

Chinese Opera Festival to present eight delightful programmes to mark 10th anniversary

The Chinese Opera Festival (COF), an annual highlight event presented by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department, will mark its 10th anniversary in 2019. Over the years, the COF has presented numerous remarkable productions with distinguished performers to bring the best of Chinese opera to the local stage. This year, there will be eight delightful programmes from different parts of China from June to August.

The Xiqu Centre of the West Kowloon Cultural District will jointly present some of the COF programmes at its venues to bring a new experience to the audience.

The China National Peking Opera Company and the Shanghai Jingju Theatre Company will be featured in the opening programme "Peking Opera Masters North and South" and give three performances. The performers will include Peking opera star duo Yu Kuizhi and Li Shengsu; "hualian" (painted-face) specialist Yang Chi; Shi Yihong, a renowned "qingyi" (virtuous female) from the school of Mei Lanfang; Wang Peiyu, an actress from the school of Yu Shuyan specialising in "laosheng" (old male) roles; and Fu Xiru, an actor from the school of Yu Shuyan specialising in civil and military "laosheng" (old male) roles.

The Jiangsu Kunqu Opera Theatre will bring to Hong Kong a strong cast of talented actors and actresses including Shi Xiaomei, Hu Jinfang and Zhang Jidie, venerable masters of Kunqu opera and Representative Bearers of Kunqu Opera as a National Intangible Cultural Heritage and winners of the Plum Blossom Award for Chinese Theatre, to grace the stage. They will be supported by Kong Aiping and Li Hongliang, also winners of the Plum Blossom Award, in the full version of "Mistake Caused by a Kite" and two operatic excerpts.

Another programme featuring Kunqu opera and Peking opera will be performed by Jingkun Theatre and Shandong Peking Opera Theatre. Well-known local artist Tang Yuen-ha will once again join renowned Kunqu opera artists Cai Zhengren and Lu Yongchang to present excerpts of operatic classics at the Tea House Theatre of the Xiqu Centre in the West Kowloon Cultural District. The setting of this new venue will create a close intimacy between the audience and the performers on stage.

Last but not the least, one of the highlights will feature a number of artists from the Shanghai Yue Opera Group who are National Class One Performers and winners of the Plum Blossom Award for Chinese Theatre, including the vice president of the Group, Qian Huili; the company director of the Number One Troupe of the Group, Fang Yafen; and leading actresses Zhang Ruihong, Shan Yangping and Wang Zhiping from different schools. This

star-studded cast will perform the Group's signature repertoire.

For regional operas, this year's COF will present Liyuan opera and Ou opera, two regional genres different in style but equally appealing on stage. Liyuan opera is one of the oldest theatrical forms in China still extant today. Zeng Jingping, a two-time winner of the Plum Blossom Award, worked with the Experimental Theatre of Liyuan Opera of Fujian to revive an almost lost play, "Zhu Maichen", based on an incomplete edition to restore its original features and charm that emerged 800 years ago. The Wenzhou Opera Research Institute will present three full-length Ou opera productions, "The Legend of the White Snake", "Killing a Dog to Admonish Her Husband" and "Gao Ji and Wu Sanchun". The cast will be led by leading lights in the world of Ou opera today, winner of the Plum Blossom Award for Chinese Theatre Fang Rujiang and National Class One Performer Cai Xiaoqiu. The programme offers a representative selection of civil and martial plays and promises an exciting theatrical experience.

To also mark the 10th anniversary of the inscription of Cantonese opera onto the UNESCO Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, local Cantonese opera virtuosi will collaborate to stage delightful programmes. Veteran Cantonese opera actor Yuen Siu-fai and Chinese music performer Yu Siu-wah will join noted vocalists in song art in "Guangdong Quadrangle – Four Folk Music Types in Concert". The concert will feature four indigenous musical art forms of Guangdong – the unaccompanied singing of "dabayin", narrative singing, Cantonese music and the Cantonese operatic song in classic singing style – within a quadrangle courtyard with Chinese architecture. A new Cantonese opera written by Sun Kim-long, "A Love Poem Stained with Blood", with Sun also acting as part of the cast together with other Cantonese opera veterans and young artists, will also be performed. The production will contribute to the transmission of Cantonese opera.

Details of the programmes are as follows:

Opening programme – Peking Opera Masters North and South: China National Peking Opera Company and Shanghai Jingju Theatre Company
June 13 to 15 and June 17 to 19:
Grand Theatre, Xiqu Centre, West Kowloon Cultural District

A New Cantonese Opera "A Love Poem Stained with Blood"
June 21 and 22: Grand Theatre, Hong Kong Cultural Centre
June 30: Auditorium, Tuen Mun Town Hall

Guangdong Quadrangle – Four Folk Music Types in Concert
June 25 and 26: Theatre, Hong Kong City Hall
July 4 to 7: Tea House Theatre, Xiqu Centre, West Kowloon Cultural District

Experimental Theatre of Liyuan Opera of Fujian
June 28 to 30: Theatre, Hong Kong City Hall

Jiangsu Kunqu Opera Theatre
July 19 to 21: Grand Theatre, Xiqu Centre, West Kowloon Cultural District

Shanghai Yue Opera Group

July 25 to 28: Grand Theatre, Hong Kong Cultural Centre

"The Fragrance of Chrysanthemums and Orchids" – A Close Encounter of Peking Opera and Kunqu Opera: Jingkun Theatre and Shandong Peking Opera Theatre

August 2 to 4: Tea House Theatre, Xiqu Centre, West Kowloon Cultural District

Wenzhou Opera Research Institute

August 16 to 18: Auditorium, Ko Shan Theatre New Wing

This year the COF will continue to hold extension activities such as lectures, film screenings, meet-the-artists sessions and exhibitions in a bid to create a comprehensive cultural experience for the audience as well as the general public.

Tickets for all performances will be available from April 17 onwards at URBTIX (www.urbtix.hk) and the Xiqu Centre Ticket Office. For telephone credit card bookings, please call 2111 5999. For programme enquiries and concessionary schemes, please call 2268 7325 or visit www.cof.gov.hk.