

Performances by China National Peking Opera Company and Shanghai Jingju Theatre Company to open Chinese Opera Festival

The 10th Chinese Opera Festival will commence in June with performances by the China National Peking Opera Company and the Shanghai Jingju Theatre Company. The opening programme "Peking Opera Masters North and South" will be staged at the newly opened Xiqu Centre in the West Kowloon Cultural District.

Yu Kuizhi, Peking Opera's foremost living master, will be joined by Li Shengsu, bearer of the tradition handed down by Mei Lanfang, in leading the China National Peking Opera Company for three evenings. Special guest artist Yang Chi, Director of the Dalian Peking Opera Company and a disciple of Yuan Shihai, will join the cast in "The Boar Forest", an iconic masterpiece of Li Shaochun. The next evening, the 1923 classic "The Great Beauty Xi Shi", which is widely celebrated as an exemplar of Mei Lanfang's contributions to the genre in the last century, will be staged. The third evening will feature "Mu Guiying Taking Command", which has been heralded as Mei's final masterpiece, the epitome of four decades of his extraordinary artistry.

The Shanghai Jingju Theatre Company will follow closely with three evenings of distinctive programmes. Wang Peiyu, a renowned female artist in the Yu (Shuyan) tradition of "laosheng" (old male) roles, will perform "Vermilion Birthmark". Two other classic excerpts: "Water Nymph of Sizhou City", highlighting a female warrior, and "Chisang Town", pitching painted-face performance against old female roles, will also be staged. The second evening will present two scenes from "Yu Tang Chun" with Shi Yihong, a renowned "qingyi" (virtuous female) in the Mei tradition, as Su San, a destitute woman whose love remains steadfast in the face of death. The first half of this double bill will feature Gai Jiaotian's popular martial arts work "Wu Song Fighting in the Tavern". The final evening will offer quintessential Shanghai-style Peking opera in "Seven Heroes and Five Gallants", a "tour de force" of expert singing and martial arts skills, in which each role enjoys a moment in the limelight, capped with a breathtaking display of "liantan", an extended vocal passage shared by seven actors on stage. This lineup provides a panorama of the outstanding artistry of northern and southern masters of China's national art form.

The performances will have Chinese and English surtitles. The detailed schedule is as follows:

June 13 (Thursday), 7.30pm

"The Boar Forest" by China National Peking Opera Company

June 14 (Friday), 7.30pm

"The Great Beauty Xi Shi" by China National Peking Opera Company

June 15 (Saturday), 7.30pm

"Mu Guiying Taking Command" by China National Peking Opera Company

June 17 (Monday), 7.30pm

"Water Nymph of Sizhou City", "Chisang Town" and "Vermilion Birthmark" by Shanghai Jingju Theatre Company

June 18 (Tuesday) 7.30pm

"Wu Song Fighting in the Tavern" plus "Su San Escorted to Trial" and "Trial by Three Magistrates" from "Yu Tang Chun" by Shanghai Jingju Theatre Company

June 19 (Wednesday) 7.30pm

"Seven Heroes and Five Gallants" by Shanghai Jingju Theatre Company

All performances will be staged at the Grand Theatre of the Xiqu Centre in the West Kowloon Cultural District. Tickets priced at \$180, \$280, \$380 and \$480 are now available at URBTIX (www.urbtix.hk) and the Xiqu Centre Ticket Office. For telephone credit card bookings, please call 2111 5999. For programme enquiries and concessionary schemes, please call 2268 7325 or visit www.cof.gov.hk/2019/en/peking.html.

There will be two meet-the-artists sessions to be held at AC2, Level 4, Administration Building, Hong Kong Cultural Centre, with free admission. Limited seats will be available on a first-come, first-served basis. Details are as follows:

June 12 (Wednesday), 7.30pm

Topic: An analysis of Peking opera repertoires "The Boar Forest", "The Great Beauty Xi Shi" and "Mu Guiying Taking Command"

Speaker: Sun Guiyuan (National Class One Director), Yu Kuizhi, Li Shengsu, Yang Chi and Du Zhe

Moderator: Chan Chun-miu (Chinese opera researcher)

June 16 (Sunday), 7.30pm

Topic: Classic acts – Shanghai Jingju Theatre Company's interpretations of Peking opera classics

Speaker: Shi Yihong, Wang Peiyu and Fu Xiru

Moderator: Chan Chun-miu