

DOUWUN

(1910-1979)

The Story of a Virtuoso Blind Musician:
Download the Voice-over and Lyrics

The Story Of A Virtuoso Blind Musician

Lyrics

(Speech) Hi there, my humble name is Douwun, and Douwun, you know, is my name on the air. This song I call Reminiscence of Douwun the Blind. That's it. Now, if you don't mind, I've got to sing a bit.

1/12

His Grim Fate Thrice Sealed

Voice-over Script

Douwun believed in fate, which, as he said, caught him thrice: that he was born impoverished, that he went blind in boyhood, and that he learnt nanyin, the southern tune. With the decline of nanyin music, Douwun could barely make a living in old age.

Lyrics

Myself, I guess, is plagued with threefold misfortunes. First, my family's strapped, hence my lowly birth. Then samsara wronged me, for I, miserably I, as a child, went blind because, alas, treatments were less potent at that time...

An Infant made Blind (1)

Voice-over Script

Douwun was born in 1910 in a village of Jin Li town in Zhaoqing, Guangdong. He was the youngest of five children, having two sisters and two brothers. As a custom of the village, every family with newborn baby had to travel to the town's ancestral hall on the Lantern Festival, which falls on the 15th day of the first lunar month each year. There they hanged up lantern to "announce new progeny", and shared out to all villagers more than a hundred catty of Cha Dan, literally "tea eggs", a local festive snack made by deep-frying glutinous rice flour in oil seasoned with sugar. It was the 14th of the first lunar month when Douwun's mother, piggybacking her three-month-old son, worked with a hired helper on the making of Cha Dan. Probably out of carelessness the helper hurt Douwun's eyes. In those two frenetic days no one spared Douwun any attention, no matter how incessantly he cried.

Lyrics

Everyone's the same on the 15th of the new year, when new lanterns were hanged everywhere. But festive articles were different in different villages. Ours, too, had customs and rules: every newbie cooked with oil, sugar and flour a sort of rice called "Tea", to share with others. Who knows, woe me, I was born ill starred...

An Infant made Blind (2)

Voice-over Script

Only after the festival, on the 16th, did Douwun's mother notice the glued-shut eyes of her baby. Behind his eyelid was nothing but a gummy layer of lard. His parents dashed to the temple, where they were told that the one who hanged up lantern for Douwun had "offended the gods". For some reasons his mother sought medical advice only on the 27th, and since the doctor managed to palliate the infection Douwun was put under his care.

Lyrics

A doctor we did find, aye, with whom I was solely entrusted. My vision began to glow and my parents got a moment's repose.

An Infant made Blind (3)

Voice-over Script

One day, when Douwun's mother brought him out for treatment, she found the clinic abandoned. The doctor had fled away for unknown reason. Poor as their family was, they could only treat Douwun with unprescribed pills and ointments. His mother, however, tightened her belt to feed him pearl powder. Since then Douwun's eyes were left damaged, carrying a mere 2 or 3 percent of standard visionary function. But Douwun believed the pearl powder had been effective, as this meager eyesight stayed with him for nearly twenty years, and he, when aged, could still make out day and night. For this Douwun was most grateful to his mother.

Lyrics

Alas, who knows? I was perhaps ill-starred, and foredoomed to the kismet of scar-marred. When that day my mother gleefully brought me to the doctor, we found only upon arrival, upon arrival at his deserted clinic, that the doctor had ran off, and I was left in the lurch.

2/12

West River Flood Wrecked his Home

Voice-over Script

The grandfather of Douwun was a plasterer. The family owned three ancestral houses and over thirty acres of ancestral farmland. His father was able to make ends meet as a farmer. In July 1915, though, Guangdong saw its worst flooding in 20 years, and virtually all dikes surrounding the Pearl River Delta were broken. Even before that, in 1914, the West River had already flooded Douwun's village, deluging his ancestral properties completely. Douwun was no more than four or five at that time. After the disastrous inundation Douwun's family could only rebuild a small house with the debris of the original three. Having lost all the land,

they had to farm on communal field. Life was already difficult, but the worse was yet to come: at the age of seven, Douwun's father passed away.

Lyrics

(Speech) Then it came to the Republic. Woe, the Republic. In the third year high water flooded our scanty land, and, yeow, the water was there for two whole years. In 1975 was the horrific West River flooding. Ay me! Land was destroyed; houses fell to the ground. Nothing, nothing ancestral or earned was left. Alas... and my parents had five to rear.

Losing a Father, Sent for a Master

Voice-over Script

Worried much about his impaired grandchild, Douwun's grandfather willed that Douwun be apprenticed to Wong Fun, a blind fortune teller in Jin Li town. Many parents put their blind children under Wong's roof as he was famed in the town for his skills in healing and fortune telling. After Douwun's father died, his mother brought him there, where he would live and learn for three years at the cost of 10 taels excluding food charge.

Lyrics

This only I shall know and my parents were never told; that I followed the wrong master. Who could believe Wong Fun knew not the way of fortune telling? He was lucky, that's all; he pointed his finger up and down, and people will foolishly call. My parents, alas, brought me under his roof because they saw him well-to-do. And three years of mine went awry.

Followed the Wrong Master to Guangzhou

Voice-over Script

Douwun was greatly disappointed and displeased with Wong Fun, his first master, who he regarded both incompetent and deceitful. In retrospect he reproached himself for wasting three years with a wrong master. Wong Fun was indeed unqualified. In a few years his business went bust, and with debts piling up he decided to leave for Guangzhou. Seeing that Douwun was a bit more than a total blind and that he was agile, he intended to bring Douwun with him. Douwun's family agreed, and his mother spared him a cotton quilt. He then went away from home at around the age of 10.

Lyrics

Things weren't going his way though, and to Guangzhou the master decided to go. He asked me to follow, because I could faintly see and help with the travel. So there to the city we headed together, arriving first in Henan and the Ju Long town. In Chang Geng Lane we settled, and days passed as we clung to each other...

Pavilion-Siting with two Bamboo Planks

Voice-over Script

Arriving Guangzhou, Douwun and his master settled in Chang Geng Lane of Henan. Every day they boiled their own pots: Wong Fun kept on telling fortune, and Douwun moved around to sing for money. At that time Douwun was uninstructed in music; all he knew were some ten lines of celebratory songs and the first few sentences the street storytellers always intoned. With two pieces of bamboo plank as a clapper and a handful of Lyrics lines, Douwun went from one threshold to another to sing muyu, a kind of song-art of the nanyin genre. In the blind musician industry this is called “pavilion-siting” or “doorstep-singing”. People in general were generous to tip this blind, smart child; this made a satisfactory living for Douwun, as the price level in Guangzhou was not too high and a hundred or two wen (i.e. ten or twenty pennies) were good enough for an eleven-or-twelve-year-old child.

Lyrics

Oh music, music is what I knew absolutely nothing of. So every day I snatched my two bamboo planks, singing the same few lines at different doorways for two wen or so. Gee, everything was still cheap at that time, like salt and oil and wood and rice! Life was easy as two hundred could make a couple of days. So time elapsed and two years passed.

The Blind Musician on Huanzhu Bridge (1)

Voice-over Script

Some time later Douwun learnt to wait at night around the Huanzhu Bridge, along which blind artists huddled and waited for night calls. Douwun had made a place in this circle. He was called for once in a while, and although he could neither play musical instruments nor sing nanyin, customers were willing to give him some tips for the few muyu Lyrics he knew.

Lyrics

(Speech) Ah, it was a year or so that I stuck around Huanzhu Bridge at night. There, on Henan’s Huanzhu Bridge — you know if you’re old enough — blind songsters waited for calls every night. A man named Pan Thirdson built the bridge, and the blind waited there because people always called for blind songster at that place. That’s it. So I went pavilion-siting every day after meals, and the hundred or so earned filled up my stomach and even made me flush...

The Blind Musician on Huanzhu Bridge (2)

Voice-over Script

Douwun, who could still dimly see, was smart and warmhearted: he often helped bringing other blind musicians to toilet and buying them tobaccos, and he never say no to these kindred spirits. Having earned plaudits from these blind artists, “Douwun kid” became a name well received throughout the industry in Henan.

Lyrics

There were some ten to twenty blind men of all ages on the Huanzhu Bridge, and, you know, it was so far away to poo and the way was too thronged. Streets then were narrow. That's it. So I guided them, because, you know, I can see a little bit, and when I guided them I sometimes bought tobacco and cigarette for them. No matter who, no matter who's sitting there waiting for business on the Bridge I got to help them and do what they needed. That's why people, those fellows in the blind music business, all raved about me...

