



Youngsters perform in *Havoc of the Dragon's Palace*, based on the classic tale *Journey to the West* at the Academy for Performing Arts. Photo: Felix Wong

## Children of 6 lured to opera in quest to revive ancient art form

Zuleika Sedgley

Children as young as six have been recruited into two Cantonese opera performances by the Academy For Performing Arts as part of its efforts to revive interest in the traditional art form.

The eight youngsters, aged six to eight, will play children of the Monkey King in *Havoc of the Dragon's Palace*, based on the classic tale *Journey to the West* performed by students of the academy as part of their assessments – the first time children so young have been included.

They were recruited by Hong Hai, a teacher in the academy's diploma programmes in Chinese traditional theatre, in a promotional tour of 36 primary and secondary schools that began in June.

Hong said it was part of the academy's "strategic plan" to promote Cantonese opera.

**Looking to the future Efforts are being made to revive interest in Cantonese opera**

The number of schools that will be part of the promotional tour that began in June

36

"Traditionally we have tried to promote opera through established actors and famous patrons, but this is the wrong way to go about it," he said. "We should be focusing on new potential actors and audiences. We brought these kids in for the future of Cantonese opera."

On his promotional tour, Hong was accompanied by diploma students who gave performances and conducted seminars on the art form.

Eventually, all eight children were selected from the Dr Catherine F. Woo Memorial School in Sha Tin and given five training sessions.

One of them, Leung Wai-yan, said that although he had never seen a Cantonese opera before, "these are stories that I have already seen on TV" and he enjoyed the experience because "I can learn a lot about history".

Cantonese opera, almost as old as the stories it tells, has increasingly

been eclipsed by the growing popularity of Canto-pop and Western opera.

Hong believes that this is all about to change.

"Chinese traditional theatre is ready to gain popularity again in Hong Kong because the environment is right," he said. "It is a combination of the Unesco inscription in 2009, the advent of the West Kowloon Cultural District and the idea that CTT [Chinese Traditional Theatre] training can lead to academic qualifications."

The United Nations cultural agency recognised Cantonese opera in 2009 as an intangible cultural heritage.

The academy has offered diploma qualifications in the art form since 1999 and an advanced diploma since 2001. In 2013 it plans to offer a degree programme in Chinese traditional theatre, the first of its kind in Hong Kong.

## Portrait of a genius as the Einstein show comes to town

Adrian Wan and Nathan Griffiths

Fans of Albert Einstein no longer need travel to his legendary museum in Switzerland to pay homage. For more than four months from today, some 200 of the genius' personal possessions and writings from the museum in Berne will be on display at the Hong Kong Science Museum.

"As a scientist, [Einstein] was absolutely marvellous," said Albert Einstein Society president Dr Hans Rudolf Ott, a physics professor at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich. "But on small things in life, like family and marriage, he failed. And he knew it. But he just didn't care," said Ott, one of the international speakers taking part in the Albert Einstein (1879-1955) Exhibition.

Today's opening kicks off an array of programmes in the city, including public lectures by prominent scientists, academic conferences, music workshops and concerts related to the father of modern physics.

Today is the anniversary of Einstein's death on April 18, 1955, in Princeton, New Jersey, and of the 1991 official opening of the Hong Kong Science Museum.

Hong Kong is the third stop on the exhibition's tour of China, which began in 2005 to celebrate 60 years of Chinese-Swiss diplomatic relations. The exhibition attracted 400,000 visitors in Beijing and Guangzhou, and may go on to other Chinese cities.

The Hong Kong exhibition is the largest to date, with displays added to explain the scientific achievements of the 1921 Nobel physics laureate, such as his theory of relativity.

