

United Chinese Americans
presents

The Making of
“Men of Iron and the Golden Spike”
交响清唱剧《铁汉金钉》之创作

Friday, January 1, 2021
8:00 PM – 9:00PM (EST)

More than 150 years ago, some 30,000 Chinese laborers came to America helped to build the Transcontinental Railroad in the American West, through the Sierra Nevada mountains and across the Nevada and Utah deserts, enduring terrible extremes of winter and summer and other brutal working conditions.

Last Year, that story comes to life in an epic symphonic oratorio *Men of Iron and the Golden Spike* (交响合唱《铁汉金钉》), receiving its world premiere in October at Carnegie Hall in New York City, and at the Bing Concert Hall at Stanford University.

Join us for a lively discussion online with composer **Zhou Long 周龙**, librettist **Su Wei 苏炜**, and conductor **Cai Jindong 蔡金冬** to learn about the history and the conception, creation, and performance of this large-scale symphonic work. Excerpts from the premiere performance will be view during the special event.



“Men of Iron and the Golden Spike” 交响清唱剧 《铁汉金钉》



2019 marks the 150th anniversary of the completion of the first Transcontinental Railroad across the United States. Between 1863 and 1869, tens of thousands of men labored under perilous, often deadly conditions to build the tracks that would join the Eastern and Western halves of the United States and forever transform our nation.

On May 10, 1869, Leland Stanford traveled to Promontory Summit, Utah, where he drove a golden spike into the ground and ceremonially linked the tracks of the Central Pacific and Union Pacific, thereby completing the line. All but invisible at the Golden Spike ceremony, and long missing from historic record, are the thousands of Chinese workers who toiled to lay the line over the monumental Sierra Nevada mountains and across the burning deserts of Nevada and Utah.

To amplify the long-silent voices of the Railroad Chinese, the Stanford Center for East Asian Studies and the US-China Music Institute at the Bard College Conservatory of Music have collaborated with the Chinese Railroad Workers' Project to commission a musical work, *Men of Iron and the Golden Spike*.

This project was conceived by Professors Jindong Cai and Gordon Chang at Stanford University back in 2013 and they decided to bring the story to the stage with a large-scale symphonic oratorio. The combination of orchestra and choruses from the U.S. and China reflects the magnitude of the undertaking, and also creates a piece for many participants, just like the building of the railroad.

As they sought to commission the piece, they learned that Yale-based writer Su Wei had penned an opera libretto on this very subject some 20 years ago. He had also written the lyrics for another oft-performed oratorio called *Ask the Sky and the Earth*, which commemorates the “sent-down youth” movement in China’s Cultural Revolution that saw millions of urban youth sent to the countryside to learn from the farmers. They knew that Su Wei was the perfect person to write the lyrics to *Men of Iron and the Golden Spike* and we were fortunate that he agreed to do so.

An oratorio of this scale naturally requires exceptional music, so they were thrilled when Pulitzer-prize winning composer Zhou Long agreed to accept our commission. Zhou does extensive research to inform his music, and he came out to Stanford and drove with Professor Jindong Cai to the Sierra Mountains and the California Railroad Museum in Sacramento so he could see firsthand where the Railroad Chinese lived and worked.

Men of Iron and the Golden Spike made its world premiere performance at Carnegie Hall on October 1, 2019 during the second annual China Now Music Festival, followed by a second performance at Stanford’s Bing Concert Hall on October 6 the same year. The performance featured The Orchestra Now and combined with Chinese and American soloists and choruses, conducted by Jindong Cai.



Carnegie Hall Performance

Stanford University Performance