Touring Chinese troupe exciting and colorful

The Peking Opera is at Schubert Theatre through November 2. Their swordplay is as adroit as that in any Errol Flynn movie, their slapstick rival the best of Chaplin or Keaton, and their acrobatic stunts make Olga Korbut look like she’s playing hopscotch. They’re the actors and actresses of the Peking Opera, in Boston for two weeks in the final stop of a ten-city US tour, and they’re spectacular.

The Peking style of drama, often termed “Peking Opera,” is a comparatively recent invention. It was developed in the middle of the nineteenth century from several provincial theater styles which date back hundreds of years. In its present form, it weaves music, dance, song, mime and acrobatics together with plots based on Chinese folk-tales to create a truly unique theatrical experience.

Chinese theater is very different from that of the West. The actor is the focus of attention throughout; there is little or no scenery, and the costumes and hand props are designed to assist and emphasize the actors’ movements. The music is also very strange-sounding to the Western ear; it is produced on a collection of cymbals, gongs, drums, horns and stringed instruments specifically designed to accompany the shell, martial white of the Chinese actor’s singing voice. While it may jar the senses of the untutored ‘Westerner, this voice is considered a fine gift, necessary to the actor’s singing voice. While it may jar the senses of the untutored ‘Westerner, this voice is considered a fine gift, necessary to the actor’s singing voice. While it may jar the senses of the untutored ‘Westerner, this voice is considered a fine gift, necessary to the actor’s singing voice. While it may jar the senses of the untutored ‘Westerner, this voice is considered a fine gift, necessary to the actor’s singing voice. While it may jar the senses of the untutored ‘Westerner, this voice is considered a fine gift, necessary to the actor’s singing voice. While it may jar the senses of the untutored ‘Westerner, this voice is considered a fine gift, necessary to the actor’s singing voice. While it may jar the senses of the untutored ‘Westerner, this voice is considered a fine gift, necessary to the actor’s singing voice. While it may jar the senses of the untutored ‘Westerner, this voice is considered a fine gift, necessary to the actor’s singing voice. While it may jar the senses of the untutored ‘Westerner, this voice is considered a fine gift, necessary to the actor’s singing voice.

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The evening’s first offering, The Three-Forked Crossroad, brought out the more comical aspects of the evening. It included examples of all four different types of role, in addition to fighting, dance, acrobatics, singing and dialogue. As such, it was the most interesting with regard to the difference between Eastern and Western theatrical styles. The arias became a bit tedious, though, as I had very little appreciation for the music, and even less for the lyrics.

The Peking Opera is a wonderful way to spend an evening. Hopefully, cultural exchange between the US and the People’s Republic of China will bring more entertainment like it.

Linda Schaffir