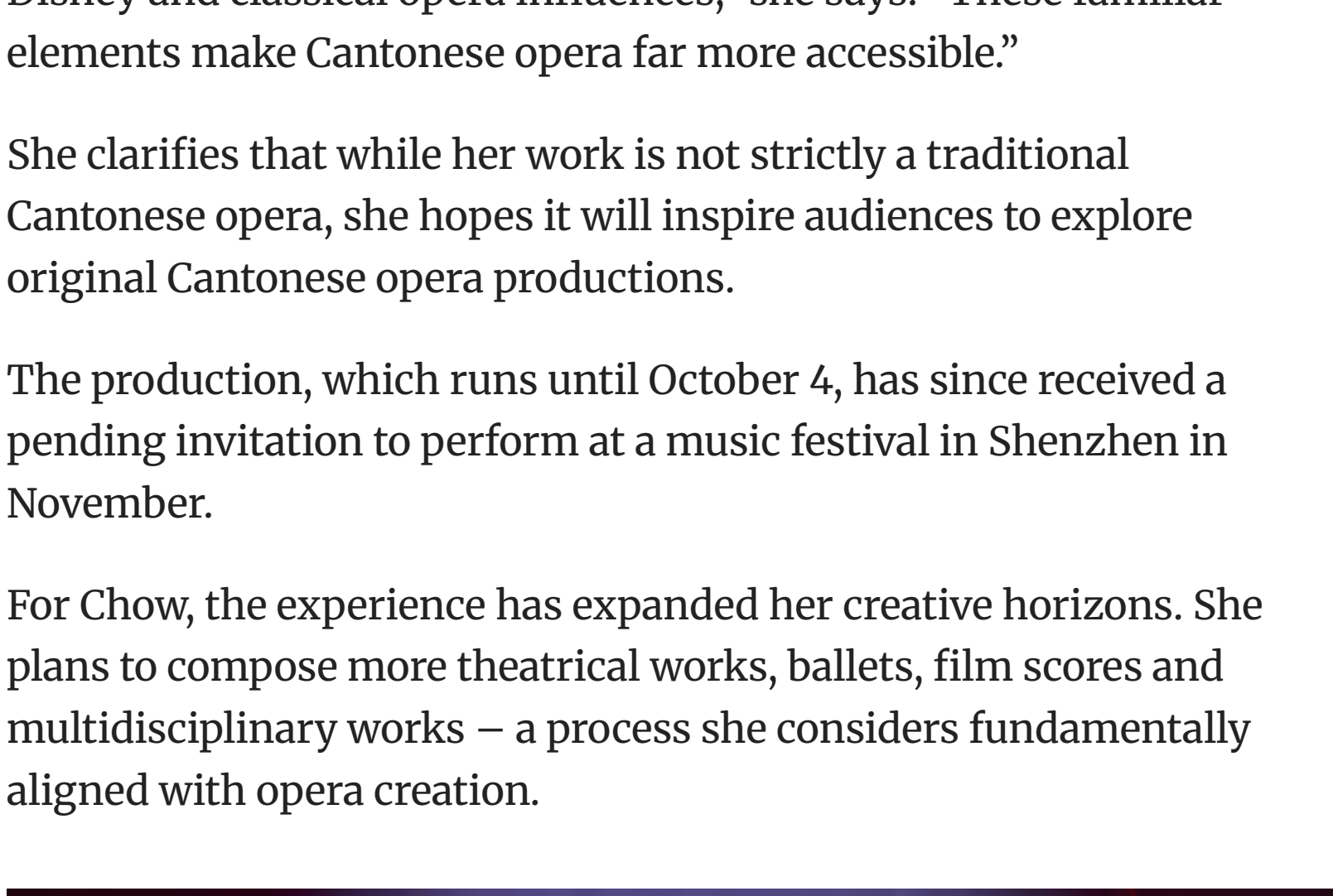
Modernising Cantonese opera

For decades, Cantonese opera has struggled to shed an outdated image among younger generations. In a city where British colonial heritage historically favoured Western classical arts, education rarely prioritised Cantonese opera.

