

# Lessons from prison

Respect for beliefs that lead people to higher standards

BY QIN CHUAN  
Epoch Times Staff

BOSTON – A democratic dissident who just recently emerged from five years in one of Beijing's prisons, Dr Yang Jianli brings a special perspective to the *Divine Performing Arts Chinese New Year Spectacular*. *The Epoch Times* caught up with Dr Yang on Thursday, just after he had seen the final show in the Spectacular's run at the Boston Opera House.

"This is an outstanding production and performance," said Dr Yang. "It's very professional. Most of the traditional Chinese performances nowadays are simply entertaining but today's show included a lot of content about belief, which is different. Some people may not like that, but I personally respect belief."

"Some of the teachings in religions are benevolent and positive and I highly respect them. I believe the whole production and all the artists put in a lot of effort and the results turned out to be great. I am very glad to see that."

Dr Yang believes Western audiences need more context in order to fully understand some of the issues raised by the show. He said, "Several programmes about the persecution seemed very real. What happens to Falun Gong practitioners in the prisons is very real."

"I know because I just came out of a prison in mainland China. The programme needs to explain to the audiences and let them know the persecution is real and not an artistic exaggeration."

"Beijing persecutes democratic intellectuals and writers, dissidents, human rights activists, Falun Gong, and members of underground churches. We need to tell the truth to the world. We know if such persecutions happen in a big country like China and the world doesn't care and give attention, this can't be a civilised world."

Dr Yang said, "I met many Falun Gong practitioners while I was in prison. I am a witness. Hence when I see people with religious belief, I always respect the belief no matter what kind it is."



Dr Yang Jianli is a well-known leader in the Chinese Democracy movement

"People decline quickly in the world and religious beliefs have the power to make people head toward a higher and more positive direction. This is why I was moved after I watched the show."

Dr Yang Jianli, Chair of the foundation for China in the 21st Century, arrived in the United States for study in 1986 and received a PhD degree in mathematics from the University of California at Berkeley and a PhD degree in political economy and government at the John F Kennedy School of Government in Harvard University.

He was on Beijing's blacklist because he participated in the Tiananmen

democratic movement in 1989. In 2002, after not being allowed to go back to China for a long time, he tried to enter China with a friend's passport and was arrested on the charges of espionage and illegal entry. He served five years in prison and in August 2007 returned to Boston and reunited with his family.

*The Epoch Times is a proud sponsor of the Divine Performing Arts shows that will perform in over 60 cities worldwide in 2008. To find out more about the show in London at the end of February go to [www.divinechina.org](http://www.divinechina.org), or see the advertisement on back page of this newspaper.*

The Divine Performing Arts Chinese New Year Spectacular will perform at London's Royal Festival Hall at the end of February



Book review  
by Opal Bonfante

I lick my  
cheese

and other notes  
FROM THE FRONTLINE OF  
FLATSHARING

Oonagh O'Hagan

I lick my cheese and other notes from the frontline of flatsharing  
by Oonagh O'Hagan

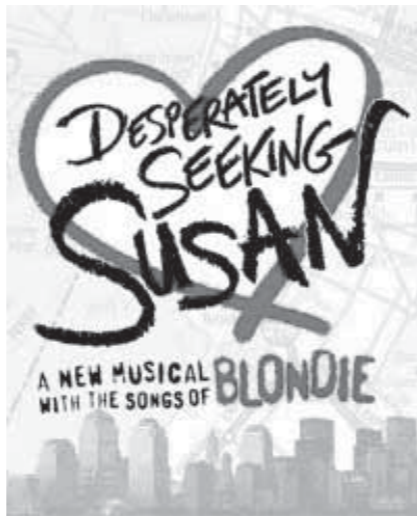
Never before have I reviewed a book that so many of my friends have then gone out and bought. In the few days I carried O'Hagan's book about, six of my friends, family and work colleagues flicked through it, had a little laugh and then went off to order it. I wasn't going to give up my copy for love nor money.

Quite simply this is a massive collection of notes between flatmates that the author either collected herself or from her university pupils. O'Hagan often jumps in and explains the circumstances behind the notes that she knows the background story of, but some need no explanation at all. My favourite is: "I pay the rent. What do you do?" Indeed.

The reason it strikes such a chord is that at some point in most London-

ers' lives, nearly all of us have rented accommodation with people we don't necessarily know that well. That's when all their idiosyncrasies, peculiarities and generally weird habits start to emerge – just when it's too late to get out. There will be a chapter that covers everything that an evil cohabiter ever did to you.

Broken up into lots of little stories, it's extremely easy to dip in and out of with lots of anger about lack of respect for each other. Petty issues between flatmates over noise, stolen food or boyfriends who have taken root on the sofa become absolutely hilarious. It's worth getting a copy for your flatmate and leaving Post-its to highlight chapters that relate to them and their annoying ways. That's what my flatmate did.

