

**Doctor of Letters,  
*honoris causa***

Dr CHOO Heng-cheong



Mr Pro-Chancellor,

There are as many performing arts elites as there are stars in the sky, but the one who has been able to gain a reputation in the field of performing arts for nearly a century, and who commands respect and reputation, must be a rare and legendary figure. They must start their career at a very young age and live a long and healthy life. Beyond natural talent and intelligence, they must be very dedicated to their field, working tirelessly day and night to achieve mastery. Even after reaching the peak of their abilities, they must continue to strive for improvement. Moreover, in the highly competitive entertainment industry, they must possess exceptional interpersonal skills, being tactful, empathetic, and able to navigate complex social situations to maintain their success. Master Choo Heng-cheong, a luminary in the realm of traditional Cantonese opera, is a legend in his own right. His extraordinary talent is matched only by his noble character. Whether he is performing onstage, directing offstage, or mentoring young artists, his artistry and wisdom command universal respect and admiration.

Dr Choo Heng-cheong, usually known as Master Choo, a legendary figure in the world of Cantonese opera, was born in Ipoh, Malaysia in 1927 and has just celebrated his 97th birthday. Born into a family of opera performers, and under the influence of his father and elder brothers, he started learning musical instruments and Cantonese operatic percussion while he was a small child. At the tender age of nine, he made his stage debut and at thirteen, he took on the role of music leader, quickly gaining recognition and becoming a sought-after music director for numerous renowned Cantonese opera troupes, including Sin Fung Ming, Chor Fung Ming, Tai Lung Fung, Hing Sun Sing, Chung Sun Sing, Hing Fung Ming, and Sun Ma., etc. He had collaborated with almost every renowned Cantonese opera performer and has taken part in all the famous operas. In addition to his role as a music leader, he served as a vocal coach for many famous performers, including Lung Kim-sang and Mui Suet-si. He has also directed the recording of more than one hundred Cantonese opera albums and songs as well as participated in the

movie soundtrack work. Master Choo is well-versed in the history of Cantonese Opera over the past hundred years, its ups and downs, laughter and tears, and the history of the industry. It is no exaggeration to call him a living dictionary of Cantonese opera.

Master Choo's musical talent is undeniable, but his dedication and vision are equally impressive. Having learned Chinese music from his father and elder brother, he is proficient in a wide range of traditional Chinese instruments, including the gong, drum, gaohu (Yuehu), Guangdong erxian, bamboo zither, yehu, erhu, sanxian, qinqin, zheng, yangqin, and dizi, playing them with remarkable ease and fluidity. However, he believes that mastering Western instruments is equally important and that one should not be confined by tradition. To elevate the standard of Chinese opera, he has actively pursued Western instruments, mastering the guitar, violin, trumpet, and saxophone, among others. He is particularly good at violin and has developed a unique playing style. When composing music, he often blends Chinese and Western elements, using a flexible and innovative approach to bring fresh perspectives to both singers and audiences.

Master Choo moved to Hong Kong in 1959 and has considered it his home ever since. His arrival coincided with the golden age of Cantonese opera in the 1950s and 1960s, allowing him to showcase his talents and achieve remarkable success. When Cantonese opera experienced a downturn from the late 1960s to the 1980s, Master Choo, while nostalgic for the glorious days of the past, chose to move forward and actively worked to preserve this unique cultural and artistic form. His efforts included rigorous training of the next generation of Cantonese opera performers to elevate their standards, as well as tailoring music and singing styles to suit individual performers, offering a fresh experience to the audience. With an open and generous spirit, he has shared his insights on music accompaniment and Cantonese opera singing with countless peers and younger generations. He has also been actively involved in promoting and educating the public about Cantonese opera through giving lectures and staging performances. In 2021, with the support of the Cantonese Opera Advisory Committee and the Cantonese Opera Development Fund, Master Choo produced a series of short films titled 《*Master Choo Heng-cheong Cantonese Opera Art Heritage and Demonstration Project*》 《朱慶祥戲曲藝術傳承及示範計劃》 to share his insights with professional young artists and global audiences.