Chow, in her thirties, grew up playing the violin in school orchestras and spending family holidays attending the opera in Vienna, Austria. The early exposure to Western classical music led her to specialise in opera during postgraduate studies. Although she had heard of *The Flower Princess* from a young age, she had never attended a [live Cantonese opera](#) production until a 2024 performance at the Xiqu Centre in Hong Kong – and even then, it was an excerpted showcase.

“My first impression was that it's very poetic. It felt like a piece of valuable Chinese heritage that we ought to preserve,” she recalls, noting that the climactic scene where the lovers sacrifice themselves moved her deeply. “When you are so intensely in love, you would rather die together. It reminds me of *Romeo and Juliet*.”

“I used to assume Cantonese opera instrumentation, particularly the percussion, was overly loud and piercing,” she continues. “But that experience changed my perception. I grew to appreciate how rich and harmonious it can be, and it became something I wanted to recreate in my own composition.”



Lora Chow at the Hong Kong Cultural Centre. Chow is one of the lead creators of *Sleepless Moon*. Photo: Lora Chow and Mark Lam

With *Sleepless Moon*, Chow's musical score leans towards a Western operatic structure. Nevertheless, she remains eager to experiment with traditional Chinese instrumentation, weaving musical motifs from *The Flower Princess* alongside traditional instruments into her orchestration.

Expanding her creative horizons

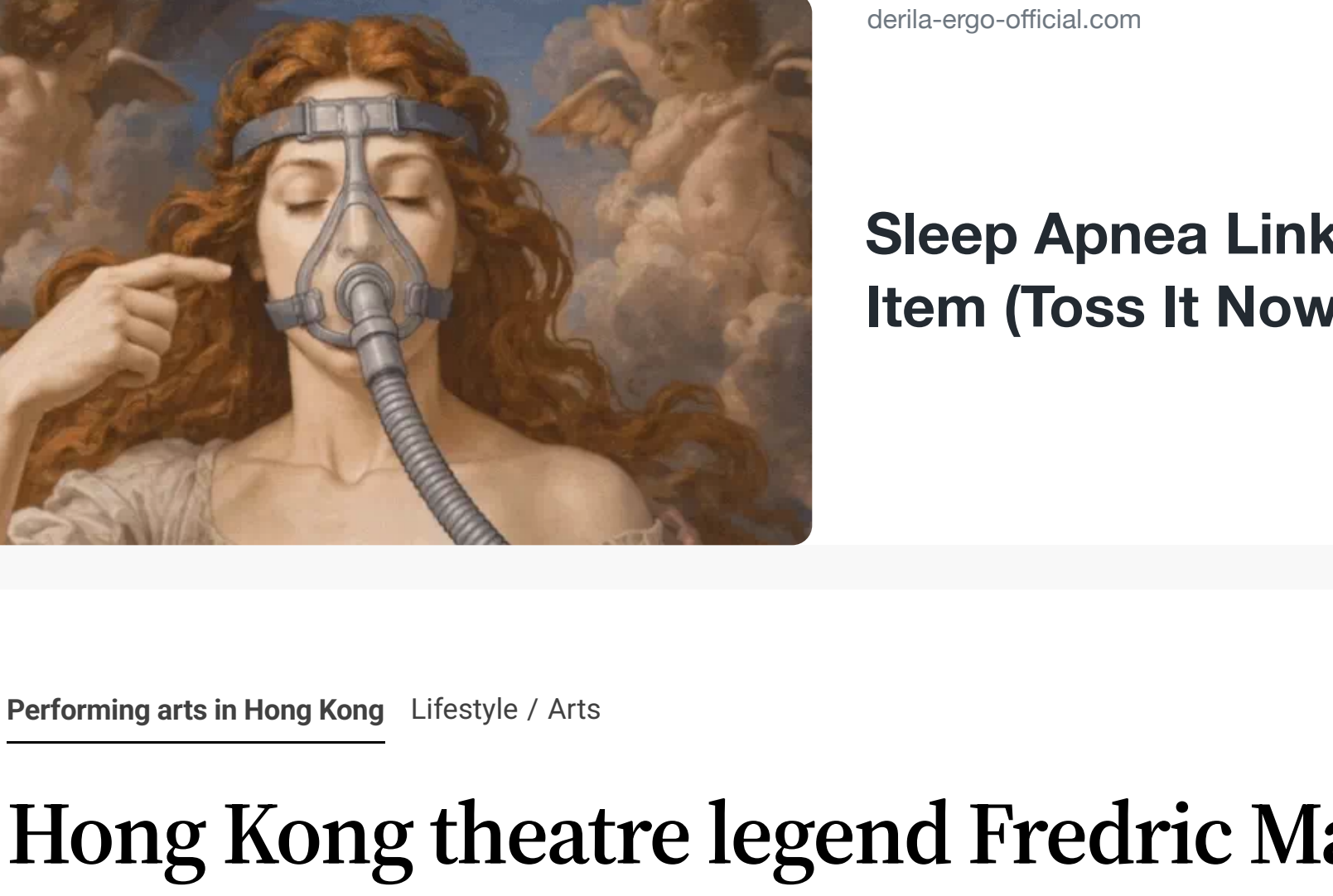
Although Chow lacks formal Cantonese opera training, she credits her technical understanding to her sister, Bona Chow Hiu-yan, an amateur [pipa player](#), and to her previous role as associate music director at Shanghai Disneyland, where she was commissioned to compose symphonic and musical scores incorporating Chinese instruments. She also benefited from the guidance of Cantonese opera masters including Tang Mi-ling, Loong Koon-tin and Hing-Cheung Chu, as well as Chinese music composers Alfred Wong and Ng Cheuk-yin.

