

LIFE

Passing the baton

Legendary conductors continue their brilliant work together after thrilling audiences over the generations, **Chen Nan** reports.

The symphony orchestra of the Xiamen Song and Dance Troupe and the Xiamen Opera Philharmonic Chorus were a few days away from performing *La Traviata*, an opera in three acts by Italian composer Giuseppe Verdi. They were ready to present a Chinese version in Xiamen, Fujian province, produced by the Zheng Xiaoying Opera Center, which was founded by 93-year-old conductor Zheng Xiaoying.

However, this time, the conductor, who was going to take the baton to perform with the symphony orchestra and the chorus for *La Traviata*, was not Zheng. It was 77-year-old Wu Lingfen, one of Zheng's students.

On Nov 25 and 26, the opera was performed for two sold-out nights. Wu and Zheng, who is the artistic director of the opera production, worked side by side during the rehearsals, which were not only for the opera, but also for a teacher-and-student reunion.

While Wu played in the orchestra pit, Zheng was behind her, giving Wu suggestions for dealing with the music and inspiring the symphony orchestra and chorus to work with the conductor.

"It feels like that I am in a class with her again. She always encourages me and gives me great advice," says Wu, who received a gift from Zheng — a brand-new baton — during the rehearsals.

It was the first time that Wu conducted an opera produced by the Zheng Xiaoying Opera Center, which was established on Jan 11 by Zheng and is headquartered in Xiamen.

The first private nonprofit art institution in China devoted to producing operas and promoting young opera talent, the center was conceived about 10 years ago.

"We held hands together when we walked into the theater to do rehearsals and she introduced me to the young singers who were going to perform in the opera," Wu adds. The opera featured some rising tenors and sopranos, including Gu Wenmeng and Guo Wei.

La Traviata was one of the first Western operas staged in China. It premiered in the country in 1956, and Zheng, who was the principal conductor of the China National



Conductors Zheng Xiaoying (left), 93, and Wu Lingfen, 77, greet the audience onstage after the Chinese version of classic opera *La Traviata* by Verdi was performed in Xiamen, Fujian province, on Nov 25. Wu conducted the opera produced by the Zheng Xiaoying Opera Center. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Opera House at the time, has conducted the opera more than 160 times since. It was also one of the first Western operas to be adapted into Chinese. Zheng participated in the adaptation personally. In 2011, she brought the Chinese version of *La Traviata* to Xiamen and, in 2020, she presented the arias of the opera with a concert, also held in Xiamen.

On Aug 27 and 28, another student of Zheng's, conductor Gao Song, led the Fuzhou Strait Symphony Orchestra in Fujian prov-

ince and the Xiamen Opera Philharmonic Chorus to perform the Chinese version of *La Traviata*. Zheng introduced the opera and guided the audience to help them better understand it on social media platform, Douyin, on Aug 27. This attracted more than 3 million viewers.

"Performing Western operas in Chinese with Chinese singers brings the Western art form closer to domestic audiences. What we are trying to do is to find the most accurate translation for the libretto, as

well as using proper Chinese words that go well with the music," Zheng says.

Zheng has been credited with introducing opera and classical music to Xiamen. In 1998, she founded the Xiamen Philharmonic Orchestra. In 2000, Zheng and the Xiamen Philharmonic Orchestra premiered *The Echoes of Hakka's Earth Buildings*, which is an original Chinese music piece, in Fujian's Longyan city. Composed by Liu Yuan, it pays tribute to the history and lives of the Hakka people. So far,

Zheng has led the symphony in the performance of the music piece about 80 times in over 12 countries and regions.

For Wu, who has been devoted to conducting choral singing for decades, she had not conducted an opera for a long time. She says that the process of preparing for conducting the opera took her back to her youth.

She also notes that Zheng has been supportive of her ideas about choral singing as a teacher and a friend.

Born in Shanghai in 1929, Zheng is the first female opera and sym-

phony conductor in China. As one of the most famous Chinese conducting professors, Zheng has taught many famed musicians, including Zhang Xian, music director of the New Jersey Symphony.

In the early 1960s, Zheng was sent to the Moscow State Tchaikovsky Conservatory to study conducting. On Oct 1, 1961, she conducted her first orchestral concert in Moscow, which she dedicated to the 12th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China. The following year, she conducted Italian composer Giacomo Puccini's opera, *Tosca*, in the Russian capital, becoming the first Chinese conductor to perform at an international opera house.