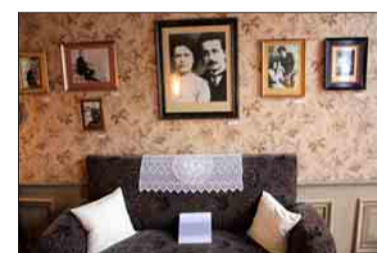
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Dr Hans Rudolf Ott, president of the Albert Einstein Society



The city of Berne (top), home of the Einstein Museum; Einstein's home (centre) from 1903 to 1905; and a display at the Science Museum. Photos: SCMP Pictures, David Wong

structed his son how to deal with his marriage issues, and it was written several years after Einstein's divorce from [first wife] Mileva Mirac," Wyss said. The letter will be on display.

The programmes on offer include six public lectures by world-famous scholars, including one by the 1991 Swiss Nobel laureate in chemistry,

Professor Richard Ernst. Visitors to the exhibition will find details about Einstein's so-called miracle year, 1905, when he published four groundbreaking papers – on the photoelectric effect, Brownian motion, special relativity and the equivalence of matter and energy – which catapulted him to the notice of academic world.

That achievement was all the more notable because Einstein was holding down a regular, 48-hours-a-week job at a patent office, Ott said. "But in a way, that might have been a good thing," Ott said. "He might not have been so successful had he not been a patent officer, because he couldn't find an academic job and was hopeless. That job gave him academic freedom because no academics were above him. I think, in retrospect, he profited from it."

Einstein's work was reflected in our daily lives, said Dr Gary Shiu, a professor of physics at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and visiting fellow at the Institute of Advanced Study at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology.

Einstein's theories of relativity had been critical in the development of many technologies such as GPS and medical accelerators, he said. GPS relies on precisely timed signals travelling at the speed of light between devices on the ground, like smartphones, and satellites orbiting thousands of kilometres above earth.

At those distances and speeds, said Shiu, a timing error of one microsecond translates into a distance error of 11 kilometres. Without using Einstein's theories of relativity, GPS calculations would be off by roughly 38 microseconds over the course of a day, making GPS effectively useless.

Medical accelerators, used in radiation therapy for cancer treatment, also rely on relativity. They use beams of electrons travelling close to the speed of light to target tumours with radiation while avoiding excessive damage to healthy surrounding cells. Medical accelerators have been in use for more than 50 years.

Shiu said he hoped that by grounding Einstein's work in its day-to-day applications, the exhibition would show people the value of fundamental scientific research.

## HK offers a 'safe haven' after quake

Phyllis Tsang

Hong Kong has served as a "safe haven" for foreign companies who pulled their staff from Japan following the March 11 earthquake and tsunami, according to an international crisis response company.

International SOS helped to relocate more than 300 people from Japan to Hong Kong, including 80 on two flights it had chartered, one for a luxury goods company and one for a university.

Other companies that considered getting their people out of Japan included those in the financial services industry, telecommunications, media, and the accounting and legal professions.

Mick Sharp, International SOS's regional security director, said its clients were desperate for reliable information in the immediate aftermath of the disasters, and the subsequent leak of radiation from the damaged nuclear reactors at Fukushima.

He said his company had received more than 2,000 inquiries from clients around the world asking for in-



**They want reliable information – what is the scale of the threat? Is it likely to get worse?**

International SOS director Mick Sharp (pictured), on clients' main concerns

formation and requesting assistance, particularly after the crisis at Fukushima, north of Tokyo.

"They want reliable information – what is the scale of the threat? Is it likely to get worse," he said.

Despite receiving professional advice that evacuation from Tokyo was not required after the quake, some firms still decided to arrange for their staff to leave Japan.

He said Hong Kong had three qualities that had made it a suitable safe haven. "Firstly, it is far away from the acute threat; secondly, the range of flight options available; and thirdly, which is the most important, the visa requirements."

The Hong Kong Immigration Department, which reported a trend of professionals relocating to Hong Kong from Japan after March 11, set up a fast-track system to approve visa applications.