“The musical style of *Sleepless Moon* is an amalgamation of cinematic, Disney and classical opera influences,” she says. “These familiar elements make Cantonese opera far more accessible.”

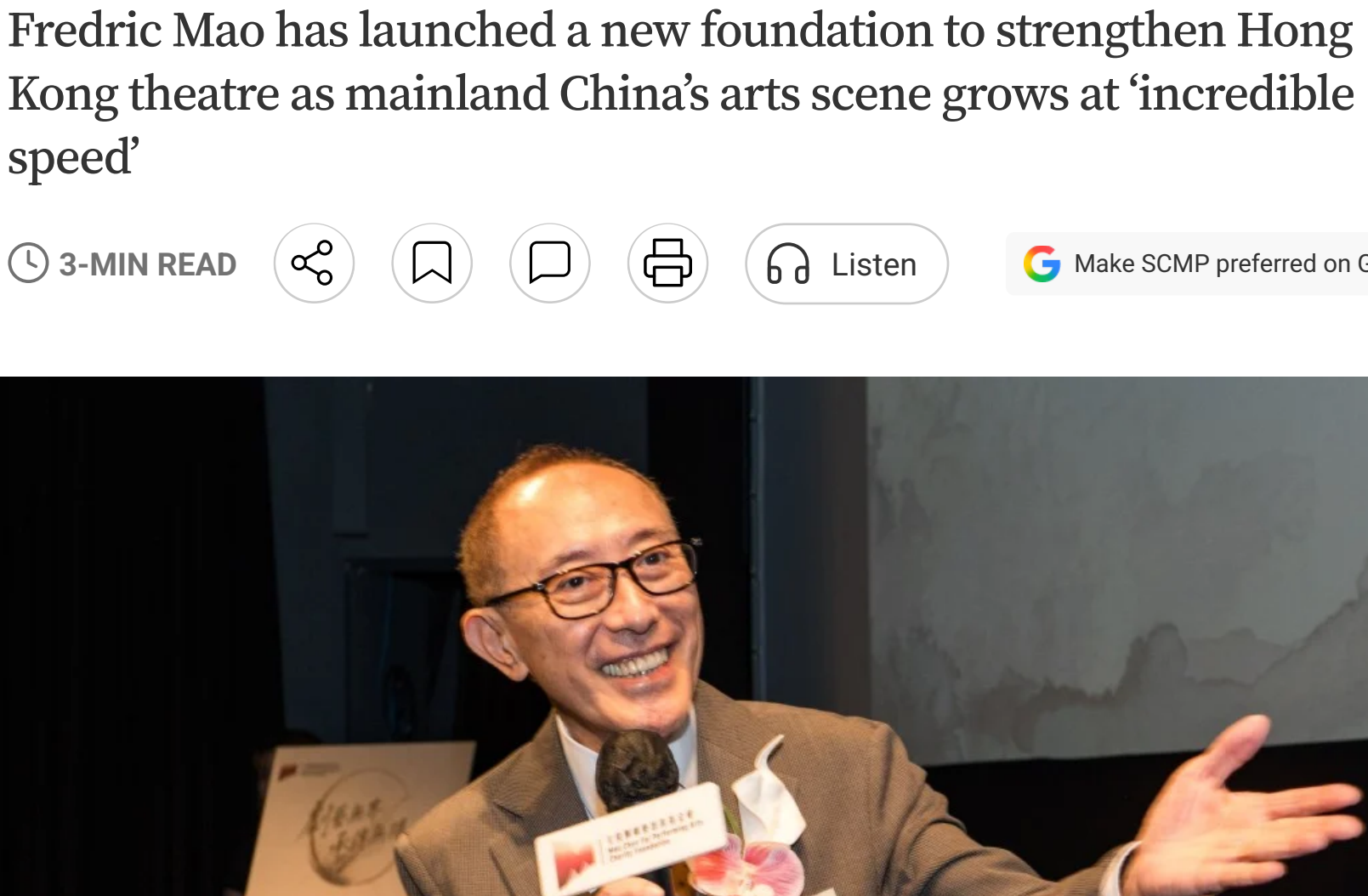
She clarifies that while her work is not strictly a traditional Cantonese opera, she hopes it will inspire audiences to explore original Cantonese opera productions.

The production, which runs until October 4, has since received a pending invitation to perform at a music festival in Shenzhen in November.

For Chow, the experience has expanded her creative horizons. She plans to compose more theatrical works, ballets, film scores and multidisciplinary works – a process she considers fundamentally aligned with opera creation.



Alis Lin and Henry Ngan in *Sleepless Moon*. Photo: Timeologie



A group photo of the *Sleepless Moon* cast and crew. Photo: Timeologie

“Opera is the highest art form because it integrates so many disciplines: vocal performance, drama and orchestration. In Cantonese opera, performers undergo rigorous training across singing, recitation, acting and martial arts,” she says, adding that she aims to push creative boundaries further through cross-cultural collaboration.

“Hong Kong is the ideal launch pad for this kind of fusion opera because of its cultural diversity,” she says. “We have an abundance of young talent across Cantonese opera, Western opera, musical theatre and set design.

“Bringing these disciplines together unlocks endless creative possibilities.”

“Sleepless Moon”, East Kowloon Cultural Centre, 60 Ngau Tau Kok Road, Kowloon. October 1-4, 2026. For tickets, visit [Urbix](#).

