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Eight-hour Dream headlines Huayi

Chinese arts festival shapes up with an immersive theatre production from Taiwan

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Expect the bending and breaking of genres at next year's Huayi, Esplanade's annual Chinese festival of the arts.

From an eight-hour immersive theatre production, *A Dream Like A Dream*, to a Yue opera adaptation of German playwright Bertolt Brecht's *The Good Person Of Szechwan*, this upcoming edition aims to offer new arts experiences to audiences here.

The festival will run from Feb 6 to 16 next year. Tickets go on sale tomorrow.

The headlining act is Taiwanese group Performance Workshop's durational play (with a dinner break in-between), written and directed by the iconic theatre practitioner Stan Lai.

The meditative *A Dream Like A Dream* (2000) opens the festival and will feature a seating space called the Lotus Pond, which places about 240 audience members right in the centre of the action, in the middle of a two-storey-high stage.

A young doctor is deeply shaken when most of her patients die on her first day at work. This is the catalyst for a tale that spans many lives and many lifetimes, traversing Taipei, Shanghai and Paris, as she struggles to confront the idea of mortality. A cast of 29 performers from China and Taiwan will take on more than 100 characters.



The rest of the festival line-up will also challenge audience members to examine the boundaries between genres and art forms, as well as their own expectations of performance.

Esplanade senior producer Mimi Yee, who heads the Huayi programming team, says: "It is important for the festival to continually excite and engage audiences at deeper levels and to provide opportunities for art to be experienced in new and different ways.

"Through the programmes in Huayi 2014, we want our audiences to be able to challenge their own artistic appetites and to make new discoveries."

Home-grown dance troupe T.H.E

Dance Company, for instance, will be collaborating with Taiwanese choreographer Wu Yi-San and local crosstalk pioneer Han Lao Da to create a work inspired by the traditional Chinese comedic art of crosstalk – a rapid and witty dialogue between two performers – titled *The Ordinary Man*.

Singaporean director Nelson Chia concludes his trilogy of 20th-century classic theatre plays in this edition of Huayi with Yasmina Reza's *Art*. Starring Oliver Chong, Peter Sau and Liu Xiaoyi, the work picks apart the complexities and conundrums of male friendships.

The all-female Zhejiang Xiaobaihua Yue Opera Troupe from China, helmed by director Guo Xiaonan, will be presenting



For opera lovers, there is *Good Soul Of South Yangtze* (left) by the all-female Zhejiang Xiaobaihua Yue Opera Troupe from China. Music lovers can catch Taiwanese instrumental jazz fusion band Sizhukong (above) as they tackle jazz on traditional Chinese instruments.

a modern adaptation of *The Good Person Of Szechwan* (1943).

This incarnation, titled *Good Soul Of South Yangtze*, will retain the poetic, lyrical foundations of Yue opera, drawing simultaneously on modern conventions of theatre. It will also be infused with hip hop, jazz music and contemporary costumes.

This fusion extends to the musical offerings at Huayi as well.

The Taiwanese instrumental jazz fusion band Sizhukong will tackle jazz on traditional Chinese instruments such as the erhu and pipa.

And the Singapore Chinese Orchestra will perform to a screening of the silent

film *The Goddess* (1934), starring the Shanghai silent film icon Ruan Lingyu.

The performance will feature music that has been specially composed and rearranged by local composer Law Wai Lun.

Ms Yee says: "We want to support the artists as they make their own artistic discoveries and breakthroughs. It is through constant evolution that an artist stays relevant and continually engages his existing supporters and reaches out to new audiences."

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For more information on next year's Huayi, go to www.huayifestival.com.sg