

48

HOURS

PARTNER REPORT



高山劇場

Ko Shan Theatre
New Wing Grand Opening

新翼開幕誌慶





Opened in 1983, Ko Shan Theatre was originally a semi-open air amphitheatre that hosted a variety of cultural performances and even rock concerts. After a renovation in 1996, it became an indoor theatre with 1,031 seats and increasingly known as a popular venue for Cantonese opera. On October 31, 2014, the opening of the Ko Shan Theatre New Wing marked yet another milestone in venue improvement for Hong Kong's one and only theatre in the park.

Ko Shan Theatre New Wing

A modern venue for Cantonese opera and performing arts



The Secretary for Home Affairs, Tsang Tak-sing, performed the eye-dotting ceremony for a lion dance at the opening ceremony of Ko Shan Theatre New Wing.

Situated on Ko Shan Road Park and built with a green roof over the auditorium, the New Wing is a contemporary architecture that blends seamlessly into the park's natural greenery, while at the same time providing a communal space for people in the neighbourhood to enjoy. The new wing, a five-storey building with a 600-seat auditorium, is particularly suitable for medium-scale performances.

Speaking at the opening ceremony on October 31, the Secretary for Home Affairs, Tsang Tak-sing, said Cantonese opera incorporates various aspects of literature and the arts. He added that Ko Shan Theatre New Wing, which has been specially designed for Cantonese opera, will undoubtedly make the whole Ko Shan Theatre a cradle for the inheritance, display and performance of the Cantonese opera genre.



Officiating guests and performers for the opening night gathered on stage.



Cantonese opera master Lam Ka-sing (middle) attended the grand opening and was welcomed by Tsang Tak-sing (first from right) and Michelle Li, Director of Leisure and Cultural Services (second from left).

More celebratory programmes are being held now until January next year, including Hong Kong Repertory Theatre's *"Footprints in the Snow"*, Shanghai Kunqu Opera Troupe's *"Riding by the Wall"* and excerpts, and Utopia Cantonese Opera Workshop's *"Tik-sang Tong's Librettos LIVE: CantOpera Concert - His Butterflies"*. A fun day and an exhibition titled *"Network Dream, Yet Heart"* by Hong Kong Professional Photographers Network will also be organised with free admission for the public.

Grand opening night with star-studded performances

To celebrate the inauguration of the Ko Shan Theatre New Wing, the Leisure and Cultural Services Department has lined up a series of spectacular programmes, including the inaugural showing of *"Prime Minister of the Six States"* and the new Cantonese opera *"A Heroic Woman of the Ming Dynasty"* written by maestro Yuen Siu-fai, and starring Mr. Yuen himself together with well-known artists Yau Sing-po, and Wan Fai-yin. The performance was well-received with a full-house attendance.



Prime Minister of the Six States

Tailor made facilities for Cantonese opera



The two-level, 600-seat auditorium in Ko Shan Theatre New Wing

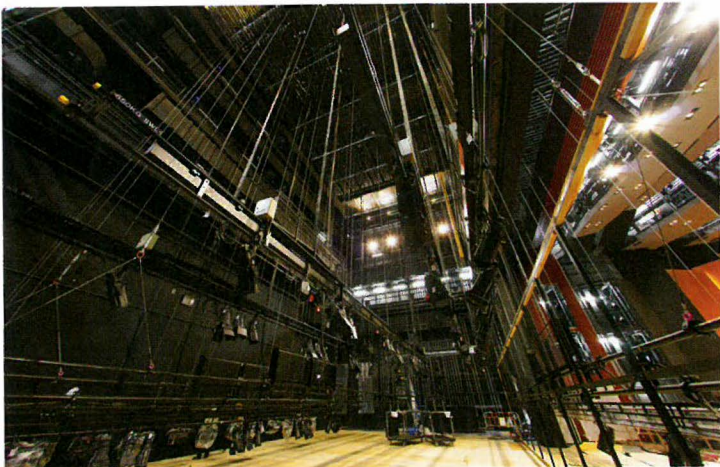
The auditorium in the Ko Shan Theatre New Wing with modern facilities serves as a perfect complement to the old 1,031 seat theatre, cementing Ko Shan Theatre's status as a performance and rehearsal base for Cantonese opera. While the new wing offers priority in venue hiring for Cantonese opera performances, it will also be open to other arts events, creating an alternative platform for a variety of

cultural activities for the local community and Hong Kong as a whole.

