

Shanghai Acrobats of the People's Republic of China

There comes a time, as a reviewer, when you just want to put down your pen and watch. When the show before you becomes so compelling, so enthralling, that you don't want to pull yourself out of the experience to complete your technical task. That moment happened for me, about 3 minutes after the opening of KCCA's first show of the 2016/2017 season.

Departing from KCCA's usual format of a musical production, the Shanghai Acrobats of the People's Republic of China presented a spectacular display of dance, theatrics, costumes, suspense, drama, and above all, amazing acrobatic displays, all wrapped around a beautiful love story. It was a show of almost endless movement and energy, with the only moments of silence and pause being for the most tension filled manoeuvres. (The audience was almost as entertaining, often openly displaying disbelief at the skill on the stage).

The story that was so skillfully woven throughout the show revolves around a boy, drawn to the beauty of a phoenix, and their journey together, a journey of love found, stolen, and reborn. Throughout the first half, we got to see displays of balance, strength and dexterity that were remarkable (though the foot juggling section did have a few weak moments). The second half of the show, while no less acrobatic, brought more drama and power as the evil ones take the phoenix and try to kill the boy. Sadly, the beloved clown sacrifices himself to save him. But all ends well with the rebirth of the phoenix and the triumph of love.

I won't go into too many technical comments on each and every act, but there were certainly some that stood out for the audience. The chair stacking act was an huge favourite, partly because of the risk and partly because he had to perform fully downstage to attain the height he needed! (He was literally touching lights and a speaker with his feet when in a handstand near the ceiling). The plates spinning on high stilts (representing dream-like trees) was one of my favourites, a stunning pairing of music and movement and costume and emotion.

In every sense, this was a complete piece of theatre, not just an acrobatic act. Great costumes, wonderful lighting, lovely story and I've seen professional dance troupes that didn't match music and movement as perfectly as did this group, including the bows. They even had 3-way pole dancing! (It's more exciting than you're thinking). It was an amazing beginning to KCCA's new season that took the audience on a wonderful journey and left them breathless.

- Neville Bowman