

Development plan for opera released

Performances in Kunshan present opportunity for beneficiaries of training to shine

By CHEN NAN
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The Ministry of Culture and Tourism announced the annual talent development plan for performers of traditional Chinese opera on July 4.

According to the announcement, 20 traditional Chinese opera actors and actresses from around the country are on the list, and will give performances showcasing the results of the talent development plan in October in Kunshan, Jiangsu province.

This year's plan was launched in February and aims to train top performers of traditional Chinese opera.

Traditional Chinese opera comes in many forms and combines a variety of art forms, including singing, dancing, martial arts and acting, and is usually hundreds of years old. Performed in local dialects and once enjoyed by both royalty and ordinary people, it has been experiencing a decline as the result of the impact of modern forms of entertainment.

The plan covers different types of traditional Chinese opera, including Huangmeixi Opera, which is also known as *caichaxi* (tea-picking opera) and originated in Anqing in Anhui province during the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), and Qinqiang Opera, which is popular in northwestern China and particularly in Shaanxi province and has its roots in the Qin Dynasty (221-206 BC).

There are 348 kinds of traditional Chinese opera, according to a report released by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism in 2017. "Compared to the figure contained in the book, *Traditional Chinese Operas Chronicles*, which was published in 1999 and which recounts the history and development of traditional Chinese opera, 47 varieties have died out and 17 are facing extinction," the report said.

The talent development plan was born from awareness of the need to protect and revive traditional Chinese opera. Plans have been launched since 2018, and an annual gala ceremony is held in Kunshan that unites top performers trained through the program.

Guo Xiao, an actress at the China National Peking Opera Company, is one of the names on this year's list of top performers.

She has been performing with the company since 2010, and has played leading roles in classic productions, including as Mu Guiying in *Female Generals of the Yang Family*, and has also performed in the experimental Peking Opera production of *Faust*, an adaptation of the Western classic by Johann Wolfgang Goethe.

"The talent development plan allowed me to learn under established Peking Opera masters and gave me more opportunities to perform onstage," said Guo, whose mother is a Peking Opera actress with the local Peking Opera troupe in Xuzhou, Jiangsu province, and father is a member of the troupe's band.

She was introduced to the art form as a child. "When I was young, I learned piano, dance and calligraphy but I was interested in



SHI YU / CHINA DAILY



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Peking Opera," she said.

Peking Opera, which is also known as *jingju*, is a 200-year-old art form that combines singing, dancing, acrobatics and martial arts and dates back to 1790, when four Hui Opera troupes visited Beijing as part of celebrations for the 80th birthday of Emperor Qianlong (1711-99). Hui Opera, or *huiju*, is a precursor of Peking Opera from Anhui province. In about 1840, Peking Opera began to take formal shape, growing rapidly under the reign of Empress Dowager Cixi (1835-1908), a

patron of the art. Afterward, Peking Opera went from strength to strength, with troupes formed in Beijing, Tianjin and Shanghai. In 2010, it was declared an intangible cultural heritage of humanity by UNESCO.

"My parents didn't plan to teach me about Peking Opera because they know that it is difficult to learn and demand for performers wasn't very high. But I learned Peking Opera when my mother gave classes to other actresses in the troupe," said Guo, whose talent got her into Beijing's Middle School Affiliated to the National Academy of Chinese Theatre Arts to study when she was 10.

Though her parents were against the idea of Guo becoming a Peking Opera actress, they supported her dream. She specializes in *qing yi*, a female role that is mature and graceful, and graduated with a master's degree in Peking Opera performance from the National Academy of Chinese Theatre Arts in 2010.

"Like many young Peking Opera performers, I wanted to perform onstage as much as possible because that is how we grow and develop into real artists," Guo said. One of her first break-

throughs was performing the classic Peking Opera piece, *Baolian Deng* (*The Lotus Lamp*), which is based on a Chinese folk tale about a young boy, Chen Xiang, who saves his mother.

"I was very lucky to have Peking Opera masters like Li Weikang and Geng Qichang guiding me. I was very young and they are national household names," she added.

According to Wang Yong, president of the China National Peking Opera Company, over half the company's 183 actors and actresses are under the age of 40.

"Young people need to get stage experience and encounter audiences as much as possible. It usually takes at least five years for them to grow into performers who can be called professionals," Wang said.

Peking Opera actor Huang Qifeng, who specializes in performing *wusheng* roles, or the male martial arts role, is also on the list, and will perform classic Peking Opera productions in Kunshan this October, including *Lin Chong Ye Ben*, or *Lin Chong Flees by Night*, one of the best-known Peking Opera pieces for *wusheng* actors.

"The government is devoted to

supporting traditional Chinese opera. The talent development plan for traditional Chinese opera offers young performers the opportunity to display their talent and move up to a new artistic level," said Huang, who works currently with the Tianjin Jingju Theatre Company.

