

香港劇場年鑑 2016

舞蹈 · 戲曲 · 戲劇

HONG
KONG
THEATRE
YEARBOOK
2016
Dance
Xiqu
Drama



香港劇場年鑑2016（舞蹈、戲曲、戲劇）

版次 2018年5月初版

資助: 香港藝術發展局

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資料協作伙伴:

香港舞蹈界聯席會議－香港舞蹈年鑑編輯室、

香港戲劇協會、香港教育劇場論壇、

香港八和會館、八和粵劇學院、

香港中文大學音樂系（戲曲資料中心）、art-mate.net

協作伙伴: 香港戲劇工程

封面、內文設計: TGIF

網頁設計及程式編寫: AlphaSoft Design Ltd.

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出版:

國際演藝評論家協會（香港分會）有限公司

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國際書號 ISBN: 978-988-13599-0-2



International Association
of Theatre Critics (Hong Kong)
國際演藝評論家協會(香港分會)



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*藝術行政人員實習計劃由香港藝術發展局資助。*The Arts Administration Internship Scheme is supported by the Hong Kong Arts Development Council.

Hong Kong Theatre Yearbook 2016 (Dance, Xiqu, Drama)

First published in May 2018

Supported by: Hong Kong Arts Development Council

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Partner: **Hong Kong Theatre Works**

Cover and Content Design: TGIF

Website Design and Software Development: AlphaSoft Design Ltd.

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Published by:

International Association of Theatre Critics (Hong Kong) Limited

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「中國戲曲節」的籌劃與未來

張文珊

「中國戲曲節」自二〇一〇年由康樂及文化事務署主理，至二〇一六年舉辦第七屆，承先啟後，未來可繼之道該怎樣走？如何穩中求變，獻演優秀傳統戲曲之餘，同時令觀眾有耳目一新的感覺？

「中國戲曲節2016」秉承過往幾屆的節目特色，除了獻演京崑粵等熱門劇種外，亦包羅紹劇等香港觀眾較少機會親身接觸的地方戲；與此同時，其他主題性延伸活動各適其適，包括講座、藝人談及展覽等，往往能與演出呼應、互相補充，為普羅大眾的觀劇旅程作深度導航；加上多齣經典戲曲三維電影作品（包括越劇電影《西廂記》、京劇電影《蕭何月下追韓信》、《霸王別姬》及崑劇電影《景陽鐘》）首度於香江公演，莫不為香港觀眾帶來新鮮的視聽體驗。

戲曲深度自由行

回顧中國戲曲節2016的節目表，除了京崑粵等主要劇種外，還有「山東菏澤市地方戲曲傳承研究院」為香港觀眾帶來風格激越粗獷的山東戲曲，其中大弦子戲、棗梆、兩夾弦、大平調更是首度在港公演，機會難逢。資深劇評人塵紓（黃健庭）坦言，戲曲迷對中國戲曲節喜聞樂見，它亦是一年一度的劇壇盛事，能夠網羅起碼五至八個演出風格及特色各異的劇種，加上相關配套活動，例如

演前導賞、電影播放及講座等，可說是難能可貴。

康樂及文化事務署高級經理（戲劇及戲曲）鄭惠貞同樣認為，中國戲曲節令不少觀眾翹首以待，她表示每年約四月份便有市民向署方索取演出節目表，並且計劃以早鳥計劃或集體形式購票。她表示以往中國戲曲節演出平均入座率達七至八成；大概受演唱語言局限所致，整體而言，武打戲較文場戲受香港觀眾歡迎。署方一方面希望推廣「戲曲節」節目予從來沒有接觸戲曲的市民欣賞，另一方面積極透過講座及演出向公眾推廣非主流的劇種。她特別提及由李寶春（京劇）及劉建楊（紹劇）等名家主講的「中國戲曲節2016——南北猴戲系列」，因它吸引了一些香港粵劇年青演員參與其中，讓本地伶人可與戲曲名家接觸，增進藝術。

