

# Inaugural Chinese Culture Festival to present two North Road Bangzi opera classics from Shanxi (with photos)

¶¶¶¶¶The inaugural Chinese Culture Festival (CCF), organised by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD), will present two North Road Bangzi opera plays set in Tang dynasty, "Sobering Up after Being Drunk" and "Dotting the Eye of a Painted Dragon", by the Academy of Xinzhou Studies, in June. The two plays will be performed by the China Theatre Plum Blossom Award (Plum Blossom Award) winner and bearer of the National Intangible Cultural Heritage of North Road Bangzi opera, Yang Zhongyi, as well as the winner of the Plum Blossom Award and Wenhua Award, Cheng Fengying, respectively. It is also the first time for the Academy to perform in Hong Kong. This programme is one of the highlights of the 12th Chinese Opera Festival.

¶¶¶¶¶Bangzi is one of the four major vocal styles in Chinese opera and the North Road Bangzi opera is one of the four Bangzi opera genres of Shanxi with a history spanning more than 300 years. The regional genre was inscribed on the first list of Intangible Cultural Heritage at the National Level in 2006, and is well known for its sonorous and impassioned vocals. The plays in its repertory are often inspired by historic epic tales and classical novels, and are rich in folk colours. The language is accessible, fully reflecting local characteristics.

¶¶¶¶¶The first performance is "Sobering Up after Being Drunk", which marks a breakthrough in North Road Bangzi opera as it moves away from the usually serious style to become comedic. The imperial family of Emperor Tang Taizong and the Prime Minister, Fang Xuanling, in the play express their quick wit as they engage in their interactions. During the performance, Yang, who acts as Prime Minister Fang, will showcase the contrast between Fang's submissive obedience to imperial authority when sober and his transformation into an articulate and forceful Prime Minister when drunk, through stunts such as "kicking of the robes" and "turning of the headgear". He will also demonstrate his solid physical training and robust singing style, a perfect showcase of what makes the laosheng (old male) role in North Road Bangzi opera exceptional.

¶¶¶¶¶The second performance, "Dotting the Eye of a Painted Dragon", is a Plum Blossom Award-winning work performed by Cheng, who plays the young and talented Emperor Taizong of Tang. She incorporates martial arts skills when performing the stunt of "dragging feet" on a bridge, showing how the Emperor maintains his regal bearing despite his troubling circumstances. There are also comedic scenes with the local tyrant, accompanied by string and percussion music, showcasing the charm of North Road Bangzi opera.

¶¶¶¶¶Details of the two performances are as follows:

## "Sobering Up after Being Drunk"

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Date and time: June 21 (Friday), 7.30pm

Main cast: Yang Zhongyi, Jia Fentao, Zhang Yuping, Feng Huiling, Zhang Zhiqiang, Du Rui

Synopsis: The Emperor Taizong of Tang agrees to restore the dilapidated Luoyang Palace as the princess's dowry, but the Empress opposes such extravagance. She gifts the submissive and timid Prime Minister Fang Xuanling a bottle of wine, asking him to advise the Emperor against the dowry issue. Fang is emboldened by the wine and delivers his admonishment, passionately criticising the Emperor, and is detained in the palace for introspection. The Empress lies to the Emperor that Fang has died. Shocked and remorseful at this news, the Emperor bestows imperial wine in an attempt to encourage Fang to continue advising him after he learns the truth.

## "Dotting the Eye of a Painted Dragon"

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Date and time: June 22 (Saturday), 7.30pm

Main cast: Cheng Fengying, Jia Fentao, Guo Jing, Wang Maolin, Li Ruixing, Liu Hongliang, Du Rui, Kang Runquan

Synopsis: The Emperor Taizong of Tang, who is diligent in governing the country, orders officials to write proposals for governance. A scholar named Ma Zhou takes this opportunity to present the Emperor with a painting of a dragon with no pupils to criticise the flaws of the time. He then travels to Xinfeng, where he meets again Si Niang, his puppy love. Impressed by Ma's proposal, the Emperor thus travels incognito to search for Ma, during which he is taken advantage of by the corrupt county magistrate Zhao Yuankai. In the end, the Emperor punishes Zhao and recruits Ma successfully, but Si Niang dies with a grudge after dotting the dragon's eyes with her own blood to protect her love.

€€€The Academy of Xinzhou Studies is an enterprise under the direct administration of the Xinzhou Municipal Government. It was established in 2020 as part of cultural system reform in Xinzhou. The Academy is responsible for theoretical research on the city's drama, music and more. It carries research and creation, holds exhibitions and showcases, as well as promotes, safeguards and ensures the transmission of the legacies of North Road Bangzi opera, folk songs and other folk-cultural arts.

€€€The two performances will be held at the Theatre of Hong Kong City Hall. Each performance will run for about two hours and 30 minutes, including an intermission of 15 minutes. Lyrics and dialogue are with Chinese and English surtitles. Tickets priced at \$180, \$280 and \$380 are now available at URB TIX ([www.urbtix.hk](http://www.urbtix.hk)). 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/academy-of-xinzhou-studies/](http://www.ccf.gov.hk/en/programme/academy-of-xinzhou-studies/).

€€€A meet-the-artists session entitled "The Artistic Features of North Road Bangzi Opera" (in Putonghua) will be held at 7.30pm on June 20 (Thursday) at AC2, 4/F, Administration Building, Hong Kong Cultural Centre. The speakers include performers of the Academy Yang Zhongyi, Cheng Fengying,

Jia Fentao, Zhang Yuping, Feng Huiling and Li Ruixing, while Chinese opera researcher Chan Chun-miu will be the moderator. Admission is free and online registration is required ([www.lcsd.gov.hk/CE/CulturalService/Programme/en/chinese\\_opera/programs\\_1716.html#tab\\_13\\_0](http://www.lcsd.gov.hk/CE/CulturalService/Programme/en/chinese_opera/programs_1716.html#tab_13_0)). Limited seats are available on a first-come, first-served basis.

The programme will also feature a session under the "Chinese Culture for All: A Special Performance Series" at 2.30pm on June 23 (Sunday) at the Theatre of Hong Kong City Hall, with free admission specially for local primary and secondary school students. Performed by artists from the Academy of Xinzhou Studies, the traditional play "Father and Son Both Received Appointment" will give students a chance to learn more about and appreciate the artistic style of Chinese regional opera so as to experience the wonders of Chinese culture and arts. Interested schools can call 2268 7325 for details.

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 will be 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](http://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](http://www.lcsd.gov.hk/en/ccpo/index.html).