The Auditorium

The two-level auditorium with 600 seats is considered a mid-sized theatre but it is versatile enough to accommodate productions of any scale. The 600 seats, spread out in the shape of a fan, are

endowed with ample leg room and good sightline. The traditional proscenium theatre features a fly tower that can hoist multiple curtains up for quick change of scenes. The orchestra pit, on the other, can be adapted to suit the settings of Cantonese opera and other performances. The auditorium is equipped with the latest professional lighting and sound systems, multimedia projector and LED surtitle display.



The fly tower and main stage



Dressing rooms with tall doors for easy access by performers with long headgear.

Rehearsal, training and ancillary facilities



Rehearsal rooms with a 6-metre ceiling height for practising stunts like tossing and throwing.

Behind the backstage are 12 dressing rooms with extra-high doors and wide passageways allowing actors to easily place their huge costume trunks and pass through in their bulky costumes and long headgear.

The five-storey, rectangular building behind the main auditorium houses some of the most important ancillary

facilities for the performing arts including rehearsal rooms, singing practice rooms and function room. These facilities, formerly considered inadequate in Ko Shan Theatre, are warmly welcomed by the Cantonese opera community. Taking advice from the Cantonese Opera Advisory Committee, these rooms have been custom-made with the needs of this art form in mind, but they are



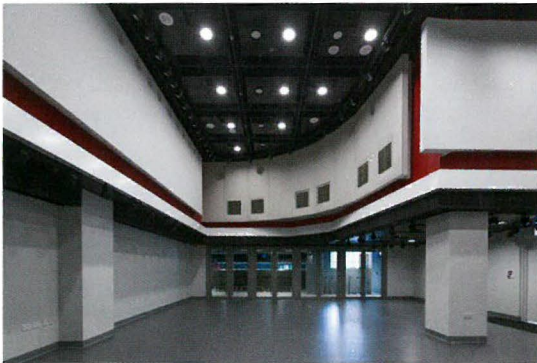
- Rehearsal Room x3
- Singing Practice Room x3
- Function Room x1
- Exhibition Gallery x1

also suitable for other performing arts because of its generous space and state-of-the-art design and acoustics.

In particular, the rehearsal rooms, which can be sub-divided into smaller rooms, are large enough to offer a rehearsal space that is the exact size of the stage. The extra high ceiling can accommodate the practice of action scenes where swords are tossed and exchanged, an important stunt in Cantonese opera. The acoustics in the singing practice rooms are top notch, with the provision of modern audio-visual systems giving artists maximum ease and support.