戲曲節 · 選材

談及每年中國戲曲節的買戲程序，鄭惠貞指署方會根據市民／市場意見構思節目方向，另一方面，劇團通常提前一年半前會向署方提交演出計劃書及演出錄影等資料，經內部商討後，署方再與藝團或統籌機構接洽。

她補充，署方支持劇團「以大帶細」，即資深演員帶領新進演員作承傳性質的演出。

以「中國戲曲節2017」的粵劇《香花山大賀壽》為例，此劇匯集粵港澳老倌及新秀攜手演出，三場演出陣容不同，希望能以老帶少，讓粵劇戲藝得以承傳。其演出版本乃根據六十年代的班本，裡面包括久未搬演的「插花」等傳統技藝。塵紓表示，有些觀眾或會感到廣東大戲演出的藝術水平不夠，但它作為本土戲曲，一定要包涵在戲曲節裡。鄭惠貞同意中國戲曲節需要支持本地演員，除非他們未能提交合適的演出計劃，否則盡量安排獻演。她補充，署方和中介機構會視察各地劇團演出，盡量安排一些未踏足過香港舞台、同時具藝術水平的劇團來港獻藝。

以中國戲曲節2016的開幕節目《紫釵記》為例，據悉早於二〇一三年古兆申在台灣觀看邢金沙和溫宇航主演的小全本《玉簪記》後，覺得演出不俗，後來促成二人再度合作。該節目由香港中華文化促進中心統籌，浙江崑劇團擔任演出班底。邢、溫二人各自從繁重的工作中多次來往杭州、香港、台灣整理劇本、拍曲、排練及處理服裝，製作認真。《紫釵記》是湯顯祖戲曲代表作「玉茗堂四夢」之一，可惜戲曲舞台流傳下來只有〈折柳楊闌〉一折，其他場折包括〈墮釵燈影〉、〈盟詩〉、〈賣釵〉的演繹及唱腔欠缺傳承，故此現時能夠集中港台三地崑劇編創人員將它搬上舞台，可說是近年難得一見的製作。

提及「戲曲節」京崑節目，鄭惠貞坦言，香港京崑名伶鄧宛霞幾乎每年都參與戲曲節，一方面她是迄今唯一香港土生土長而榮獲中國戲劇界最高榮譽「梅花獎」的戲曲伶人，另一方面她籌辦的「京崑劇場」亦是香港藝術發展局支持團體之一，在傳承教學和演出推廣各方面的成績有目共睹。

曾多次受邀參加中國戲曲節的鄧宛霞對政府的買戲制度及文化政策具相當深刻的體會。她指過往多數由藝團向署方建議演出概念及劇目，例如中國戲曲節2017節目「玉宇霞光雋永」的點子便由她提供。她指出，現時香港很多文化政策都鼓勵藝團以行政模式思考製作，很少顧及藝術考量，藝團需要花費唇舌游說政府主辦節目，大大減少伶人在藝術探索的時間和精力。不少藝術大師乃是臥虎藏龍，例如京劇名家李玉聲的紅生表演藝術爐火純青，之前卻不為政府人士所聞知。

她坦言，京崑表演藝術內涵如此深邃精深，但香港政府文化當局對藝術價值的認識，只是鳳毛麟角，文化政策亦對成名藝人的重視和協助不足。香港作為國際大都會，若芭蕾舞和話劇都能夠組織旗艦團體的話，那麼中國舞台表演藝術亦應該有其代表團體。藝團發展乃長期計劃，唯現時不少與政府合作的項目都是逐年籌劃的短期性單一項目，即使是中國戲曲節，沒有人能保證能每年參與，

故此藝團難以評估及規劃其發展規模，鄧宛霞：「（資助）都是『bread and butter』……劇團（發展）唔知可以去到邊。」

戲曲節·主題

歷年「戲曲節」節目可謂多姿多采，在摸石過河的過程中，除了戲的呈現，時有夾雜曲藝演出（例如「福建南音」），但塵紓認為此做法並不可取。他解釋，中國傳統以來便流行說唱文學，但一九四九年之後才正式有「曲藝」一詞，而「曲」和「劇」是兩碼子的事，不可混為一談。他建議署方可考慮另行舉辦「中國曲藝節」，選址可考慮小型劇院，例如油麻地戲院，以饗觀眾。他認為署方每年應該為戲曲節設立主題，令整個活動更像個小型節慶，例如演三場「目蓮戲」便可以它作為演出主題。

