



Inside Job

Going for a song

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This month: Peking opera singer

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She tells me that I am to learn the role of the *dan*; I'm assured that like in Jacobean drama, men often take the roles of women (in the early days they did so

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I ask Tian if it would be feasible for me to become a Peking opera star aged 29, and she responds in the negative. 'You can practice for fun, and make it your hobby,' she tells me, 'but to be a professional you must start from an early age.' I respond by making the 'sadness' gesture at her, and she looks at me impassively and tells me I'm doing it wrong. At least she doesn't cane me.

All it seems to be is twirling your hands around a lot

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Next month An offer you can't refuse: our guide to Shanghai's gangster past

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