

Arts & ENTERTAINMENT

Unlikely Star in World of Chinese Opera

Teen crosses cultural lines

Tyler Thompson is an unlikely star in the world of Chinese opera.

The black teenager from Oakland has captivated audiences in the U.S. and China with his ability to sing pitch-perfect Mandarin and perform the ancient Chinese art form.

"As soon as he opens his mouth and sings in Chinese, the Chinese are very surprised and then feel very proud of him," said his music teacher Sherlyn Chew. "When he puts on the costume, and all the acting, you can see that he's pretty good."

Tyler, 15, is a standout student in Chew's Oakland-based Purple Silk Music Education program, which teaches children and youth — mostly from low-income immigrant families — how to sing and play



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The African American Men's Club, Inc.

AAMC Summer Dance

Saturday, August 20, 2011

Elks Lodge

6 North Tillamook St., Portland, Oregon

8 PM - 1 AM

*Good Music * 50/50 Split Raffle * Good Food*

Dress to Impress

Tickets: \$15.00 - available at:

AAMC Club Members + Elks Lodge 503-284-4853

Cannon's Rib Express 503-288-3836

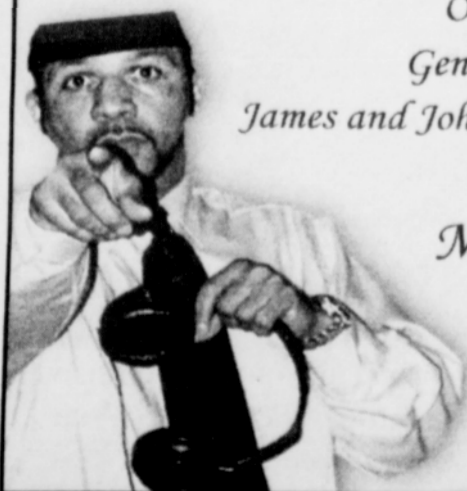
One Stop Music, Inc. 503-284-8103

Geneva's Shear Perfection 503-285-1159

James and Johnnie Mae Mayfield (Vancouver) 503-282-5809

Music By DJ Mike Morris

*Proceeds to benefit the AAMC Scholarship Program
The African American Men's Club is a non-profit organization*



traditional Chinese music. The program's Great Wall Youth Orchestra & Chorus has performed around the country.

Tyler has learned to sing several well-known pieces of Chinese opera, a centuries-old form of musical theater known for its elaborate costumes, clanging gongs and cymbals, wide-ranging vocals and highly stylized movements.

At the World Children's Festival in Washington in June, Tyler, dressed in a black robe emblazoned with golden dragons, got a standing ovation when he performed as Justice Bao, a famous Song Dynasty judge who fought government corruption, from the Chinese classic "Bao Qing Tian."

"The music is very beautiful, and it's very passionate. You can hear it when it's being played," said Tyler, a theater student at the Oakland School for the Arts. "It's made me want to know more about the world outside of America or California or Oakland."

David Lei, chairman of the Chinese Performing Arts Foundation in San Francisco, has seen Tyler perform several times and arranged to have him sing at the opening of a Chinese opera exhibit several years ago.

"It's very authentic because he hits the tones just right, so you understand everything," Lei said. "People just don't expect an Afro-American kid to be doing it. It's the initial shock. There's a sense of novelty."

Tyler, who comes from a music-loving family, began learning how to sing in Chinese a decade ago when he was a kindergartner in Chew's music class at Oakland's Lincoln Elementary School, where about 90 percent of students are Asian.

Chew quickly recognized Tyler's talent and recruited him to join her Purple Silk music program, where students learn to sing Chinese songs and play traditional instruments such as a two-string

Tyler became a sensation in China several years ago after Chinese Central Television broadcast his performance at a Lunar New Year show in San Jose.

In recent years, he has begun studying theater and acting more seriously, but he plans to keep performing traditional Chinese music, which has opened up a world of opportunities to him.

"I've been sticking to this to see where else it will take me," he said.

--The Associated Press