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SATURDAY, MAY 30, 2009



The Taipei Arts Festival is offering reduced prices on tickets purchased by June 7

The early bird gets a discount

BY DIANE BAKER
STAFF REPORTER

The economic downturn has hurt many industries and the arts are no exception. Recent performances by local and international artists, including Klaus Obermaier's *Apparition II* at the National Theater and Novel Hall Dance 2009 series, have been noticeably emptier than they would have been last year. Discounts are hard to come by unless you are a student, in the military, a senior citizen or have at least 19 friends who all want to see the same show.

The folks putting together the 11th annual Taipei Arts Festival, which opens Aug. 12 and runs through Sept. 9, are hoping to avoid empty seats by offering an "Early Bird Special" through June 7 of 25 percent off regular tickets, except for the lowest-priced seats for each show.

For those who can plan ahead, this is a great deal because the lineup for the festival includes both local and international theater companies, dance troupes and musicians such as LAFA & Artists, Teatr Biuro Podrozy from Poland, Schauspielhaus Zurich and a joint production by the Taipei Chinese Orchestra and Cloud Gate 2. There will also be several free lectures (in Chinese) and shows as well, plus pre- or after-show discussions. The shows will be held at venues around Taipei, including Metropolitan Hall, Novel Hall and Zhongshan Hall.



Cloud Gate 2 is among the companies that will perform at the Taipei Arts Festival. PHOTOS COURTESY OF CLOUD GATE 2

After June 8, Taipei Arts Festival is offering 20-percent discounts on ticket packages to members of Friends of the Taipei Arts Festival and 10-percent discounts will also be offered to those who are members of Friends of the Taipei Culture Foundation, Friends of the National Theater and Concert Hall (NTCH), students or senior citizens or those paying for tickets with a Visa credit card.

More information about the festival and the various ticket offers can be found on the festival's Web site (www.taipeifestival.org), which has information in Chinese and English. As of press time, however, the English-language page for joining the Friends of the Taipei Arts Festival was not available.

For fans of Lin Hwai-min (林懷民) and Cloud Gate Dance Theatre (雲門舞集), September will offer a rare chance to see all three works in Lin's *Cursive* series at the National Theater over three weeks beginning Sept. 6. If you act fast — the offer expires on tomorrow — there is a 20-percent discount on a package of either NT\$1,600 or NT\$2,000 tickets for all three productions for members of Friends of Cloud Gate or Friends of NTCH. Details can be found (in Chinese only) on the Web sites of the organizations: www.cloudgate.org.tw or www.artsticket.com.tw (for NTCH).



'Good Old Operas'

Master performer Li Baochun returns with some of Beijing opera's most traditional repertoire. Will he be able to shake the dust off these pieces and make them live again?

BY IAN BARTHOLOMEW
STAFF REPORTER

This weekend the Koo Foundation's (辜公亮文教基金會) new program, *Good Old Operas* (好老戲), which opened at Novel Hall last night, presents a number of classic operas performed by its talented cast of regulars led, and directed by Li Baochun (李寶春).

Li, who reached the top of his profession performing the acrobatically demanding martial males roles of Beijing opera, has achieved further success in recent years with ventures into the writing and performing of new-style Beijing operas, most notably his adaptation of Verdi's opera *Rigoletto* under the title of *The Jester* (弄臣) in December last year.

With *Good Old Operas*, Li has returned to some of the most traditional of Beijing opera's repertoire. He presented *Si Lang Seeks His Mother* (四郎探母) last night and will stage *Zhao Jun Departs for Barbarian Lands* (昭君出塞)

and *The Search for the Orphan* (搜孤救孤) tonight and highlights from *The Battle of Wits Between Zhou Yu and Zhuge Liang* (瑜亮鬥智) tomorrow.

All these operas deal with "generals, prime ministers, kings and nobles" (將相王侯), and provide plenty of opportunities to show off the elaborate costumes and heroic poses much loved of Beijing opera audiences.

The operagoing public will be familiar with these operas, but Li has brought in a strong cast of performers from both China and Taiwan to give the imposing presence that these stories of high diplomacy, grand strategy and courtly intrigue demand. There will be a chance to see Taiwan's Huang Yu-lin (黃宇琳), whose performance in the National Guoguang Opera Company's (國光劇團) *Ghostly Stunts* (鬼·瘋) show earlier this month was curtailed as a result of injuries she suffered in a car accident.

Li is a master performer and has proved himself able to give opera a contemporary vibrancy without tampering with fundamentals. With *Good Old Opera* he is going back to Beijing opera roots, picking stories that deal with the survival of empires and the ambitions of powerful men. Patriotism; loyalty and morality; emperor, race and family: These are the core themes of Beijing opera, and these can easily seem dated or irrelevant to a modern theater audience. It can be hoped that Li, with his towering stage presence, will shake the dust off these pieces and make them live again. Performances take place at Novel Hall today at 7:30pm and tomorrow at 2:30pm. Tickets are NT\$500 to NT\$1,500 and are available through ERA ticketing or online at www.ticket.com.tw.

Li Baochun, left, and Huang Yu-lin, right, in *Si Lang Seeks His Mother*. PHOTOS COURTESY OF KOO FOUNDATION