中國戲曲節2016有兩個副題，其一是紀念莎士比亞與湯顯祖逝世四百周年的上崑與浙崑演出，其二是響應猴年、分別由北京京劇院青年團與李寶春、浙江紹劇藝術研究院獻技的「南北猴戲系列」，令觀眾留下深刻印象。塵紓建議，署方日後可以考慮以「京丑消暑大匯演」為「戲曲節」主題，以京劇名丑蕭長華及南崑副丑王世瑤為題，京崑較技，迸發藝術火花。

戲曲節拉闊演期？

有關中國戲曲節的演期問題，亦是不少觀眾關注的議題。鄧宛霞認為，「戲曲節」應考慮加長演期，並非限於兩個月內密集進行；塵紓亦有相同看法，指出中國戲曲節能匯聚戲曲迷，但節目集中在八個星期內公演，不少觀眾欠缺精神及金錢購票參與。他建議主辦方可以仿效「香港藝術節」，安排節目「延續篇」，讓全年節目互相呼應；或如「香港小交響樂團」一樣，安排早場或午間節目，雖然預期觀眾不會太多，但能夠讓不同觀眾欣賞節目，署方應盡力去做。

鄭惠貞回應道，署方需要宏觀規劃演出，由於不少劇團演出檔期緊張，與藝團協商檔期需要花費功夫。一般來說，署方安排好場地後，才和劇團商討演出細節。她續稱，現時「法國五月」、香港藝術節劇季主要都在春季進行，署方選擇於暑假（六月至八月）舉行中國戲曲節，讓全年的表演藝術節目分佈較為平均，不與其他節目撞期，以增加影響力。

儘管每年中國戲曲節好戲連場，但真正能耳聞目睹的觀眾有限，即使沒法親身欣賞節目，能夠透過錄影重溫精彩演出，亦是不少戲迷引頸期盼的。鄭惠貞表示，以往舉辦「中國戲曲曲藝專場」、「中國戲曲絕技絕



為慶賀香港特別行政區成立二十周年，香港八和會館一眾梨園子弟各展功架，獻上粵劇經典，演出例戲《香花山大賀壽》。



為紀念湯顯祖逝世400周年，中國戲曲節2016上演開幕節目《紫釵記》，由邢金沙、溫宇航與浙江崑劇團攜手演出。

活展演」等演出，大會都有拍攝和錄影作檔案收藏，但其後如何給外界觀賞，則要與藝團仔細商討。此外，她認為如果演員知道大會設有錄影，或會增加其演出壓力，因此牽涉多重考慮。塵紓認為，署方可以游說劇團提供演員自感水準之作，透過署方公開讓有興趣人士瀏覽，不失為折衷方法。

觀眾與演員

觀、演、評同是戲曲表演生態的重要元素，缺一不可。一場成功的演出，除了台上精彩外，台下觀眾的反饋尤關重要。中國戲曲節除了向觀眾派發演出問卷外，亦舉行演前／演後藝人談，以作觀演交流。

塵紓笑稱，他常在其主講的戲曲講座內遇到一些觀眾，向他發表之前觀看「戲曲節」節目的觀劇感。他認為中國戲曲節節目安排可說是「無可挑剔」，唯一是欠缺了演後真正讓觀眾發表意見的渠道。他解釋，並非每位觀眾都喜歡以筆記錄所感，加上戲曲演出普遍時間較長，觀眾於演出結束後再填寫問卷，未必奏效。他提議主辦方組織工作坊或