In 1964, she returned to China to teach at the Central Conservatory of Music, where she became Wu's teacher.

Wu's father was a priest and Wu listened to lots of music in church and learned piano as a child. Her music talent was recognized by Zheng. "Wu is creative and full of ideas, which I love very much," says Zheng.

Like her mentor, from 1986 to 1988, Wu was sent to study at the Moscow State Tchaikovsky Conservatory. It was there that she became interested in choral singing, which was supported by Zheng.

When Wu taught conducting at the China Conservatory of Music in 1998, she initiated the idea of training conductors from choral singing. She let students sing at chorus and conduct the chorus themselves.

Now, Wu is a professor of the China Conservatory of Music's conducting department and works as the conductor of the NCPA Chorus, the resident chorus of the National Centre for the Performing Arts.

During the 16th China International Chorus Festival, Wu, the festival's artistic director, invited Zheng to be the guest conductor and honorary president of the event's arts committee. From July 16 to 20, the festival, held online, featured over 530 choirs from 52 countries and regions, as well as over 30,000 choral singing enthusiasts.

"I am happy that I am still able to learn and work with Zheng," says Wu.

Contact the writer at chenman@chinadaily.com.cn

International Education Column

If you are interested in this, please contact: i.education@chinadaily.com.cn AD

US UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX BUSINESS SCHOOL

Join a UK top ranked Business School

- 1st in the UK for Accounting & Finance Graduate prospects on track. Complete University Guide 2022
- 13th in the UK for Business and Economics. Times Higher Education World Rankings 2022
- Times Higher Education Awards 2021 - Business School of the Year Finalist

Accounting • Finance • Banking • Business Studies • MBA
Development Economics • Econometrics • Energy • Human Resource Management • Global Supply Chain Management • Innovation Studies
Leadership • Marketing • Policy • Sustainability • Trade

TO FIND OUT MORE VISIT:
www.sussex.ac.uk/business-school
Or email China@sussex.ac.uk

CONNECT WITH US ON WECHAT AND SINA WEIBO

#1

UNI IN THE WORLD FOR COMMITMENT TO UNITED NATIONS' SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Times Higher Education Impact Rankings 2022

WESTERN SYDNEY UNIVERSITY

CRICOS 00917K

EARN A MASTER OF PUBLIC POLICY AT PEPPERDINE

1 DEGREE
5 SPECIALIZATIONS

- American Policy and Politics
- International Relations and National Security
- Applied Economic Policy
- Public Policy and Dispute Resolution
- State and Local Policy

TOP 10 POLICY PROGRAM

The Pepperdine School of Public Policy's Master of Public Policy is a top 10 policy program in the West, as ranked by *U.S. News & World Report*

BEAUTIFUL LOCATION

Located in the greater Los Angeles Area

STRATEGIC EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES

Path to PhD/doctoral studies

APPLY TODAY!

Contact Us
sppadmissions@pepperdine.edu
310.506.7493

PEPPERDINE SCHOOL OF PUBLIC POLICY

Be U. Be a RESPONSIBLE BUSINESS LEADER

Be part of the HKBU School of Business, where responsible business leaders are nurtured.

bus.hkbu.edu.hk/responsible-leader

Carnegie Mellon University Qatar

Biological Sciences • Business Administration
Computer Science • Information Systems

Carnegie Mellon University attracts a certain type of student: motivated, inventive and driven to make a difference. Students come to Carnegie Mellon to learn, create and innovate in a nurturing environment. They leave with the passion, connections, credentials and lifelong friends who will help them change the world.

GET STARTED

www.qatar.cmu.edu

EHL Hospitality Business School

Worldwide Hospitality & Leisure Management Studies
QS World University Rankings 2019 - 2022

Switzerland Business & Management Studies
QS World University Rankings 2021 - 2022

EHL's Lifelong Learning Solutions

- Pre-University Courses for Teens
- Undergraduate Degree
 - Bachelor of Science in International Hospitality Management
- Graduate Degrees
 - Master's in Global Hospitality Business
 - Master's in Hospitality Management
 - Master's in Wine & Hospitality Management
 - MBA in Hospitality
 - Joint Hospitality Executive MBA with CEIBS
 - Executive MBA
- Modular Professional Development Programs
- Customized Corporate Training Programs

EHL Hospitality Business School: Redefining Hospitality Leadership

follow us on WeChat
www.ehl.edu/