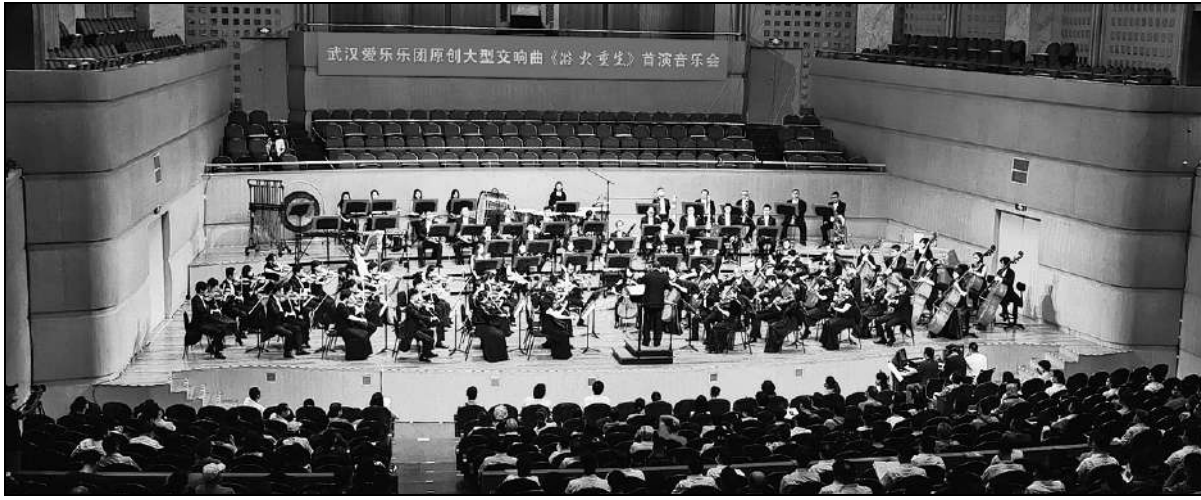


LIFE



The Wuhan Philharmonic Orchestra premieres the symphony, *Reborn From the Fire*, under the baton of Shao En at the Wuhan Qintai Concert Hall on Aug 15. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Music captures the spirit of Wuhan

New composition to honor the city's people will be performed in Beijing. **Chen Nan** reports.

In early 2020, Wuhan, the capital city of Hubei province, was hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic. All public transportation and businesses were suspended, and residents were required to stay indoors to help cut transmission.

Zhang Shouzhong, president of the Wuhan Philharmonic Orchestra, along with his colleagues, sprang into action. They worked as volunteers to help residents living in nearby neighborhoods by delivering supplies, food and carrying out temperature checks.

While doing his volunteer assignments every day from 7 am to 7 pm, Zhang considered the orchestra's first concert when the pandemic had passed.

He called his friend, composer and conductor Shao En one day in March. They agreed to create an original composition dedicated to the city of Wuhan and the people who fought against the pandemic.

Given travel restrictions and social distancing rules, the process of writing the piece became an experiment in online collaboration.

The four-movement musical composition, titled *Reborn From the Fire*, jointly composed by Guan Xia, Shao En, Yang Fan and Huang Kairan, was premiered by the Wuhan Philharmonic Orchestra under the baton of Shao on Aug 15, at the Wuhan Qintai Concert Hall. Zhang notes that the four composers worked voluntarily.

To commemorate the first anniversary of Wuhan ending its 76-day lockdown on April 8, 2020, the Wuhan Philharmonic Orchestra will perform *Reborn From the Fire*, under the baton of Shao at the National Center for the Performing Arts in Beijing on Thursday, as the opening concert of the NCPA's annual event, the China Orchestra Festival. This monthlong event showcases and promotes the country's symphony orchestras and



Top: (Front row, from left) Composers of the piece, Huang Kairan, Yang Fan, Guan Xia and Shao En, at its premiere in Wuhan on Aug 15. **Above:** The Wuhan Philharmonic Orchestra presents *Reborn From the Fire*, under the baton of its artistic director, Chinese-Singaporean conductor James P. Liu, at the historic landmark, the Yellow Crane Tower, in Wuhan on Nov 3.

works by Chinese composers.

The four-movement piece tells the story of Wuhan enduring the pandemic early last year and its triumph over the crisis.

It will be the debut performance of the Wuhan Philharmonic Orchestra at the China Orchestra Festival. Shao will also lead the orchestra to perform *Ode to the Red Flag* by Chinese composer Lyu Qiming and the prelude to composer Guan Xia's *Symphony No 1, The Years of Burning Passion*.

