

# Original cast of “‘The Peony Pavilion’ – The Youth Version” to perform at Chinese Opera Festival in July (with photos)

After a 17-year hiatus, the Suzhou Kunqu Opera Theatre of Jiangsu is returning to Hong Kong upon the invitation of the Leisure and Cultural Services Department for a rerun of "'The Peony Pavilion' – The Youth Version", a classic in Kunqu opera, featuring the original cast. The full-length programme, which consists of three parts, will be staged at the Chinese Opera Festival (COF) this summer for three consecutive nights starting from July 28 for a total of eight hours. The acclaimed production seamlessly blends the traditional art of Kunqu with modern aesthetics to recreate the 400-year-old romantic love legacy. The programme has received an overwhelming response from theatregoers, and some of the performances are almost sold out. Those who are interested are reminded to buy tickets as early as possible.

Renowned novelist Pai Hisen-yung has been the chief producer and artistic director of "'The Peony Pavilion' – The Youth Version", with top Kunqu performing artists Wang Shiyu and the late Zhang Jiqing as artistic consultants. China Theatre Plum Blossom Award winners Shen Fengying and Yu Jiulin will revisit the Hong Kong stage to bring opera fans the touching love story of Du Liniang and Liu Mengmei that transcends death.

"The Peony Pavilion" is the magnum opus of the great Ming dynasty dramatist, Tang Xianzu. "'The Peony Pavilion' – The Youth Version" has condensed the original play into 27 scenes and will be presented in three parts: "Love in a Dream", "Love between a Mortal and a Ghost" and "Love in This World". Not only does the music base itself on the vocal styles of the original version and traditional set tunes, but the original lyrics are also fully adopted. Meanwhile, the production is an ingenious mix of music, singing and dance. While it retains the poetic finesse of Kunqu, its staging seamlessly blends classical charm with modern appeal, as shown in the portrayal of characters and in the technical aspects, which mark a synthesis of heritage and innovation, and instil the joy and life of youth into the art of Kunqu.

Details of the three performances are as follows:

Part one: "Love in a Dream"

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Date and time: July 28 (Friday), 7.30pm

Synopsis: The story takes place in the Southern Song period. Du Liniang, daughter of Prefect of Nan'an Du Bao, is a quiet and sweet beauty. One spring day, while she goes to the back garden and sees the beautiful spring scene, her amorous heart is awakened. She falls asleep and dreams of having an

amorous encounter with a handsome scholar at the Peony Pavilion. She wakes up and begins to pine for the elusive love, so much so that she soon dies.

#### Part two: "Love between a Mortal and a Ghost"

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Date and time: July 29 (Saturday), 7.30pm

Synopsis: There is a scholar named Liu Mengmei, who finds a portrait of Liniang and expresses his admiration for her beauty. The spirit of Liniang is invoked, and despite the rift between the worlds of the living and the dead, the two become husband and wife. Liu goes to Liniang's tomb to resurrect her out of true love, and Liniang returns to life.

#### Part three: "Love in this World"

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Date and time: July 30 (Sunday), 7.30pm

Synopsis: But no sooner is the couple enjoying their newly married life than they are forced to part. Liu wades through thick and thin to find Liniang's father, only to be treated as a tomb raider, tortured and beaten. Later, Liu comes first in the national civil examination. At the imperial court, he is highly honoured by the emperor, and the whole family is reunited.

As a professional performing arts company from the birthplace of the Kunqu art form, the Suzhou Kunqu Opera Theatre of Jiangsu stands out among the other troupes through its efforts to uphold the age-old traditional format and the unadulterated style and features of Kunqu opera. The troupe has trained various Kunqu opera stars over the years. Among them, Wang Fang won the high honour of being presented with the China Theatre Plum Blossom Award – Second-time Around. Shen Fengying, Yu Jiulin and Zhou Xuefeng have won the Plum Blossom Award. In the last decade or more, the troupe has created various signature productions, making landmark achievements in the Kunqu opera circle and even the cultural milieu in general.

The three performances will be held at the Grand Theatre of Xiqu Centre, West Kowloon Cultural District. Each performance will run for about two hours and 30 minutes, including an intermission of 15 minutes. Lyrics and dialogues are with Chinese and English surtitles. Tickets priced at \$180, \$280, \$380 and \$480 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 the programme website [www.cof.gov.hk/2023/en/kunqu.html](http://www.cof.gov.hk/2023/en/kunqu.html).

A Meet-the-Artists session entitled "The Timeless 'Peony Pavilion'" (in Putonghua) will be held at 7.30pm on July 27 (Thursday) at Seminar Hall, 2/F Xiqu Centre, West Kowloon Cultural District. The speakers include Pai Hsien-yung, Wang Shiyu, Yu Jiulin and Shen Fengying, while Chinese opera researcher Chan Chun-miu will be the moderator. Admission is free with limited seats available on a first-come, first-served basis. Details can be found on the above-mentioned programme website.

In addition, a demonstration lecture entitled "From Scholar to King – on the Acting in 'The Peony Pavilion and The Prophecies of Taoist Monk Iron Headgear'" (in Putonghua), which is co-ordinated by the Hong Kong Institute

for Promotion of Chinese Culture and the Jao Tsung-I Academy, will be held at 7pm on July 31 (Monday) at Theatre (Block I, Middle Zone), Jao Tsung-I Academy. The speaker is national-class performer of the Suzhou Kunqu Opera Theatre of Jiangsu Zhou Xuefeng. Zhou as well as the troupe's performers Wen Yi and Shu Liang will be the demonstrators, while Professor Cheng Pei-kai will be the moderator. Admission is free with limited seats available by registration. Interested parties can register online starting from June 30. Details can be found on [www.jtia.hk](http://www.jtia.hk).

Since its inception in 2010, the COF has curated quality operatic programmes with the aim of promoting the artistry and culture of Chinese traditional opera. The COF 2023 will once again bring together an excellent line-up of Chinese opera troupes to stage nine quality operatic programmes covering a variety of theatrical genres, including Peking opera, Qu opera, Sichuan opera, Han opera, Cantonese opera, Wu opera, Kunqu opera and Yue opera, from June to October, showcasing the splendour of Chinese operatic art in all its glory. For more details, please visit [www.cof.gov.hk](http://www.cof.gov.hk).

