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Children: "we cannot buy happiness"

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by Xinhua writers Ding Yimin, Zhang Meng

CAIRO, June 2 (Xinhua) -- Forty children of different nationalities staged a Chinese fable-turned musical at an Irish school in suburban Cairo Wednesday evening, to tell a story of how two devoted lovers found their happiness not through money but love and loyalty.

"I liked it all, especially the part of wedding dance," said 4-year-old Chinese girl Wang Huoran, who played the heroine Koong-Se, the beautiful daughter of a wealthy mandarin.

The owner of the Irish School Marian Phelan said that it was always good to present something "different" to the students and their parents coming from more than 50 countries, and a story taking place in a Chinese garden seemed to have done the job.

By turning an outdoor climbing frame into a lantern-decorated palace, Phelan and her colleagues tried to catch as much Chinese flavor as possible through oriental singing and dancing, and traditional Chinese costumes designed for different characters in the play.

The six-act play tells the story of a young daughter from a Chinese wealthy family who fled the wedding of her arranged marriage and ran off with her lover -- a poor gardener. They were turned into a pair of birds by fairies when they got caught by the girl's ruthless father, and lived in their love nest happily ever after.

"I think it is very educational, inspirational and informative for children to have knowledge and understanding of the world," said Phelan. "So we would like to take it from the local environment here to an international perspective."

Phelan said she found the script of the play back in Ireland. The story was originally based on the paintings of Chinese characters and willows, which appeared on a blue and white porcelain plate, imported from China to England about 400 years ago. The teachers adapted the "blue willow" story into a more lively form of singing and dancing play for children, and named it "In a garden in China".

"We actually made a longer version for the primary school kids and a condensed and simpler version for younger children, which is shown tonight," she said.

Two classes of children between 4-6 years old attended the show, and it took three months for them to practice for the play, she said.

Phelan said that the play had helped the children to be well aware of the Chinese culture and customs, adding that the primary school children had a lot of materials and work on China in their classes. They were instructed to locate the country, and to know more about the folklore and the culture.

Class teacher Delia Abouzaid said that the children also did a lot of arts and crafts on Chinese culture. They painted the willow patterns, made Chinese dragons and Chinese flags.

"They got to know about Chinese calligraphy, and even learnt how to say 'thank you' in Chinese at the end," Abouzaid said.

"Chinese culture is very ancient and exciting to follow up upon," said Class teacher Janet Daniels.

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"the story is not just about the 'willow pattern' but has a lot of meaning in it."

She said some children were unable to speak English when they started practicing, given the fact that some of them are from Asian countries, and some are from France and Scandinavian countries. "But it is very rewarding to see how they picked up acting quickly and how they became good at English speaking towards the end of rehearsal."

Taking the Chinese girl Huoran as an example, Daniels said, " she learns very quickly and has a lot of enthusiasm."

The Irish School was founded in Cairo in 1982, and had since developed into an international school with four branches, hosting 400 students aged between six months to 11 years old, from about 56 countries, the owner Phelan said.

The assistant director of the school Francoise Chansagnard said that the show is very good for children because it helps them learn that "money does not buy happiness".

"I think it is not only a Chinese theme, but an international one," she said.

Editor: yan

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