"During those hard days, we didn't know when our lives would go back to normal. We felt sad, disappointed and scared. But there was hope. The pandemic gave us a chance to rethink humanity and we want to record those days with music," says Zhang. "It will be a

memorable concert since the date, April 8, is significant for Wuhan and the people of the city."

For Shao, who lives in Beijing and works as the head of the composition department of the China Conservatory of Music, it was also his wish to compose such a piece. He soon contacted composer Guan Xia, the former president of the China National Symphony Orchestra, who invited two of his students, young Chinese composer Huang Kairan and Yang Fan, to work together.

"Guan Xia had already started composing a new piece when I called him last March. Like many people, he watched lots of news about the pandemic at home and was deeply touched by the people who made great contributions to the fight against it," recalls Shao. "We

shared the mutual understanding about the piece."

"The fight against the pandemic keeps people together. We wanted to do something and, as musicians, composing and performing music are the best ways," adds Shao. Led by Guan, the composers revised the piece more than 20 times since "the style of the piece needs to be consistent."

According to Zhang, when *Reborn from the Fire* premiered in Wuhan, the concert was also livestreamed across major social media platforms. Medical workers in Wuhan were invited to enjoy the concert.

On Nov 3, the piece was staged again by the Wuhan Philharmonic Orchestra under the baton of its artistic director, Chinese-Singaporean conductor James P. Liu, near the historic landmark, the Yellow Crane Tower, in Wuhan. The composers have rearranged the piece by adding sounds of Chinese *bianzhong* (chime bells), which is one of the most famous symbols of Hubei province. A set of 65 bronze chime bells, which dates back 2,400 years to the time of Marquis Yi of the Zeng state, is housed in the Hubei Provincial Museum.

"It was very emotional for people in Wuhan to review the year of 2020. Music has the power to heal. When the melody of the piece, *Reborn From the Fire*, was played out by the orchestra, many of the audience were touched and even cried," says Zhang.

The Wuhan Philharmonic Orchestra, founded in 1993, performed its first post-lockdown live concert on July 3, to a 30 percent capacity Wuhan Qintai Concert Hall. The *Symphony No 3 in E-flat major (Op 55)*, also known as *Hero*, by Ludwig van Beethoven, was performed by the orchestra, as 2020 also marked the 250th anniversary of the German composer's birth.

During the days without live concerts, the orchestra kept in touch with its audience by offering online content, such as musicians performing from home. From May to June, the orchestra staged six online concerts with its first concert, which was held on May 28, attracting more than 90 million viewers.

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Love affair with porcelain defies age

NANCHANG — Over 15 km from the center of the famed ceramics capital of Jingdezhen in East China's Jiangxi province, several eye-catching buildings stand beside the road, decorated with fragments of brightly colored porcelain that dazzle tourists.

Strange though it may seem, these impressive structures in Xinping village, Fuliang county, were designed by a woman when she was in her 80s, standing as a tribute to her favorite art form.

Now 91, Yu Ermei has devoted a lifetime to porcelain, originally as a craftswoman and dealer, but now as a self-funding creator of porcelain palaces, as she dubs them.

Born in 1930, Yu started at the age of 12, working as an apprentice to her uncle in a porcelain workshop in Jingdezhen. Since the first day, she never shied away from the drudgery of the craft.

Although petite, Yu mustered all her strength for the skills required in the 72-step porcelain-making procedure. Such diligence subsequently won her jobs at two State-run porcelain factories, where she was awarded the accolade of excellent female worker time and again.

After retiring at the age of 50, Yu did not dwell upon her past career, but opened her own kiln and porcelain factory. She made a fortune selling porcelain products within China and to countries like Russia and Thailand.

In 2007, Yu made a business trip to North China's Tianjin Municipality, where she saw a unique house built and decorated with copious amounts of porcelain.

It was that trip that inspired her to create her own porcelain palace in Jingdezhen. "At that time, I spent a sleepless night thinking about the fact that China's porcelain capital did not have any porcelain buildings like that," she recalls.

So in 2010, in the twilight of her years and quite alone, Yu put up a makeshift shed in the village and started designing a porcelain palace based on two photographs of circular structures known as *tulou*, meaning "earthen buildings", which are typical of East China's Fujian province.

Her plan was met with resistance from almost all her friends and relatives. They did not understand her vision, and even wondered whether she might be going senile.

But Yu's perseverance prevailed, and she set about the work of construction. To fund the project, she used up all her savings and even sold a house

inherited from her mother.

Over a period of four years, Yu's blueprint was translated into a three-story circular building. Tens of thousands of porcelain fragments, bottles and plates were incorporated into the structure, testament to the unquenchable fires of Jingdezhen's kilns.