3/12

Fortuity in Turmoil

Voice-over Script

In June 1922, when Douwun was about thirteen, the “616 Incident” broke out. Led by Chen Jiongming, the Guangdong army mounted a coup d'état and went to war with the Guomin army. The city was in chaos; bombardment and gunfire were often heard in the streets. Whenever danger came, Douwun would lead the blind to a safe place. In a time of turmoil these blind musicians were bound affectionately closer to each other. One night, when rains poured down abruptly, Douwun and several blind artists sought shelter in the Hua Guang Temple near the Bridge. They started chattering out of boredom. A musician called Suen Sang asked about Douwun — how he paid his way, which master he followed, and what he learnt. Douwun was tongue-tied at his questions, but another musician, Blind Zhen, knew him well enough to answer.

Lyrics

So happened this Suen Sang asked: how do you get by? He asked: Kid, how many did you learn? From whom did you learn? What indeed did you learn? Fore me! I heard him, and yet I lost my words. Fortunately a fellow spoke for me, and he was, and he was called Blind Zhen, surnamed “Ng” from Panyu.

Learning Nanyin with Master Suen

Voice-over Script

Blind Zhen, having finished Douwun's story and remarked that he was clever and dutiful, encouraged Suen Sang to take Douwun as an apprentice. Suen nodded his consent, and things worked out after they went to the Guang Cheng Shrine for God's guidance and endorsement. Suen's parents were also fond of Douwun. Since then, Douwun became a pupil of Suen, visiting his place everyday in early morning to learn zither and nanyin before he went to work. Master Suen also referred Douwun to Water Curtain Mansion, a place where blind artists lived together. Douwun was grateful to Master Suen for good. Even a decade after Douwun moved to Hong Kong he had tried to bring Master Suen there, though without success.

Lyrics

(Speech) My Master, Suen Sang, was the best master in Henan, no shield! He taught you winds and strings, and he taught you how to sing. He also taught you

fortune-telling. It's your own fault if you didn't learn. Well, I — because of poverty I couldn't learn everything from him in such a short time. It was a short time. In the 12th Year of the Republic I followed him, but in the 14th I fled to Hong Kong. So, alas, what they called a half-baked student was me, lacking the consummate skills of my Master. But I did learn something useful for a living, and that's playing zither and singing nanyin. So you see, I'm indebted to Master Suen, and all the good things of my life had to do with his lead. No doubt. And yes, it's also my stroke of luck to have met Master Suen's father, you know, as it's so very difficult to find someone who treated you like a son, perhaps even better.

Strikes Did Them Apart

Voice-over Script

Guangzhou from 1922 to 1925 was the battlefield of warlords. The city shook. After 1923, street battles were so often that the area was placed under curfew time and again. Blind musicians, who made their livings by singing at night, were cut to the bone. Induced by the May 30th Massacre in Shanghai, anti-foreign movements overwhelmed the country in May 1925. In June came the great "Canton-Hong Kong Strike". During the upheaval many people ran away from Hong Kong and Guangzhou. Almost all blind musicians on the Huanzhu Bridge decamped to different places.

Lyrics

Time flies, right, and flies so fast, the Year 14 came like a blast. All of a sudden it was that turbulent summer. Look, oh look, in Hong Kong and Kowloon workers went on strikes, and people flocked back home as crisis and mayhem loomed. Those who wanted to fly the coop, could bring no more than five dollars, so everybody panicked, and all the souls were shattered.

4/12

To Hong Kong, via Macau

Voice-over Script

At that time Douwun made acquaintance with two musicians, Blind Fa and Blind Choi, who returned to Guangzhou from Hong Kong. They told Douwun that Hong Kong was a better place to live and they would bring him there when the situation became stable. In 1926, the 13th day of the lunar March, Blind Fa, Blind Choi, Douwun and another comrade set out together to Hong Kong. First they took a riverboat, the "floral -stern vessel", to Shiqi, and then headed to Macau by the vessel of Qian Shan Gate. The four of them paid their travelling expense by performing on the vessel.

Lyrics

We four, ay, we four in 1926 sallied forth on the night of the 13th of the third month on the Chinese calendar. We took the waterway and boarded on the Shiqi floral-stern vessel. An unruffled night, then day, and in the afternoon we got to

Shiqi the midway. We spent a night in Shiqi, but all of a sudden the vessel had to stay. So, on the 14th we changed to a Qian Shan ship, and got to Macau by this means. As we had nothing better to do on the vessel in those days, we sang and played music, so as to earn on the way...

The New Voice in Rua da Felicidade

Voice-over Script

That day, the four of them arrived at Macau. Following Blind Choi's advice, Douwun went first to sing at the brothels in Rua da Felicidade for a few hours before making his way to No.9 Pátio dos Penates in the Galcada do Gamboa, a friend's place, where he dined and spent the night. Rua da Felicidade was then the most boisterous commercial region of Macau, famous also for being one of the three streets in which upscale brothels lined up. Once there, Douwun was immediately called upon and earned 6 cents for three songs. At Pátio dos Penates Douwun was introduced to two fortunetellers, a husband and a wife, who asked about his lot. They persuaded Douwun to stay in Macau and promised to take him in care. But Douwun hesitated: he had undertaken to make the journey with his blind fellows to Hong Kong, and if he stayed they would have to go alone. So Douwun gently declined their offer, and the four proceeded to Hong Kong as planned.

Lyrics

Why don't you stay here in Macau, they said, take not the trouble of going all the way to Hong Kong. It's the same, after all, just money that matters; but comfort is everywhere, and money comes up anywhere. Look, if you take our advice, you may just stay and reside; here, in our place, we will save you from hunger and penury, and give you money if necessary. I heard them, and thought back of the past...

Early Days in Temple Street, Hong Kong

Voice-over Script

In April 1926 the four blind musicians set foot in Hong Kong. They rented a blind men apartment in the "New Reclaimed Land", that is, today's Mong Kok. Douwun sang in the street every day — after three years of learning from Master Suen, he was now a nanyin songster. The owner of that blind men apartment was also a blind musician, nicknamed Blind Chicken. A while later he asked a friend to bring Douwun to perform in brothels. Since then, Douwun became a blind musician hinging on brothels around Mong Kok and Yau Ma Tei.

Lyrics

(Speech) At the beginning it was Mong Kok we lodged, so until now I remained in Mong Kok. It was called the "New Reclaimed Land" in the old days. That's it. After that, there're twists and turns and I moved to several different places. Looking back, lawks, it's all preordained; all the toils, the good and the bad are determined, governed. (Lyrics) So in Hong Kong we're settled for the nonce; all who lived with us were our kind, the blind, hence a truly huge bond. We took up routines to sing in day time and sleep at night, without more to do. And before noon I practice upstairs in the loft.

Nanyin in Brothel Parties

Voice-over Script

Prostitution was still legal in those days. Douwun, a sharp-witted young man and a good songster, won an instant liking from the courtesans, who sent for him regularly and frequently. At first he sang at the threshold of these brothels, later he moved inside to perform. Even customers called for Douwun when they had parties. All these gave him much opportunity to earn a good life. With this growth of income, Douwun ceased performing on the streets in daytime. Then three months past. Douwun had promised Master Suen to go back Guangzhou in lunar July, for three important festivals, the Guan Yi Festival, the Mount Hua Festival and the Night of Sevens, were drawing near, and blind musicians as a rule participated in several shows for some good money. Though reluctant to leave Hong Kong, Douwun kept his promise and departed in lunar June with some gifts.

Lyrics

I was taught what's what in the south of Temple Street, and so gleeful I was to feel its beat! Every night I made my way to the flowery world, where the flowery ladies were delighted and thought much of my songs and words. I sang at the doorstep at first, and — how strange people were! — more of my performance they saw and heard, more of my performance was preferred. But as I became more demanded and earned more night after night, I was not that keen on working in day light... (speech) So I made my debut in the flowery world. Ah, how merry I was! The ladies, the so-called hookers, returned once they had heard me sing. At first I performed at the entrance, but then customers began calling for me and I was asked for even in party halls. Ah, how merry I was. Then I started working at night. How gleeful it was! I was just 17 that year.