聚會讓觀眾表達意見，這類型的討論平台可考慮在香港文化中心行政大樓四樓的會議室進行，活動可邀請一些不涉及利益衝突的中立人士擔任主持，讓觀眾於自由發表意見。

談及演前／演後藝人談，塵紓認為藝人發言經常「煞有介事」，而觀眾的反應則趨向兩極化，一些反應冷淡，一些異常「火爆」。鄧宛霞從藝人的角度，指出演前藝人談僅屬於一次性分享，成效有限，卻令藝人疲於奔命。中國傳統文化講求師道，她認為由大師開班口傳心授，比導賞或藝人談活動更能傳承藝術。她構思未來以「紅生」為主題，籌辦相關演出及大師班，並邀請京劇名宿李玉聲主持，公開讓中港台三地戲曲人才參與，真正承傳藝術。

戲曲節·展望

誠如資深戲曲工作者周嘉儀撰文所述¹，中國戲曲節作為香港開埠以來戲曲盛事的「第三波」，乃香港政府自九七回歸籌辦的大型戲曲匯演、以及後來「中國地方戲曲選」、「古道戲情」及「中國梆子戲系列」的成功

1. 周嘉儀。2012。〈香港戲曲盛事：中國戲曲節2010多面體〉，《香港戲曲年鑑2010》，頁15-16。香港：國際演藝評論家協會（香港分會）。

例子後，再次造就的戲曲盛事。除了為香港觀眾獻演全國各地戲曲，更有望成為吸引遊客的優質文化活動。

鄧宛霞希望讓大眾知道戲曲藝術的觀賞重點和方法，並且培養觀眾對藝術的鑑賞能力，讓他們親證戲曲藝術，體驗中國文化。她補充，近年感到部分「戲曲節」節目出現脫離戲曲慣例的趨勢，例如有些場刊只刊登劇情介紹，而沒有演員介紹，偏離戲曲以演員為中心的傳統。她表示自己會盡力為京崑藝術爭取國際演出及聲譽，將中國藝術放回應有的位置。

張文珊

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Chinese Opera Festival: Its Planning and the Way Forward

Milky Cheung Man-shan

Presented by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) since 2010, the Chinese Opera Festival (COF) entered its seventh year in 2016. How did the festival consolidate its previous achievements to strive for a broader future? How did it forge new paths while standing its ground, offering Xiqu fans a breath of fresh air other than the traditional gems being staged over the years?

In the same vein as the previous editions, COF 2016 featured a sumptuous line-up with major genres such as Beijing and Kunqu operas, as well as regional genres like Shao opera, which is lesser known among the Hong Kong audience. A wide array of extension activities, including talks, artists' talks and exhibitions, were also organised to complement the stage productions, leading attendees on a journey deep into the heart of Xiqu. Furthermore, the Hong Kong premiere of 3D motion pictures of classic operas, namely Yue opera *Story of the West Chamber*, Beijing operas *Chasing after Han Xin under the Moon* and *Farewell My Concubine*, and Kunqu opera *The Palace Bell*, provided audiences with a brand new audio-visual experience.

In-depth journey into Xiqu

Among the COF 2016 repertoire, other than primary genres such as Beijing and Kunqu operas, the Research Institute of Regional Opera Legacy of Heze Municipal of Shandong brought to Hong Kong a fine selection of Shandong operas, best known for their bold, rustic charm. Among them, *Daxianzi*, *Zaobang*, *Liangjiaxian* and *Dapingdiao* operas graced the local stage for the first time. Veteran Xiqu critic Wong Kin-ting notes that many Xiqu enthusiasts look forward to the annual extravaganza of COF. Each year, five to eight distinct genres are paraded, complete with ancillary activities such as pre-performance guided talks, film screenings and talks. This is a massive effort which deserves recognition.

