

Voice of Divine Performing Arts tenor conveys hope

By HELENA ZHU
Epoch Times Staff

When Guimin Guan sang his first note on stage at a Beijing concert in 1979, his voice marked the rise of a star.

Mr. Guan is one of China's most celebrated tenors of recent decades and has recorded soundtracks for over 50 movies and television shows. As his popularity grew, he became the first artist named as a "National First-Class Performer" by China's Ministry of Culture.

Once the judge for numerous national-level vocal competitions in China, he now serves as a soloist and assistant company manager for Divine Performing Arts (DPA) International Company. In 1996, Mr. Guan decided to begin a new life in America. After that, his early fans in China heard little from him.

"Those in China haven't seen me for a while and thought that I disappeared," said Mr. Guan. "Actually, I'm still around, it's just that my singing is quite different from before. Some fans knew that I was in America, and they missed my songs from before."

Mr. Guan said that due to the political circumstances in mainland China back then, he sang a lot of songs praising the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

"However, those songs were sung in mainland China, which is ruled by the Chinese Communist Party. They force politics on everyday activities. These songs are all plagued by political messages. Although on the surface they don't seem to carry those messages, in the end you will have the implied impression that the communist leaders are good."

Refusing to use his talent to

praise the CCP, he now sings new songs that he himself has composed. One of them is *Let Me Not Regret*, a song he sings in the DPA 2009 World Tour.

"These songs tell people some situations," he says. "These songs tell people what to do in the modern world, and the meaning of life. I hope my fans from before [in China] may come and listen to my current songs."

Mr. Guan said that in China artistic freedom does not exist. Although some fans really miss the old songs he sang, those are not real art. DPA receives recognition from people of all ethnicities and ages because it brings a new way of thinking and presents art that genuinely uplifts and inspires. True artists should "carry the responsibility to uplift moral values," he said.

"People are dignified and noble when they have morality. When people don't have morality, they are like animals... As society progresses, with personal and material interests and money, people no longer believe in divine beings. Moral corruption is very serious. Some people still talk about morality on the surface, but in reality they don't care about it in their hearts. They are all after money, and will do anything to achieve that."

The singer wants something more than to entertain his new and old fans.

"People in China usually call the arts community the entertainment community. I think arts should belong to culture, and are a part of a culture. So I don't really think it should be referred as the entertainment community. We hope people's morality will ascend again, so that mankind will become nobler. I started to practice Falun Gong. It



Currently on tour with Divine Performing International Company, Guimin Guan's powerful voice thrills and uplifts the audience.

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really is a very good spiritual practice; it is a practice for improvement of morality. The CCP slanders Falun Gong, and many people are deceived by the CCP propaganda and blind their own eyes."

Mr. Guan explained that when he is on stage, he wants to "reveal the truth" to the audience.

"I hope that they are not going to stay deceived. Mankind has its moral standard, yet the CCP does not follow any moral standard. You can see the current Chinese society, on the surface, economically it is very glamorous, yet people don't have morality. People don't believe in one another. Embezzlement and corruption are everywhere."

During the DPA 2009 World Tour's four-month span, Mr. Guan's voice will be heard by hundreds of thousands of audience members in some of the 20 countries that the three DPA companies

visit. Many of his early fans have seen the performance, recalling the familiar voice that they loved and still love.

Mr. Yuan, a Chinese folk music expert visiting the United States from mainland China, attended the final DPA show at the War Memorial Opera House in San Francisco on January 11. Mr. Guan is a favourite of Mr. Yuan and his family and he was very happy to have heard him sing.

"We have enjoyed his singing since the start of his career in the 1980s. Guan's voice is very bright and unique. I wished he would sing a few more songs at today's performance," Mr. Yuan said.

In the audience in Cupertino, California on January 13 was Cheng Kai, a veteran Chinese journalist. He was immensely moved by the song, *Let Me Not Regret*. He said that through his singing, Mr.