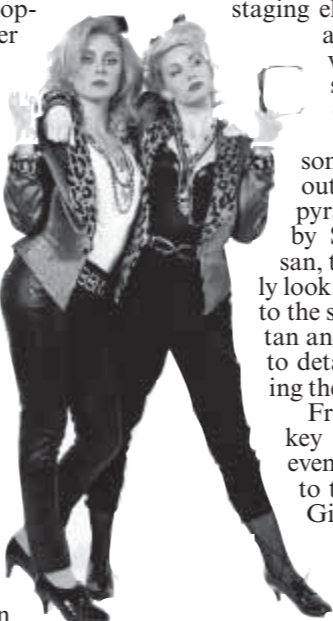


Desperately Seeking Susan  
Novello Theatre, London

The eighties explodes to life in front of your eyes, in a toe tapping, sing-along extravaganza which takes the best of that decade and condenses it into a couple of pleasurable hours. Even if you're no Blondie fan, you can't help but appreciate this extravaganza of opulence, excess and nostalgia, with smoking hot outfits to boot. *Desperately Seeking Susan* is a delight from beginning to end with riveting songs and a unique chemistry between the two central roles, Susan (Emma Williams) and Roberta Glass (Kelly Price).

Enter the world of 1979, a year which is waving goodbye to the sedentary seventies, but teetering on the cusp of punk culture and independence, where women strive to make something of themselves, but some need a little more help than others. We see Glass, a bored New Jersey suburban housewife intrigued by a strange woman she bumps into. Susan, who seems to embody all the independent, in-your-face characteristics she longs for. She covertly tails Susan hoping for a glimpse of her carefree life and accidentally purchases her staple zebra print jacket – with all of Susan's personal effects inside! She tries to track her down but along the way manages to lose her memory, as you do, and is mistaken for Susan by some unsavoury characters.

The show is a whistle stop tour of the highlights of New York, from the disreputable Gramercy Park, to Manhattan's night spots and shows. From strip-joints to cabaret, no stone is left unturned in



Theatre review  
by Zara Rabinowicz

this entertaining tale, as Susan herself is not the carefree wench she pertains to be, with a troubled long distance relationship with a tortured musician (Alec Newman) to a shady criminal past and an unaccountably dead guy in a hotel room. Add to this melting pot a seriously expensive pair of diamond earrings and we have the scene set for capers and intrigue.

A fabulous soundtrack pre-approved by the infamous Debbie Harry steals the show, with epic moments such as 'One Way or Another' performed during a high tension revelatory chase, which literally moves the script along. Some of the numbers feel slightly forced, as though they are directing the script rather than the other way round, but they are performed with such energy that it is hard to mind. Director Angus Jackson has transformed the film into a spectacle that necessitates a theatre, working with rather than against the story, as many adaptations forget. He skilfully combines staging elements with super songs and recaptures the joie de vivre that made the film such an astounding success.

The cast are clothed in some seriously mesmerising outfits, from the blinding pyramid jacket as modelled by Susan and wannabe Susan, to the ripped 80s rockabilly look featured on the musician, to the suburbanite seventies style tan and corduroy. The attention to detail is exquisite, transporting the audience to that era.

Friendship and unity are key themes, and you could even consider it a precursor to the girl power of the Spice Girls, with the forces of Susan and Roberta together so much more powerful than when alone. *Desperately?* I don't think so.

## Israeli pianist Barenboim takes Palestinian passport

RAMALLAH, West Bank (Reuters) – Daniel Barenboim, the world renowned Israeli pianist and conductor, has taken Palestinian citizenship and said he believed his rare new status could serve as a model for peace between the two peoples.

"It is a great honour to be offered a passport," he said late on Saturday after a Beethoven piano recital in Ramallah, the West Bank city where he has been active for some years in promoting contact between young Arab and Israeli musicians.

"I have also accepted it because I believe that the destinies of ... the Israeli people and the Palestinian people are inextricably linked," Barenboim said. "We are blessed – or cursed – to live with each other. And I prefer the first."

"The fact that an Israeli citizen can be awarded a Palestinian passport, can be a sign that it is actually possible."

Former Palestinian Information

Minister Mustafa Barghouti, who helped organise Saturday's concert, said the passport had been approved by the previous government of which he was a member and which was replaced in June. The passport had actually been issued about six weeks ago, he added.

Argentine-born Barenboim, 65, is a controversial figure in his adoptive homeland, both for his promotion of German music and vocal opposition to Israel's occupation of the West Bank.

Asked about US President George W Bush's remarks last week on a visit to the region that a peace could be signed this year, Barenboim warned of the danger of raising hopes too high.

"It would be absolutely horrible if now, with good intentions, expectations are raised which will not be able to be fulfilled," Barenboim said. "Then we will sink into an even greater depression."

Though he dismissed any wish to play a political role, the former music director of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra took a dig at Bush's strikingly forceful call in Jerusalem last week for Israel to end, in the president's own words, "the occupation".

"Now even not very intelligent people are saying that the occupation has to be stopped," Barenboim said.

Based in Berlin, he is closely identified with German music and in 2001 conducted an opera by 19th-century composer Richard Wagner in Jerusalem despite anger in some quarters at a performance of a work by a German accused of anti-Semitic views.

For the past decade, Barenboim has promoted Arab-Israeli cultural contacts, notably alongside the late Palestinian-American writer Edward Said.

