

Shanghai Kunqu Opera Troupe to perform "The Palace of Eternal Life" (with photo)

The Chinese Opera Festival, an annual event presented by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department, will open in June with "The Palace of Eternal Life" by the Shanghai Kunqu Opera Troupe.

The Shanghai Kunqu Opera Troupe debuted the full-length version of "The Palace of Eternal Life" in Shanghai in 2007. Last year, the Troupe once again staged this classic production across major Chinese cities with its full cast and received remarkable acclaim.

The gem of Kunqu opera is now being brought to the stage in Hong Kong with a full cast of elite actors from different generations and cohorts. Kunqu opera virtuoso Cai Zhengren will lead a cast of younger actors including Li An, Shen Yili, Yu Bin, Luo Chenxue and Ni Xuhao to perform in this opening programme.

The timeless legend "The Palace of Eternal Life" is an everlasting classic in Kunqu opera. The work, written by dramatist Hong Sheng of the Qing dynasty, was inspired by "The Song of Everlasting Regret" by poet Bai Juyi of the Tang dynasty and the Za opera work "The Firmiana Rain" by dramatist Bai Pu of the Yuan dynasty. Based on the beautiful yet sad love story of Emperor Xuanzong of Tang and Imperial Concubine Yang Yuhuan, the play is known as a grand epic of Chinese opera. The Shanghai Kunqu Opera Troupe arranges and presents the play in four chapters to feature two parallel plot lines: the love between the Emperor and Lady Yang, and the An Lushan Rebellion. While the four chapters are relatively independent, they also dovetail with one another. Collections of body movements, vocal styles and music are created that are not performed in usual excerpt performances, demonstrating creativity in every aspect. The Troupe strives for perfection and excellence in terms of showmanship, music, set design, lighting, costumes, styling and props in this rerun.

Details of the performances are as follows:

June 14 (Thursday), 7.30pm
Chapter One "The Pledge"
Main cast: Ni Xuhao and Luo Chenxue

June 15 (Friday), 7.30pm
Chapter Two "The Dance of the Rainbow and Feathery Garments"
Main cast: Li An and Shen Yili

June 16 (Saturday), 7.30pm
Chapter Three "The Mutiny at Mawei"

Main cast: Cai Zhengren (former part)/Li An (latter part) and Yu Bin

June 17 (Sunday), 2.30pm
Chapter Four "The Lover's Reunion"
Main cast: Li An and Yu Bin

All performances will be staged at the Grand Theatre of the Hong Kong Cultural Centre. Tickets priced at \$150, \$250, \$350 and \$450 are now available at URBTIX (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.cof.gov.hk.

Talks and a meet-the-artists session will be held for this programme. Admission is free, and limited seats will be available on a first-come, first-served basis.

"Talks on the Art of Kunqu Opera" (in Cantonese) featuring seasoned Kunqu opera researcher Cheung Lai-chun as speaker will be held at AC2, Level 4, Administration Building, Hong Kong Cultural Centre, with details as follows:

May 12 (Saturday), 3pm
Topic: The Jealous Imperial Concubine – An Analysis of "Complaints in the Pavilion" from "The Palace of Eternal Life"

May 19 (Saturday), 3pm
Topic: The Emperor's Tears – An Analysis of "Lamenting the Statue" from "The Palace of Eternal Life"

A meet-the-artists session, "Our Journey through 'The Palace of Eternal Life'" (in Putonghua), featuring Cai Zhengren, Li An, Shen Yili, Yu Bin, Luo Chenxue and Ni Xuhao will be held at 7.30pm on June 13 (Wednesday) at AC2, Level 4, Administration Building, Hong Kong Cultural Centre. The moderator will be Chinese opera researcher Chan Chun-miu.

