

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## Esplanade launches *Xiqu – Chinese Opera Series* to Breathe New Life into One of the Oldest Art Forms in the World



**SINGAPORE, 17 Oct 2019** – Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay launches *Xiqu – Chinese Opera Series* to provide more opportunities for audiences, young and old, to appreciate different forms of xiqu (Chinese Opera) throughout the year. Xiqu, which literally means musical theatre in Chinese, is one of the oldest art forms in the world and tells timeless stories that are deeply rooted in Chinese culture and traditions. The new programme series will present a variety of large-scale and intimate xiqu performances, in addition to the free xiqu programmes featured during Esplanade’s annual festivals, *Huayi – Chinese Festival of Arts* and *Moonfest – A Mid-Autumn Celebration*.

Mimi Yee, Head, Community Programmes, The Esplanade Co Ltd, said, “Xiqu is a rich form of theatre that combines drama, dance, music and literary arts and can be enjoyed by everyone. The stories told through xiqu often stem from values of loyalty, filial piety, benevolence and righteousness, which are values still relevant to the society today. Many xiqu troupes are working hard to preserve and inject new life into this art form, and we want to do our part to promote xiqu by having year-round programmes to reach audiences of different age groups. We are heartened to have the support of our audiences for our Chinese Opera programmes all these years, and we are committed to continue growing this pool of loyal

audiences whose tastes and appreciation of this art form have expanded and become more sophisticated. With our new *Xiqu Series*, Esplanade will be able to introduce a greater variety of both traditional and contemporary xiqu performances by Singapore and overseas opera artists and companies to our audiences and engage them through activities such as talks and workshops. For young audiences, we will also work with the troupes to present performances specially designed to help them get to know and appreciate Chinese Opera, whenever possible.”

The first programme to be presented under this new series is ***Four Dreams in the Camellia Hall\****, comprising four signature Kun Opera works performed by Shanghai Kunqu Opera Troupe (China) at the Esplanade Theatre from 26 – 29 Mar 2020. Written by Ming Dynasty playwright Tang Xianzu—often referred to as William Shakespeare of the East—the four masterpieces are, *A Pair of Purple Hairpins*, *A Dream under the Southern Bough*, *The Tale of Handan* and *The Peony Pavilion* and they will be performed over four consecutive evenings. Those who enjoy theatre and xiqu can look forward to experience these famous classics that have provided inspiration for and been adapted and reprised in many different art forms and genres. It is a rare, not-to-be-missed opportunity for theatre goers in Singapore to see the work in its complete collection.

In Jul 2020, Jiangsu Performing Arts Group Wuxi Opera Troupe will be staging two iconic Wuxi Opera titles, ***The Pearl Pagoda*** and ***The Lost Prince*** at the Esplanade Theatre. Rarely presented in Southeast Asia, Wuxi Opera is one of the major Chinese Opera forms in East China, alongside the more commonly seen Yue Opera and Huangmei Opera. Plum Blossom Award winner and Jiangsu Performing Arts Group Wuxi Opera Troupe’s leader Zhou Dongliang will be starring in *The Pearl Pagoda*, as Fang Qing, grandson of a former prime minister, whose family had since fallen into hard times. Against all odds, Fang came out tops in the civil examination, and returned home to get married to his cousin who had helped him. Zhou will also be playing the lead role in *The Lost Prince*, as the lost Prince Wang Hua.

“There are over 300 different Chinese Opera forms recorded to date, and audiences in Singapore are probably familiar with about 20 of these genres which are more regularly presented here. Through the *Xiqu Series*, our audience can also expect to see rare opera forms like Wuxi Opera, Shao Opera, Gaojia Opera, and Liyuan Opera in our Theatre as well as our new 550-seat Singtel Waterfront Theatre which will open in 2021. Xiqu performances in a more intimate setting will present audiences a whole new experience of watching Chinese Opera. So when our waterfront theatre is ready, we will be able to present a greater variety of xiqu performances more regularly at Esplanade,” added Mimi Yee.

Besides watching performances, it is also important to help audiences better understand and appreciate xiqu. Whenever there are opportunities, Esplanade often works with international artists to conduct talks, masterclasses, workshops and even performances specially catered for young audiences. For example, when the renowned GuoGuang Opera Company (Taiwan) is here to stage Peking Opera ***The Ghost Seller*** later this month, Esplanade is working with the artists to present a special performance designed for students which will include interactive and introductory components as well as educational resource guides for both the teachers and students.