Guan was conveying an important message to the Chinese people to implore them not to accept the CCP's lies and deception.

"[The song] saves this ethnicity, this country [China], for our people to be no longer deceived by CCP. I absolutely love this song."

Westerners were touched, too. Ms. Strauss, Arts Commissioner of the City of Milpitas, was enthralled by the message of the tenor's song. She heard him when DPA visited Cupertino.

"The messages were beautiful, also giving hope. I felt it giving peace back to the world, making you feel very good in your soul... I think that message is very important," she said.

Mr. Guan is touring with DPA International Company. Like his fellow singers, contralto Jiansheng Yang and tenor Yuan Qu, Mr. Guan's desire is reflected in the

last two lines of his song, "There is nothing we seek in return/ We wish only to share with you a hopeful tomorrow."

"I hope those who listen to my songs at performances can truly benefit, rather than watching an ordinary performance where you are simply entertained and when you return home you have not learned anything. I hope this does not happen. I hope all of my fans will harvest something new in this New Year, especially about human values."

This article was written with files from NTDTV, a media partner of The Epoch Times.

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Apollo theatre celebrates 75th birthday

By KATY MANTYK
Epoch Times Staff

NEW YORK—The historic Apollo Theatre in Harlem unveiled its 75th anniversary programming on Tuesday designed to illuminate the vital impact the landmark Theatre has had on American culture. The special line up of programs will showcase its role as a creative catalyst for Harlem, the city of New York, and the nation.

On January 28, a special edition of the world-famous Apollo Theatre's signature Amateur Night was held, with special guests, Amateur Night alumni, and a birthday cake.

"Since 1934, the Apollo has had an enormous impact on American culture, and has been the launching pad and nurturer of literally thousands of performers, many of whom have gone on to become legends," said Jonelle Procope, President and CEO of the Apollo Theater Foundation, Inc.

Some of those stars include Ella Fitzgerald, Billie Holiday, Michael Jackson, Lauryn Hill, and Alicia Keys.

From January 2009 through the beginning of 2011, the Apollo's 75th Anniversary Season will be celebrated in Harlem and across the country and will include special performances as well as a wide range of national and community offerings.

Among the season's many highlights are:

- A series of special 75th anniversary performances, including: the national launch of Dreamgirls; a series of events in conjunction with Honour!, a festival celebrating African-American culture in partnership with Carnegie Hall and curated by celebrated soprano Jessye Norman; and an intimate evening with soul music superstar John Legend.

- A national, touring exhibition in collaboration with the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of African American History and Culture to explore the history and impact of the Apollo and its role in shaping music and culture around the world. The exhibition—the first



(R-L) Dancer Savion Glover, CEO of the Apollo Theatre Foundation Jonelle Procope, musician Chuck Jackson, singer Dionne Warwick, and musician Change attend the Apollo's 75th anniversary season announcement and press conference at the Apollo Theatre on Jan 27.

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of its kind—will draw upon the Apollo Theatre archive to showcase rarely seen Apollo photographs, video clips, and other artifacts and memorabilia, and will open in April 2010 at the National Museum of American History in Washington, D.C., with an accompanying book to be developed and published in

partnership with the Smithsonian Institution Press and the National Museum of African American History and Culture.

- The launch of a music and performing arts celebration. Inspired! in October 2010, which will feature artists across generations learning from one another and performing

together.

- The Apollo will hold Open Houses in February and October 2009 featuring tours of the theatre led by in-house historian Billy Mitchell, film screenings about the Apollo's history, and a mini exhibition featuring photos of key Apollo figures and legendary performers at milestone moments.

- Plans for a documentary film co-produced by Emmy Award-winner Charles Hobson and directed by noted filmmaker Stanley Nelson, as well as a television special to be produced by the legendary Ron Weisner.