Tina Cheng, Senior Manager (Theatre and Chinese Opera), LCSD, concurs that COF has become a much-anticipated event among Xiqu lovers. By April every year, members of the public would request the programme calendar from the LCSD, as they plan to book their tickets through early-bird booking or group booking. Over the past years, COF has attracted a 70%–80% attendance on average. Acrobatic plays, on the whole, are more popular among the Hong Kong audience than non-action ones, a likely result of language

differences. The LCSD, on the one hand, sets out to extend COF to citizens with no previous exposure to Xiqu; on the other, through talks and stage performances, it strives to bring non-mainstream genres to a wider audience. In particular, Cheng mentions the Monkey King Play workshops in COF 2016 co-hosted by Li Baochun (Beijing opera) and Liu Jianyang (Shao opera). In attendance were some local young Cantonese opera performers, whose exchange with the visiting maestros has greatly nourished their art.

COF: selection of repertoire

In regard to the sourcing of COF programmes, Cheng says the LCSD duly takes into account public opinion and market feedback in planning the line-up. Theatre troupes, on the other hand, usually submit programme proposals and performance videos to the LCSD a year and a half in advance for consideration. After internal discussions, the LCSD will liaise further with the theatre troupes or coordinating institutions.

Cheng adds that the LCSD encourages "the big ones to mentor the small ones", which means putting the veterans and the young on the same stage, where crafts and skills are passed down to the next generation. Take the Cantonese

opera programme in COF 2017, *Grand Birthday Celebration at Mount Heung Fa*, for example. A different cast of both seasoned and new artists were enlisted from Guangzhou, Hong Kong and Macau for each of the three shows, so that old legacy would continue to live. The current version is based on an antique script from the 1960s. Traditional stagecraft such as "Flower Planting" contained therein was revived after a long absence. As for the significance of Cantonese opera, despite opinions that present-day productions are not quite up to par artistically, Wong Kin-ting asserts that this homegrown genre must be included in the COF programme. Cheng shares his view, as COF is duty-bound to support local actors and give them opportunities, unless they are unable to come up with appropriate proposals. She reveals that the LCSD and relevant agencies are constantly scouting around for suitable programmes, giving priority to those artistically outstanding troupes who have never performed in Hong Kong before.

Take for example *Legend of the Purple Hairpin*, the opening performance of COF 2016. Back in 2013, a full length version of *Story of the Jade Hairpin* performed by Ying Kam-sha and Wen Yu-hang in Taiwan caught the attention of Kunqu opera connoisseur Koo Siu-sun, who went on to pair them up again for *Legend of the Purple Hairpin*. The opera

was staged under the coordination of the Hong Kong Institute for Promotion of Chinese Culture, with Zhejiang Kunqu Opera Troupe forming the core of the production crew. Ying and Wen, despite their busy schedules, travelled back and forth between Hangzhou, Hong Kong and Taiwan, where they gathered to polish the script, practise the duets, rehearse the scenes, and perfect the wardrobe with utmost effort. *Legend of the Purple Hairpin* is one of the "Four Dreams of Yuming Hall", the signature works of famed playwright Tang Xianzu. Sadly, only the excerpt of "Breaking the Willow at the Yang Pass" has survived to this day on stage; the remaining ones, including "Hairpin Dropped at the Lantern Festival", "Union by the Poem", and "Selling the Hairpin" have nothing left but the text itself. All things considered, the 2016 version, which brought together creative and production professionals of Kunqu opera from Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, is an incredible feat that has been rarely seen in recent years.

Tang Yuen-ha, a Beijing and Kunqu opera artist from Hong Kong, has been featured in almost every edition of COF. Cheng explains that Tang is so far the only native Hong Kong Xiqu artist who has garnered the Plum Blossom Award, the highest honour in contemporary Chinese theatre. She is also the founder of Jingkun Theatre, one of the organisations

subsidised by the Hong Kong Arts Development Council. Her vast achievements in Xiqu education and promotion are widely recognised.

Having been invited to star in COF repeatedly, Tang has much to say about the government's sourcing mechanism and cultural polices. So far, the usual practice is that arts organisations approach the LCSD with programme ideas and repertoire. The idea of the programme "Everlasting Glow of a Flawless Jade" for COF 2017, for example, was her brainchild. As for cultural policies, Tang notes that arts organisations are often asked to consider the production side of things from an administrative perspective, whereas little attention is paid to artistic merits. Artists go to great lengths to persuade the government to present programmes, in turn losing a great deal of time and energy for their artistic practice. Many great masters are yet to be discovered, such as Beijing opera maestro Li Yusheng whose artistry as *hongsheng* (red-faced male role) is close to perfection. He, however, had remained unknown to the government representatives until he was introduced by Tang.