If you ask the 97-year-old Master Choo to share some unforgettable memories, you will know that he is a man of deep affection and loyalty. What he always remembers is not his personal brilliant achievements, but the two brothers who introduced him to the world of Cantonese opera and provided him with valuable advice; his wife who has shared both the joys and sorrows of life with

him for over 50 years; the kindness of Sit Gok-sin, the patriarch of Cantonese Opera who offered him with opportunities to showcase his talent; and the heart-warming gesture of the renowned opera actress Law Yim-hing who gifted him a quilt during a cold winter.

What we should admire is not only Master Choo's unparalleled artistic achievements but also his attitude towards life and relationships. He believes that in a theater troupe or any team, it is essential to be tolerant, understanding, and strive for harmony so as to achieve greatness. Personally, he often emphasises the importance of being modest and humble, gratitude, respecting one's teachers, and the pursuit of continuous improvement. As someone who has made Hong Kong his home, Master Choo also hopes that Hong Kong people, especially the younger generation, can possess these qualities to ensure Hong Kong's continued prosperity.

Master Choo's association with Hong Kong Metropolitan University (formerly known as The Open University of Hong Kong) began in 2016 when he was invited to give a Cantonese opera lecture, which was enthusiastically received by the audience. In 2019, during the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of The Open University of Hong Kong, Master Choo served as the artistic advisor for the Cantonese opera concert "Dream of the Red Chamber" which was highly acclaimed. In 2023, Hong Kong Metropolitan University held the opening ceremony of the "Ina Ho Cantonese Opera Research Centre" at the Xiqu Centre in the West Kowloon Cultural District. The School of Arts and Social Sciences was responsible for coordinating the performance, with Master Choo serving as the Guest Chief Musician.

In 2020, Master Choo was honoured with an Honorary Fellowship by The Open University of Hong Kong, and in 2021, he was further recognised with an Honorary Doctorate by the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts in 2021. In 2022, Dr Choo was among the awardees included in the "Secretary for Culture, Sports and Tourism's Commendation Scheme" in recognition of his outstanding contribution to the development of the arts, cultural and creative industries.

Mr Pro-Chancellor, in recognition of Dr Choo Heng-cheong's unparalleled artistic achievements as a grandmaster of Cantonese opera, and in gratitude for his efforts in promoting Cantonese opera, which is now recognised as a world heritage, may I invite our President to present Dr Choo Heng-cheong for the conferment of the degree of Doctor of Letters, *honoris causa*.

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*Citation to be delivered by Professor Charles KWONG Che-leung*

## 榮譽文學博士

### 朱慶祥博士

副校監先生：

古今中外，風靡一時的演藝精英多如天上繁星，但能夠享譽演藝領域近一個世紀、而且令人肅然起敬、有口皆碑的精英一定是鳳毛麟角，絕無僅有的傳奇人物。他 / 她不但要孩提時代入行，還要壽享遐齡；不但要天賦具足、靈心慧性，還要焚膏繼晷，廢寢忘餐，爐火純青之餘，繼續竿頭日進；而且在競爭殘酷的演藝領域，他 / 她立身處世必須懂得掌握分寸、通情達理、八面玲瓏，才能屹立不倒。戲曲大師朱慶祥師傅便是這樣的一個傳奇人物，他才華橫溢，德藝雙馨，無論是臺上表演、臺下指揮、或者設帳授徒都讓人推崇備至，拜服不已。

朱慶祥博士，行內尊稱為朱師傅，於 1927 年在馬來西亞怡保出生，剛剛過了 97 歲的生日，他出生戲曲世家，在父、兄的影響下，自小已經學習樂器和粵曲拍和，九歲初踏臺板，十三歲任頭架（音樂領班），嶄露頭角，備受各粵劇老倌歡迎，聘任他擔任音樂領導的劇團先後包括仙鳳鳴、雛鳳鳴、大龍鳳、慶新聲、頌新聲、慶鳳鳴及新馬等著名劇團，差不多所有粵劇紅伶都與他合作過，所有著名劇目他都有參與演出過，除了當頭架，朱師傅更是多位名伶包括龍劍笙和梅雪詩的唱腔導師，也領導了超過一百張粵曲唱片的灌錄工作及參與電影配樂工作。朱師傅對近百年粵劇行內的人和事、笑聲淚水、盛衰起落瞭如指掌，說他是一部粵劇活字典，絕不為過。