Head Back, and Farewell

Voice-over Script

In Guangzhou, Douwun lived with Master Suen and sang through the three grand festivals with him and other fellow apprentices. But Douwun could not forget the ravishing life in Hong Kong, from which he was now far away. In lunar 18th of July, after the Night of Sevens, he and his fellows left Master Suen again for Hong Kong. Since then he made Hong Kong his home until his death in 1979.

Lyrics

It was hard to swallow, but I had to say it. Er, in Henan, you see, I couldn't keep it to myself; there one couldn't earn much, not by day, not at night. Henan was not like Yau Ma Tei, where one was at ease, where one sang every night happily, where one felt free and wore winsomely. Why, then why, don't we go back before it's too late...

La Dolce Vita

Voice-over Script

In August 1926 Douwun returned to Hong Kong and settled to perform in brothels in Woosung Street, Yau Ma Tei, one of the most boisterous red-light districts in Hong Kong. The performance of Douwun was widely appreciated; he earned 2 or 3 dollars every night, which made him a well-to-do man relative to the price level at that time. Both opium smoking and opium dens were legal in old Hong Kong. Opium trade was open and popular. In the brothels, most prostitutes and their patrons consumed opium, and casual chats and business talks between customers were all conducted on opium beds.

Lyrics

Since I settled in Hong Kong, my life itself was a dulcet song. Singing was a pleasant job to do, and from autumn to autumn I was in a jolly mood. Every night I was called upon to help people make their bond. Sometimes I added fun to their drinking, sometimes I liven up their coupling. In the brothels were all kinds of scene hard to describe by any means. Life was trouble-free as we caroused or lingered in teahouse by day and worked just a few hours at night. For the whole day I was just palling around, doing the make-friend stuffs...

The Ruinous Addiction to Opium

Voice-over Script

As a 16 or 17-year-old boy who loitered around brothels and had ample money at hand, Douwun eventually became addicted to opium. At first he, an uneducated young man, was simply fond of listening to others, for knowledge and information, on the smoke bed. His light smoking, however, turned into a heavy addition before he could regret. In old age he often said opium ruined his life. Douwun got rid of this habit only in the early 1970s when he was over 60.

Lyrics

I seldom hung around with the blind now, but went smoking with the sighted. Why, I was too much a callow to have tried opium, and I strung out on it as time went by. Alas! So it's important, where you were born, and how you think. Think thrice for everything. Because, you see, I was thoughtless, and brainless to have let opium shackle me for life. (Speech) At that time, you know, opium trade was open and we got legal smoke. When people talked, they talked on smoke beds. Woe, that's what I've loved most since birth! What's it that I loved? I loved people reading to me; I loved people talking to me. Because I couldn't see and was never lectured by an educated man. Ay, I depended on others for everything! So what came from the ear enthralled me. But, gee, the thing's this: Who's willing to talk to a man like me? Who? That'll be those good-for-nothing, sluggish, dodgy opium smokers. Only they talked bubbly to me, and only their words came to my ear. Look, to tell from the beginning...

For the Songstress he Fell

Voice-over Script

In late 1929 Douwun reached twenty. Around this time he met a songstress surnamed Yu, who sang Cantonese opera in a House of Ba Yam Gwun in Yau Ma Tei. They shared a mutual fondness as both of them made a living by singing. Later they started seeing each other every night at the head of Temple Street and came into the habit of dating secretly at the backstreet of Astor Theatre, one of the lovers' favorites.

Lyrics

In mid-July I met a lady at the portal of the House of Ba Yam Gwun. It so happened we were both there after working our rounds. So we met that week, that night, and what a nice fluke that we both used our voices to earn the pounds... We bound ourselves to see each other at the head of Temple Street, so it's not very frequent that we could get together. Nowadays, you know, lovers aren't bothered; they hold hands here and there. But in those days barefaced love was not to be spared.

Plighting their Troth for the Baby to Come

Voice-over Script

A few months later Yu was pregnant, and the lovers married forthwith. Songstresses, as a rule, were raised by a foster mother who depended on them. Yu's foster mother, however, did not think highly of her foster daughter because Yu was a mediocre singer with modest earning ability. So her mother agreed on the marriage for just \$100 as a betrothal gift. Douwun and Yu rented an apartment in Woosung Street. They were pronounced married after paying obeisance to the Deity of the Earth and hosting a simple wedding feast with their friends. Since Douwun received a nice income from the bawdy houses, his wife no longer had to work; Douwun had also carted his mother to Hong Kong to take care of the baby to come.

Lyrics

We became husband and wife, and we lived our new lives on the third floor of 47 Woosung Street. We thought, alas, we thought we would grow old together, but one could do nothing when Heaven had erred. Well, my singing made good money, and a year later — thank ancestors — our boy was born. We thought, alas, we thought we would live happily ever after. (Speech) Woe is me! People received two tots in three years, why, I received three in five, but none of them lived. Alas, it must be, because raising a child, you know, was all about thrift. Because raising a child in those days was so much different from what you do today. So although they were born healthy, they had not enough nurture and upbringing. That's what made me forlorn.

Four Children Died Young

Voice-over Script

In 1930 Yu delivered the first son, who died three months later. The next year a second son was born, but he, too, lived no more than two months. Four years later

they gave birth to a daughter who perished in four months' time. In 1935, a boy was again born, and the parents were overjoyed. This little boy grew healthily, but at the age of five he died suddenly of "choking illness", a kind of respiratory tract infection. Douwun never conceived any children afterwards.

Lyrics

Rearing children was indeed terribly tough: the first was gone, the second met his fate, and the third, too, didn't live long. The fourth, gee, we thought would make a family, but at five he couldn't get along. Just think! Just think how it was terribly tough to rear a child in those days; it was tough just by thinking. Nurturing was no easy stuff; it's tougher than climbing through a thousand mountains, when every day is a try of luck. Not even a lovely, lively tot could escape misfortune. Sometimes it was sickness and all of a sudden you were stuck. You know, in the past medicine's not that sophisticated, so it's hard to cure illness. So everyone knew that rearing children was terribly tough.

Hard Times with Prostitution Prohibited

Voice-over Script

In 1935 the Hong Kong government declared prostitution illegal. The act proved to be a significant setback for blind musicians who relied on performing in brothels. Douwun, therefore, lost his source of income, and his addiction to opium made lives even harder for the family. Seeing his dead end, Douwun began singing in the streets again. Yau Ma Tei was no longer the hub it used to be, and Douwun could have but scanty earnings from the neighbor audience.

Lyrics

Misfortune that haunted me since birth returned; now there were still a mother and a wife to take care, and I became a street singer again in despair. Every night I sang to the same faces who lived nearby, who for decades lingered around, who never moved to another ground. Ah, time past so quickly, and destiny mocked me so wickedly...

6/12

Mother's Last Breathe and the Japanese Invasion

Voice-over Script

Douwun's mother died, after several difficult years, in 1940. That year, the Japanese army had already launched massive onslaughts on the Chinese land. In the winter of 1941 Hong Kong was in panic; the Japanese air raids started finally on the 8th of December. Rumours were immediately fueled, and the entire Kowloon and Hong Kong Island ran into chaos. In great fear, people began looting rice shops and other stores. For its weak defense Kowloon collapsed after three days with the British army retreating to Hong Kong Island.

Lyrics

Getting to the 1940 I lost my mother; that was a disastrous time, I sighed, but in 1941 the moan was shared by many others. In winter, the 20th of October, war broke out after dawn. We two trembled in sheer terror, as we had neither effects nor valuable gears. Worse still my wife was out of sorts, a chronic illness that preyed on my thoughts. So there the war's drawing near, and I was beset by acute fear. I felt more wretched, whenever I thought of my bitter and star-crossed life...

Raiding Rice to Keep Alive

Voice-over Script

In those precarious days Douwun and his ailing wife stowed themselves away at home. When rice stock ran out, they had to make do with nibbles, but that ran out too after several days. Deprived of food, Douwun gripped the family's last few dollars to buy some sustenance. In wartime, however, money could buy them nothing, not even food. Fortunately their lessor gave them some rice, which fed them for four days. Later a friend led Douwun to Kowloon Wharf to raid rice. The couple managed to live for two weeks on the half bag of rice Douwun looted.

Lyrics

Mayhem broke out more than once after the winter of 1941. In Kowloon and Hong Kong things went wild every day after dawn, and people were ever more overwrought. The sound of explosion filled women with trepidation; things got even worse in Kowloon, as people started raiding rice long before sunset...

