Bard reboot opens theater gala

Tadao Suzuki returns to the Chinese capital with his radical reworking of the Shakespearean classic King Lear to launch this year’s NCPA International Theatre Festival. CHEN NAN reports.

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It was a cold and snowy night 350 years ago when the legendary Japanese theatre director Tadao Suzuki premiered his version of the classic Shakespearean tragedy King Lear, performed by actors on an outdoor stage in the mountainous region of Drama-land just north of Japan's Honshu island.

Among the spectators that night in the village where the director and his Suzuki Noh Company of Toga are based were theatre critics from the United States and Europe, who were so impressed by the play that they later took it to the West.

In 1984, the play toured the US for six months, which was one American actor staged more than 30 shows before later opening at the Moscow Art Theatre featuring an all-male Russian cast.

In 2014, Suzuki brought the play to China for the first time collaborating with a group of young Chinese actors, including actor Tan Chen, then 25, who played the role of Lear.

Five years later, the play is now returning to the capital with three performances having been staged at the National Center for the Performing Arts from Thursday to Saturday.

With actors from five countries—China, Japan, South Korea, Russia, and the US—who all perform in their mother tongues each year, the play opened the 2019 NCPA International Theatre Festival.

“We've been staging King Lear for more than 30 years now and we have never stopped adding new shows into the play, which keeps it alive,” said Suzuki at the NCPA on June 4. “It always want to create plays that can be shared by people of all ages and generations,” he add. “I believe this is one of the secrets to our success.”

Six actors, who may also be seen throughout Asia, are in the cast. The story is based on the 1605 original by Shakespeare, who was a director himself of the tale.

The story focuses on the human body’s experience of natural energy as the basis for theatre performance, which focuses on the development of his own method of training actors, which has attracted both international and domestic attention since it started 35 years ago when the legend began.

In 2017, Suzuki staged two of his productions, which was adapted from the ancient Greek tragedy The Bacchae, and The Trojan Women, which is based on a tragedy dealing with the Trojan War, both penned by Filho Amfitrion and Euripides.

After King Lear, 10 plays from Russia, Germany, Britain and China will be staged in 42 shows during the 2019 NCPA International Theatre Festival, which runs through September.

Since 2012, the NCPA International Theatre Festival has been offering international theatrical productions, dialogue sessions, art exhibitions and theater workshops to audiences.

Highlights of this year's festival will include a condensation of Don Juan by Bulgarian director Alexander Morfov of the Komissarzhevskaya Theater of St. Petersburg, Russia, and the NCPA’s Chinese version of Jane Eyre based on English writer Charlotte Bronte’s popular novel of the same title which premiered at the NCPA a decade ago.

The Chinese play, Love Letter, which is directed by Russian dramatist Yevgeny Zvyagintsev, will show the festival opening. Revolving around the romance between the two lead characters spanning from 1975 to 2015, the play, which features well-known TV host Yu Hewei, is set to be performed in Beijing on Aug 16, 2019, and China last year.

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