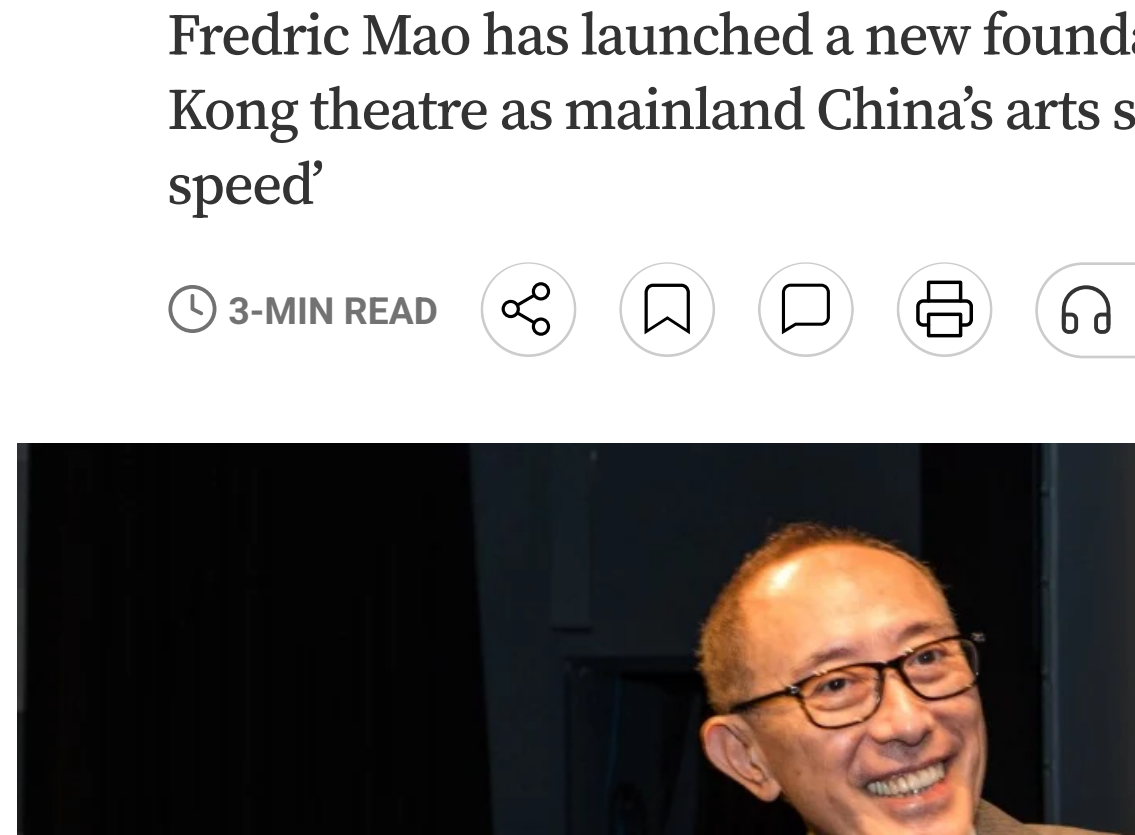


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Zabrina joined the SCMP in 2026 to cover arts, culture and social impact, bringing eight years of editorial experience. She has interviewed global icons – including Golden Lion...