The Fall of Hong Kong and his Wife's Demise

Voice-over Script

In 25th December 1941, Hong Kong governor Mark Aitchison Young surrounded the city to the Japanese army, marking the fall of Hong Kong. At the beginning pillage was still widespread. Douwun could not work and the family was devastated. It was for the help from friends and neighbors, who altruistically shared some rice loots with them, that they pulled through a month. The city calmed fairly down in early 1942. Regular customers came back for Douwun's music. On the 15th of the first lunar month, however, Douwun's wife passed away. All that was left of Douwun was an empty home. In just a few years he lost his children, his mother and his wife. He felt more miserable as loneliness came to be his last company.

Lyrics

Alas, it's really an ill fate of mine. All that's dear to me were lost in three year's time. In 1939 I lost my son, in the spring of 1940 my mother died. In the first month of 1941, my wife got laid up, and it was an enduring sickness; when lanterns were hanged up, on the 15th, she departed. Woe! So I was all by myself in that tiny lonely shell; the entire house was so unbearably bare, as everything was sold, and nothing was within my hold. How, then, how could I make do with nothing?

The Stranded City

Voice-over Script

During the Japanese occupation people in Hong Kong were either expelled or steered to other places. Many fled to the free zones inland. Following the trend, blind musicians left the city one by one. Yau Ma Tei in ruination made an indelible impression on Douwun. Casualties abound in Temple Street. Every day hundreds of people died from hunger, and vacant shops were turned into morgues. Douwun himself bumped into at least seven dead bodies on the street. Great panic hit the city when the Japanese Army introduced military scrip in replacement of the Hong Kong dollars. Price level surged day after day, causing the bankruptcy of merchants and mayhem for commoners. Every single soul in the street was starving.

Lyrics

Good news came on the 27th of the prime month: everyone was rationed 400g rice stock, so we got more stable sustenance. And we lived our days as days went by. Though my business was rather secured, it was a torment to see the misery of others. In Temple Street were failed souls, groaning always along the road. Vacant shops were turned into morgues, where every night we saw new corpses. Alas, how intolerable it was to see death and death alone; one was heart broken, if not drown in tears. Even now I, ah I, will tremble thinking back on the time when hundreds of living bodies became cold every day in Kowloon. Many left for home, alas, as men were then like strays...

A Trade Shattered in the Blackout

Voice-over Script

While some comrades of Douwun died in turmoil, many others decamped from Hong Kong. Only a handful of blind musicians were left in the city. To survive, Douwun kept performing at night regardless of danger. It was for the appreciation and support of two famous artists, Yee Chau Sui and Chow Chi Shing, that he managed to make ends meet at that time. The great blackout began in 1943, shrouding the whole city in complete darkness after midnight. Coming to a dead end, Douwun started thinking about running off to the free zones inland.

Lyrics

But one night in 1943, the great blackout was decreed. No light was allowed after 12 o'clock, and again the street was swamped with anxiety. Here, the rule commanded, no light should come to sight. So darkness prevailed every day since midnight. I, of course, dared not to sing in the street; and the audience was too restless to come to me indeed. That's it. So everyday we primed for further hardship...

The Opportune Second Marriage

Voice-over Script

Amid the havoc Douwun met Ah Yau, a newly widowed blind singer. Since she performed Cantonese opera around the same place as Douwun, they got acquainted,

and decided to cohabit shortly afterwards. Rather informally they proclaimed married after paying obeisance to the Deity of the Earth. Certainly they united out of mutual empathy, for both of them needed companion and support. But Douwun admitted that he had his calculation as well. If the situation got worse he would have to leave Hong Kong, and the only place he could drift to was but Huizhou and the surrounding areas — the Hakka region. The Hakkas, however, were no fans of nanyin, which meant he would have no way to survive. It was only with Ah Yau, a Cantonese opera singer, that they could perhaps get through in that part of the country.

Lyrics

A happenstance it was, that I met a woman, a blind singer of about my age. A happenstance it was, that she lost her husband a year ago, so when I knew her she was newly widowed. She sang for a living like I did, and she sang in a place near me, so we chatted often. As I felt kind of threatened at present, we got married, to live our good and bad together, to depend on each other...

7/12

Liberation and Peace

Voice-over Script

After marriage, the couple worked at their own street performance and got through those difficult days. Then, the blackout ceased, and Hong Kong was liberated. The city gradually recovered after a few years. Rapid economic growth and social development followed. Douwun's business, too, thrived during the five or six years after the war. In peace he was worry-free, at least for a moment.

Lyrics

Look here, time went fast. We got hold of the long lost peace, enjoyed the clear sky and bright light as the blackout ceased. At once the city was enlivened; day and night we heard firecrackers, as everyone was immersed in the manna from heaven. We songsters were even more ebullient; getting calls after calls, we're, in fact, tremendously jubilant... (Speech) Whee! Everybody saw this: the liberation! Certainly my joy was shared among all, and though we're blind we're elated and content. We're gleeful to be able to sing and earn every day. It was, as people said, joy to the world! How good it was to live and work peacefully, free from anxiety and get abundance! The end of the war was like a narrow escape. And we, singers by trade, were naturally well off. Is it not?

A Blow from Radio Rediffusion

Voice-over Script

In 1950 a broadcasting company called Rediffusion was established in Hong Kong, providing people with radio entertainment. To Douwun it was a nightmare. As people turned to radio for leisure, nanyin began to ebb. All the neighbors could listen to and enjoy the broadcasting simply by putting a transistor radio at the

door. Douwun's business naturally dwindled. But there was always a way out. A friend told Douwun that in George Park, which adjoined Kwun Chung Market in Jordon Road, a mass gathered at night to chat and rest. Getting there, Douwun found it a boisterous place indeed. Very soon his performance attracted a good lot of audience, and he managed to earn nicely there for two years.

Lyrics

(Speech) Oy vey, you know, good times never last long. Time was 1950, and suddenly there popped up a monster, one that killed by way of technology. What was it? It was called Radio Rediffusion. Dear me! Once it came, my business slumped. Why? 'Coz I was in Kowloon, where workers lodged. There the landlord took care of electricity, and so also the radio. In the past we had no transistor radios; if tenants wanted to listen to it they had to call on the landlord. Then, if they listened to it they had to pay more, so most of them weren't willing to do so. Now that Rediffusion appeared, my audience — my former audience — all procured a transistor, since, for sure, they loved music. With those radios at their door they no longer listened to me. I got no business at night. Yeow! It slumped, not a thousand feet but a million! What's more, alas, bad lucks came in threes. What'd you think it was? — worse than adding fuel to the fire! (Lyrics) Oy! It's not my time, not my time, since Radio Rediffusion reigned supreme. Our business slumped as no one came, and it's really difficult to live against the stream.

The Split-Up

Voice-over Script

Good times, however, slipped away before long. In 1953 an extension project for George Park was set in motion. With the iron fencing people could no longer loitered inside. Douwun then moved to the back of the adjacent market, but life became difficult again since there were too few pedestrians. Ah Yau kept urging Douwun to be more realistic. Now that he had lost the park, Ah Yau thought, he should "count the door", meaning that he should panhandle for money with his singing. But this was not an option for Douwun. He had always had a large audienceship since he came to Hong Kong. Be it in the brothels or George Park, his admirers had always held him in high regards. His self-esteem was too high to beg on the streets. In Ah Yau's eyes, however, he was lazy, and it was just a matter of time for her to be dragged into his mire. As their love was thin at the outset, the two split up straightaway.

Lyrics

(Speech) For the extension project, they fenced out George Park with iron wires and therefore few walked pass the back of the market. Since the pedestrian flow was cut off, my earning was cut off. In the past I earned \$10 to \$ 20 a night, but now it's \$ 4 or \$5. Hard to live with, indeed. Alas, hard to live with. Day after day I got more agonized. How wretched I was! (Lyrics) Ay, things changed, things changed again like a shot...

Left for Macau in Despair

Voice-over Script

After the split-up, Ah Yau moved to Hong Kong Island and Douwun lived his tough days in Kowloon as before. In late 1954, Douwun in despair decided to take the advice of his friends — to move to Macau. At \$200, Douwun sold his effects and the apartment. On the 18th of the tenth lunar month, at night, he sailed off to Macau.

Lyrics

I sailed off to Macau on the 18th of the tenth month. That night, though, the weather began to howl. When we arrived it was baking hot so my friend and I sweated a lot. Anyway my friend had got to go after carrying my luggage off the boat. When I was by myself again, the weather, oh, started to change! At once I had to get more coverings...