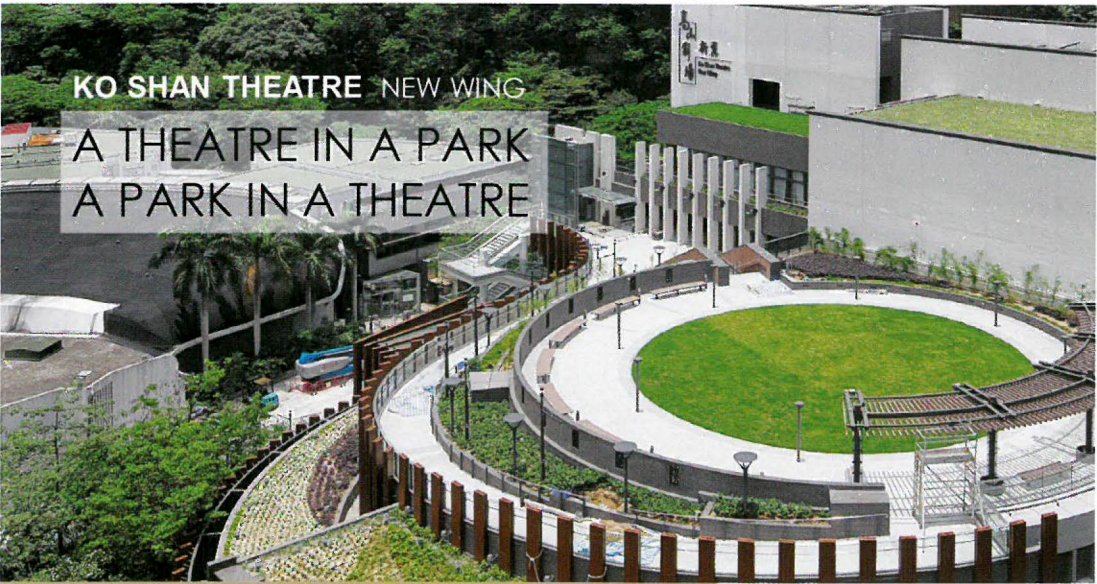


Singing practice rooms with good acoustics, piano and sound system for Chinese opera singing or other vocal training.



Exhibition Gallery

Theatre in a park



Ko Shan Theatre New Wing is a contemporary theatre integrated into its natural surrounds.

Community integration is important in creating new architecture in today's world. "We approach every project with a strong community sense so we look at the site's unique character and try to meet the needs of the surrounding community," explained Bryant Lu, Vice Chairman of Ronald Lu & Partners (RLP), the architectural firm tasked with the creation of the new wing.

According to Mr. Lu, the idea is to create a "sanctuary" that sits comfortably within the park, one that exudes an atmosphere

of a courtyard theatre from the old times.

A seamless integration

The original site of the new wing was four tennis courts with a total area of 4,000 sqm. The challenge for the architect was to build a modern theatre with 600 seats together with rehearsal and ancillary facilities on this limited plot of land. Inevitably things have to be stacked up, but not to the point of creating a huge building mass in the middle of lush greenery.



The new wing is built on a site that was formerly four tennis courts.

"We consider the new theatre first and foremost a community facility, so the first concern was how it can negotiate harmoniously with the park's topography, preserving the trees and adding communal space for people to enjoy," said Peter Yam, Director of RLP and architect of the new wing.

The new wing can be roughly seen as two parts, with the taller, rectangular building housing the rehearsal rooms built next to a hill, and the more organically shaped auditorium building facing the open park. Mr. Yam said, "theatres can take on many shapes but we found that a horse-shoe shape in this case can help us preserve the most trees and integrate seamlessly into the surroundings."

Mr. Yam noted that the new wing has achieved a 33% green coverage thanks to the addition of a "green trail". It connects the park vertically through lavishly-landscaped terraces to the green roof, which features a Lingnan-style white wash wall.



The new wing resembles a Chinese courtyard theatre with design elements such as timber and lattice motifs.

With the construction of the new wing, accessibility features in the park have also been enhanced for people in wheelchairs to access the facilities with ease.

An interior that borrows from nature

The auditorium is 180-degree surrounded by a curvilinear foyer. Natural daylight, sound and scenery are captured through high glass windows with sun-shading fins. This is also analogous to the "view-borrowing technique" in traditional Chinese courtyard design. The foyer that wraps around the auditorium where you can see the greenery outside gives you an continuous sense of space.

Mr. Yam said, "the spectator experience is important in theatre design. By incorporating the natural environment into the interior you would not feel cut off once you enter the building. This is, after all, a simple architecture that belongs to the local community."

