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Inside the Rings: Twice-a-Day Video Report

Olympic Balladeer’s Voice Was Dubbed



Vladimir Rys/Bongarts, via Getty Images

Nine-year-old Lin Miaoke performed during the opening ceremony for the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics on Friday.

By JIM YARDLEY

Published: August 12, 2008

BELJING — Pigtailed and smiling, Lin Miaoke, age 9, stood in a red dress and white shoes during last Friday’s Olympic opening ceremony and performed “Ode to the Motherland” in what would become one of the evening’s most indelible images: a lone child, fireworks blazing overhead, singing a patriotic ballad before an estimated 1 billion viewers.

Except that she was not really singing.

Her proud father, Lin Hui, who only learned of her singing role 15 minutes before the ceremony, watched on television and noticed “that the voice was a little different from hers.” On Tuesday, Mr. Lin said in a telephone interview that he had assumed “the difference might be caused by the acoustics.”

Acoustics had nothing to do with it. Under pressure from the highest levels of the ruling Communist Party to find the perfect face and voice, the ceremony’s production team concluded the only solution was to use two girls instead of one. Miaoke, a third-grader, was judged cute and appealing but “not suitable” as a singer. Another girl, Yang Peiyi, 7, was judged the best singer but not as cute. So when Miaoke opened her mouth to sing, the voice that was actually heard was a recording of Peiyi.

And it is unclear if Miaoke even knew.

“The reason was for the national interest,” explained Chen Qigang, general music designer of the opening ceremony,

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who revealed the deception during a Sunday radio interview. "The child on camera should be flawless in image, internal feeling and expression."

China wants the Olympics as a stage to present a picture-perfect image to the outside world, and perfection was clearly the goal for the dazzling opening ceremony.

Filmmaker [Zhang Yimou](#), who oversaw the production, has drawn international raves for a performance considered one of the most spectacular in Olympic history. But to achieve the spectacular, Mr. Zhang not only faked the song but organizers also have admitted that one early sequence of the stunning fireworks shown to television viewers were actually digitally enhanced computer graphics used for "theatrical effect."

Dubbing music during large outdoor performances is not unprecedented.. At the 2006 Winter Olympics in Turin, the famed tenor [Luciano Pavarotti](#), then 71, lip-synched an aria because of his age and the cold weather. But the recording was still his voice, as is usually the case when performers lip-synch.

After last Friday's performance, Mr. Zhang appeared at a news conference with Chinese reporters and praised Miaoke. "She's very cute and sings quite well, too," he said. Asked to name which section of the show he found most satisfying, he first mentioned Miaoke.

"I was moved every time we did a rehearsal on this, from the bottom of my heart," he said, according to a transcript of the news conference.

Miaoke's song was considered critical because it coincided with the arrival of the national flag inside the massive National Stadium, known as the Bird's Nest. In his radio interview, Mr. Chen said that a member of the ruling Communist Party's powerful Politburo, whom he did not identify, attended one of the last rehearsals, along with numerous other officials, and demanded that Miaoke's voice "must change."

By Tuesday, the Chinese media had already pounced on the story, instigating a national conversation that government censors were trying to mute by stripping away many, but not all, of the public comments posted online. The outrage was especially heated over the cold calculation used to appraise the girls.

"Please save the last bit of trueness in our children," wrote one person with an online name of Weirderhua. "They think Yang Peiyi's smile is not cute enough? What we need is truth, not some fake loveliness! I hope the kids will not be hurt. This is not their fault."

Another person added: "Children are innocent. Don't contaminate their minds!"

Mr. Lin, the father, said his daughter had been under strict orders not to discuss plans for the performance. He got only the 15-minute notice about her role and was thrilled. He only later learned of the voice switch when he saw a video clip of the interview by the musical director, Mr. Chen.

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*Huang Yuanxi contributed research*

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