A Respite in Macau

Voice-over Script

With the help of Wong Tak Sum, a blind musician and an old friend, Douwun was fairly settled in Macau. Chan arranged for his lodging and introduced him to a teahouse. The many hotels and inns around the area brought plentiful audience to Douwun, and within a week he had secured not a few patrons and made friends with other musicians. Later he moved to a casino restaurant, namely Yu King, where he sang from 2am to 5am every night. He was widely appreciated and got along very well there.

Lyrics

Once I got to Macau I knew it was a nice place to dwell; money was easy to make, so I guessed here I can settle quite well. 'Coz at once I got many customers, and it was just a week before everyone knew my name as a singer. So I guessed I was blessed in this place; I guessed it suited my zodiac, and I might make it a home perhaps. Business was good, as good in bright day as in dark night. So my days passed easily, and life was definitely comfy. With a good life here I felt unusually safe and happy... (Speech) Ah, it was so good getting to Macau. Once I arrived I made myself known in just a week. Almost all houses, except those very central, knew I was here in Macau now. So that year I was really a star; I received calls every night, more than I could handle. Well, well. It was as good as that. When I was driven to despair in Hong Kong, you know, Macau brought me back to life. That's how my mind got settled down in this place.

Upheaval in Macau and the Return

Voice-over Script

In the early 1950s Macau was at loggerheads with the communist government. Disputes sparked off along the borders frequently. When Douwun, having stayed

in Macau for more than a month, decided to settle down, a blast was heard on the 8th of the eleventh lunar month in late 1954. That was an explosion; a time bomb was hid in the city center. The atmosphere turned brittle. The city was placed under curfew, and Douwun was out of job again. He got by with his savings for twenty- some days, but the situation wasn't improved when he had only 20 dollars left. He had to bid farewell to his friends and go back to Hong Kong.

Lyrics

(Speech) Good times never last long, really. It was the 15th and, in a flash, it came to the 8th of the eleventh month. When the clock struck eight, we heard explosion — a time bomb, people said. Then the world changed. All of us were agitated, and things went into chaos. What a stroke of bad luck! It happened that it was biting cold those days. That year was the coldest, in fact, so cold that even oil was jelling. And the coldness endured. Woe! My business slumped again, and I sang for no audience at all. Oy, a turn of life was but a void! Then, well, since the 8th my life got worse and worse. Suddenly I realized I had \$200, you know, earned in Macau. That was good, but not good enough. I almost spent them all in less than twenty days, leaving only \$20. Oh no. Then I thought, no I was not going to stay in a new place. If I had to die I had to die in Hong Kong, my place. So with that \$ 20 I said goodbye to my friends and returned, not knowing, though, if it was for better or worse. (Lyrics) Things in life are unpredictable, it's true. All are void. I was just having a dream, for several months.

Loafing around in the Opium Den

Voice-over Script

In Hong Kong, a friend, also a blind musician, let Douwun stay with him and his wife for the nonce, but it was still a bother for the couple to live with a man. It happened that an old friend called on him. Knowing his difficulty, this friend brought Douwun to an opium den in Hung Hom. Although opium smoking and trade had been prohibited back in 1931 and 1945, some dens remained. The owner of the den was a neighborly man. He took Douwun in and gave him food and shelter. Douwun stayed in the den for seven months without singing a single hymn. All the time he lolled on the smoke bed and chattered with the patrons.

Lyrics

(Lyrics) Well, back to Hong Kong I found this good old friend, who lent me a hand by housing me in his own little flat. But it was still a problem to live with them, because there were the husband and wife, and it was a nuisance to live so closely with another man. They couldn't, of course, lend me a bed to sleep, so I couldn't put my head down indeed. (Speech) Three days after my comeback a man got in touch with me. We used to call him "Oom". He sold opium in Hung Hom, and hearing of my arrival he asked his men to look in on me. Well, he knew I did well in the past. He knew I sold my apartment and sought better opportunities elsewhere. He knew how difficult I was now, being forced to come back. And he knew in Hong Kong I could only find a place to eat but not to sleep. So he gave me shelter and treated me well. He was, you know, a rare bird. Ah! I believe I'm the very first blind man in history living in an opium den. (Lyrics) There was still a stroke of luck to have a godsend bailed me out when I got stuck. He offered me a place in the den, and assured that I could survive well enough.

Nanyin on the Air

Voice-over Script

It was the 18th of the seventh lunar month in 1955. Douwun was smoking opium in the afternoon when Ho San, an old partner of Douwun, had him over to Yau Ma Tei. He invited Douwun to sing for the Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK). Since then Douwun sang regularly in a RTHK radio show. At the beginning he worked once a week, and then it became twice and thrice a week. Douwun kept performing on the air for the 15 years.

Lyrics

(Speech) The truth is, a door's always opened even in a cul-de-sac. Right. It happened that a man, oh, on the 18th of the seventh month, came to me in Shing Tak Shan. (Lyrics) Someone was offering me a smoke when a folk appeared beside my couch. He sounded happy as he spoke: "You! You're taking flight now! Go, go quickly to Yau Ma Tei. Move, move, you're getting a chance at that place. Someone's going to see you play and give you a show on the airwave! You must love it, and perhaps you can patch up your days!"

Rising to Fame

Voice-over Script

With its rising popularity, the nanyin broadcast of Douwun was proved to be a great success. He received \$35 for each show at the beginning, but for him it was not about the money. The show was like advertisement, boosting the reputation of Douwun; with it, more and more people sent for him. Among these patrons Douwun was most grateful to Ho Iu Kwong, a wealthy merchant. Ho approached Douwun through RTHK a year after his show got under way. Every year since then, he would send for Douwun on the Chinese new year and other festivals.

Lyrics

"If you felt like it, you will never quit," he said, "because with this show you can for always make end meet." Really, once I entered Radio Hong Kong I kept singing in there for long. Now my trouble waters were all cleared, and I sang on the air for ten-some years.

The Lessor-Lessee Camaraderie (1)

Voice-over Script

The 15 years of radio broadcasting was the most stable and joyous in Douwun's life. During that time Douwun rented a cubicle (a small partitioned room of a flat) in Yau Ma Tei. The lessor, Lau Chong Fei, an exceptionally benign man, cared for Douwun and was always helpful. According to Lau, Douwun was a dignified, amiable and sincere person; he would dress up meticulously every time he went to the radio station, to show his etiquette. Lau treated Douwun like a family member, and his son actually made Douwun his godfather.

Lyrics

In this world, I think, one had to be humble and truthful to earn friendship and backing. You know, in this world, as the old sayings goes, when you talk you've got to talk pleasantly, when you buy you've got to buy munificently. It's not a boast, or a flattery; it's what ought to be when you want to have camaraderie.

The Lessor-Lessee Camaraderie (2)

Voice-over Script

Even in 1971 when Douwun moved out to live with a friend because he couldn't afford the rental, Lau Chong Fei kept visiting him from time to time. In the prime month of 1974, a cold spell set in, but Douwun had no overcoat or the money to buy one. Without further ado Lau bought two overcoats for Douwun, which helped him get through that harsh winter.

Lyrics

The prime month of that year was a bleak, chilly mid-winter. Though I got along okay I'd no topcoat whatsoever. Fortunately my former lessor paid me a call. Seeing my clothes were threadbare, and my short single-layer, he went out right away to buy me two overcoats to wear. It was my fortune to have him here, for I couldn't possibly get through without his bestowing this favor. It was true the cold didn't last long, but one coat could hardly keep me warm; how caring he was to buy me two, how tender he was to help me through.

10/12

The Decline of Nanyin

Voice-over Script

Douwun's comfortable life, which lasted for more than ten years, came to an end with the change of social trend. In the 1970s, what people wanted for entertainment was no longer the same. On a Friday afternoon, in late 1970, Douwun received a notice after singing Romance of the Next Life in the RTHK studio. It was announced that all radio programmes would be restructured, and the company decided to withdraw the nanyin show. In face of this policy Douwun could do nothing except finishing Romance of the Next Life within a month. Douwun's 15 years of radio broadcasting was brought to a close.

Lyrics

How time flies! Let me cast back my mind to 1970, when I was in the studio, singing Romance of the Next Life. I got to the volume where the young protagonist Huangfu was about to go to war. That was a Friday, and the Director passed a notice. So Lam Lo Shu, the one on duty, gave me this note when I finished. Well, it said: this programme's coming to a close, and within a month you have to end the show.

