

Shanghai Yue Opera Group to perform with all-star cast

The Leisure and Cultural Services Department's Chinese Opera Festival will present four Yue opera performances in July, with the Shanghai Yue Opera Group staging an all-star cast featuring National Class One Performers and winners of the Plum Blossom Award for Chinese Theatre including Qian Huili of the Xu (Yulan) school; Fang Yafen of the Yuan (Xuefen) school; Zhang Ruihong of the Fan (Ruijuan) school; and Shan Yangping and Wang Zhiping of the Wang (Wenjuan) school.

The star cast and their signature repertoire offer an exciting showcase for Yue opera's dulcet melodies, lyricism and aesthetic appeal, with the various schools each boasting its own unique charm. There will be four full-length traditional classics – "Romance of the West Chamber", "Meng Lijun", "Tale of the West Garden" and "Southeast the Peacocks Fly".

"Romance of the West Chamber", a love story with an elegant libretto, is adapted from the "zaju" play of the same title by Wang Shifu of the Yuan period. With an emphasis on poetic ambience, the company's staging of this classic in the repertoire of the Yuan school has been hailed as one of the most faithful adaptations of the original play among contemporary works. "Meng Lijun", a comedy with an imperial court setting, follows the repertoire of the Wang school. The libretto is based on the the "tanci" lyrics of "Eternal Happiness" by the poetess Chen Duansheng of the Qing period. The light-hearted comedy, "Tale of the West Garden", is the signature play of the legendary duo of Yue Opera, Xu Yulan and Wang Wenjuan. The script is based on the work of the same title by dramatist Wu Bing from the late Ming period, as well as the Kunqu Opera adaptation by dramatist Bei Geng in the 1960's. The play moves at a lively pace and is presented with graceful staging and design. The story of "Southeast the Peacocks Fly" originates from "An Ancient Poem Written for the Wife of Jiao Zhongqing" of the East Han period and is in the stock repertoire of the Fan and Fu (Quanxiang) schools. The arias, "The Lonely Chamber after That Person is Gone" and "A Fond Farewell", have become classics and remain popular to this day.

Performances (with Chinese and English surtitles) details are as follows:

July 25 (Thursday); 7.30pm
"Romance of the West Chamber"
Main cast: Fang Yafen, Qian Huili

July 26 (Friday); 7.30pm
"Meng Lijun"
Main cast: Shan Yangping, Zhang Ruihong, Ding Xiaowa

July 27 (Saturday); 7.30pm

"Tale of the West Garden"

Main cast: Qian Huili, Huang Hui, Wang Zhiping

July 28 (Sunday); 2.30pm

"Southeast the Peacocks Fly"

Main cast: Zhang Ruihong, Chen Ying

Performances will be staged at the Grand Theatre, Hong Kong Cultural Centre. 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/yue.html.

A meet-the-artists session entitled "A Guided Appreciation of the Artistic Features of Yue Opera Classics" will be held at 7.30pm on July 24 (Wednesday) at AC2, Level 4, Administration Building, Hong Kong Cultural Centre. Speakers include Qian Huili, Shan Yangping, Zhang Ruihong, Fang Yafen and Wang Zhiping as well as Elbe Lau as moderator. Admission is free. Limited seats will be available on a first-come, first-served basis.