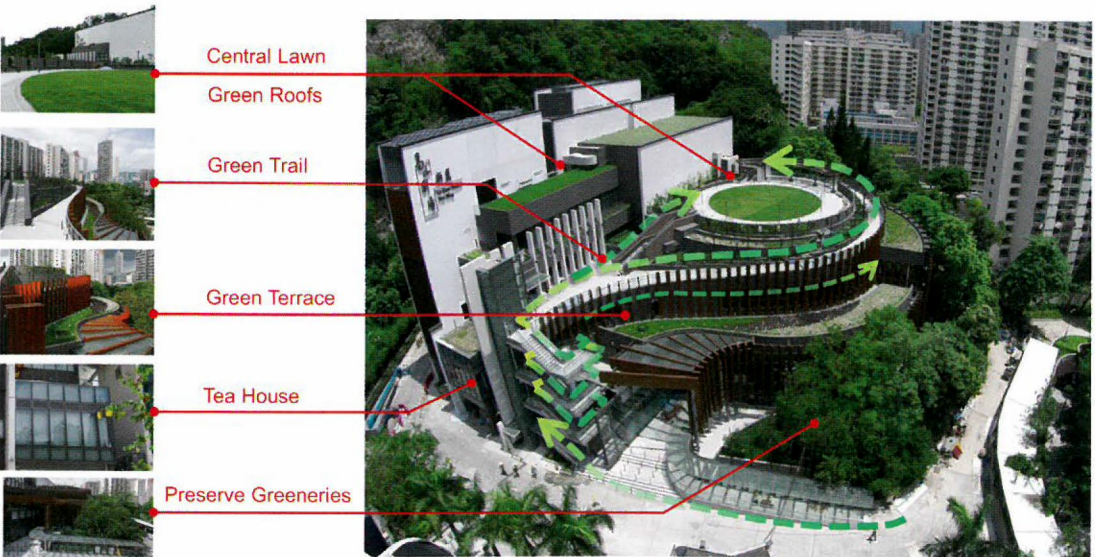
A Cantonese opera-dedicated venue

The Cantonese opera images on the giant glass wall at the auditorium entrance highlights the new wing as a dedicated venue for Cantonese opera. In addition, many technical features in the auditorium and rehearsal facilities have been built around the needs of this art form. The spacious rehearsal rooms with high ceiling

enables artists to train their action scenes involving sword throwing in an area that resembles the size of the stage.

A conventional orchestra pit usually has the conductor facing the performers but the one in the new wing can be adapted so that it is the musicians who face the performers, allowing them to communicate through eye contact and control the flow of the show.

The use of Chinese architectural expressions such as lattice motifs, stone-textured grey wall tiles and timber screen door motifs help to create the traditional "courtyard theatre" feel for this modern performance venue.



The new wing has an impressive 33% green coverage befitting its location in a park.

A breeding ground for new talents



(From left) Tsim Ho-fung, Li Pui-yan, Cheng Nga-ki and Keith Lai.

Young Cantonese opera artists are enthusiastic about the addition of another dedicated Cantonese opera venue and state-of-the-art facilities at the new wing. Four artists, Li Pui-yan,

Cheng Nga-ki, Keith Lai and Tsim Ho-fung, came together to perform in a rare stage comeback of Sabrina Lee, Cantonese opera superstar famously known as Lung Kim-sang, as part

Aspiring Cantonese opera artists welcome the Ko Shan Theatre New Wing.

With the installation of a fly tower in the new wing, artists are able to get creative with stage effects.

of Hong Kong Cultural Centre's 25th anniversary celebratory programmes in mid November. They have been using the new wing for rehearsals and applaud its top-notch design and facilities.

The artists are particularly pleased with the rehearsal rooms. The high ceiling means they can practice their action scenes and sword throwing stunts without any inhibition. Cheng Nga-ki said, "the huge rehearsal rooms also enable us to simulate the real stage in any venue by making markings on the floor."



Ko Shan Theatre New Wing will serve as a breeding ground for the new generation of Cantonese opera performers.



A fly tower, which flies curtains, lights and other devices for stage effect in and out of the stage, is not usually available in older theatres. With the installation of a fly tower in the new wing, artists are able to get creative with stage effects. Keith Lai said, "in the past we might need at least 3 or 4 minutes to change scenery but now we can do it very quickly and easily. This enables us to control the flow of the show and gives us room for more creativity."



