

Fujian Fanghua Yue Opera Troupe to perform beautiful Yue opera at inaugural Chinese Culture Festival in July (with photos)

The Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) has invited the Fujian Fanghua Yue Opera Troupe to come to Hong Kong to perform three Yue opera performances in the Yin style at the inaugural Chinese Culture Festival (CCF). Wang Junan, the fifth-generation disciple of great master Yin Guifang, will collaborate with China Theatre Plum Blossom Award (Plum Blossom Award) winners Zheng Quan and Li Min to stage "the most beautiful Yue opera", "Liu Yong" and classic work "The Jade Dragonfly", respectively. Artists of different generations from the troupe will also gather in Hong Kong to bring opera fans a number of classic excerpts, showcasing the elegant and expressive acting style of the xiaosheng (young male) roles of the Yin School while celebrating the legacy of Yin. This programme is co-presented by the LCSD and the West Kowloon Cultural District Xiqu Centre, and is one of the highlights of the 12th Chinese Opera Festival.

Yue opera, also known as Shaoxing opera, originated from the local dialect and folk music in Shengxian County of Zhejiang Province. It is mainly characterised by the Banqiang style (accompanied by small drum and wood clappers) and various schools of vocal styles. Its performance is similar to that of a song-and-dance drama. Over the past century, Yue opera assimilated the merits of Shaoxing opera, Peking opera, Kunqu opera and drama, fostering the development of performing art in this opera genre.

The first performance will feature "Liu Yong", a play tailor made by the late renowned playwright Wang Renjie for Wang Junan, for which the latter won the Plum Blossom Award. Interweaving six poems penned by the Northern Song poet Liu Yong, the work is filled with an arts and cultural spirit, and is known as "the most beautiful Yue opera ever". Wang Junan meticulously interprets Liu Yong's youthful frivolity and unappreciated talent and skilfully portrays the laosheng (elderly male lead) role in the final act, breaking away from her usual gentlemanly image. Zheng Quan plays the role of Liu Yong's confidante, Chongniang, who is with Liu Yong for a lifetime.

"The Jade Dragonfly", a classic work tailor made for Wang Junan by Yin Guifang, will be staged in the second performance. Wang Junan portrays two different roles in the play, Shen Guisheng and his son, showcasing the difference in maturity as a husband and a son. Li Min, who plays Shen Guisheng's lover, highlights her character's transformation from a girl to a mother. A unique vocal style nicknamed "the deep, deep waves of the Eastern Sea" was specially created for the character Xu Yanzai, Shen Guisheng's son. Opera fans should not miss the climax of the entire play, the scene "Persuading the Three Mothers".

The final performance will be the "Showcase of Yue Opera Excerpt Classics of the Yin Guifang Style", featuring a number of classic excerpts of the Yin School of Yue opera that are rarely performed in Hong Kong. The starring roles of Wang Junan and Li Min in the play "The Lotus Pavilion" from "Questioning His Wife and Demanding to Find His Wife" have many eagerly anticipating the performance. Artists of different generations from the troupe will come together to perform, showcasing the beauty of inheritance.

Details of the three performances are as follows:

"Liu Yong"

Date and time: July 12 (Friday), 7.30pm

Main cast: Wang Junan, Zheng Quan, Chen Cuihong, Zou Meiyong, Mao Xiaoge, Shen Min, Xing Lihua

Synopsis: Ever since failing the civil service examination, Liu Yong has been dallying in the brothels until a letter from home shakes him up. He heads to the capital to take the examination again, but the emperor considers his talent only adequate enough for plebeian tastes and refuses to offer him an official appointment. Upon recommendation by a Jiangnan songstress, Liu Yong is offered a post, but fails again owing to his lack of savoir-faire in the world of officialdom. He finally gets through the examination at an advanced age.

"The Jade Dragonfly"

Date and time: July 13 (Saturday), 7.30pm

Main cast: Wang Junan, Li Min, Chen Cuihong, Wu Minfei, Xing Lihua, Shen Min

Synopsis: Shen Guisheng comes from a prominent family in Suzhou, and has a poor relationship with his wife. One day, he encounters Wang Zhizhen at the Fahua Nunnery, and they fall in love. Zhizhen soon bears Guisheng's child, and on the verge of childbirth, Guisheng falls critically ill. Before he dies, he gives Zhizhen the jade dragonfly, which is a family heirloom. Zhizhen has no choice but to abandon the newborn. The baby is found by chance by Lady Yang, the wife of Minister Xu, who named it Yanzai. After many twists and turns for years, the mother and son are finally reunited.

"Showcase of Yue Opera Excerpt Classics of the Yin Guifang Style"

Date and time: July 14 (Sunday), 2.30pm

Excerpt "Seeking out His Wife at the Mulberry Orchard" from "He Wenxiu"

Main cast: Qiu Jie, Luan Xiaojie, Xing Bier, Mao Xiaoge, Wang Siying

Synopsis: During the Jiaping era of the Ming dynasty, He Wenxiu and his wife are separated after being framed by the malicious Zhang Tang. Three years later, he becomes an imperial inspector, and finds out the whereabouts of his wife during an incognito visit.

Excerpt "Delivering a Message" from "For the Love of the Country"

Main cast: Zhao Ye, Tang Wanying

Synopsis: Lady Mian Jiang of Cao is abducted and made the queen by Lord Xu

Xigong. Palace maid Dai Ying, through the help of maid Ji Di, manages to convince the military officers Zhong Si and Shen Xi to rescue Mian Jiang.