Tang remarks that the Hong Kong government's culture bureaus know little about the untold riches of Beijing and Kunqu operas; established artists are not given adequate recognition or support under

the prevailing cultural policies. As a metropolis, Hong Kong should have a flagship organisation for Chinese performing arts, besides the existing ones for ballet and drama. Running an arts organisation is a long-term endeavour. And yet, collaborations with the government are mostly one-off, short-term projects conceived from scratch by the year. Speaking of COF, there is no guarantee that one may participate in the festival every year, so it is difficult for arts organisations to assess and define their scope of development. “[Subsidy] is a bread-and-butter issue. Arts organisations have no idea how far we may go,” Tang adds.

COF: theme

Over the years, the COF programme line-ups have been a diverse mix of gems. In its formative stage where tests and trials are inevitable, COF sometimes also features *quyi* (narrative-singing arts) performances, such as *Nanyin* (“Southern Sound”) from Fujian Province. Wong Kin-ting does not agree with this programming strategy: Narrative singing has long been a literary tradition in China, but the term of *quyi* did not come about until after the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949; *qu* (singing) and *ju* (repertory) are, after all, two distinct entities which should not be considered in the same breath. The LCSD, in

his opinion, may consider presenting separately a “Chinese Narrative-Singing Arts Festival” at smaller venues like the Yau Ma Tei Theatre. Every year, a theme should be given to COF to make it a small scale festive celebration. For example, the festival could highlight the theme of *Mulan* plays by staging three productions belonging to the genre.

COF 2016 had two secondary themes — first, the 400th anniversary of William Shakespeare and Tang Xianzu’s passing, with performances staged by Shanghai Kunqu Opera Troupe and Zhejiang Kunqu Opera Troupe respectively; second, echoing the Year of the Monkey, the Monkey King Play Series put together by the Youth Troupe of the Peking Opera Theatre of Beijing and Li Baochun, as well as the Shao Opera Art Research Institute of Zhejiang. These productions have made a major impression on *Xiqu* lovers. Wong proposes a theme for a future edition of COF — “Beat the Heat with Clowns in National Operas”, pitting followers of Xiao Changhua, the famed *chou* (clown role) actor from Beijing opera [from North China], against those of Wang Shiyao, another *chou* master from Kunqu opera [from South China], on the same stage.

COF: longer run time?

The run time of the COF itself is also a matter of concern to many Xiqu enthusiasts. Tang Yuen-ha asserts that the Festival programmes, now packed closely together within two months, should be stretched over a longer period of time. Wong Kin-tung holds similar views: COF succeeds in bringing Xiqu fans together, but staging all the shows in the course of eight weeks makes it less affordable for many, in terms of both energy and finance. He suggests that the LCSD follow the example of Hong Kong Arts Festival in curating "Part II", so that the year-round programmes would form an organic whole. Another example for reference is the Hong Kong Sinfonietta which presents morning concerts and matinees. The audience might not be as big but could become more diverse, since the programmes would be brought to a wider demographic. This is something the LCSD should devote efforts to.

In response to the aforementioned suggestions, Tina Cheng says that the LCSD has to structure their programmes from a macro view. Very often, theatre troupes have most of their time slots occupied, so it takes quite some effort to invite them to perform. Generally speaking, the LCSD will go into the details of collaboration with the troupes only after venue arrangements are made. She adds that since Le

French May and Hong Kong Arts Festival take place in spring, the LCSD has chosen to schedule COF for the summer holiday (June to August). By doing so, performing arts programmes are more evenly distributed throughout the year, and COF may create greater impact without clashing with other programmes.