Similarly, Esplanade will also work with both Shanghai Kunqu Opera Troupe and Jiangsu Performing Arts Group Wuxi Opera Troupe to conduct free talks with demonstrations for the public when they are in Singapore. As part of Esplanade's Community Engagement programme, the troupes will also be performing Chinese Opera excerpts at suitable social service organisations in Singapore.

Tickets to ***Four Dreams in the Camellia Hall***\* can be purchased on Esplanade's [website](#) and Box Office at the Mezzanine level, as well as all SISTIC outlets and through SISTIC Hotline (Tel: +65 6348 5555). Tickets to ***The Pearl Pagoda*** and ***The Lost Prince*** will go on sale in Apr 2020. Tickets Please refer to the Annexe or visit [www.esplanade.com/xiqu](http://www.esplanade.com/xiqu) for more information.

**\*Cancellation Notice:**

***Four Dreams in the Camellia Hall*** by Shanghai Kunqu Opera Troupe, which comprises four works, will be cancelled due to the evolving COVID-19 (Coronavirus Disease 2019) situation. The troupe sends their deepest regrets and looks forward to rescheduling their performances at Esplanade at another time soon.

All patrons who purchased tickets for the performances will receive an email with details on full refunds soon.

*Last updated: 9 Mar 2020*

## About Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay

Esplanade is Singapore's national performing arts centre. It has a year-round line-up of about 3,500 performances presented by Esplanade, its partners and hirers. As an arts centre for everyone, Esplanade also creates opportunities for seniors, youth, children and underserved communities to experience the arts. More than 70% of the shows that take place each year at the centre are non-ticketed. The centre works in close partnership with local, regional and international artists to develop artistic capabilities and content, push artistic boundaries and engage audiences. Esplanade supports the creation of artistic content by commissioning and producing new Singapore and Asian work for the international stage. It also develops technical capabilities for the industry nationally.

To bring even more of the arts to a wider audience and provide more platforms to support Singapore's next generation of artists, Esplanade is building a new theatre along its busy waterfront. Named Singtel Waterfront Theatre, the 550-seat venue will open in 2021.

Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay is operated by The Esplanade Co Ltd (TECL), which is a not-for-profit organisation, a registered Charity and an Institution of a Public Character. The Charity Council awarded TECL the Charity Governance Award – Special Commendation for Clarity of Strategy in 2016, and the Charity Transparency Award for three consecutive years since 2016.

TECL is funded by Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth and its Community Programmes are supported by Tote Board Family, comprising Tote Board, Singapore Pools and Singapore Turf Club.

Visit [Esplanade.com](http://Esplanade.com) for more information and [Esplanade.com/Offstage](http://Esplanade.com/Offstage) for an all-access backstage pass and insider's guide to Singapore and Asian arts and culture.

~ End ~

Issued by *The Esplanade Co Ltd*.

For more information, please contact:

See Ling Ling  
Head, Communications  
The Esplanade Co Ltd  
Tel: 6828 8334  
Email: [slingling@esplanade.com](mailto:slingling@esplanade.com)

Jackie Wong  
Arts Marketing Strategist  
The Esplanade Co Ltd  
Tel: 6828 8343  
Email: [wjackie@esplanade.com](mailto:wjackie@esplanade.com)

## Annexe

Esplanade Presents

### **Xiqu – Chinese Opera Series**



Mar and Jul 2020

[www.esplanade.com/xiqu](http://www.esplanade.com/xiqu)

*Xiqu Series* showcases the beauty and diversity of Chinese Opera (“Xiqu” in Chinese). Literally translating as “musical theatre”, Xiqu is one of the oldest Chinese art forms in the world. Through a combination of drama, dance, music, martial and literary arts, Xiqu tells timeless stories deeply rooted in Chinese culture and traditions. Stories that stem from values of loyalty, filial piety, benevolence and righteousness.

Today, Xiqu features more than 300 distinct genres, encompassing a wide spectrum of dialects, singing styles, movements, costumes and make-up. Each genre is a unique showcase of the characteristics of its community and of its region of origin.

*Xiqu Series* presents a variety of Xiqu performances from the large-scale to the intimate, the traditional to the contemporary, as well as workshops and talks. Selected Xiqu programmes can also be experienced at Esplanade’s *Huayi – Chinese Festival of Arts and Moonfest – A Mid-Autumn Celebration*.