Li Pui-yan said, "we are really impressed with the facilities here and want to use them as much as possible. Since Cantonese opera performers operate like individual contractors, we plan our schedules at least a year in advance. We hope the rental policies here will match the way we operate."

As with any art form, Cantonese opera is

constantly evolving with influences from other cultures. Keith and Li are adapting Shakespeare's Hamlet into Cantonese opera which they will perform later in the year. She said, "we always joke that we have planned it for 3 years and 8 months but finally it's done. Hopefully the new wing can help ease our venue concerns so we can stage more works efficiently."

Tsim Ho-fung, who performed in the new wing's grand opening show together with his teacher and renowned artist Yuen Siu-fai, said, "the design for the backstage area is outstanding. It's very spacious with high ceiling so the actors are able to move around very easily. The seats are also very comfortable with good sightline to the stage."



The costume specialist



The shop owner Henry Kwong.

Located in the lobby of Ko Shan Theatre New Wing is a very special shop. It is one of very few shops in Hong Kong selling Cantonese opera costumes and gear, and the biggest one of its kind. Henry Kwong, whose Chinese name means "Jade Dragon", looks like a treasure trove with elaborate gowns, headgear, theatrical weaponry, wigs, shoes, assorted accessories and souvenirs on display, while photos of famous Cantonese opera artists adorn the wall.

Henry Kwong, the owner, has been in the business for over 30 years. A Cantonese opera artist himself, he started selling costumes first in his own flat before moving

A one-stop shop for Cantonese opera.



to a shop space in Shek Kip Mei. With the opening of the new wing, he was offered this new space by the LCSD but also keeps a showroom in the Yau Ma Tei Theatre, a historic building that is also a Cantonese opera dedicated venue.

Mr. Kwong has produced costumes for every Cantonese opera star. He said that a custom made, hand-embroidered gown now costs RMB18,000 because the costs for gold threads and labour have risen drastically. A skilled tailor may take up to 35 days to complete a gown.

"You can choose a ready-made one embroidered by machines. But the

difference in quality is obvious when you compare it with the intricacy of hand-embroidery." Veteran actors usually go for the more expensive option because those gowns can last much longer. It is partly for this reason that costumes are considered an important part of an actor's asset.

Each role in Cantonese opera has specific costume requirements from headgear to shoes. A long beard, which often denotes authority and can come in many colours, is traditionally made from Tibetan yak hair but cheaper options are now available in nylon. The store also displays a variety of weapons including those used for real fight scenes and heavier ones that are mainly decorative.



A variety of theatrical weaponry and accessories are on display in this unique shop for Cantonese opera.



Points of interests

Ko Shan Theatre New Wing has a number of points of interests. Situated within the Ko Shan Road Park, it is a dedicated theatre for Cantonese opera, as well as a cultural venue created for the leisure use of the general community.

The main entrance

Cantonese opera motifs are featured prominently in the new wing. The thoughtfully chosen images on the glass window walls at the main entrance forecourt highlight the important elements of Cantonese opera.



Sculpture

A pair of sculptures entitled "Unforgettable Memories from Costumes" created by renowned local artist Man Fung Yi is displayed on the first floor of the new wing. Modelled on the forms and patterns of Cantonese opera costumes for female and male, the artist has woven together criss-crossing, silver coloured wires to express the intricacy and uniqueness of Chinese opera, a Chinese intangible cultural heritage.

Green roof

From the park, visitors can walk up to the roof garden of the auditorium building via the green trail. The circular lawn and Lingnan-style plain white wash wall provide a unique cultural experience with reference to Cantonese opera. It is a pleasant walk with lush green views.



Fun Day

To celebrate the opening of the new wing, a fun day will be organised on November 30th 2014 with Cantonese opera screenings, an exhibition, a workshop, games and Chinese traditional arts performances for the general public. A performance of Cantonese opera excerpts will also be held in the auditorium in the evening.

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