Despite the strong line-up the annual COF has to offer, not everyone can appreciate them in person. Many fans have been looking forward to watching the great performances on video. Tina Cheng remarks that their past initiatives, such as the Chinese Operatic Art Series and A Showcase of Masterly Skills in Chinese Opera, have been photographed and videoed for archival purpose. Liaison with the relevant performing groups, however, is necessary as to how such footage is shared with the public. What's more, artists may feel uncomfortable if they know that their performance is being taped, so multiple factors have to be taken into consideration. Wong makes a counter-suggestion: The LCSD may persuade actors to submit for public viewing the performances they are most confident of.

Viewers and performers

Appreciation, performance, and critique are all indispensable to the development of Xiqu. For a



To celebrate the 20th anniversary of the establishment of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, the Chinese Artists Association of Hong Kong banded together local Cantonese Opera performers to stage suspicious piece, *Grand Birthday Celebration at Mount Heung Fa*.



In commemoration of the 400th anniversary of the death of Tang Xianzu, Ying Kam-sha and Wen Yu-hang performed *The Legend of the Purple Hairpin* with the Zhejiang Kunqu Opera Troupe as the opening programme of the COF 2016.

successful performance, audience feedback is just as important as its actual delivery on stage. In this regard, COF provides audience questionnaires as well as pre/post-performance artists' talks to facilitate exchange.

Wong Kin-ting quips that during the Xiqu talks he hosts, there are often attendees who share their views ardently on the performances they have seen. While COF, in his opinion, almost leaves nothing to be desired, the only missing piece of the puzzle is the presence of a proper channel for audiences to express their views. He maintains that not everyone likes putting their words on paper; and given that a Xiqu performance usually runs longer than other kinds of productions, it may not be effective to ask audiences to fill in questionnaires after the show. He therefore suggests that the LCSD organise workshops or gatherings for audiences to voice their opinions. Smaller venues, such as those function rooms on Level 4 of the Administration Building of Hong Kong Cultural Centre, may be suitable venues. These activities may be hosted by someone who has no conflict of interest with the performers and

so on, so that participants may feel free to speak their minds.

In regard to pre/post-performance artists' talks, Wong observes that the artists do not always find it comfortable to speak freely, whereas audience response tends to be polarised — either being indifferent or excessively emotional. Tang Yuen-ha, as an opera artist, questions the effectiveness of such one-off sharing sessions, which in her view can be exhausting. Respect for the teacher means a great deal in traditional Chinese culture. She believes that masterclass is a better way for artists to pass the torch than guided talks or artists' talks. Currently, she is putting together a programme on the *hongsheng* (red-faced male role), inviting Beijing opera great Li Yusheng to lead stage performances and masterclasses for talents from Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan to study his craft.

COF: the way forward

As seasoned Xiqu professional Annie Chow points out in an article¹, COF is the third wave of Xiqu

1. Annie Chow. 2012. "A Xiqu Spectacular in Hong Kong: All About Chinese Opera Festival 2010", *Hong Kong Xiqu Yearbook 2010*, pp.15-16. Hong Kong: International Association of Theatre Critics (Hong Kong).

spectaculars that has been launched since the establishment of Hong Kong as a free port. It was preceded by the celebratory extravaganza presented by the government for Hong Kong's reunification with Mainland China in 1997, and then the successful examples of topical showcases, namely the Chinese Regional Opera Series, Chinese Operas with an Ancient Lineage, and The Chinese Clapper Opera Series. Bringing home to the audience different operatic genres from all over Mainland China, COF is poised to become a premium cultural event that appeals to visitors to Hong Kong.

Tang Yuen-ha hopes that theatregoers would be able to grasp the essence of *Xiqu* appreciation and develop an eye for the arts by experiencing *Xiqu* and the Chinese culture at large. She further points out that some recent COF programmes have departed from the norm in *Xiqu*, which always puts the performer front and centre. This is evident in the programme note which carries only the plot summary but no information about the performers. In the days ahead, she aspires to broaden the presence of Beijing and Kunqu operas on the global stage, winning back the prestige and status Chinese performing arts have long deserved.

(Translated by Elbe Lau)

Milky Cheung Man-shan

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