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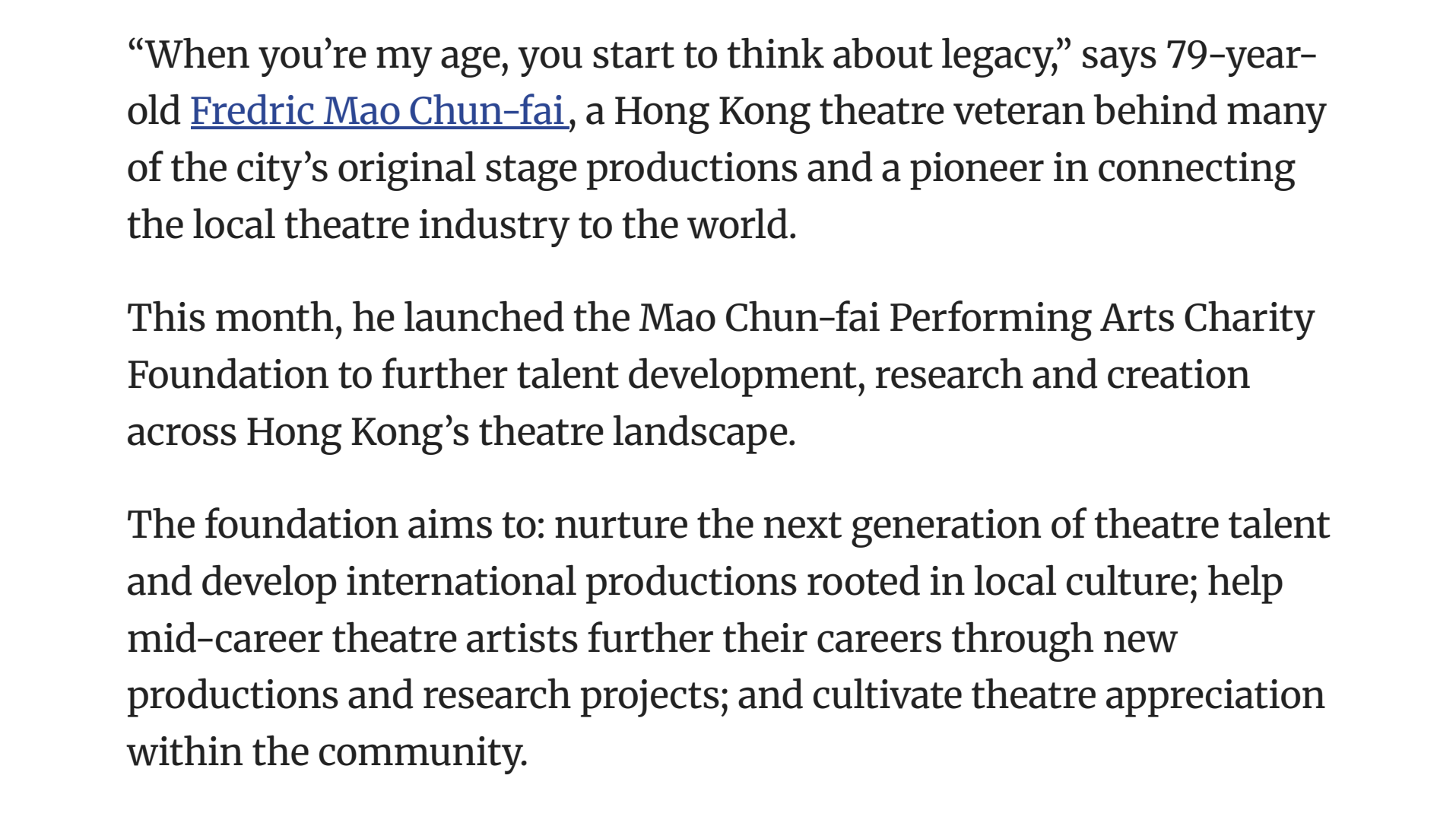
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Hong Kong theatre legend Fredric Mao launches foundation to boost city's performing arts

Fredric Mao has launched a new foundation to strengthen Hong Kong theatre as mainland China's arts scene grows at ‘incredible speed’

