

LCQ7: Developing venues for Cantonese opera

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Following is a question by the Hon Timothy Fok and a written reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Tsang Tak-sing, in the Legislative Council today (February 4):

Question:

As it is learnt that the tenancy renewal for the Sunbeam Theatre in North Point has not yet been settled, it is expected that the project of converting the Yau Ma Tei Theatre into a Xiqu Activity Centre with a small theatre will not be completed until 2011, and the supporting facilities and seating capacity of the Ko Shan Theatre do not exactly meet the requirements of Cantonese opera performances, will the Government inform this Council whether it will take immediate measures to assist the Cantonese opera sector in solving the problem of shortage of performance venues?

Reply:

President,

The Government is thankful to the Sunbeam Theatre's landlord for his continued contribution to the development of Cantonese opera in Hong Kong over the years. We have been proactively supporting the discussion between the operator and the landlord on renewing the tenancy of Sunbeam Theatre. We look forward to reaching a satisfactory arrangement between both parties.

In the development plan for providing venues for Cantonese opera, the Government has decided to develop the following venues of different scales to meet the various development needs of the Cantonese opera sector:

1. to convert the Yau Ma Tei Theatre and the Red Brick Building into a Xiqu Activity Centre with a small theatre of about 300 seats. The project which is scheduled for completion in 2011 will provide a venue for small-scale performances and operatic singing activities;

2. to construct an Annex Building to the Ko Shan Theatre comprising a medium-sized theatre of about 600 seats, large-scale rehearsal rooms and audio-recording studios. The Annex Building which is scheduled for completion in 2012, together with the existing theatre of 1,031 seats can be used for various purposes such as performances, rehearsals, and audio-visual production of Cantonese opera; and

3. to build a large-scale theatre of about 1,200 to 1,400 seats, a small-sized theatre of about 400 seats and various practising facilities in the Xiqu Centre of the West Kowloon Cultural District. Scheduled for completion in 2014-15, the project will provide permanent performance venues of international standards for staging professional performances of Cantonese opera (The seating capacity of Sunbeam Theatre is 1,033).

Currently, the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) has been providing additional time slots for staging Cantonese opera performances by implementing special measures for venue hiring, including:

1. "Venue Partnership Scheme"

The LCSD has supported the Cantonese opera sector to take part in the "Venue Partnership Scheme" in the Sha Tin Town Hall and the Tuen Mun Town Hall from 2008-09 to 2011-12. The sector will be provided with a total of 118 days of time slots for performances in these two venues in 2009-10.

2. Further development of the Ko Shan Theatre into one of the major performance venues for Cantonese opera

Since the implementation of LCSD's "priority venue hiring policy for Cantonese opera performances" in the Ko Shan Theatre in 2004, the number of organisations using the theatre for Cantonese opera performances has been increasing year by year. In 2008, 149 Cantonese opera performances and 106 Cantonese operatic concerts were staged in the theatre. The theatre can provide another 100 days or so of time slots for Cantonese opera performances in 2009. The LCSD has been fine-tuning the policy in response to the development needs of the Cantonese opera sector. At present, apart from full-length performances, excerpt performances are also accorded priority.

The LCSD has also kept improving the supporting facilities of the Ko Shan Theatre to cater for the needs of large-scale Cantonese opera performances. Such measures include additional provision of toilet cubicles, dressing rooms, directional sign boards, parking spaces, etc. It is also planned that a covered walkway leading to the theatre will be constructed, illuminated advertisement boxes to promote the performances be installed and current seats be replaced by more comfortable ones.

### 3. Reserving time slots at major performing arts venues in the urban areas and the New Territories

For 2009-10, the LCSD is going to make an additional provision of about 44 days of reserved time slots at several major performing arts venues for priority hiring by Cantonese opera troupes. These venues include the Hong Kong Cultural Centre, the Hong Kong City Hall, the Kwai Tsing Theatre, the Sha Tin Town Hall and the Tsuen Wan Town Hall. It also plans to increase the additional provision to about 70 days of times slots for Cantonese opera performances starting from 2010-11. We are consulting the Cantonese Opera Advisory Committee, the Chinese Artists Association of Hong Kong and the Hong Kong Cantonese Opera Chamber of Commerce on the proposal. Apart from priority hiring of reserved time slots, Cantonese opera troupes can continue to hire the 13 performing arts venues of the LCSD through ordinary booking.

To sum up the above measures, we estimate that about 262 days of time slots for performances will be provided additionally by the LCSD for the Cantonese opera sector in 2009-10.

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