朱師傅的音樂天份毋庸置疑，但他的努力和視野也令人汗顏。他的中樂師承父兄，鑼、鼓、高胡（粵胡）、廣東二弦、竹提琴、椰胡、二胡、三弦、秦琴、箏、揚琴、大笛等無不精通，揮灑自如、但他認為掌握西洋學器亦為重要，不要固步自封，才可以帶領戲曲更上

層樓，於是他又積極學習西方樂器，結他、小提琴、小號、色士風等吹、拉、彈、打他都能上手，尤善小提琴，而且演奏風格自成一家。他在設計樂曲的時候，經常中西合璧，靈活求變，令歌者和觀眾都耳目一新。

朱師傅 1959 年移居香港，從此視香港為家，適值五、六十年代是粵劇全盛時期，正好讓朱師傅大展拳腳，取得非凡成就。其後粵劇在 1960 年代末至 1980 年代經歷了一段低潮期，朱師傅固然眷戀昔日的光輝歲月，但他選擇積極向前，從多方面著手讓粵劇這項獨特的文化和藝術得以傳承下去，例如嚴格訓練粵劇接班人，提升他們的水平；又為演出者度身打造音樂和唱腔，一新戲迷耳目。他一直以「知無不言、言無不盡」的態度，把音樂拍和與粵曲演唱的心得，與同業、後輩分享，受學者不計其數。此外亦經常參與粵劇推廣及教育工作，包括發表演講、演出拍和等。2021 年，在粵劇發展諮詢委員會及粵劇發展基金的資助下，朱師傅拍攝了一系列題為《朱慶祥戲曲藝術傳承及示範計劃》的短片，向行內後進及廣大觀眾分享藝術心得。

請 97 歲的朱師傅說一些他難以忘懷的事，就知道他是一個非常重情重義的人，他始終記掛的不是個人的輝煌成就，而是帶他入行、耳提面命的兩位兄長；與他同甘共苦五十多年的妻子；還有粵劇宗師薛覺先的知遇之恩，和名伶羅豔卿在寒冬送贈的一張棉被。

我們要欣賞的不單止是朱師傅登峰造極的藝術成就，也要欣賞他做人處事的態度。對於戲班、對於團隊，他認為必須事事包容體諒，追求和諧融洽，才能成就輝煌。對於個人，他經常強調滿招損、謙受益；飲水思源、尊師重道；力求上進，積極向前。一直以香港為家的朱師傅也希望香港人，特別年輕一代也能夠具備這些特質，讓香港繼續發光發亮。

朱師傅與香港都會大學（前稱香港公開大學）結緣於 2016 年，朱師傅應邀出席一場粵劇講座，觀眾反應熱烈。2019 年，香港公開大學 30 周年慶典期間，朱師傅擔任「戲說紅樓夢」粵劇音樂會的藝術顧問，該節目大獲好評。2023 年，香港都會大學在西九文化區戲曲中心的「何陳婉珍粵劇研藝中心」舉行開幕典禮，人文社會科學院負責統籌表演，由朱師傅擔任客席音樂領導。

2020年，朱師傅獲香港公開大學頒授榮譽院士，2021年又獲香港演藝學院頒授榮譽博士，實至名歸。2022年，朱博士是「文化體育及旅遊局長嘉許計劃」其中一名獲嘉許人士，以表揚他對藝術、文化及創意產業發展的卓越貢獻。

副校監先生，為表揚朱慶祥博士這位粵劇一代宗師超群絕倫的藝術成就，以及感謝他將已成世界遺產的粵劇發揚光大，本人恭請校長引介朱慶祥博士接受本校的榮譽文學博士學位。

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贊辭由鄭志良教授宣讀