

## **Opera Hong Kong's Role in the Development of the West Kowloon Cultural District**

Western opera is probably the most sublime and demanding of the performing arts, integrating music, drama and dance and giving audiences an unparalleled artistic, dramatic, emotional, musical and visual experience. Although opera, like western classical music, originated in Europe, it is now an international art form with leading opera singers and houses found in most continents, not least Asia where the Mainland has done much to promote western opera in recent years.

Opera Hong Kong ('OHK') was established in 2003 as Hong Kong's first professional Western Opera Company. OHK is a charitable arts organization which focuses on bringing high-quality opera performances to Hong Kong audiences and promoting the development of opera in Hong Kong. The latter is achieved through a very extensive education and outreach programme which places considerable emphasis on increasing awareness and appreciation of opera in schools. OHK is also firmly committed to nurturing local musical talent by providing leading local singers, many of whom are graduates of the Academy for the Performing Arts, with performance opportunities in its productions.

OHK's Artistic Director is Mr. Warren Mok who has had a very distinguished and lengthy international musical career since his European debut at the Deutsche Oper Berlin in 1987 and sung leading tenor roles in opera houses all over the world. Along with Dai Yuqiang and Wei Song, he is one of China's 'three tenors'.

Hong Kong, like London and New York, is one of the world's leading international and financial centres. While, in many respects, Hong Kong is on a par with these two cities, by comparison, its cultural life is very undeveloped, particularly in the area of western opera. If Hong Kong is to make good its claim to be 'Asia's World City', it has to place a far greater emphasis on and devote more public resources to the development of the performing arts, in particular opera. OHK therefore urges the West Kowloon Cultural District Authority ('WKCDA') to prioritise the development and promotion of opera as a key element in its development programme for performing arts venues.

As Hong Kong currently lacks proper venues for grand opera performances, OHK is very disappointed that the principal performing venue designated for this purpose, the Great Theatre, is scheduled for completion only in Phase II of the WKCD development after 2020. We are also very disappointed and surprised that the seating capacity of this venue has been reduced from 2,200 in the Government's initial consultation proposals to only 1,600 in the current design. As OHK was not consulted prior to these decisions being taken, it is not at all clear how and why they were made. We are also very concerned that this reduction of scope will adversely affect the venue's viability and artistic and performance functionality.

As a professional arts and cultural organisation specialized in opera production and promotion, OHK has close working relationships with many international opera houses. However, to our great disappointment, the WKCDA has neither initiated any formal consultation with OHK regarding the provision of a world-class opera venue in the WKCD nor responded to our attempts to make contact. Despite this, we would very much like to develop a close working relationship with the Authority so that we can contribute to Hong Kong's transformation into a major international artistic centre. As part of the process, OHK strongly hopes to become a future resident company of the WKCD.

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