

Anhui Nuo Opera

Anhui Nuo is special because it is performed on a clan basis not by a troupe as in other places. Chizhou Nuo is the best known Nuo opera of Anhui. The origins of Nuo culture in Chizhou areas is one of the most ancient and can be traced back over thousands of years to the neolithic period that has been recently included in the Nation's First Catalogue of Intangible Cultural Heritage. Chizhou Nuo opera is divided into three performing formats: Nuo ritual, Nuo dancing and Nuo drama.

The complete stage performance must be mixed with dramatic plot, performing procedure, role-playing, type of role, and qiemo (settings, scene and props). All of those should bear the theatrical characters. The performing skill can only be learned through oral instruction and the personal teachings passed on to disciples in person from generation to generation. Therefore, the performing art of Nuo opera is normally passed on within a clan from generation to generation.

There may be two sacrificial ceremonies (in which the Nuo opera are performed as a must) a year: the "spring sacrificial ceremony" that is held sometime between the seventh day to the fifteenth day of the first lunar month and the "autumn sacrificial ceremony" that is held on the fifteenth day of the eighth lunar month. Except for these two ceremonies, there is no performance at all throughout the year.

The dance remains in many villages in Guichi county of Chizhou today which has a strong local flavor. Surrounded in the mist of incense and smoke, "Nuo" dancers would dress colorfully; walk on stilts and wear masks while performing, expressing their wishes of sacrifice to their ancestors, praying for blessing and dispelling the evils.

While performing in some mountainous villages, dancers have to put masks on their foreheads, letting the audiences who are standing on the surrounding slopes to see them clearly. To accompany the dancing, the music instruments range from drum, bell, earthen bowl, bamboo flute and suona. There is a popular saying among Chizhou area that a village would not be considered a village without Nuo opera.

When Chizhou Nuo opera is performed, it normally has three integrative components: Nuo dancing, main performance, and salutatory & complimentary remarks. Some of the well-known repertoires of Chizhou Nuo opera are "Liu Wenlong", "Meng Jiangnü", "Fan Silking" and "Zhang Wenxian" and so on.