3-MIN READ



Zabrina Lo

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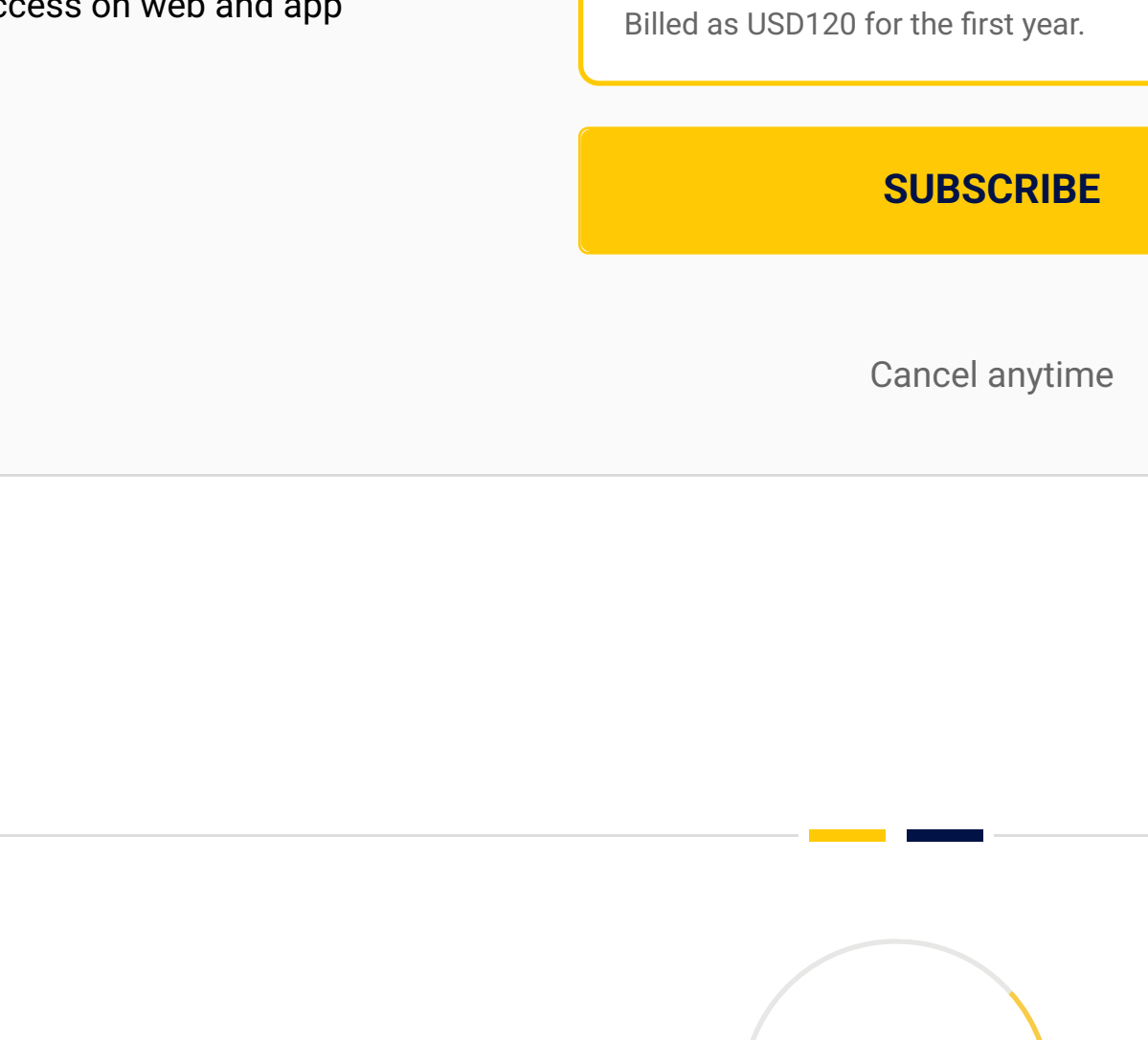
“When you're my age, you start to think about legacy,” says 79-year-old [Fredric Mao Chun-fai](#), a Hong Kong theatre veteran behind many of the city's original stage productions and a pioneer in connecting the local theatre industry to the world.

This month, he launched the Mao Chun-fai Performing Arts Charity Foundation to further talent development, research and creation across Hong Kong's theatre landscape.

The foundation aims to: nurture the next generation of theatre talent and develop international connections rooted in local culture; help mid-career theatre artists further their careers through new productions and research projects; and cultivate theatre appreciation within the community.

For five decades, Mao has been instrumental in shaping Hong Kong theatre.

He studied acting in New York under Sanford Meisner, performing on Broadway in the 1970s before returning to Hong Kong in 1985 as the first head of acting at the then newly established [Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts](#)' School of Drama.



Ma (left) performs in the United Provinces in Singapore.

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