

Inaugural Chinese Culture Festival to focus on Shanghai in August to explore Shanghai-style culture through Chinese opera and music (with photos)

The inaugural Chinese Culture Festival (CCF), organised by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD), has designated Shanghai as its focal city this year, and has invited two leading art groups, the Shanghai Jingju Theatre Company and the Shanghai Chinese Orchestra, to come to Hong Kong and stage opera and music performances for five consecutive days starting August 2. The performances will showcase the unique charm of Shanghai-style culture as well as pass down the fine traditional Chinese culture in the context of breaking new ground while upholding fundamental principles. In addition, a series of extension activities will be held to provide a platform for culture lovers from Shanghai and Hong Kong to appreciate the arts and share their experiences.

Peking opera programme: Shanghai Jingju Theatre Company (August 2 to 4)

After a hiatus of five years, the Shanghai Jingju Theatre Company will present the classic play "The House of Wulong" of the Qi School and the Shanghai-style Peking opera "Seven Heroes and Five Gallants" at the Hong Kong Cultural Centre from August 2 to 4. "The House of Wulong", which originated from "The Water Margin", is a work of Peking opera maestro Zhou Xinfang (stage name Qilintong) who is famous for the vivid portrayal of his personas. In the story, Song Jiang rescues Yan Xijiao, who has put herself up for sale to give her father a burial. Song Jiang takes her as a concubine, but they later turn against each other. Chen Shaoyun (as Song Jiang in the second half of the play), the esteemed performing artist of the Qi School and a recipient of the China Theatre Plum Blossom Award (Plum Blossom Award), will lead national-class performers Lu Su (as Song Jiang in the first half of the play) and Yang Yang (as Yan Xijiao) to bring the play's richly detailed characters to life on stage. Chen Shaoyun has mastered the distinctive styles of the Qi School, and portrays Song Jiang's character and emotions with great delicacy. The excerpt, "Killing Xijiao", is the climax of the play with a fast pace and a condensed plot. Opera fans should not miss this rare opportunity to savour the thrill of witnessing the master's spectacular performance.

The troupe will also stage the full-length serial opera of "Seven Heroes and Five Gallants" for the first time in Hong Kong for two consecutive days. This play recreates the exquisite set design and showcases the various skills of the actors in both civil and military highlights. The story is adapted from the novel "Three Heroes and Five Gallants". In Part One of the play, Zhan Zhao is courted by the Song Emperor and is given a royal title of "Imperial Cat", thus angering Bai Yutang the "Brocade-Coated Rat", who wants

to engage him in a duel. In Part Two, Bai Yutang, together with Judge Bao's apprentice Yan Chasan and other heroes, set out to punish the rebellious Prince of Xiangyang, Zhao Jue. Fu Xiru (as Bai Yutang in Part One and Yan Chasan in Part Two), renowned as the "most handsome laosheng (old male role)" and a winner of the Plum Blossom Award, will join forces with Hao Shuai (as Zhan Zhao in Part One and Bai Yutang in Part Two), National Class One performer and leading wusheng (martial male) actor of the troupe, as well as other outstanding young actors to present this performance. A tour de force of Shanghai-style Peking opera for its elaborate staging and featuring the full range of roles, this work not only features Qi-style vocal passages, but also a display of "liantan", an extended vocal passage shared by seven actors, which is distinctly Shanghainese. The highlighted episodes "A Fish Feast that Leads to Sworn Brotherhood", "Night Talk in the Field Headquarters" and "Meeting in an Inn" are vivid portrayals of the characters' personalities and emotions, in particular their heroic spirits.

"New Oriental Chinese Music Scene" by Shanghai Chinese Orchestra (August 5 and 6)

Under the baton of internationally acclaimed conductor Tang Muhai, the Shanghai Chinese Orchestra will visit Hong Kong again after a hiatus of 12 years, and present its most well-known classic music brand "New Oriental Chinese Music Scene" (concert version) by national-class musicians. The two concerts combine the delicate elegance of Jiangnan silk and bamboo music with the grandeur of ethnic orchestral music. Programme highlights include "Spirit of Chinese Calligraphy", presenting the profound artistic realm of Chinese calligraphy with various playing techniques; "Chu-Han War" that depicts the significant historical battle between the kingdoms of Chu and Han; "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" with a melancholy and ethereal rhythm, which is created by composer Tan Dun for the film of same name; "Caterpillar Fungus" that celebrates an endless life; "Czárdás", a concerto for erhu, depicting the intense feeling of deep autumn; the two Chinese orchestral works, "Silk Road" and "National Music Ode to China", depicting different styles from the flavour of Western regions to the deepest praise of the motherland, fully embodying the artistic characteristics of openness and inclusiveness in Shanghai-style Chinese music.

The "New Oriental Chinese Music Scene" is a refreshing mix of classic melodies and new arrangements, bringing audiences an extraordinary impression of Chinese music. It has been performed over 100 times in major concert halls around the world, and has been well received by audiences at home and abroad. This time, the Hong Kong concerts are further highlighted with the presence of renowned conductor Tang Muhai. Tang is now serving as the Conductor Emeritus of the China National Symphony Orchestra and the Tianjin Symphony Orchestra. He is also the first Resident Conductor for the China Shanghai International Arts Festival. Tang rose to international prominence in 1983 when he was invited by conductor Herbert von Karajan to conduct the Berliner Philharmoniker. Since then, he has been invited to work with the Berliner Philharmoniker on numerous occasions, as well as many other world-renowned orchestras, including the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra and the London

Symphony Orchestra, to name a few. Among Tang's many recordings, he won a Grammy Award in 2002 for his collaboration with the Gulbenkian Orchestra.

