

Chinese Culture Festival 2025 to open in Hong Kong with contemporary dance “Dongpo: Life in Poems” in June (with photos)

“The Chinese Cultural Festival (CCF) 2025, organised by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD), will open in June with “Dongpo: Life in Poems”, a contemporary dance performance by the China Oriental Performing Arts Group. Directed by international acclaimed choreographer and visual artist Shen Wei, the production is inspired by the poetry and life of Su Dongpo, a literary master in the Song dynasty. The performance, to be staged in Hong Kong, as an East-meets-West centre for international cultural exchanges that boldly explores the integration of Chinese and Western arts, will showcase the remarkable talent and patriotic spirit of Su, while confidently presenting the beauty of traditional Chinese culture to the world.

Su, a polymath in literature, calligraphy and painting in Chinese history, remains a celebrated figure 1 000 years later. His classic verses are still widely recited and resonate deeply today. “Dongpo: Life in Poems” goes beyond the usual linear narrative of dance drama. Instead, it revolves around 12 of Su's poems that epitomise the poet's life philosophy from over 3 000 works, while reinterpreting Su's multifaceted legacy through contemporary dance. Divided into six acts, the selected poems, each of which touches on a different aspect of the poet's life philosophy, are integrated to convey the poetic culture and texture with famous lines displayed onstage in calligraphic form. The poetic verses are about magnificent landscapes and graceful rivers, patriotic sentiments and timeless human nature and value. They range from the heroic emotion in “To the east, the Yangtze River constantly flows, bringing with its waves numerous ancient heroes” to the profound thoughts for his deceased wife in “Life and death have separated us for 10 years”; the world of compassion in “May all of us far apart be blessed with longevity”, and optimism in “I don't mind leading a life in a raincoat”. By merging “cognitive essence” and “aesthetic realm”, this approach is designed to transcend linguistic barriers, allowing audiences to explore Su's spiritual world through a contemporary lens.

Upholding traditions while embracing innovation is the creative concept behind “Dongpo: Life in Poems”, the production uses contemporary dance as a form of expression, while deeply integrating various fine traditional Chinese culture elements, such as poetry writing, traditional Chinese painting, calligraphy, seal engraving, guqin, Chinese opera and martial arts in a pioneering manner. Through a multisensory experience of music, dance, poetry and painting, it distils the quintessence of Chinese classical philosophy and aesthetics, delicately deconstructing Su's poetry and intellectual allure to immerse audiences in the poetic and pictorial elegance of the aesthetics of

the Song dynasty. Meanwhile, the work features contemporary music together with live guqin tunes, as well as icons spanning different eras – from horse-drawn carriages and palanquins to bicycles and skateboards – creating a bold, innovative spectacle that transports audiences on a dialogue through time, as if stepping from antiquity into the present.

The creative team of the production represents a gathering of top artists; in addition to Shen as the chief director, choreographer, visual director as well as stage set, costume and styling designer, he also serves as the playwright with Guo Changhong, a National Class One playwright. The team also includes Chen Qigang and Xiao Lihe, who were the music director and lighting designer respectively for the opening ceremony of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games. The President of the China Calligraphy Academy, Yang Tao, designs calligraphy and seal carvings for the show. Associate Professor of the Dance Department of Beijing Normal University Su Peng, along with over 20 outstanding young performers from the China Oriental Song and Dance Troupe and the Meishan Song and Dance Theatre, as well as guqin virtuoso Professor of the Central Conservatory of Music Zhao Xiaoxia will come to Hong Kong to perform. The production has been staged in many Mainland cities since its premiere in Shanghai in July 2023, and was performed in New York and Washington, DC, early last year to critical acclaim.

The China Oriental Performing Arts Group, under the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, is one of the most prestigious national art troupes, originating from the China Song and Dance Troupe, the Oriental Song and Dance Troupe as well as the China Light Music Troupe. It has nurtured numerous world-renowned artists, and has created and performed many fine art works that have been well received by local and overseas audiences.

"'Dongpo: Life in Poems' by China Oriental Performing Arts Group" will be held at 7.30pm on June 13 and 14 (Friday and Saturday) at the Grand Theatre of the Hong Kong Cultural Centre (HKCC). Tickets priced at \$200, \$260, \$360, \$460 and \$560 are available at URB TIX (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 Chinese Opera Festival (COF) 2025 and the "Legacy and Vision: Conversations with Chinese Cultural Masters" lecture. For programme enquiries and concessionary schemes, please call 2268 7323 or visit www.ccf.gov.hk/en/programme/dongpo-life-in-poems/. The programme is sponsored by the Agricultural Bank of China Limited Hong Kong Branch.

In addition, a thematic exhibition will be held from May 28 to June 14 at the Foyer Exhibition Area of the HKCC. The exhibition will introduce Shen Wei's paintings created for the programme and the creative process behind the scene. Admission is free. Members of the public are welcome to join on the spot.

The programme will also feature a session under the "Chinese Culture for All: A Special Performance Series", with an open rehearsal to be held at 2.15pm on June 13 at the Grand Theatre of the HKCC. Admission is free for local primary and secondary school students to encourage them to participate

in cultural activities and experience the wonders of Chinese culture and arts. Interested schools can call 2268 7323 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 both 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.



