

Chinese Culture Festival 2025 to focus on Xi'an by presenting "China's oldest rock 'n' roll" Qinqiang in Hong Kong in July (with photos)

The Chinese Culture Festival (CCF) 2025, organised by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD), has designated Xi'an as its focal city this year. The Festival will gather six renowned Qinqiang artists and China Theatre Plum Blossom Award (Plum Blossom Award) winners, including Dou Fengqin, Qi Aiyun, Wang Xincang, Qu Qiaozhe, Zhang Tao and Tan Jianxun, in Hong Kong this July. They will lead the emerging talent from the Xi'an Performing Arts Group's Youth Experimental Troupe of Qinqiang Opera to perform Qinqiang classic plays "Returning to Jingzhou" and "Zhou Ren on the Way Home", showcasing Qinqiang's unique "howling" style, while allowing audiences to experience the robust spirit of the people of the northwest and their cultural confidence in celebrating life. This programme is also part of the 13th Chinese Opera Festival (COF).

Qinqiang, also known as "luantan" and "bangzi" vocal style, is one of the oldest operatic forms in northwestern China. It first appeared during the western Zhou period, and was popular in the Shaanxi and Gansu regions. The genre was inscribed on the first list of Intangible Cultural Heritage at the National Level. Its artistic features have cast a profound influence on face painting and the "xipi" and "liushui" tunes in Peking opera. Renowned for its broad vocal range and powerful, impassioned delivery, Qinqiang is often hailed as "China's oldest rock 'n' roll" for its directness, exuberance and exquisiteness in expressing emotions.

Details of the two performances are as follows:

"Returning to Jingzhou"

Date and time: July 4 (Friday), 7.30pm

"Returning to Jingzhou", also named "A Right Royal Match", tells a story from "Romance of the Three Kingdoms", depicting Zhou Yu's plot to reclaim Jingzhou by arranging Liu Bei's river-crossing marriage to Sun Shangxiang. It features the full range of roles in Qinqiang opera, gathering the four pillar roles of sheng (male), dan (female), jing (painted face), and chou (clown). Together with meticulous singing, reciting, acting, and martial arts, as well as the resonant rhythms of "bangzi", the play will showcase the very best of Qinqiang artistry in all aspects. Qi Aiyun, one of the "four famous dan actresses" in Qinqiang, together with Qu Qiaozhe, will portray Sun Shangxiang and her mother Lady Wu respectively. In the scene "Farewell to Mother", both of them will poignantly convey the complex emotions between familial bonds and righteous duty with their seamless vocal interplay. In addition, popular actor Zhang Tao, who portrays Zhou Yu, will demonstrate captivating arias and

martial arts skills in the scene "Zhou Yu the Marshal", adding other highlights to the play.

"Zhou Ren on the Way Home"

Date and time: July 5 (Saturday), 7.30pm

"Zhou Ren on the Way Home" is one of the famous "Eight Great Libretti of Qinqiang". The story is set during the Yan Song domination of the government of the Ming dynasty, where the royals are corrupt; framing the loyal and virtuous, bullying the kind and coveting other's wife. Wang Xincang and Tan Jianxun will alternate in the role of Zhou Ren. In the scenes "Regrets on the Road" and "On His Way Home", Wang will use a piercingly sorrowful singing style, combined with masterly skills such as "headgear shaking" and "hair twirling", depicting Zhou Ren's despair and inner conflict of sacrificing his wife to save a friend. "A Torture Session" and "Weeping at the Tomb" are the climax of the play, where Tan will demonstrate "rolling on the floor and hair flinging" skills to perform the disheartened aria. Dou Fengqin, acclaimed as a "Golden Voice in Gansu Province" and a representative bearer of National Intangible Cultural Heritage of Qinqiang opera, will portray Zhou Ren's wife, Li Lanying, a loyal and righteous character who disguises herself to assassinate the evil-doer, but fails and ultimately sacrifices herself to aid her husband's noble cause. Her uniquely robust yet melodious singing style of the dan role in Qinqiang opera demonstrates the harmonious balance of strength and tenderness of the genre.

The Xi'an Performing Arts Group's Youth Experimental Troupe of Qinqiang Opera was established in 2022, led by Class One director He Hongxing, with Zhang Tao and renowned director Wang Guoquan as deputy directors. The troupe has specially invited a number of Plum Blossom Award laureates as artistic advisors, dedicated to nurturing young talent and passing on traditional opera arts, and has staged a multitude of classic productions and excerpts, receiving public acclaim.

The two performances will be held at the Auditorium of the Ko Shan Theatre New Wing. Lyrics and dialogue are with Chinese and English surtitles. Tickets priced at \$190, \$290 and \$390 are now available at URBTIX (www.urbtix.hk). For telephone bookings, please call 3166 1288. Group booking discounts and package booking discounts are available for purchasing selected CCF stage programmes, the "Chinese Opera Film Shows" of the COF 2025 and the "Legacy and Vision: Conversations with Chinese Cultural Masters" lecture. For programme enquiries and concessionary schemes, please call 2268 7325 or visit www.ccf.gov.hk/en/programme/xian-performing-arts-groups-youth-experimental-troupe-of-qinqiang-opera/.

A meet-the-artists session entitled "The Beauty of Qinqiang Opera" (in Putonghua and Cantonese) will be held at 7.30pm on July 3 (Thursday) at AC2, Level 4, Administration Building, Hong Kong Cultural Centre. The speakers include representative bearer of National Intangible Cultural Heritage of Qinqiang opera Ma Youxian, together with Qi Aiyun, Wang Xincang and Zhang Tao, while Chinese opera researcher Chan Chun-miu will be the moderator. Admission is free and online registration is required

(www.lcsd.gov.hk/CE/CulturalService/Programme/en/chinese_opera/programs_1839.html#tab_13_0). Limited seats are available on a first-come, first-served basis.

The programme will also feature a session under the "Chinese Culture for All: A Special Performance Series" at 2.30pm on July 4 (Friday) at the Auditorium of the Ko Shan Theatre New Wing, with free admission specially for local primary and secondary school students. The troupe will perform selected excerpts from "Returning to Jingzhou" and "Zhou Ren on the Way Home", accompanied by easy-to-follow demonstrations and guided appreciation, allowing students to closely experience Qinqiang opera. Interested schools can call 2268 7325 for details.

The CCF, presented by the Culture, Sports and Tourism Bureau and organised by the Chinese Culture Promotion Office under the LCSd, aims to promote Chinese culture and enhance the public's national identity and cultural confidence. It also aims to attract top-notch artists and arts groups from the Mainland and other parts of the world for exchanges in Chinese arts and culture. The CCF 2025 will be held from June to September. Through different performing arts programmes in various forms and related extension activities, including selected programmes of the COF, "Tan Dun WE-Festival", film screenings, exhibitions, as well as community and school activities and more, the festival provides members of the public and visitors with more opportunities to enjoy distinctive programmes that showcase fine traditional Chinese culture, thereby facilitating patriotic education and contributing to the inheritance, transformation and development of traditional Chinese culture in Hong Kong. For more information about programmes and activities of the CCF 2025, please visit www.ccf.gov.hk.