He said that the key to training young actors and actresses in traditional Chinese opera is to have established artists teach them.

"I learned many classic Peking Opera pieces word by word, move by move, from established artists. Many of them are still performing onstage, which permits us to learn from them and improve ourselves," he said.

"Traditional Chinese opera is the quintessence of Chinese culture, condensing the wisdom and efforts of artists from many generations. It needs to be passed on and developed by younger performers."

One of the 40-something's main missions besides performing is coaching young *wusheng* actors at the Tianjin Jingju Theatre Company. He also gives workshops at schools in Tianjin, and is devoted to popularizing the ancient art form among the young.

Policy Digest

10 million to be recruited to do new forms of work

China's trade unions plan to recruit more than 3 million workers a year through new forms of employment between next year and 2025, with a total of 10 million people to be recruited during the period, the All-China Federation of Trade Unions said on Friday.

The move is part of the federation's efforts to implement a three-year action plan to promote new forms of employment, which plays an important role in national employment.

Huang Long, an official with the federation, told a press conference in Beijing that China currently has 84 million people working in new forms of employment, and they include truck drivers, ride-hailing drivers, couriers and food delivery workers.

According to the federation, to better guarantee the legitimate rights of workers in new forms of employment, the federation will work to secure stability in terms of their salary and position, which concerns workers most.

It will also ask government departments to refine systems related to the protection of the workers' rights and encourage companies to better fulfill their responsibilities.

Awareness, precautions against heat, floods

The Ministry of Culture and Tourism has reminded tourists across the country to be more aware of potential risks during the summer vacation, which coincides with the main flood season, which starts late this month and continues till early next month.

In a notice issued on July 13, the ministry said that tourists should keep abreast of the latest weather forecasts and warnings and remain alert to the dangers of landslides, falling rocks, mudslides and other risks.

Tourists are also reminded to strictly abide by fire safety regulations and to avoid smoking, barbecuing or using an open flame in areas with flammable materials.

Given the high temperatures currently affecting many regions, the ministry advised tourists to arrange their travel itineraries rationally, avoid or reduce outdoor activities, and ensure they have reasonable rest.

Zero tolerance for fraud, academic dishonesty

China maintains a zero-tolerance approach to scientific fraud and academic dishonesty as it has set itself the goal of becoming a leading country in education by 2035, an official at the Ministry of Education said on July 12.

Lei Chaozi, director of the ministry's department of science, technology and informatization, told a conference in Beijing that a major reason universities are falling short in supporting China's development is that they do not have enough top-notch people producing innovation.

Lei said that in order to create a better environment for research innovation and the training of talent, it is important to get tough on academic integrity by displaying zero tolerance for misconduct, especially at world-class universities. China has progressed significantly in terms of independent innovation over the past decade, as evidenced by the steady rise of its global ranking from 34th to 11th on the Global Innovation Index released by the World Intellectual Property Organization last year.

MO JINGXI

Online live performance standards set for influencers, agencies

By CHEN NAN

The China Association of Performing Arts has released two notifications setting new standards for live performances on streaming platforms, the "Requirements for Operations and Services for Live Performance (Streaming) Platform" and the "Requirements for Operations and Services for Live Performance (Streaming) Talent Agencies".

The association's latest move follows the online live performance

(streaming and short video) terminology issued by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism in March.

"The rapid development of live online performances (streaming) has played a positive role in boosting consumption, especially during the difficult period during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, it has also led to problems and negative events. The healthy environment for live online performance (streaming) needs to be strengthened," the association said, adding that "the move will help shape a

healthy environment and the growth of the boom in the livestreaming sector".

The two notifications seek to expand the reach of regulatory authorities to livestreaming influencers.

The content of live online performances (streaming) will be examined and regulated, including the language used by online influencers, the way they present themselves, and the comments and *danmu* (video commentary consisting of scrolling viewer messages on

top of the video in real time) posted.

Agencies that manage online influencers are also being regulated and must follow rules regarding the management of online influencers, content verification, and advertising.

According to the China Association of Performing Arts, online performances (streaming) and livestreaming e-commerce have changed the way people consume. Last year, online streaming brought in 199 billion yuan (\$27.75 billion) in revenues, and there were about 150

million online accounts involved in online performances and livestreaming e-commerce.

In 2021, the Cyberspace Administration of China and six other government entities, including the Ministry of Commerce, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and the State Administration for Market Regulation, released guidelines regulating the country's booming livestreaming industry and set standards for livestreaming e-commerce platforms, operators and hosts.

The guidelines were designed to

protect the rights and interests of consumers and tackle problems including false advertising and the sale of poor-quality goods.

Authorities have released rules and regulations and set standards for live online performances (streaming) because the rapidly growing audience reached 469 million in June last year, compared to 204 million in March 2020, according to a report by the Academy of China Council for the Promotion of International Trade released last November.