

Chinese Artists Association of Hong Kong to perform "The Imperial Emperor of Heaven Holding Court" in November

The Chinese Artists Association of Hong Kong will perform "The Imperial Emperor of Heaven Holding Court" and three traditional Cantonese repertoires, namely "Eight Immortals Bestowing Longevity", "Blessing by the God of Fortune" and "A Fairy Returns Her Son to the Mortal Father" in November. The shows are presented by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department.

The story of "The Imperial Emperor of Heaven Holding Court" follows the Imperial Emperor of Heaven. The immortals report signs of unrest in the mortal world, prompting the Emperor to dispatch a heavenly host to descend from heaven to save the mortals. The plot of this drama exemplifies Chinese people's traditional view of the universe, namely that Heaven is mindful of the well-being of mortals and whenever there is disaster in the mortal world, heaven will send forces to their rescue. It is the usual practice of operatic troupes to perform "The Imperial Emperor of Heaven Holding Court" as an opener for matinee shows. It is often staged alongside "Eight Immortals Bestowing Longevity" and "A Fairy Returns Her Son to the Mortal Father".

A standard playlet in the traditional repertory of Cantonese opera, "Eight Immortals Bestowing Longevity" describes the titular eight immortals – Han Zhongli, Lu Dongbin, Zhang Guolao, Cao Guojiu, Tieguai Li, Han Xiangzi, Lan Caihe and He Xiangyu – coming to the Queen Mother of Heaven's birthday party to offer their best wishes.

"Blessing by the God of Fortune", also known as "Promoting to High Officialdom", is a traditional playlet found in the stock repertory of many regional theatrical genres of ancient provenance, functioning as a ritual performance for the gods. The "wusheng" (military male) actor in the martial role of the God of Fortune dons a mask, keeping it in place by biting a small piece of wood on the underside. He holds an official tablet and delivers flamboyant stylised movements, ending with a scroll showing words of blessings.

"A Fairy Returns Her Son to the Mortal Father", is the story of the destitute Dong Yong, who sells himself into bondage to give his father a proper burial. Moved by his filial piety, the Seventh Fairy secretly descends to the mortal world to marry him. When the Imperial Emperor of Heaven learns about this, he orders her to return to heaven, and husband and wife are separated. Dong Yong later earns the honour of Top Scholar in the civil service exam, while the Seventh Fairy gives birth to a son in heaven. By His Majesty's order, Dong will have a parade in his honour for three days. The Seventh Fairy pleads with the Imperial Emperor to let her descend to the mortal world with her six sisters to give Dong their son. Having accomplished this, she returns to heaven. The six fairies perform a transformation stunt

in the "flipping the court dress" technique, which demonstrates the consummate choreography of traditional playlets as well as the exquisite tailoring and costume designs of old-style theatre.

The cast of the performances includes (in order of their Chinese names) Yat Dim-hung, Chin Yin, Wong Hai-wing, Wan Fai-yin, Man Chun-sing, Man Shuet-kau, Man Wah, Wong Chiu-kwan, Wang Kit-ching, Yau Sing-po, Yuen Chi-chung, Ruan Dewen, Johnson Yuen, Ng Lap-hei, Li Pui-yan, Song Hongbo, Lui Hung-kwong, Shem Pak-chuen, Ng Kwok-wa, Shum Tsui-hung, Sum Yung, Miu Dan-ching, Nam Fung, Chui Yuet-ming, Chan On-kiu, Kwok Chun-hang, Chan Kei-ting, Kwok Kai-fai, Chan Wing-kwei, Chan Kim-fung, Chan Chak-lui, Chan Hung-chun, Ko Lai, Leung Sum-yee, Leung Siu-ming, Leung Fei-tung, Cheung Wai-ping, Leung Shuk-ming, Cheung Siu-lun, Huang Yongjie, Vong Seng-pan, Huang Weikun, Wong Yuk-wah, Wan Chi-hung, Wan Yuk-yu, Sun Kim-long, Tang Mi-ling, Liu Kwok-sum, Pui Jun-hin, Lai Yiu-wai, Kim Lun, Lung Koon-tin, Siu Wing-yee, Lo Lai-see, Chung Yat-ming, Tse Siu-ki, Tse Hue-ying, Chung Kui-man, Juliana Kwan, Law Ka-ying, Doris Kwan, Tam Wing-lun and Premium Jiny So.

The Chinese Artists Association of Hong Kong's "The Imperial Emperor of Heaven Holding Court" will be staged at 8.15pm on November 8 and 9 (Friday and Saturday) and at 4.30pm on November 10 (Sunday) at the Grand Theatre, Hong Kong Cultural Centre. The programme, running about 70 minutes, will be performed in "guanhua" (the ancient official dialect of the Central Plains) with Chinese and English surtitles. Tickets priced from \$100 to \$300 are now available at URB TIX (www.urbtix.hk). For telephone credit card bookings, please call 2111 5999. For programme enquiries and concessionary schemes, please call 2268 7325 or visit www.lcsd.gov.hk/CE/CulturalService/Programme/en/chinese_opera/programs_866.html.

Two pre-performance talks (in Cantonese) will be held at 2.30pm on October 13 (Sunday) at AC2, 4/F, Administration Building, Hong Kong Cultural Centre; and at 7.30pm on October 15 (Tuesday) at Function Room, 4/F, Ko Shan Theatre New Wing. Admission is free. Limited seats are available on a first-come, first-served basis.