The first palace was completed in 2016, while the second is almost finished; two more structures are under construction.

A tour of the first porcelain palace is like diving into a wonderland. The facade is covered in bright mosaic patterns reflecting Chinese culture — zodiac signs, dragons and phoenixes.

Inside, the effect is simply magical: windows formed in the shape of a porcelain vase; ceilings decorated with delicate porcelain bowls; shimmering walls embedded with unique pieces of porcelain; and paintings showing classic Chinese folk stories.

At an age when many would expect Yu to be enjoying a relaxed retirement, she is still active, never slowing her pace. Not only is she supervising the construction of more buildings, but she conducts guided tours for the growing number of visitors.

Jin Xiaofan, a 25-year-old tourist from Yunnan province, was so impressed with the exquisite porcelain palaces that she made a video call to share the view with her family. "Grandma Yu has made me realize that it is never too late to chase our dreams," she says.

When the visitors are gone, Yu approaches the palaces with labored footsteps and caresses the glittering porcelain pieces, pondering which parts still need to be fixed.

Looking ahead, Yu says that, even if she becomes largely immobile, she will stay beside her palaces, which she views as her children, the product of a lifelong love affair with porcelain.

"It's reassuring to be next to them," she says.

XINHUA



Top right: Yu Ermei introduces an artwork, in March, inside a "porcelain palace" she built in Xinping village, Fuliang county. **Above:** The "porcelain palaces" Yu built in the village are tourist hot spots. PHOTOS BY ZHOU MI / XINHUA

Time for full reckoning with anti-Asian racism

The National Day of Action and Healing on March 26 was launched in the United States to galvanize individuals, businesses and organizations

to take steps to tackle anti-Asian racism and hate incidents. As organizers have called for efforts to make streets and businesses safer for Asians, they're also asking that business leaders work to address the long-standing problem of anti-Asian discrimination in areas such as the workplace.

I'm encouraged that people are also seizing this moment as an

opportunity to shine a light on the pervasive problem of anti-Asian bias, which often acts insidiously through systems and institutions and doesn't usually produce the kind of shocking video footage that commands more attention in the media.

The 2019 study *Discrimination in the US: Experiences of Asian Americans* published in Health Services Research found 37 percent of Asian adults said they had experienced racial discrimination. That number jumped to 60 percent for the overseas Chinese in a recent survey highlighted by the US-based World Journal in a March 26 article. Such discrimination may not necessarily inflict physical harm,

yet can be devastating. Imagine being prosecuted by the government for alleged espionage you never committed. Racial profiling under the guise of national security has long threatened the livelihoods of scores of Chinese scientists in the US. Most are familiar with Wen Ho Lee, who was later exonerated, but more recently many others have been wrongfully targeted — including Cao Guoqing, Li Shuyu, Sherry Chen and Xi Xiaoxing. More often, though, anti-Asian workplace discrimination occurs in subtle ways. Consider the news in February 2021 that Google agreed to a settlement with the US Department of Labor, after an

investigation exposed problems including "hiring rate differences" that impacted not only female but also Asian job seekers.

Meanwhile, Asian students can have their education and careers harmed at the hands of instructors and faculty, who may disguise racial animus behind pretextual explanations.

Han Xuemei, a graduate student at Yale University, had been threatened with the loss of her funding and told to leave the university due to being "not in good academic standing", an allegation contradicted by how she had passed all tests and exams (including a language test), published a paper and began

research. A grievance filed in 2005 on the discriminatory treatment, plus public pressure, pushed the university to restore her funding and allow her to continue her studies in another department.

In 2020, the University of Illinois dismissed graduate student Ivor Chen over failing to comply with the school's COVID-19 testing mandate, a punishment so draconian that it sparked public outcry and a petition that ultimately led to his reinstatement.

Some extreme cases have emerged at flight schools in the US, such as with Yan Yang in 2019. Court filings described Yan's training program as creating a hostile

environment for Chinese students and enforcing harsh, discriminatory policies that didn't apply to non-Chinese peers. His family contends the abusive and discriminatory treatment resulted in Yan's suicide.

As the Stop Asian Hate movement gains momentum, let's hope, much like the organizers behind this year's National Day of Action and Healing, that this energy can be harnessed to fight not only the horrifying pandemic of hate incidents and violence, but also all forms of anti-Asian racism and discrimination. Just as Asians deserve to walk the streets without fear of attacks, so too should they have the opportunity to thrive in a workplace or a classroom free of bias and discrimination.

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