1970s: the Fallen Songster (1)

Voice-over Script

Losing the income from radio show, Douwun was dragged into a straitened circumstance. In early 1971, he made up his mind to go back in the street. 1971 and 1972 were the most downcast years of Douwun. 15 years on the air had made him a well-known and well-admired figure; now, in the street, seeking charity from others was to him utterly disgraceful and unbearably humiliating. Always he tried to cover himself up to avoid being recognized. He was even more despondent on thinking that he was now reduced to an ordinary blind beggar, while he had, for his entire life, earned a living with his own talent and effort, either by fortune-telling or singing.

Lyrics

Alas! At first I kept my head down, feeling sorry for myself because I hadn't yet found my feet in the crowded street. Alas! At first I kept my face hidden when I had my performance because now I had to seek alms from those I had once stunned. Alas! People always said things are difficult in the outset; of course one feels ashamed at first. When you get used to it you'll feel nothing, because it's for survival that you sing.

1970s: the Fallen Songster (2)

Voice-over Script

For Douwun it was the only way left. Pop songs and radio dramas were so popular that they drove almost all nanyin lovers away. High-rises, moreover, were widely erected; who would call him over when no one could hear his singing in the street below? In the street, a warm-hearted pedestrian might drop him ten or twenty dollars. Sometimes he got only ten something for the whole night. Under bad weather, it could be zero.

Lyrics

Alas! I had to work my life out after all; I had rent to pay off, and I had everything to shell out for. So I must walk along the street, I must sing every night to earn ready money. Alas! But the past had past; Radios were everywhere, and no matter how hard I sang, nobody could hear up above the lofty towers...

1970s: the Fallen Songster (3)

Voice-over Script

Price level soared in Hong Kong at that time. What Douwun earned, however, could hardly keep his head above water. Unable even to pay the rental, he had to move out from his lodging. Luckily a comrade offered to take him home. So Douwun moved to his place, an attic of No.996 Canton Road. Every night Douwun sang in the Yau Ma Tei and Mongkok area; off and on, he chanted in the Canton Road or the Argyle Street. It was during this time that Yuen Siu Fai, an eminent Cantonese opera singer, pricked up his ears on Douwun. Often he listened quietly to his songs, to grasp the style and mood of nanyin music.

Lyrics

(Speech) That was 1971, and 1972. Ah! So I sang in the street for two whole years. I sang, you know, and I waited. Like what people said, I waited for the charity of others. Woe me! I was, really, so downhearted at first, and not willing to show my face. But then, like what people said, you felt nothing when you got used to it. You know, I was thankful to my comrades indeed. I thanked them for bringing me here, for I wouldn't, I believe, hold out with my face hidden all the time. Ay, I was thankful to my comrades for helping me out as well. 'Coz in the past, when I was doing the radio show, I seldom meet them up because, you know, we didn't seem the same type. Ay! We either sang or told fortune. Who would think about singing in the street? It was like, alas, it was like begging. So I was grateful, honestly grateful for his help. It was, again, a way out.

Social Assistance Came to his Aid**Voice-over Script**

In 1973 Douwun met a Good Samaritan. This man helped Douwun apply for social security assistance and took him through all the procedures. That being done, Douwun received some \$100 disability allowance every month. But the allowance, of course, was a paltry sum compared to the cost of living. Whenever he was short of money, especially in the end of a month, he had to go back on the street with his zither. In the past he could tell fortune on top of performing; now, in the 1970s, few people were interested in fortune telling. Anyway, with the allowance, he could choose not to go out in harsh weather.

Lyrics

(Speech) In 1973, by good fortune, a good man — er, this good man! What a shame I forget his surname again — a very generous, affable and compassionate man helped me put in an application form, seeing my difficulty and helplessness. What did I apply for? Social security assistance. Ah! Then I got my smiles back! With a hundred dollars I could be a bit more at ease. So life's fine now. That's why I'm grateful to all the helping hands. You know, I've got through everything sour, sweet, bitter and hot in one single life. Aw! I really can't remember much. (Lyrics) Ou aye! Since then I had an easier life. Though I didn't get much from the allowance, I could maintain myself with intermittent street performance. Thank heaven I was still healthy, so there're not much to worry...

11/12**Growth of Income with Fitful Calls (1)****Voice-over Script**

From 1971 when Douwun was reduced to a street singer to 1979 when he died, some clients did send for him sporadically. From these calls he earned a little,

ranging from \$100 to \$250. In 1972, he remember, someone brought him to Kwan Tei, a village in Fanling, the New Territories. He performed for 2 nights there. The warm reception from the villagers left him with a wonderful impression. The paths to the village, he remember, were very rugged; on his return he made a mess when carelessly tumbled down into a field.

Lyrics

Then I must tell you about a show in Kwan Tei, which was remote but restful. The villagers were incredibly hospitable, and I sang for two nights as I felt so at home and comfortable. Ah! But on the way back, though someone took me by the hand, the trail was too rugged I couldn't even stand. So I hurried to the side, but my guide was too careless perhaps, and we — oops! — fell on our back, and we — bang! — dropped into the grassland. You know, coldness hanged in the air when I was soaked in field water, and my jaws chattered as the piercing wind cut through my heart. My guide went guilt-ridden, and kept stuttering to beg my pardon. "It's not your fault," I kept saying, "just that I was too laggard to have lost my footing."

Growth of Income with Fitful Calls (2)

Voice-over Script

In the autumn of 1973, Douwun was invited to the Li Po Chun Chambers in Central to perform with his old partner Ho San. Douwun sang Farewell My Concubine and Mourning for My Lady, accompanied by Ho's flute. The host drove them to the spot and brought them home. They were overjoyed as each of them earned \$200. The 15th of the tenth lunar month in 1975 was the Spirit Festival. Douwun was invited to Shatin and performed two festive songs at \$250.

Lyrics

Lawks! It was my old partner Ho San looking for his old friend. "What's up?" I asked, and he bid me to join him in an event. "Where to?" I asked, "Li Po Chun Chambers," he said, "but I don't know who's calling in fact." So we don't know who was calling; anyway we go for some extra earnings. (Speech) Hark! I asked "Who's calling in fact?" Ho San said he didn't know. Aha! We were such a fathead, didn't even know who's sending for us. "I don't know," he said, "Ah Gou referred this to me. Heard there's a Ms. something." So he ordered me not to take other jobs that day, but go with him to the 11/F of Li Po Chun Chambers. "So, how much?" Each \$200, he said. "How long?" Just two songs, he said. So I took it right away. Ah! That's great we didn't have to ask for direction. Why? We had Ho's wife. We had her lead the way, so we didn't have to pay. And that's great a driver took us there, took all of us together. (Lyrics) How exhilarated I was, to sing with my old chap like before.

Nanyin Drama in the Festival of Hong Kong

Voice-over Script

Though a street singer, Douwun's prowess as a songster drew much attention from academics and culturati alike. In the 1970s he was invited several times to perform in universities and concert halls. In 1973, for example, the drama Circle of Chalk

was performed in the City Hall theatre as one of the programmes of the Festival of Hong Kong. Before each act, Douwun sang a prologue in nanyin to summarize the plot. The drama was on stage for seven days. In 1974 the Urban Council organized a nanyin concert called “Folk Tales and Historic Stories” in the City Hall. Douwun was the singer, and Ho San the instrumentalist.

Lyrics

Well, that day in the evening I was tittle -tattling with my roommates at home, when we heard someone’s knocking. They came for the Festival of Hong Kong, as they wanted me to sing some songs when the Circle of Chalk kicked off in the City Hall. They wanted me to sing for seven days, to chant the plot of the play before the drama began. So I took this New Year show, And sang for seven acts in a week as was told. Like what people said, staging means earning, so life then was quite comforting.

Staging in the Academic World

Voice-over Script

Douwun’s advent on the Festival of Hong Kong brought him to public notice, especially from the academics. In 1974, Dr. Leung Pui Kam of the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK), who had earlier seen him perform at the entrance of Sincere Department Store at Argyle Street, offered to record his singing in the New Asia Institute of Advanced Chinese Studies in Tin Kwong Road. In 1975, Douwun was invited to sing, accompanied by Ho San, in the Chung Chi College of CUHK for an evening variety show. At his age, Douwun recalled, his body was failing and lacked the breath to sustain a long performance. But that night he sang Words of Comfort for the Daughter for 50 minutes. The audience broke out in a massive round of applause after he finished, and he was thrilled. He had also given a show in the Institute of Chinese Culture at CUHK in 1976.

