

For immediate release



BEDAZZLED: SEQUINED COSTUMES OF CANTONESE OPERA
Enter a spellbinding world of visual opulence

Singapore, 5 February 2008 – In the 1950s, the career success of Cantonese opera performers could be reflected literally in the man-made stones on their costumes - the brighter the gems on their garments, the bigger the star they were. Clad in these heavily sequined draperies, they enthralled countless audiences with stories of love and hate, life and death.

Showcasing highlights from an exquisite collection of costumes once owned by late opera veterans Liew Seng Wah (廖醒华) and Pak Choy Yoke (毕翠玉), the National Museum of Singapore presents ***Bedazzled: Sequined Costumes of Cantonese Opera*** from **6 February to 1 May 2008**. The costumes and accessories on display are part of a major acquisition of 1500 Chinese opera artefacts by the National Museum, and offer a glimpse into the social and cultural history of Singapore in the 1950s through the art of Chinese opera.

“The 1950s is a very colourful chapter for Chinese opera performances and we want to preserve this traditional performing art, as well as to bring it to a wider audience in as many ways as possible. By showcasing local heritage and culture, the Museum hopes to inspire local arts practitioners to create distinctive works that reflect Singapore’s culture,” says Ms Lee Chor Lin, Director, National Museum of Singapore.

Elaborate stage costumes used in Chinese opera not only provide the visual razzmatazz to pull in the crowds, it also enabled seasoned audiences to differentiate the characters portrayed on stage – a male from a female, a warrior from a scholar, and a king from a commoner.

The artefacts on display belonged to the late veteran couple Liew Seng Wah and Pak Choy Yoke, who were the golden couple of the Cantonese opera scene. Their popularity peaked in the post-war period of the 1950s, which saw a boom in Cantonese opera performances and film. After 50 years of performance, they retired from the stage but continued to actively teach the next generation their craft, dedicating their lifetimes to perfecting and promoting the art.

The focal piece in this exhibition is a full set of operatic military regalia, weighing over 20 kilograms. Such pieces tested the performer's skill and endurance, as the actor performing the *wusheng* role (a military role), for example, would have to perform acrobatic feats while dressed in the heavy and bulky costume.

In the past year, the Museum has launched many projects documenting and promoting Chinese street opera, one of which is the commissioning of *Sin Sai Hong*, a movie documentary by Royston Tan that intimately details the lives and stories behind the local opera troupe of the same name. *Sin Sai Hong* has since been picked to be screened in the International Film Festival Rotterdam this year (see annex).

The history of Chinese opera in Singapore has also been permanently documented in the Museum's Living Galleries – Film & Wayang. Visitors can view video presentations of street opera performances around the early 1960s, and find more Chinese opera costumes and paraphernalia obtained from local street opera troupe *Sin Yong Hua Heng*, cultural medallion recipients Mdm Phan Wait Hong and Mrs Joanna Wong and the late Mr Liew and Mdm Pak. In March 2008, the Museum will also be co-organising a second symposium on Chinese opera together with the Chinese Opera Institute.

-END-

Media contacts

Pauline Kheng

Manager, Corporate Communications
National Museum of Singapore
T: +65 6332 9270
M: +65 9757 2246
pauline_kheng@nhb.gov.sg

Samantha Liew

Assistant Manager, Corporate Communications
National Museum of Singapore
T: +65 6332 9269
M: +65 9118 1084
samantha_liew@nhb.gov.sg

Melvin Ang

Senior Associate
Communications DNA
T: +65 6327 7163
M: +65 9678 5952
melvin.ang@commsdna.com

Candy Li

Associate
Communications DNA
T: +65 6327 7161
M: +65 9388 4898
candy.li@commsdna.com

Exhibition details

Bedazzled: Sequined Costumes of Cantonese Opera 粤剧亮片戏服展览

Wednesday 6 February 08 – Thursday 1 May 08

10am – 8pm, daily

National Museum of Singapore, the Balcony

Free admission

Living Galleries – Film & Wayang

10am – 8pm, daily

National Museum of Singapore, Level 2

S\$10 (50% concession seniors, children, students and NSF)

Free admission from 6pm – 8pm, daily

About the National Museum of Singapore

With a rich history dating back to its inception in 1887, the National Museum of Singapore is Singapore's oldest museum with the youngest and most innovative soul. Designed to be the people's museum, this 120-year-old prides itself on introducing cutting-edge and varied ways of presenting history to redefine conventional museum experience.

More than just a space for exhibitions and artefacts, the National Museum also distinguishes itself through its challenging and vibrant festivals and events that will unleash new creative possibilities in culture and heritage. This programming is supported by Food & Beverage and retail services as well as state-of-the-art facilities. The Museum was officially opened to the public on 8 December 2006.

For details, please visit www.nationalmuseum.sg