

SYNOPS

OPERA AS LIFE FORCE

- Norbu Tsering, Tibetan opera master in exile

Opera is the heart of Tibetan culture

H.H. Dalai Lama

Opera as life force is a story about an unknown opera culture, the Tibetan one, and about art's ability to heal and develop in exile. 60 minutes.

In 1959, Tibet was occupied. H.H Dalai Lama was forced to flee incognito with government and family members across the inaccessible Himalayan mountain range. Thousands of people followed, also many opera artists. What happened?

I hear there is a Tibetan exile opera high up in the Himalayan mountain range, in India. I decide to go there to meet the opera-theatre collective with over 160 members. It is both a school and an opera. Meet the aging opera master Norbu Tsering and the young artist Sonam Phuntsok, and many, many other artists. The latter have never been to Tibet.

Incredibly, after only six months in exile, the Dalai Lama had begun to rebuild the Tibetan Opera, the Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts, also known as TIPA. Why? "Culture develops empathy and strengthens self-esteem," he replies. The Dalai Lama becomes the opera's patron.

But it is through the aging opera master Norbu Tsering that we get to follow developments in exile. Rehearsals, performances, interviews, everyday events - as well as a series of conversations with H.H. Dalai Lama, we are approaching both an unknown but also universal landscape. This is interspersed with archival footage from inside Tibet, and concludes with the great Shoton Opera Festival, an important tradition that Norbu Tsering and the Dalai Lama brought with them from Tibet. Together, they have become bridge builders between the old and the new.

When I arrive, the time has come, according to Tibetan tradition, to choose a replacement. The choice has fallen on the young, talented artist Sonam Phuntsok, who hesitates. Unsure if he will be able to cope with the great responsibility, and so he carries other dreams, too.

Finally, Sonam Phuntsok takes a stand and decides to shoulder the role of the new opera master. Norbu Tsering can breathe out and summarize his life, both in Tibet and in exile. And H.H. The Dalai Lama opens up that new subjects should also be included in the 600-year-old Tibetan opera canon. It is important to both preserve and renew.

Gunilla Palo Nordlund