Lyrics

In the recording studio that day in two hours I made two displays. A popular record, Farewell My Concubine, was the first I played. Then I sang Sorrow of the Traveller, so two songs in one day. After that we gathered in the garden to take a photograph. I knew they were taking the shot although I couldn’t see a lot, because the flash struck my sensory fast, so I knew when the shot-taking last. Very happy indeed, to be together. They were nice and polite, and everything about them was just right. Gee! It was time to go away; I took my belongings, and they led me all the way. But I’ll recount our goodbye elsewhere anyway...

For Ever Beholden to the Ho Family (1)

Voice-over Script

Despite his miserable life, Douwun said, some lucky stars were always there to bail him out in pitfalls. One of them was Ho Iu Kwong, the founder of Fook Lee Construction Co. Ltd., to whom Douwun was most grateful. No sooner had Douwun started performing on the radio, in 1955, than Ho got reach of him through RTHK. Since then, Ho invited him to his mansion at Blue Pool Road, Happy Valley, every

New Year and other festivals. In 1971, when Douwun's show was terminated, he moved out from his lodging in face of instability. That was when he lost contact with Ho. Ho, however, had not put Douwun out of his mind. He ordered his driver to keep inquiring his whereabouts.

Lyrics

One night at eight something after dinner, someone knocked on the door, and I hurried to ask what was going on there. Someone called out my name, and I was so very pleased to answer. Instantly I opened the door to see who was finding me; no other but my customer! That man sent for me every year since I sang on the air. Every year he called me several times to sing for a day. Outside the door was no other but the man's driver. Smiling, he asked me out. I was vastly elated no doubt. So, again, I'm going to the Ho's house...

For Ever Beholden to the Ho Family (2)

Voice-over Script

One night in 1974 (may also be 1975), Ho's driver, Bro. Cheung, finally put Douwun in touch with his boss. After the union, Douwun frequented Ho's mansion again. Ho, like before, was very magnanimous to him; he received him courteously, and never bothered with what and how long he sang. Even though Douwun became frail and lacked the strength to sing long, the Ho family still paid for his performance. The Ho family gave Douwun absolute respect. They let him perform in their living room and ordered the driver to take him from the Edinburgh Place in Central to their mansion. Douwun was immensely moved by what they did. In not a few occasions Douwun expressed his appreciation: "the Ho family in Hong Kong was so much different from the wealthy in Guangzhou!"

Lyrics

They were very munificent, very munificent. The entire family, old and young, was great-hearted and decent. He, noble and truthful, deserved to be a gentleman of wealth! I still remember when I was young... (Speech) Ah! The gentleman Ho Iu Kwong, and in fact his entire family, was incredibly nice. So noble and humble and courteous! They deserved to be rich. Why? When I was young, I remember, I followed my master to Guangzhou. Where do you think I went? It's quite laughable, quite laughable indeed, thinking back on the day. The place was called Tian Xin, you know, because the family was surnamed Tian Xin, and the man's called Tian Xin Yang. So they sent for my master, and since I was his new pupil I had to follow him. When we got there — what do you think was the foodstuff? They ate well, of course, but we were ill-treated. The teacup, you know, we had to use those called the sunflower teacup, that is, those the servants used. So different from what they'd been using — I had a peek to their table as I could see better in youth. You get the idea how mean they were. The teacup was for maids, also the dish- washing maids. Our food, too, was different from theirs. We were not even given a proper chair, you know, but a bench that's for the maids to sit in kitchen. That's what they gave us for resting. You see, poles apart from the temperament of the Ho family. Poles apart! (Lyrics) Thinking back to the past, it's interesting to notice the very different characters of people in the world at large. To class them together, it's simply two worlds, like heaven and hell, no blather.

For Ever Beholden to the Ho Family (3)

Voice-over Script

In the early 1970s cassette player gained popularity. Ho Iu Kwong had his driver taped Douwun's singing every time so that he could listen to it when free. So far as Douwun could remember, what he had been singing all his life, like the short songs Sorrow of the Traveller and Farewell My Concubine and other long pieces, were almost completely recorded in Ho's house. One day, as usual, Bro. Cheung drove him back to the Edinburg Place after the singing. When Douwun was about to get off, Bro. Cheung handed him a present. It was a full-recorded set of the Banshee's Revenge on a Lothario Douwun performed. He was, of course, touched and overjoyed. Returning home, he immediately borrowed a recorder from a friend to listen to his own singing. Later on he lent the set to a comrade, who promised to duplicate one set for documentary purpose. But the set was eventually ruined in the hand of this comrade, and was never returned to Douwun. Historic material of the Ho Family: (In 2006, thirty years after Douwun passed away, the Chinese Music Archive of the CUHK Music Department, sponsored by the Ho Iu Kwong Charity Foundation, initiated a research and subsequently published a recording titled "Hong Kong cultural treasure: nanyin of Douwun". Mr. Ho Sai Yiu, the seventh son of Ho Iu Kwong, took the lead to retrieve the seven cassette tapes at home and donate them to the Chinese Music Archive.)

Lyrics

I knew quite well that my(Lyrics) was too vulgar, too helplessly vulgar, but Mr. Ho still took the pleasure to hear. He would ask his driver to record my singing when he was too occupied to be there. So a lot must have been recorded over the many years, and since I sang several times every year, there were certainly repetitions. But he taped it anyway, and of course I wouldn't mind, as it's really a nice thing to be paid more. So I'm very glad to do it indeed... (Speech) Right. After I started singing in Ho's house, ah, after that they had many of my songs recorded. Most of my songs, I believed, were taped. They had only missed those in a set, you know, because I didn't sing them. Ay! But most of them were taped, as they taped many. I think it was 80 percent. The short ones, like Sorrow of the Traveller and Farewell My Concubine, were all recorded. Hmm, let's not talk about those I forgot, but it was 80 percent of those I remembered. I don't know if they're still in the Ho's house, you know, because it was when Mr. Ho was not free that he ordered the driver to tape it, so that he could listen at night. Ha! It was congeniality, I assumed, though I've always think I'm not worth it. Ay! I'm so very beholden to his appreciation.

12/12

When the Scholar Met the Songster (1)

Voice-over Script

Douwun considered 1975 a year of luck. Early in the year a customer invited him to a mansion in Canton Road, to sing in celebration for the New Year. In March he performed in the St. John's Cathedral in Central. There he met a "Mr. Yung", who would be recording his singing in Fu Lung Teahouse later. What he called Mr.

Yung was Dr. Bell Yung, a scholar returned from the United States. Bell Yung took down his address and telephone number the same day. A few days later Douwun received his call. As a matter of fact the two had met two years ago in City Hall when Douwun was singing for the Circle of Chalk. At that time Yung had already proposed to record his performance. Now that he brought up the matter again, Douwun was well pleased to give this nice idea a try.

Lyrics

That was a Cathedral, but what it was about I didn't quite know. Anyway I sang there in broad daylight, the first song being "Wishes from the Eight Immortals". After the break I sang another, but what it was, hmm what it was I couldn't remember. Yep I couldn't remember. That very same day I met Mr. Yung there. We chatted a bit, feeling delighted to come across each other. Then I gave him my address and number, and he said he'll meet me again some time later.

When the Scholar Met the Songster (2)

Voice-over Script

Born in Hong Kong, Bell Yung graduated from the Harvard University as an ethnomusicologist. He recognized a great artistic value in Douwun's nanyin. To recreate the environment in which the blind musician performed, he decided to record his singing like live.

Lyrics

(Speech) Ah! Mr. Yung and I had met before in the City Hall, and we had, indeed, talked about this idea. Then we ran into each other again in this Cathedral. Ay! And we talked about the same thing again. Right. "For how long can you sing?" he asked. I said: "Not so long now. Now I got to take two breaks in an hour. One session, if things go well, is around 25 minutes — can't make half an hour now. My breath's weak, so I can just barely make it even for intermittence. In good condition, and if my breath allows, perhaps I can go for half an hour — with difficulty. Normally, though, I'd say 20 minutes the best." "In this case," he said, "you may just sing two sessions for an hour." So I accepted his offer, on phone. When did it happen? Hmm, it's around March... I can't remember when it started. I think I'd forgotten, perhaps February or March. Can't recall, but it was around that time. February or March, like on the 6th or 7th, or say from the 5th to 7th. Why? 'Coz I remember I had made some scheduling to make way for the show in Chung Chi College. Ay, that was how I made it happen and on time. So I remember the time.

