

Large-scale Cantonese opera showcase under bamboo theatre to reappear in urban area with spectacular performances to stage at Victoria Park in September and October (with photos)

The grand finale of the Chinese Opera Festival (COF) 2023, "Blessing This Land – Cantonese Opera Showcase under the Bamboo Theatre at Victoria Park" organised by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD), will be staged from September 23 to October 8. A large-scale bamboo theatre will be erected at Victoria Park, where four local Cantonese opera troupes will stage multiple exciting repertoires by renowned artists, bringing back the local culture of bamboo theatre in urban areas of the past, and celebrating the National Day and Mid-Autumn Festival with well wishes for the prosperity and peace of Hong Kong.

The Chinese title for this programme is a famous line by Lu You, a renowned poet during the Song dynasty. He wrote about a prosperous era when people lived well, cultural activities thrived, and performance venues could be found everywhere. The vision just fits in well with the format of this Cantonese opera bamboo-theatre showcase. The showcase will raise the curtain by the Chinese Artists Association of Hong Kong with the traditional set piece "The Imperial Emperor of Heaven Holding Court" as an opener for the matinee show, which symbolises the prayer for heaven's blessings on the mortals and for the good of Hong Kong. Nearly 100 local veteran Chinese opera artists and talented young stars will perform onstage together for this opening performance. Other traditional playlets, including "Eight Immortals Bestowing Longevity", "Blessing by the God of Fortune" and "A Fairy Returns Her Son to the Mortal Father" will also be performed during the matinee show. After that, performances of regular repertoire will be presented for three consecutive evenings, namely "Green Bamboo Temple", "Liulang Executing His Son" and "Executing the Duke's Second Brother" (in classic singing style), as well as "Redressing Multiple Grievances", respectively.

The showcase will continue with captivating performances by the Dragon and Phoenix Cantonese Opera Troupe that will start with the traditional set piece "Prime Minister of Six States" that demonstrates their strong cast. Tong Tik-sang's masterpiece "White Rabbit Reunion" and two stunning comedies, "A Comedy of Mistaken Heroes" and "Two Heroic Families", will also be featured to share joyful evenings with audiences during the Mid-Autumn Festival period. They will be followed by the Spring Glory Cantonese Opera Workshop's performances which will begin with "Havoc at Guang Chang Long". Two classic works of the late Mak Bing-wing and Fung Wong Nui, "Romance of the Phoenix Chamber" and "Return from Battle for His Love", will also be featured which will certainly prompt the collective memories of the audience.

The finale of the programme by the Golden Dragon Troupe will feature three fun-filled Cantonese opera plays namely "Golden Phoenix and Silver Dragon", "The Impetuous Generals" and "A 'Mismatched' Couple", also famous pieces of Mak and Fung, and conclude the Cantonese opera bamboo-theatre showcase with a happy ending.

For programme dates and details of "Blessing This Land – Cantonese Opera Showcase under the Bamboo Theatre at Victoria Park", please see the Annex. Each performance will run for about three hours and 15 minutes, including an intermission of 15 minutes. Lyrics and dialogue are with Chinese and English surtitles. Tickets for each performance priced at \$140 and \$180 will be available from August 15 (Tuesday) onwards at URBTIX (www.urbtix.hk). For telephone bookings, please call 3166 1288. For programme enquiries and concessionary schemes, please call 2268 7325 or visit www.cof.gov.hk/2023/en/blessthisland.html.

To enable members of the public to have a better understanding of the artistic characteristics of bamboo theatre and Cantonese opera plays staged under the bamboo sheds, the LCSD is staging an exhibition entitled "Bamboo Theatres and Chinese Opera under the Bamboo Shed – A Hong Kong Cultural Symbol" at the foyer exhibition area of the Hong Kong Cultural Centre from now until August 24. The exhibition area will simulate the wardrobe area at the backstage of a traditional bamboo theatre, where real wardrobe boxes (wooden boxes for storing actors' costumes and headdresses, etc) will be displayed. Visitors can get a closer look at some little-known facts about the backstage area of a bamboo theatre. Photo and textual panels will also be displayed to illustrate the relationship between the bamboo theatre and the opera of the bamboo sheds. The exhibition will be relocated to the Sha Tin Town Hall from August 27 to September 10, and the Arts Resource Centre on 10/F, Hong Kong Central Library from September 6 to October 10 respectively.

In addition, three free seminars will be organised to introduce the building technique of bamboo theatre in Hong Kong, the legacy of opera in the bamboo theatre as well as experience sharing of performing in bamboo theatres by renowned Cantonese opera artist Loong Koon-tin. A number of educational programmes on bamboo theatres and Cantonese opera will be specially arranged for teachers and students for the promotion of Chinese culture to the next generation. Meanwhile, the Hong Kong Heritage Museum and Ko Shan Theatre will organise Cantonese opera performances and talks in support of the Cantonese opera bamboo-theatre showcase. For details, please visit related websites.

â€‹The LCSD has all along promoted Chinese history and culture. Apart from the bamboo theatre performance, the Mid-Autumn Lantern Carnivals 2023 with fascinating programmes will be held in Victoria Park, Sha Tin Park and Tuen Mun Park from September 23 to October 2. Meanwhile, the Chinese Film Panorama 2023 will be launched on September 27. Members of the public can make use of these occasions to learn more about the characteristics of the Chinese culture.