Excerpt "The Cold Moon over the Mountain Pass" from "Prince Xinling"

Main cast: Xing Lihua, Zhu Hongbo

Synopsis: The King of Qin has besieged Handan, and Lord Xingling would like to save Zhao. His follower Hou Ying advises him to first obtain the Tiger Talisman and seize military power in order to defeat the Qin army. Lord Xingling then pleads with Lady Ru Ji to steal the Tiger Talisman.

Excerpt "Wedding Night" from "Questioning His Wife and Demanding to Find His Wife"

Main cast: Wang Siying, Zhang Qianqian

Synopsis: On the wedding night, Liang Yushu showers Xie Yunxia with great affection and tenderness. Despite being moved by Liang's gestures, Xie has to reject him owing to their families' feud.

Excerpt "The Cold Crescent Moon" from "The Desolate Moon in the Lonesome Palace of Liao"

Main cast: Chen Cuihong, Chang Jing, Tang Liyun

Synopsis: Xiao Guanyin, the imperial consort of Emperor Daozong of the Liao State, learns to play an impressive piece titled "Pains of Separation", expressing the wish for the emperor to be sympathetic to the tribulations of these subjects. However, Emperor Daozong falsely accuses Empress Xiao of having an affair with the musician, leading to an unjust verdict.

Excerpt "Fortune-Telling" from "The Prince of the Desert"

Main cast: Mao Lexiao, Zhao Yang

Synopsis: Prince Luolan, after reclaiming his kingdom, misses his beloved Princess Yili. He disguises himself as a fortune-teller carrying a qin (a musical instrument) and searches for her everywhere. One day, Yili hears the melody of the qin and summons Luolan into her tent. Recognising the prince, they are finally reunited.

Excerpt "Reading Romance of the Western Chamber" from "The Dream of the Red Chamber"

Main cast: Qiu Jie, Yu Aili

Synopsis: After reading the "Romance of the Western Chamber" together, Baoyu expresses his admiration for Daiyu through the texts in the novel. Daiyu accepts his love, and the two no longer need to conceal their feelings towards each other.

Excerpt "Judge Bao Begs for Forgiveness" from "Chisang Town"

Main cast: Shen Min, Fang Xiaoying, Liu Qiuchun, Xing Yujing

Synopsis: After Judge Bao sentences his nephew Bao Mian to death, his sister-in-law, Wu Miaozhen, blames him for not considering their family relationship. Bao explains to her the need to adhere to a righteous principle. Wu eventually forgives him.

Excerpt "Fortune-Telling" from "He Wenxiu"

Main cast: Mao Xiaoge, Wu Bingyao, Zhang Haiyan, Zhao Si

Synopsis: He Wenxiu, reaching his official position as an imperial inspector, visits Haining in disguise to privately investigate the whereabouts of his wife. Since Zhang Tang is still at large, he must hide his real identity. Instead, he disguises himself as a fortune teller and writes a plea for justice on his wife's behalf.

Excerpt "The Lotus Pavilion" from "Questioning His Wife and Demanding to Find His Wife"

Main cast: Wang Junan, Li Min

Synopsis: After their marriage, Xie Yunxia grew increasingly distant from Liang Yushu, leaving him puzzled. On the night of the Mid-Autumn Festival, Liang questions his wife subtly. Though Xie is touched by his sincerity, she still cannot overcome her grievances over her parents' murder. Eventually, she retires to her room in silence.

The Fujian Fanghua Yue Opera Troupe was founded by Yue opera master Yin Guifang in Shanghai in 1946 and subsequently relocated to Fujian. Over the years, the troupe has groomed numerous young talent, and among them, Li Min, Wang Junan, Chen Liyu and Zheng Quan have won Plum Blossom Awards. It has also performed in New Zealand, South Africa, Hungary, Indonesia and other places, and received wide acclaim.

The three performances will be held at the Grand Theatre of Xiqu Centre, West Kowloon Cultural District. Lyrics and dialogues are with Chinese and English surtitles. Tickets priced at \$200, \$300, \$400 and \$500 are now available at URBTIX (www.urbtix.hk) and at the Xiqu Centre Ticket Office, West Kowloon Cultural District. For telephone bookings, please call 3166 1288. For programme enquiries and concessionary schemes, please call 2268 7325 or visit www.ccf.gov.hk/en/programme/fujian-fanghua-yue-opera-troupe/.

The CCF, presented by the Culture, Sports and Tourism Bureau and organised by the LCSD's Chinese Culture Promotion Office, aims to enhance the public's appreciation of Chinese culture and cultivate citizens' national identity and cultural confidence. The inaugural CCF is held from June to September. Through different performing arts programmes in various forms and related extension activities, including selected programmes of the Chinese Opera Festival, exemplary local arts projects recognised by the China National Arts Fund, performing arts programmes from arts and cultural organisations, film screenings, exhibitions, talks and more, the festival allows members of the public and visitors to experience the broad and profound Chinese culture with a view to promoting Chinese culture and patriotic education as well as enhancing national identity amongst the people of Hong Kong, making contributions to the steadfast and successful implementation of "one country, two systems". For details, please visit the CCF website www.ccf.gov.hk.

The LCSD has long been promoting Chinese history and culture through organising an array of programmes and activities to enable the public to learn more about the broad and profound Chinese culture. For more information, please visit www.lcsd.gov.hk/en/ccpo/index.html.