The three performances by the Shanghai Jingju Theatre Company, namely "The House of Wulong" at 7.30pm on August 2 (Friday), the "Seven Heroes and Five Gallants" – Part One at 2.30pm on August 3 (Saturday) and the "Seven Heroes and Five Gallants" – Part Two at 7.30pm on August 4 (Sunday), will be held at the Grand Theatre of Hong Kong Cultural Centre. Lyrics and dialogues are with Chinese and English surtitles. Tickets priced at \$220, \$320, \$420 and \$520 are now available at URBTIX (www.urbtix.hk). For telephone bookings, please call 3166 1288. For programme enquiries and concessionary schemes, please call 2268 7325 or visit www.ccf.gov.hk/en/programme/shanghai-jingju-theatre-company/. This programme is one of the highlights of the 12th Chinese Opera Festival, and a celebratory programme of the 35th anniversary of the Hong Kong Cultural Centre.

The first concert of "New Oriental Chinese Music Scene" by the Shanghai Chinese Orchestra will be held at 8pm on August 5 (Monday) at the Concert Hall of Hong Kong City Hall. Tickets are priced at \$200, \$280, \$360 and \$440. The second concert will be held at 8pm on August 6 (Tuesday) at the Auditorium of Tsuen Wan Town Hall. Tickets are priced at \$200, \$260, \$320 and \$380. They are now available at URBTIX (www.urbtix.hk). For telephone bookings, please call 3166 1288. For programme enquiries and concessionary schemes, please call 2268 7321 or visit www.ccf.gov.hk/en/programme/new-oriental-chinese-music-scene/.

In order to let the members of the public understand the artistic characteristics of Peking opera and Chinese music in Shanghai styles, a number of extension activities will be held, with details as follows:

For the performances of the Shanghai Jingju Theatre Company, a meet-the-artists session entitled "On the Artistic Features of the Shanghai-Style and Qi School" (in Putonghua) will be held at 7.30pm on August 1 (Thursday) at AC2, Level 4, Administration Building, the Hong Kong Cultural Centre. Speakers include performers of the troupe Chen Shaoyun, Fu Xiru and Lu Su, while Chinese opera researcher Hu Guangming will be the moderator. Admission is free, and online registration is required (www.lcsd.gov.hk/CE/CulturalService/Programme/en/chinese_opera/programs_1716.html#tab_13_0). Limited seats are available on a first-come, first-served basis. In addition, a demonstration performance of the extracts of Peking opera "Picking Up the Jade Bracelet" will be held at 5.30pm on August 3 (Saturday) at the Foyer of the Hong Kong Cultural Centre. Admission is free. This demonstration is one of the major activities for the LCSO Photo-taking and Video-shooting Competition. Members of the public are welcome to join. Please visit www.lcsd.gov.hk/en/ptvsc/index.html for more details.

National Class One musicians Yu Bing, Hu Chenyun and Wang Yinrui will deliver three masterclasses (in Putonghua) from 10am to 1pm (one hour per session) on pipa, suona and percussion respectively on August 5 (Monday) at the Recital Hall of Hong Kong City Hall. Pak Tak-wan, Head of Academic

Studies in Music of the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts, will be the moderator. Online registration is required (www.lcsd.gov.hk/CE/CulturalService/Programme/en/music/programs_1692.html#tab_8_0). Also, a pre-concert meet-the-artist session (in Putonghua) will be held at 6.45pm on August 5 at the Recital Hall of Hong Kong City Hall. The speaker will be Yao Shenshen, resident conductor of Shanghai Chinese Orchestra, with Dr Jim Chang, part-time lecturer of the Academy of Music of Hong Kong Baptist University, who will be the moderator. Also, a pre-concert talk entitled "Shanghai Chinese Orchestra – About 'He Wuqi'" (in Cantonese) will be held at 7pm on August 6 (Tuesday) at the Cultural Activities Hall of Tsuen Wan Town Hall. The speaker will be Dr Jim Chang. Admissions are free for these masterclasses and talks, with limited seats available on a first-come, first-served basis.

The above-mentioned performances by the Shanghai Jingju Theatre Company and the "New Oriental Chinese Music Scene" by the Shanghai Chinese Orchestra are the programmes of "City in Focus: Shanghai" of the inaugural CCF and Shanghai Culture Week. Another spectacular programme showcasing the cultural charm of Shanghai styles is the exhibition "The Hong Kong Jockey Club Series: Fragrance of Time – In Search of Chinese Art of Scent" being held at the Hong Kong Museum of Art until October 16 (Wednesday). Shanghai Culture Week is co-presented by the LCSD, the Shanghai Municipal Administration of Culture and Tourism and the Center for China Shanghai International Arts Festival with an opening reception and ceremony at the Hong Kong Cultural Centre on August 2.

The CCF, presented by the Culture, Sports and Tourism Bureau and organised by the LCSD's Chinese Culture Promotion Office, aims to enhance the public's appreciation of Chinese culture and cultivate citizens' national identity and cultural confidence. The inaugural CCF is being held from June to September. Through different performing arts programmes in various forms and related extension activities, including selected programmes of the Chinese Opera Festival, exemplary local arts projects recognised by the China National Arts Fund, performing arts programmes from arts and cultural organisations, film screenings, exhibitions, talks and more, the festival allows members of the public and visitors to experience the broad and profound Chinese culture with a view to promoting Chinese culture and patriotic education as well as enhancing national identity amongst the people of Hong Kong, making contributions to the steadfast and successful implementation of "one country, two systems". For details, please visit the CCF website www.ccf.gov.hk.

The LCSD has long been promoting Chinese history and culture through organising an array of programmes and activities to enable the public to learn more about the broad and profound Chinese culture. For more information, please visit www.lcsd.gov.hk/en/ccpo/index.html.



