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SE Good Food
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BY peter barrett
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shu-cheen yu

opera singer

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She's sung for Imelda Marcos, performed with George Michael and been watched by **billions** at the Sydney Olympic Games opening ceremony, in 2000. But more recently, **Chinese**-born opera singer Shu-Cheen Yu has been eight-shows-a-week-busy taking to the stage as Lady Thiang in the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical The King and I. At home in Melbourne's Prahran, she seldom drinks alcohol (it dries out her vocal cords) and prefers to cook for herself and her husband, Kelvin Gough, rather than risk getting sick eating out.

Last night's dinner

Brown rice, vegetables and a can of fish. I can't eat a big meal before I go on stage, it's no good for singing. I eat about three or four times a day. During the Uncle Tom's Cabin number in the second act, I have 28 minutes rest so that's when I have my main meal.

My inspiration

I firmly believe we are what we eat. For someone who has a career, who is so busy - eight shows a week, teaching 11 students (some of them come twice) - to be able to sing well I must keep my body in prime condition. Therefore, what I eat is very, very important.

The staples

My pantry There's always peanut **butter**, Vegemite (I like it in soups or on stewed vegetables), Promite (for making egg sandwiches), MasterFoods hot English mustard, unprocessed organic bran (to keep me regular in between long-haul flights), and always brown rice, although I like to cook white, brown, black (wild) rice and barley together - I just love the different mixture of tastes. And I boil my rice, too. I always have mixed nuts handy to snack on and I love free-range boiled eggs, which I have with a little black pepper, sesame oil and my special soy sauce.

My fridge For my special soy sauce I start with Fountain soy, then add Maggi seasoning, **Chinese** vinegar, dark soy, sesame oil, **Chinese** pepper oil (Bai Wei Zhai **brand** "green prickly ash oil") and crushed garlic. There's usually leftover rice (which I reheat in the microwave in my special ceramic pot with a plastic lid), and pumpkin, pickles, hot peppers, garlic (it keeps better in the fridge), coffee and Rochester Ginger drink.

Secret vice

Chocolate. I love dark chocolate with roasted almonds. I have it about every second day.

Discovery

In the last two-to-three months I've started using barley. I've always known it was a powerful nutrient with vitamin **B** and when I was young my uncle used to mix it with herbs so I thought it was a herb. But now I discovered you can eat it as rice, so I add a little bit in and the rest is history.

My toolkit

I **buy** wooden chopping boards from local makers, I use wooden spoons, I boil my rice in a small pot and have an all-purpose non-stick pan to do my stir-fries and stewed vegetables in. I also have a small pan to boil my eggs. My secret weapon is my Pronto stainless steel cleaver. I keep my green tea in a special ceramic canister my friend James Fang gave me - it's from Hangzhou.

Recipe stalwart

I make vegetable stew. I use salt, pepper, garlic, spring onion, purple onion, baby carrot, pumpkin, potato and sweet potato, olive oil, honey and soy sauce. Sometimes I add some Sanitarium nutmeat for protein.

I'm drinking

I'm very fussy about my tea - I like organic green tea, **Chinese** black tea and my favourite, Goddess of Mercy oolong tea. I believe the best teas come from **China** so I always bring back tea when I can. I also drink warm water with lemon and honey in the morning, but only occasionally alcohol - prosecco or champagne - because it dries me out too much. I'll sometimes have a plunger coffee or a soy latte.

Most unforgettable meal

Singing at the Australian Pavilion of the World Expo in Shanghai in 2010. It made me feel so proud and special to be there. I met Kerri-Anne Kennerley and sat next to Neil Perry, who cooked beef and lamb - pure "Aussie" cooking. I was so happy, and yet something disastrous happened - my high heel snapped halfway through the performance. But that's show **business!**

Favourite

I bought hand-carved pepper and salt shakers from Shepparton. I like to use a mix of yellow, pink, black and white pepper and Murray River salt in them.

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