"This is the very stage where Ella Fitzgerald invented scat when she performed in Amateur Night. This is the very place where James Brown discovered that he had soul, the place where Aretha Franklin properly curtsy. Our anniversary season has been designed to reflect our extraordinary role as one of America's most important cultural resources. New talent will continue to stretch our boundaries, legendary performers will continue to grace our stage, and our incredibly rich history will be magnified through the lenses of our many program partners," said Procope.

"The Apollo has always been about 'what's next,'" said Richard D. Parsons, Chairman of the Apollo Theatre's board. "With the 75th Anniversary Season, we're celebrating our mission of innovation in the next 75 years by looking ahead. We have and will continue to push the boundaries of new art forms in American popular culture."

The Apollo is operated by the Apollo Theatre Foundation, Inc., a not-for-profit institution currently in the midst of a \$96 million capital campaign, more than half of which has already been raised. The funds will be used to complete a phased project to enhance, upgrade and expand the legendary theatre's facilities and to support future programming.

Throughout the years, the Apollo has been one of the few American venues where the tradition of discovering and promoting amateurs is as important as presenting established stars.

Roedde House museum: more than a house

By HAZELLE WANG
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VANCOUVER, British Columbia—Rainy days are not always a welcome sight in Vancouver but they are all too common in winter. It could be a perfect time to take a tour of the Roedde House heritage building, a restored late 1893 Victorian home in Vancouver's West End. A day in a warm, old house accompanied by a cup of tea is a lovely way to spend a dreary Sunday.

Roedde house was built in the "Queen Anne revival" style, for Gustav and Mathilda Roedde in 1893. The house was designed by architect, Francis M. Attenbury who also designed the provincial parliament buildings, the famed Empress hotel and the Vancouver art gallery.

The conservation of this particular house is an interesting story. After the Roeddes moved out, the house's condition began to wither. When it became a rooming house in the 1960s, it was bought by the city of Vancouver, and joined the ranks of nearby houses that were to be torn down to make space for a large park.

"In the late 50s, early 60s, Vancouver was booming. The city just exploded," says Shirley Smith, one of the volunteers at the Roedde House Museum. "The zoning changed, and the West End was zoned for high rises. And the houses were doomed, because they would just be demolished, and high rises would go up."

When citizens around the area became concerned they urged the city not to tear down the historical site. The city finally agreed to authorize the Roedde House as a Class A Heritage Building in 1976.

Its grand opening was in 1999 and as the fight to save the Roedde house had been won, the community decided to rescue the other houses on the block as well. Nine houses in total have been saved. One of them is a wellness centre, and the other a senior centre and the block has been renamed Barclay Square.

A touch of old mystique

The story of the old house is quite typical. Gustav and Matilda Roedde, with six children of their own, one adopted son and Gustav's beloved St. Bernard dogs lived in the modest Roedde house.

Gustav and his wife were German immigrants to Canada, and when they settled in Vancouver, Gustav started Vancouver's first book-binding business, which flourished beautifully. The house was built in 1893, and the expansive family lived there until 1925. It was a newer house in its generation and was built near English Bay and Stanley Park, where the children often went for a swim in the summer.

A closer look

In the Roedde household, everyone had a room. The girls had their shared bedrooms and the boys theirs. Mrs. Roedde had a small sewing room, and her indoor garden, which was also a tiny attic. Mr. Roedde had a rec room with a gramophone, and the piano room off the foyer.

Filling the rooms are toys and gadgets from the era. Old-fashioned telephones, queer looking swimsuits, miniature sewing machines and an ancient shaver for Mr. Roedde and the boys are on display at the house. The children's toys were quite different from the modern ones of today. Nothing is battery powered and nothing connects to the internet. There are dolls and knitting spoons for the girls and soccer balls and stamps for the boys.

Judging from the displayed household items housework was more tiring than it is now. With heavy irons, clumsy 'state-of-the-art' vacuums, and hand-washed laundry; it's no wonder housewives were occupied all day long!

Many events are held at the museum, such as a Christmas gathering, and an upcoming Valentine's Day treat, with songs and tea. Definitely not to be missed. For more information, visit www.roedde-house.org.