### **[Cancelled] Four Dreams in the Camellia Hall**

Shanghai Kunqu Opera Troupe

***The Tale of Handan*** – 26 Mar 2020, Thu, 8pm

***A Pair of Purple Hairpins*** – 27 Mar 2020, Fri, 8pm

***A Dream Under the Southern Bough*** – 28 Mar 2020, Sat, 8pm

***The Peony Pavilion*** – 29 Mar 2020, Sun, 8pm

Thu to Sun, 8pm, Esplanade Theatre

#### **Cancellation Notice:**

***Four Dreams in the Camellia Hall*** by Shanghai Kunqu Opera Troupe, which comprises four works, will be cancelled due to the evolving COVID-19 (Coronavirus Disease 2019) situation. The troupe sends their deepest regrets and looks forward to rescheduling their performances at Esplanade at another time soon.

All patrons who purchased tickets for the performances will receive an email with details on full refunds soon.

#### **About *Four Dreams in the Camellia Hall***

For every Kunqu performer, it is a dream to be a part of *Four Dreams in the Camellia Hall*. Written by influential Ming dynasty playwright Tang Xianzu, it is a collection of four outstanding classic operas regarded for its culture value and philosophical thoughts. Author Wang Siren, Tang’s contemporary, summarised the collection as chivalry (*A Pair of Purple Hairpins*), love (*The Peony Pavilion*), Buddhist meditation (*A Dream Under the Southern Bough*) and immortality (*The Tale of Handan*). These four dreams are the crystallisation of Tang’s experiences, insights and artistry, and have long been regarded as the benchmark of excellence for Kunqu works. Four centuries later, the incomparable brilliance of these *Four Dreams* still shines bright.

To mark the 400th anniversary of Tang Xianzu's passing in 2016, Shanghai Kunqu Opera Troupe began touring performances of *Four Dreams in the Camellia Hall* to various parts of the world. The performances were well-received regionally and internationally in major Chinese cities, as well as in USA, Czech Republic and Belgium.

The Shanghai Kunqu Opera Troupe believes in respecting and revering tradition and is dedicated to the continuation and promotion of Kunqu. This is the spirit which the troupe adopted in their approach towards the production of the *Four Dreams*. A dream unfolds each evening, and over the course of four nights, the troupe weaves a cohesive experience for audiences through imaginative staging that brings alive the literary beauty of Tang's words and the aesthetic essence of Kunqu.

These works are performed by opera icons as well as younger performers who are given the opportunity to share the stage with Kunqu masters. The result is an elegant expression of Kunqu that is both precise and nuanced — a worthy homage to one of the oldest opera genres in the world.

---

**[Cancelled] Four Dreams in the Camellia Hall – The Tale of Handan**  
**26 Mar 2020**, Thu, 8pm

The down-and-out scholar Lu Sheng dreams of a life of fortune, power and women. He encounters the immortal Lu Dongbin who gifts him a porcelain pillow. That night, as Lu laid his head on the pillow, he dreams of becoming a top scholar and was married to a beautiful woman. In the dream, Lu experiences 50 years of highs and lows of fame as a high-ranking official, only to wake up to the stark reality that the yellow millet porridge that had been simmering away in a nearby shop before he fell asleep was still not cooked. He had crested heights of achievement and fallen from grace only in his dreams. Enlightened, Lu decides to follow the immortal Lu Dongbin and no longer covets worldly desires.

Capturing the seamy side of officialdom in a feudal society, Tang Xianzu wrote the play a year after he retired as an official and returned to his hometown. *The Tale of Handan* is often regarded as the most remarkable literary masterpieces amongst the *Four Dreams*.

Cast: Zhang Wei Wei, Chen Li

(2hrs 30mins, including 20min intermission)  
Performed with English and Chinese surtitles.

**[Cancelled] Four Dreams in the Camellia Hall – A Pair of Purple Hairpins**  
**27 Mar 2020**, Fri, 8pm

The shortest of the *Four Dreams*, *A Pair of Purple Hairpins* is also the most evocative. Scholar Li Yi falls in love with famous courtesan Huo Xiaoyu and becomes man and wife. However, their relationship was persecuted by military official Lu, and the pair were separated. Huo is consumed with longing for Li. In a dream, she meets a chivalrous knight who is dressed in yellow robes and carries a fine sword. He gifts her with a pair of embroidered shoes (the Chinese pronunciation of shoes is a homonym of the Chinese word for harmony), and she sees this as a sign that the star-crossed couple will find their way back to each other.

In reality, a happy ending would have been virtually impossible under the same circumstances. The knight in yellow robes is a symbol of resistance towards authoritarian power and expresses Tang's hope of a better world.

Cast: Li An, Shen Yili

(2hrs 30mins, including 20min intermission)  
Performed with English and Chinese surtitles.

