

Law Ka-ying to perform in his new Cantonese opera "The Asura Judgment"

Cantonese opera virtuoso Law Ka-ying's latest Cantonese opera work, "The Asura Judgment", adapted from "Rashomon", will be staged in June and July. The music designer is Tam Siu-wai and the lighting designer is Leo Siu. Apart from Law playing the roles of playwright, actor and artistic director, the production has a strong cast including Ng Chin-fung, Li Qiuyuan, Chan Hung-chun, Lui Hung-kwong, Wan Yuk-yu, Cheng Wing-mui, Li Pui-yan, Chong Yuen-sin, Chan Ka-ming, Hong Hai, Wang Zhiliang and Vong Seng-pan.

For Law Ka-ying, Akira Kurosawa is a role model – someone to admire and learn from. His films combine the quintessence of Chinese and Western cultures, illuminating deep truths for the audience to ruminate on. "Rashomon" is one of his masterpieces that left an indelible impression on Law.

Law said, "Adapting it for the stage was no easy task. I had to push myself to the limit, as the storyline of 'Rashomon' is too limited to hold the interest of Cantonese opera fans, who tend to be more invested in the plot development. To turn this story into a Cantonese opera, we had to break down the story and put it back together in new ways that serve the art form. We had to break free from the usual stage setting and lighting in traditional Chinese theatre, and keep changing time and space in order to guide the audience into grasping the essence of the story with the state of mind that one would have when watching a film or TV drama."

The story of "The Asura Judgment" takes place towards the end of the Ming dynasty. A murder is committed at a small seaside county in the south. Dongfang Yu and his wife Zhu are passing through Tiger Tail Mountain when they are accosted by the solitary brigand Huyan Bao. Bao sees the woman and immediately lusts after her, and he forces himself upon her after restraining her husband. By a curious twist of fate, he passes out after drinking poisoned water from a river, and is captured by bailiffs. A farmer finds Yu's body while a monk saves Zhu, and they both make reports to the authorities.

However, different stories lie behind the situation. Bao admits that it was all his doing and proudly pleads guilty. However, Zhu tearfully recalls that Yu had refused to forgive her after she was raped, so she drew her dagger to threaten him. She fainted, and woke to find her husband dead. She was about to commit suicide by throwing herself into the river, but was rescued by the monk. The magistrate enlists the help of a medium to take Yu's statement from the netherworld. Yu pours his heart out: he felt helpless at being unable to save Zhu from being raped, and it also tore him apart to see his wife showing an attachment for the brigand. Consumed with shame, he slit his own throat with the dagger. The farmer Ou Yang, however, tells a different version of the story: after violating Zhu, Bao went down on his knees and begged for her forgiveness, promising to turn over a new leaf and

stay by her side forever. She told Bao that she would go with him if he killed her husband. On the other hand, she asked Yu to prove that he was a man by killing the brigand. The two men fought to prove their courage, and it ended with Yu dead.

Law takes the role of the monk Hongding, who laments, "What is true, and what is false? Can we still bring ourselves to trust others? Without trust among people, wouldn't life be the same as living in hell? Where has our humanity gone?" Suddenly, the cries of an abandoned baby are heard from behind the Asura Palace. Cantonese opera lovers are invited to find out the conclusion.

Presented by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department, A New Cantonese Opera "The Asura Judgment" will be staged at 7.30pm on June 22 and 23 (Tuesday and Wednesday) at the Grand Theatre of the Hong Kong Cultural Centre, and at 2.30pm on July 18 (Sunday) at the Auditorium of Tuen Mun Town Hall. Tickets priced at \$180 to \$480 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_1133.html.

Meet-the-artist sessions will be held before and after the performances. Details are as follows:

June 7 (Monday), 7.30pm

AC1, Level 4, Administration Building, Hong Kong Cultural Centre

Speaker: Law Ka-ying (in Cantonese)

Telephone registration only at 2268 7267 starting at 10am on May 24 (Monday). Each person can reserve one seat for the talk. Limited seats are available on a first-come, first-served basis.

July 18 (Sunday), after the show

Auditorium, Tuen Mun Town Hall

Speaker: Law Ka-ying (in Cantonese)

No reservation is required. Ticket holders will be admitted with priority. Limited seats are available on a first-come, first-served basis.