Bring in the Chinese New Year with Three Chinese Comedies

Fights & Delights opens on February 16, 2017

The University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa’s Department of Theatre + Dance is proud to present Fights & Delights: Three Chinese Comedies, co-directed by Elizabeth Wichmann-Walczak and Mark Branner. Celebrating the chou—or comic—character, the three plays filled with acrobatic contortions, mistaken identities, adorable lovers, and exhilarating battles are sure to entertain audiences of all ages. This production highlights the vibrancy of traditional Chinese theatre and opens on the Kennedy Theatre Mainstage February 16—Chinese New Year 2018. Performances run February 16, 17, 23, and 24 at 7:30 p.m., and on February 18 and 25 at 2:00 p.m.; free pre-show chats will be held on February 17 and 24 at 6:45 p.m. Saturday, February 17 is “Throwback Saturday” with tickets only $5.00-$15.00. Regularly priced tickets are just $8.00-$25.00. Fights & Delights will be performed in English.

Fights & Delights is the twelfth traditional Chinese theatrical production performed at Kennedy Theatre since it opened in 1963. In the 1980s, UHM alumna and professor of Asian Theatre Elizabeth Wichmann-Walczak became the director of the department’s Asian Theatre Program and began the tradition of producing xiqu (pronounced she-chew)—indigenous or traditional Chinese theatre or “opera”—every four years at Kennedy Theatre. Throughout the years, something that has remained consistent through performances ranging from The Phoenix Returns to Its Nest to The Jade Hall of Spring and The White Snake has been the high skill-level of the student performers, who receive 4 to 8 months of intensive training in song, speech, dance, acting, and combat all taught by leading artists from China. Wichmann-Walczak says, “To me this high level of skill is the most astonishing thing about these productions. It is still
very rare for Chinese theatre to be performed in the English-speaking world, and even more unusual for such performances to result from a long-term, intense, and rigorous training program like this one.”

In the past, Kennedy Theatre’s Chinese productions have been single, stand-alone, full-length plays. This year, *Fights & Delights* offers audiences three comedies, each a complete play with its own distinct characters and story line. Two of these plays are in the *jingju* style of *xiqu*; this is the indigenous Chinese theatre form that originated in Beijing (also known in English as Beijing/Peking “opera”). The third piece is in a style making its debut at Kennedy Theatre, called *chuanju*, from Sichuan Province. This production also marks the first collaboration between the department’s Asian Theatre and Theatre for Young Audiences programs, creating a special tagline: *Xiqu for Young Audiences* (XYA). “*Xiqu* has always been for whole families,” Wichmann-Walczak states. “Traditionally, any sort of rite of passage—for families or whole villages—could not be properly celebrated without going to the theatre or having a theatre performance.” Branner adds, “The *chou* [comedic character] appeals to younger audiences as well as to all audiences. The pieces have verbal comedy, but they also have physical comedy that I more generally associate with younger audiences.” Because of the focus on bringing whole families—both the young and young at heart—into the theatre, this partnership allows audiences to gain a better sense of what Chinese theatre is all about—communal sharing. And it provides an ideal opportunity for celebrating the lunar new year with family and friends!

The three Chinese comedies featured in *Fights & Delights* are: the *chuanju*, “*Pi Jin Rolls the Lamp,*” and the two *jingju;* “*Treasure in the Chest*” and “*Where Three Roads Meet.*” “*Treasure in the Chest*” tells the story of a young woman whose mother and brother leave home to arrange a marriage for her. While they are gone, a young scholar arrives and begs her to save him from two officers hot on his trail. She rescues him by hiding him in her family’s clothes chest, but her brother and mother soon return and are scandalized to find her alone in the house with a strange young man. Once they learn just who the young man really is, however, it becomes possible to arrange a marriage much closer to home. “*Pi Jin Rolls the Lamp*” recounts the tale of a wife punishing her husband for his gambling problem. The wife, with the help
of her daughter, compels her husband to perform spectacular acrobatics while balancing an oil lamp on his head. “Where Three Roads Meet” relates a story about the famous Chinese general, Jiao Zan, in which he has killed a traitor and is travelling into exile under armed guard. It features a comic innkeeper and his clever wife, two comedic officers, and a young warrior determined to protect Jiao Zan. Mistaken identities lead to a virtuoso fight in the dark between the inn keeper and the young warrior, and all is resolved in the end by Jiao Zan himself.

Tickets for Fights & Delights: Three Chinese Comedies are available 24/7 online at etickethawaii.com, by phone at (808) 944-2697, and at official outlets. Sales at the Kennedy Theatre Box Office begin on Feb. 12th from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Monday through Friday with extended sales hours on show days.

EVENT:
Fights & Delights: Three Chinese Comedies

PRESENTED BY:
UHM Department of Theatre + Dance

WHEN:
February 16, 17*, 23 and 24* at 7:30 p.m.
Matinee February 18 and 25 at 2:00 p.m.
* 6:45 p.m. - free pre-show chat

WHERE:
Kennedy Theatre Mainstage
1770 East-West Road, 96822

REGULAR TICKET PRICES:
$25 Adult
$22 Senior, Military, UH Faculty/ Staff
$20 UHAA
$15 Students/Youth
$8 UHM Students with Valid
ID Ticket prices include all service fees.

PURCHASE INFO:
Tickets are available online at etickethawaii.com, by phone at (808) 944-2697, at participating outlets and at the Kennedy Theatre box office. The box office is open from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Monday through Friday during show weeks, with extended hours on performance dates.