The department said that between March 17 and April 11 it had received 310 applications from professionals in Japan for working visas in Hong Kong. They were all granted a one-year visa, including 171 who

were granted visas on an employment or investment basis, 81 for their dependants, two for studying, and 56 who had applied to extend their visas when they were in Hong Kong immediately after the earthquake.

Meanwhile, International SOS said the global reach of mainland business enterprises meant they were increasingly aware of the need for planning and emergency preparations in the event of natural disasters and political unrest.

Political unrest in places such as Libya, Tunisia and Bahrain meant that timely intelligence was vital, Sharp said.

In the case of Libya, International SOS helped pull out 1,500 workers for company clients, including 500 working for the China National Petroleum Corporation.

Besides using its own military to bring Chinese nationals home from foreign trouble spots, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has increasingly turned to private companies such as International SOS, with which it has signed a contract to provide services for its diplomats aboard.

## Out of tune on musical education

Is there a connection between maths, creativity and music? Einstein, an accomplished amateur violinist, certainly thought so. And many tiger mothers today have taken his advice to heart by forcing their children to take up an instrument at a very early age.

But for researchers studying how we learn, such connections are a little less clear, says Louis Lee Ngai-yin, assistant professor of educational psychology at Chinese University.

While there is a growing body of research indicating that students who follow a strict regimen of musical study can do better in school, Lee cautioned against such sweeping claims on the connection between musical education and intelligence. "There is very little clear-cut evidence that playing music leads to improved performance in

academic disciplines," said Lee, noting there were many variables involved.

This has not stopped local parents – looking to give their children an edge in a competitive education system – from enrolling them in music lessons and enforcing strict practice schedules from an early age. Whether it is out of the belief that music makes their children smarter or simply to bulk up their university applications, music education is rarely a matter of choice.

While any kind of musical education was bound to benefit children, there was a concern that by focusing on external results rather than developing musical appreciation, parents and children would sometimes miss the point, said Bright Sheng, composer and artistic director of the upcoming Intimacy of Creativity, hosted by the

Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, that is part of the Einstein extravaganza.

Sheng said all too often parents paid huge amounts of money for weekly piano lessons, but never took their children to hear a pianist perform.

Lee said making children learn an instrument for a university application was not fostering interest in music at all.

Shifting motivation to something external made it more likely that children would lose interest in music for its own sake, he said. Pupils learn that playing an instrument was something you did to get into a good school, he said. Once at university, "they don't play any more".

Nathan Griffiths

**CitySeen** with Vivian Chen  
Send tips, tickets and invitations to cityseen@scmp.com.

### The Script spice up flying visit with a dai pai dong treat

Dublin rockers The Script were in town on Thursday for their show at Kitec Star Hall, and despite their tight schedule (they arrived just the night before their show), they found time to try Hong Kong's spiciest seafood and catch up on football action.

Singer Danny O'Donoghue (pictured) and guitarist Mark Sheehan spent the first night walking around the city and eating street snacks, especially relishing the spicy prawns at a dai pai dong.

After dinner, the band caught a football match at their hotel.

"My favourite player of all time is [former Manchester United star] Roy Keane," said Sheehan. "I was just glad I got time to catch a game."

Since hitting the big time with their self-titled debut album in 2008, the band have been thinking of ways to improve on the sound of its second album, *Science & Faith*, which was released last year and debuted at number one in the UK and Ireland and number three in the US.

"There's a bit of a hip hop sound in our record this time. Hip hop is definitely an influence," said O'Donoghue.

The guys said being on the road constantly made them homesick, but technology had been a great cure.

"Thank goodness for Skype, which allows us to keep in touch with family," said O'Donoghue.

"And ultimately, getting on stage cures everything." **Ben Sin**



### Piglet display cases and leopard heel chairs a hit with fashionistas

The founders of Opening Ceremony, Humberto Leon and Carol Lim, blew into town last week to celebrate their fashion-forward lifestyle brand's new, exclusive capsule collection with Lane Crawford.

