

Inaugural Chinese Culture Festival to open with dance drama "Five Stars Rising in the East" in Hong Kong in June (with photos)

The inaugural Chinese Culture Festival (CCF), organised by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD), will stage the award-winning dance drama "Five Stars Rising in the East" by the Beijing Dance Drama and Opera as the opening programme in early June. Centering on a cultural relic, the dance drama ingeniously merges Chinese aesthetics and the flavour of Western regions through innovative dance languages. The troupe takes the profound cultural connotation of the precious relic – an ancient brocade armguard – and 1 000 years of exchanges and integration of Chinese culture that shine on stage, demonstrating a deeper sense of cultural confidence.

The dance drama was inspired by a piece of a Han dynasty brocade armguard unearthed in 1995 from an archaeological tomb at the Niya cultural relics site in Hotan Prefecture, at the ancient Silk Roads in Xinjiang. It is embroidered with Chinese characters in seal script that literally translate as "five stars rising in the East are auspicious signs for the Central Plain". The colours of the brocade are still bright after thousands of years, and it is now a National Class One Cultural Relic.

The dance drama begins with the discovery of the brocade armguard at the archaeological site, as if a door to the past has been opened from the golden sand that tells the story behind the brocade; a Han dynasty general stationed at the Western border, Feng, and the son of the leader of the Northern State, Jiante, get caught in a sandstorm. They are rescued by a monk who brings them into the ancient city of Jingjue, where they meet Chunjun, the daughter of the city leader. Despite an initial animosity that leads to conflicts, the three eventually form a deep friendship. The brocade armguard that Feng left behind serves as a reminder of his duties to his land, and bears witness to his friendship with the people of the Western regions. It represents an ideal that all ethnic groups "cluster together like pomegranate seeds", forming a sense of community for Chinese nation.

The innovative approach of the dance choreography in this production has incorporated various types of dances that showcase the colourful ethnic cultures. For example, the lantern dance in Jingjue city is infused with the Western regions' style. The group dance in the market is a mix of modern and tap dance, while the excerpt "Embroidery" is presented in a Han-Tang style classical dance. With distinctive characters, compact plot lines, as well as humorous styles, the dance drama has been performed nearly 100 times since its premiere in 2021, and has won the 16th Five One Project Award and the 17th Wenhua Grand Award. Excerpts such as "Embroidery", "Lantern Dance" and "Market Dance" were featured in a number of programmes on the Mainland, including last year's CCTV Spring Festival Gala, and has received high

acclaim.

Established in 1978, the Beijing Dance Drama and Opera is under the Beijing Performance and Arts Group as one of its nine performing arts companies. It is also the only professional performing group that specialises in song and dance performances under the administration of the Beijing Municipal Government. It has produced many award-winning productions including dance dramas "The Way to the Sky" and "Five Stars Rising in the East". It has also been invited to participate in various cultural exchange events and other large-scale performing activities at home and abroad, and has performed in more than 30 countries and regions.

The dance drama "Five Stars Rising in the East" by the Beijing Dance Drama and Opera will be held at 8pm on June 7 and 8 (Friday and Saturday) at the Auditorium of Sha Tin Town Hall. Tickets priced at \$200, \$280, \$380 and \$480 are available at URBTIX (www.urbtix.hk) and the Xiqu Centre Ticket Office. For telephone bookings, please call 3166 1288. For programme enquiries and concessionary schemes, please call 2268 7323 or visit www.ccf.gov.hk/en/programme/opening-programme-dance-drama-five-stars-rising-in-the-east/.

In conjunction with the grand opening of the CCF, the "Encountering Chinese Culture" carnival will be organised on June 9 (Sunday) at 2pm at the Plaza and Foyer of Sha Tin Town Hall and the Entrance Arena at L1, Phase 1 of the New Town Plaza. Alongside stage performances with Chinese cultural characteristics, a "Library-on-Wheels", inspiring cultural booths, a concert featuring Chinese music and more will be presented for all to experience the colourful Chinese culture and arts at close range. In addition, "Glowing Beauties – A Photo Exhibition on Ethnic Costumes" will be held from May 29 to June 9 at the Foyer and Exhibition Gallery of Sha Tin Town Hall. The exhibition will feature the photos of the brocade armguard behind the dance drama "Five Stars Rising in the East" and costume photos of China's 56 ethnic groups. Members of the public can learn more about their distinctive cultural practices, costumes and traditional ways of life. Admission is free for the two above-mentioned special events. Members of the public are welcome to join on the spot. For details, please visit the CCF website www.ccf.gov.hk.

The programme "Five Stars Rising in the East" will also feature a session under the "Chinese Culture for All: A Special Performance Series". An open rehearsal of the dance drama will be held at 2.15pm on June 7 at the Auditorium of Sha Tin Town Hall with free admission 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 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 will be 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". Please visit the above-mentioned CCF website for details.

The LCSD has long promoted 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.