When the Scholar Met the Songster (3)

Voice-over Script

Brothels and opium dens had largely disappeared in Hong Kong in the mid-1970s. Seeing that parks and streets were equally unsuitable for recording, Yung turned to Fu Lung Teahouse in Sheung Wan's Possession Street. Fu Lung was one of the few existing teahouses in a classical décor. It's practices, too, remained the same as decades ago, with maids winding round their necks a wooden tray on which heaps of dim sum laid, and customers bringing along their bird cages to chatter with others and enjoy their meal. Yung worked out with Fu Lung's Mr. Liu on the project, and it was agreed that the recording would be made in the teahouse free

of charges except some tips for the servers. The recording was thus arranged.

Lyrics

(Speech) So we started the recording. The first time, we spent a day in Fu Lung and I sang for about an hour or more. Well, after I finished, Mr. Yung asked how I'd like to sing. I said I couldn't sing for consecutive days — as he wanted me to — and I needed at least a day's rest in between. So after discussion we made it Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, all in Fu Lung. Therefore I started to go there every week, singing regularly every two days. I could do an estimate, in fact. Considering that I was sometimes interrupted once in two or three weeks, the recording lasted until May, if I remember correctly. So I'd sung for many hours, something like an hour a day, or more than an hour a day. What did I sing, then? A lot, indeed. Like Mourning for My Lady and Sorrow of the Traveller. So I'd sung many songs of various forms. Ah, then, I sang regularly until the end of the 5th lunar month — around this time I think. After that we'd stopped for some time, but by then I'd sung for a long time. And also he gave me a sheet of paper afterwards, a so-called contract. Well well. Really a contract meant nothing, right? Anyway it was stamped, and I kept it, and kept it in mind. I shouldn't let it slip, right? If people are treating you well, you've got to be grateful. So until today I keep good hold of it like a deed. That's right. I'm fine with it, true, but a contract's not important really. I'll finish it anyway! So I sang for some hundred hours, but I'm not going into the details now. (Lyrics) Ah! My livelihood was unexpectedly secured, so I didn't have to endure the tiring search from east to west from months to years. If it was not for him, yipes, I would be toiling around every day to look for an escape from life's trap door.

Live Recording in Fu Lung Teahouse (1)

Voice-over Script

Starting from 11 March 1975, Douwun sang in Fu Lung Teahouse for about an hour every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday during lunchtime. Bell Yung and his assistant helped record his performance live. Apart from the famous short songs like Sorrow of the Traveller, Mourning for My Lady and Farewell My Concubine, Douwun sang also selected clips of long pieces like Miserable Liang Tianlai and Tiger Killer Wu Song and several mid-length pieces such as Banshee's Revenge on a Lothario and The Advent of Guanyin. At Yung's request, Douwun had also performed long zhou, a kind of Cantonese narrative song, and ban yan, another kind of Cantonese narrative song. The latter was a lost song-art even at that time. By 26th June when the recording came to a close, Douwun had already performed 16 songs. The entire collection was roughly a 40-hour live recording.

Lyrics

There, there. Let's not digress anymore. Just listen to my song of the week to see what happen after Wu Song left off. So Wu Song walk and walk until the day breaks when birds are all awake and the sun goes up bright and big. The East is lighted up; I sit down to think things over after freshened up. Looking back, yipes, I shouldn't have been so rash. My brother was showing himself, for sure, to talk to me of some important fairs. Think I had been too foolhardy to have scared away my buddy. I must be too strong a living soul for his spirit; think I had broken his spirit to pieces probably...

Live Recording in Fu Lung Teahouse (2)

Voice-over Script

Aged 65, Douwun was living at Canton Road in Kowloon at that time. Every time he went to Fu Lung Teahouse in Hong Kong Island, he had to be escorted by Ah Soo, a woman a few years younger than him. After the recording, they would take a bus to the United Pier and changed ferry to get across the harbor. A motley of sounds hanged around the air in Fu Lung: birds twittered, maids cried their dishes, patrons and servers talked with each other. All these sounds, and otherwise noises, mingled with Douwun's nanyin in the recording. Sometimes when a server laid down a cup of tea for Douwun, he replied with thanks. When resting, Douwun chatted with Yung about his life story, or sipped a mouthful of tea and chattered with other patrons.

Lyrics

Puny Tom- Tom (ban yan) Aiyo! I plod, and plod, and plod, and plod. Know not what to do, gosh! Why? My heart keeps rattling hell of a lot and a lot. You see, I am Puny Tom -Tom, and I pissed everybody off since I was brought forth. No, no, I didn't piss everybody off but everybody hates me and at me they scoff. You see, I am Puny Tom-Tom, and I made my own tomb: aiya! I learnt not from Guanyin but Ho Er the bone idle. When I was rich, you know, I made Shameen a home. I spent money on river tours, and always spent more than was asked for. Look, look, look! Tonight I sent for Qin Lan, tomorrow I sent for Sui Zan. Another night I would have Sui Choi and Sui Zhen and Sui Sim...

Reminiscence Impromptu

Voice-over Script

On 19 June, Douwun arrived at Fu Lung Teahouse as usual, but with a question to Bell Yung: "I've almost sung all that I'd sung in my life. What next?" After a moment's thought, Douwun proposed that he would "sing his life". Yung was of course very delighted. Douwun also suggested the title: "Reminiscence of Douwun the Blind". That day, he performed the first chapter of his reminiscence. He continued on the 21th, 24th and 25th, and had just started retelling how he was invited to RTHK for a radio nanyin show, when it happened that Yung had to go back to the States. The remaining parts of the recording were, in the following year, entrusted to Nishimura Mari, a friend of Yung and an ethnomusicologist. On 6 and 13 March 1976, Nishimura Mari recorded the last two chapters of Douwun's Reminiscence in a lecture room in the Center of Asian Studies at the University of Hong Kong. Rare Cultural Heritage: Reminiscence of Douwun the Blind is approximately a 6-hour recording. It is valuable both as an epitome of Cantonese song-art and a rarity of Hong Kong's oral history — a treasurable art and cultural heritage, that is to say, pertaining to the history of Hong Kong as a whole. It is through this recording that "Hong Kong Memory" recreates the story of a virtuoso blind musician.

Lyrics

And so it is my life, a life of hustle and bustle, a life of hardship and toil. Those who've taken pleasure in my songs on the 15th never call again, not until the next year begins. As no one's calling, dear me, I was like a beggar making a desperate plea. And social assistance, though I have one, couldn't help when it's so exorbitant

to sustain an existence. No matter how hard you try, you have to try again; so living always makes you tired, although time easily flies. Destiny, really, decides life's wax and wane, and gain and loss. That said — hard work, still, is half your boss. So if anyone can live well he must have done more than we can tell...

A Miserable Life Ends in Misery

Voice-over Script

Douwun earned a few thousand dollars from singing in Fu Lung for more than two months. This sum of money, he thought, would give him good days for quite some time. Things, however, were not as expected because price level was soaring and he seldom went on the street with extras at hand. In September he had used up all the money and was poverty -stricken again. Unable to sustain himself only with the meager social assistance, he picked up street singing once more, but calls were patchy. He lived his life in penury even as he walked into the jaws of death. In 1979, Douwun died from illness. Few remembered him as a blind musician by then. Several comrades and his old lessor clubbed together to pay for his funeral and entombed him in Tsuen Wan's Western Monastery.

Lyrics

I've always wanted a quiet life; to live fairly safe and sound under the mercy of heaven. But since I am blind and have no other talent, singing is the only way to make it happen. I have to thank heaven because I manage to live till today while many others left halfway. Cataclysm and crisis are never easy to get through, but every time I pull round; and though feeble I now am I'm still here, perhaps because I am destined to stay around. But there're always two ways to look at one thing. Perhaps it's a punishment from heaven to make me struggle in torment. You know, perhaps heaven still has its arrangement, so I'm still here, not knowing which of the two has been my judgment. Anyway, how every one of us think about it is never important. But I'm born humble and junky, and miserable and gloomy; alas, I wish no one's like me, and I wish everybody can live in wealth and glee.

Douwun 1910-1979

Voice-over Script

So ends the story of a virtuoso blind musician.

Lyrics

Well! I wish joy be with every soul, every man and woman in this world. I wish your star of fortune be around, and you'll be happy and cheery all the time. I wish everything you come upon is sweet and jolly on and on. I wish, from this moment on, this world is without war and bloodshed, without war and bloodshed. I wish this world be peaceful and out of threat, and you have abundance, never again be filled with dread.