Among their entourage was *Big Love* actress and it-girl eternal Chloe Sevigny (pictured right with Godfrey Tsao), whose designs are included in OC and Lane Crawford's month-long pop-up project.

Fashionistas and trendsetters at Thursday night's opening party were the first to lay eyes on the transformation of Lane Crawford's IFC space. Shop-within-the-shop alcoves were styled into little



vignettes – of New York's Broadway marquee, a Los Angeles street scene, a French flea market – all "cities and places that have inspired and shaped Opening

### Whistle-stop trip brings a little magic to Hong Kong with launch of the Fairy Bag

Despite only spending 24 hours in Hong Kong, Jacopo Etro (pictured) made the long-haul flight from Milan in time for the launch of his exclusive-to-Asia Fairy Bag on Thursday at the IFC atrium.

"As it is, I missed the opening party for our first dedicated menswear boutique at The Landmark yesterday," Etro's head of textile design said. "I'm glad I could catch some of the fun today."

Etro's Fairy Bag design is a playful departure from the brand's signature paisley jacquard print, featuring characters from beloved children's tales such as *The Frog Prince* and *Alice in Wonderland*, hand-painted on several styles of totes.

"For this summer, I wanted to go for

something light and colourful," Etro, whose father founded the eponymous Milan-based fashion house in 1968, said. "I also wanted to create something that made people smile. I think we all could use a bit of joy after all the recent natural disasters and economic downturn."

The launch party also showcased a selection of iconic Etro bags from past seasons. "You can see we aren't shy about pushing design in all different directions," Etro said. "In fact, the reason I'm rushing back to Milan is for the *Salon di Mobile* annual design fair, where we are working on an exciting collaboration with plastic furniture maker Kartell. I like the challenge of having to reinvent the way we see textiles." **Yvonne Lai**



## HK star Max Mok in Beijing drugs arrest

Ada Lee

Hong Kong singer and movie star Max Mok Siu-chung was arrested for allegedly taking drugs in Beijing on Friday. Beijing police confirmed the arrest yesterday, but refused to disclose what drugs were allegedly in his possessions.

Mok was arrested with several other people in the Chaoyang district of the capital after officers received tip-offs, mainland police said.

They did not say what Mok and the others were doing.

Mok was not expected to be sent to a compulsory treatment centre because it was his first arrest for drugs, the Beijing police said.

The 50-year-old actor and singer is known for his work in *Last Eunuch in China* in 1988, and his role as Leung Foon, a student of famed kung fu master Wong Fei-hung, in *Once Upon a Time in China* in the early 1990s. Mok has acted in some 20 movies and also starred in popular television dramas. He released five Putonghua and Cantonese albums in the 1990s. He is preparing for a Hong Kong film production in August. Mok has an 11-year-old son with actress Catherine Hung Yan, but they are not married.

Several Hong Kong stars have been caught in drug-related controversies in recent years. Model Rosemary Vandembroucke was arrested in the United States last year for pos-

sessing Ecstasy and crashing her car. She was fined US\$1,000 for obstructing or delaying a police officer, after the drug and careless driving charges were dropped. She was also fined US\$1,400 for careless driving.

Model Monique Chau was arrested for possession of ketamine at school in 2009. The 19-year-old was put on probation for 12 months.

In the same year, singers Kelvin Kwan Chor-yiu and Jill Vidal were detained in Tokyo for about 20 days



Max Mok Siu-chung

after cannabis was found in a rolled-up cigarette. Kwan apologised to the public after returning to Hong Kong. Vidal was detained for a short period before being released.

In 2004, actress Cherrie Ying Choi-yi, model and singer Tricia Chan Kin-fay, singer Deep Ng and actor Roy Chow Wing-hang were also caught carrying drugs. Singers Alex To and William So Wing-hong were also found to have possessed drugs in 2002.



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Updated on *Apr 18, 2011*

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