**[Cancelled] Four Dreams in the Camellia Hall – A Dream Under the Southern Bough**  
**28 Mar 2020, Sat, 8pm**

Depressed and laying in a drunken slumber under the old pagoda tree, a discharged army official Chun Yufen dreams that he visits the kingdom of ants. In his dream, he marries the princess and is appointed to an illustrious position in the kingdom. He achieves numerous successes and becomes an influential figure. Unfortunately, upon the passing of his wife, his power and arrogance turned him into the target of much jealousy, and he was ultimately sent into exile. Waking from his dream, Yufen realises that all his accomplishments were an illusion. A priest performs a religious ceremony to help the soul of his deceased wife find peace, and he chooses to seek enlightenment from Buddhism.

Disillusioned by the corruption of the imperial court, it is said that despondent drunkard Yufen embodied the author's own struggles with worldly ambition.

Cast: Luo Chen Xue, Wei Li

(2hrs 30mins, including 20min intermission)  
Performed with English and Chinese surtitles.

**[Cancelled] Four Dreams in the Camellia Hall – The Peony Pavilion**  
**29 Mar 2020, Sun, 8pm**

Du Liniang is the daughter of a high-ranking official. After dreaming of a young scholar she meets in a peony pavilion, Du wakes up and wastes away her life pinning for the scholar before passing away with a broken heart. Her devotion moves the underworld. Three years later, scholar Liu Mengmei chances upon Du's portrait in the garden where she is buried beside the peony pavilion. Convinced that he has met Du before, a sense of romantic déjà vu fills him. His exhortations of love bring Du back to life and the lovers reunite for a happy ending,

Regarded as one Tang Xianzu's most celebrated work, *The Peony Pavilion* weaves a tale of love with the beauty of nature through the usage of lyrical metaphor.

Cast: Li An, Shen Yili

(3hrs, including 20min intermission)  
Performed with English and Chinese surtitles.

---

**About Shanghai Kunqu Opera Troupe**

Founded in 1978 with Kunqu maestro Yu Zhenfei as its first director, the Shanghai Kunqu Opera Troupe has since developed into a company of outstanding artists of diverse roles and skills, many of whom are recipients of the Plum Blossom Award, China's most prestigious theatre accolade. Currently led by director Gu Haohao, the troupe received the top national honour from China's Ministry of Culture in 1986 for its accomplishments and contributions in the conservation and promotion of Kunqu.

Since its establishment, the troupe has staged over 300 traditional performance excerpts

and 70 full-length classic opera productions, as well as the creation of new works and adaptations. The troupe has performed extensively to great critical acclaim in USA, Japan, United Kingdom, France, Germany, Spain, Denmark, Sweden, Holland, Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan.

---

**\$28\*, \$48\*\*, \$68^, \$88^, \$108 (VIP Meet & Greet)**

Limited concessions for students, seniors and NSFs: \$22\*, \$37\*\*

**VIP Meet & Greet** ticket holders are entitled to an exclusive meet & greet with the lead performers after the show.

#### **Early Bird Special (17 Oct – 17 Nov 2019)**

- **^Esplanade&Me Special**  
Black & White Card: 20% savings (Cat 1 & 2 tickets only)
- **^JOYears:** 15% savings (Cat 1 & 2 tickets only)
- **^Xiqu Special:** 15% savings (Cat 1 & 2 tickets only)  
Purchase 2 to 4 tickets of the same price category to one or more performances of the *Four Dreams in the Camellia Hall*. Limited tickets available. Terms and Conditions apply.

#### **Regular Savings (from 18 Nov 2019 onwards)**

- **^Esplanade&Me Special**  
Black & White Card: 15% savings (Cat 1 & 2 tickets only)
- **^JOYears:** 10% savings (Cat 1 & 2 tickets only)
- **^Xiqu Special:** 10% savings (Cat 1 & 2 tickets only)  
Purchase 2 to 4 tickets of the same price category to one or more performances of the *Four Dreams in the Camellia Hall*. Limited tickets available. Terms and Conditions apply.

Tickets to *Four Dreams in the Camellia Hall* can be purchased on Esplanade's website [www.esplanade.com/xiqu](http://www.esplanade.com/xiqu) and Box Office at the Mezzanine level, as well as all SISTIC outlets and through SISTIC Hotline (Tel: +65 6348 5555).

---

### **The Pearl Pagoda**

Jiangsu Performing Arts Group Wuxi Opera Troupe (China)

**10 July 2020, Fri**

### **The Lost Prince**

Jiangsu Performing Arts Group Wuxi Opera Troupe (China)

**12 July 2020, Sun**

Show details will be available in Apr 2020.