

Tales from the Beijing Opera



The Art of Beijing Opera

Beijing Opera is a comprehensive art form that combines dance, acrobatics, stage combat, mime and dialogue into a theatrical whole. Beijing Opera is only one of the many opera forms that exists throughout China. It was developed about 200 years ago in Beijing. At the time Beijing was a center for theatrical activity and many provincial troupes came to the capital to perform for officials and traders eager to hear the music and dialect of their hometowns. Beijing Opera developed as an amalgamation of several types of local drama popular at the time. It has a reputation for being rowdy and colorful.

The costumes and makeup are elaborate, but the scenery and props are sparse. Chairs and tables double as mountains, a horse whip indicates the character is riding a horse, a paddle means the character is on a boat and making a circle is the equivalent of a long journey. Such conventions mean that audiences and actors are meant to use their imaginations.

Stories are taken from history, mythology and literature and are divided into two main types: civil and military. Civil plays focus on singing and often tell stories of romance or political intrigue. Martial plays contain battle scenes from China's long history and feature famous generals, heroic outlaws or women warriors.

- Multicultural Programming appropriate for ALL AGES
- Unique Bilingual Performances in English and Chinese
- Variety: Music, Singing, Dance, Mime, Acrobatics and Dialogue
- Customized Programs
- Optional Live Music Performance of Traditional Chinese Instruments Between Scenes
- Optional Pre-Show Workshop and Post-Show Q&A
- Opportunities to Collaborate and Share Cost with Other Campus Departments
- Programs well during:
 - Lunar New Year - February
 - Asian/Pacific Heritage Month - May (celebrated in some areas in March or April)
 - Chinese Moon Festival - September
 - China's National Day - October



The artists of "Tales from the Beijing Opera" are dedicated to bringing Chinese and American theatre artists together to produce theatre and conduct workshops that promote cultural exchange and artistic exploration. They produce bilingual adaptations of traditional Beijing Operas and teach workshops for professional theatre artists, students, and children. "Tales from the Beijing Opera" is a selection of comic and dramatic scenes from some of China's most popular operas performed in both Chinese and English. With a mixture of singing, dance, music, mime, stage fighting and acrobatics, this colorful show is fun for audiences of all ages. Some of the scenes include:

"Autumn River" is a romantic tale of a nun who escapes from her convent in order to pursue the young scholar whom she loves. This episode consists of comic dialogue and mime as an old boatman helps her across Autumn River.

"Fighting in the State of Ji" is an historical drama taken from an episode of the novel Romance of the Three Kingdoms. This scene tells of a brave general who, in spite of his loyalty to the Han government, is being pursued and crushed by a corrupt official and his lackeys.

"Monkey and Pigsy" is a selection from China's most beloved story, Journey to the West, about the naughty Monkey King, gluttonous Pigsy and their master, the monk Tang Sheng who leads them to enlightenment. In this scene Monkey and Pigsy's crimes against Heaven lead them to banishment on earth where they continue to make trouble by stealing a magic weapon from a dragon.

"Farewell My Concubine" is the classic tale of tragic love between the General Xiang Yu and his concubine Yu Ji. The story takes place in the hours before the defeat of Xiang Yu's army to his enemy Liu Bang of the Han dynasty. Yu Ji comforts her lover with a sword dance and as the invading army approaches, Xiang Yu fights gallantly, but to no avail.

"Fighting in the Dark" uses mime and stage combat to illustrate the comic episode of an innkeeper's attempt to kill one of his guests in the darkened room.

Additional educational programs can be added before or after the performance. Some of our offerings are listed below:

- Acting in the Beijing
- Music of the Beijing Opera
- The World of Beijing Opera
- Movement/Acting
- Stage Fighting
- The Art of Beijing Opera Face Painting and Design

Residencies designed for serious student and professional actors are also available. We organize a series of classes to your needs. This might include a series of lecture/demonstrations as well as movement and singing workshops in which students work towards a particular role. Longer residencies may culminate in a final performance with veteran actors of the Beijing Opera.



"Definitely our
most successful
Visiting Scholars program
ever!"

Prof. Lew Robinson, Sacramento State University

Tales from the Beijing Opera

"The 90-minute show's most impressive charm is the chance to see a veteran professional at work in this exotic style, to say nothing of his achievements in turning full somersaults in his elaborate, colorful costumes. The show opened with the simple comedy of the Monkey stealing fruit from a table and bickering with a gluttonous Pigsy (Moore in a pig mask). It ended with a scene from a historical drama of warfare, cruelty and betrayal, "Fighting in the State of Ji," in which Zhou is a heroic general punished for his victory by the death of his infant son. His dance of grief had heroic jumps and splits and won strong applause."

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