

Master playwright mourned

The life and love of Wu Zuguang reads like one of his dramas

By YU NAN
China Daily staff

Tucked away in a nondescript residential building in the east of downtown Beijing, the apartment where Wu Zuguang, one of China's most famous playwrights lived, was not easy to find.

But in the past week, by tracing the line of the flowers including lilies, white chrysanthemums, white roses and carnations along the stairs, it is easy to find Mr Wu's door, neighbours told the continuous flow of visitors.

Floral tributes marked the passing of the eminent dramatist, who died from coronary heart disease on April 9, at the age of 86.

Many of Wu's old friends, including famous cartoonist Ding Cong, prominent Chinese art historian and calligrapher Huang Miaozi, and renowned Hong Kong writer Jin Yong (Louis Cha) have come, or telephoned, to express their condolences, said Wu's youngest daughter Wu Shuang.

"Our home cannot hold the so many flowers from my father's friends, students, relatives and admirers. So people just put them along stairs from the fifth floor to the ground," she said.

The official funeral service will be held on Saturday (April 19) at Babaoshan Cemetery for Revolutionaries, where many famous Chinese citizens are buried.

Shu Yi, son of the Chinese writer and playwright Lao She (1899-1966) and a writer in his own right, said he was deeply saddened by the passing of his father's best friend.



Floral tributes: Friends, students, relatives, and admirers and fellow artists have filled the sitting room of Wu Zuguang's apartment with flowers, an expression of their sorrow at the passing of the great, modern Chinese playwright. In the centre of the bouquets is a photograph of the young Wu and his beloved wife Xin Fengxia.

"Wu was a master playwright and held a prominent position in the history of China's contemporary literature," said Shu.

Forever prodigy

Wu's successful launch onto the literary stage came at the age of 19 with the publication of his first drama "Feng Huang Cheng (Phoenix City)" in the winter of 1937, and at the beginning of the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression (1937-45).

The drama, arguably the first in China with an inspiring patriotic theme, and urged the people to fight the Japanese invaders.

Quickly becoming popular, it echoed the feelings of the nation. Wu earned the title "A Child Prodigy in Drama" and was praised by Zhou Enlai (1898-1976), the late premier of the People's Republic of China. In the following two years, he produced several popular dramas inspired by the same theme, such as "Zheng Qi Ge (The Song of Righteousness)" and "Hai Zi Jun (Children's Army)," which extolled the courage of the Chinese people during the war.

"Compared with other master playwrights, like Cao Yu (1910-96) and my father, Wu, full of talent, achieved success at a very young age and that's why people called him a prodigy."

In Beijing in 1917, Wu was nurtured on Chinese art and literature.

After finishing high school, he entered Zhongfa University (1920-50), but left after studying for only one year in the Chinese literature department and instead headed south to Nanjing where he worked and taught in the then National Drama School.

The 1937-1947 period is regarded as the first high point of Wu's creativity. During this decade he produced 11 high-quality dramas. Among them, "Feng Xue Ye Gui Ren (Return Home on a Snowy Night)" came to be regarded as Wu's best work and established him as a dramatist of repute.

The drama told the story of the tragic love affair between a Peking Opera actor and a bureaucrat's concubine who endures a life of misery. It movingly

showed the desire of people to lead beautiful lives and awakened pure and lofty ideals.

The drama was performed thousands of times on stages across the nation at that time and continued to win popular acclaim after the founding of New China in 1949. It has gone on to become one of the classic masterpieces of Chinese theatre, according to Shu.

In late 1947, Wu fled to Hong Kong to escape persecution at the hands of the Kuomintang because of his dramas "Change Ben Yue (Chang'e Flying to the Moon)" and "Zhuo Gui Zhuan (Catching the Devil)".

Wu produced and directed several films, including "Feng Xue Ye Gui Ren" and "Mo Fu Qing Chun (Waste Not Our Youth)".

Wu's second artistic high was between 1966-65, during which time he produced the well-known Pingju Opera "Hua Wei Mei (Flower as Our Matchmaker)" in which his wife, Xin Fengxia (1927-98), a famous Pingju Opera singer, played the leading role.

"Chuang Jiang Hu (Itinerant Performer)" produced in 1979 is another favourite. It was based on the real life experiences of Wu's wife.

"Wu has won renown as a master playwright because he was great on a wide variety of art forms, including modern dramas, Peking Opera, other local operas and even films," said Shu.

With such a breadth and

depth of achievements in literature and the performing arts, Wu also proved himself a successful director with documentaries on the maestros of Peking Opera, Mei Lanfang and Cheng Yanqiu.

Before his death, Wu donated 24 manuscripts in his own handwriting, said Shu, the chief curator and director of the National Museum of Modern Chinese Literature, where a special library named after the writer is planned.

Genius and beauty

The names of Wu and Xin, a talented dramatist and a well-loved Pingju Opera star, were always spoken of as one.

Their love for each other has been described as "the perfect love of the past century."

The marriage, however, was opposed by most of their friends at first, because they came from "too different backgrounds," recalled Shu.

The marriage would defy traditional conventions that dictated marriage partners should be of an equal educational and social standing.

Xin, who grew up alone in Tianjin and was self-taught in the art of Pingju Opera, had become a nationwide Pingju Opera star by the age of 14.

"She was illiterate at that time, but with an extraordinary gift in opera," Shu said. "Wu met her in Beijing when Wu was already a famous playwright."

The couple finally got married in 1951 with the firm support of Lao She and Ouyang Yuqian, both of whom held prominent positions in the world of literature, said Shu.

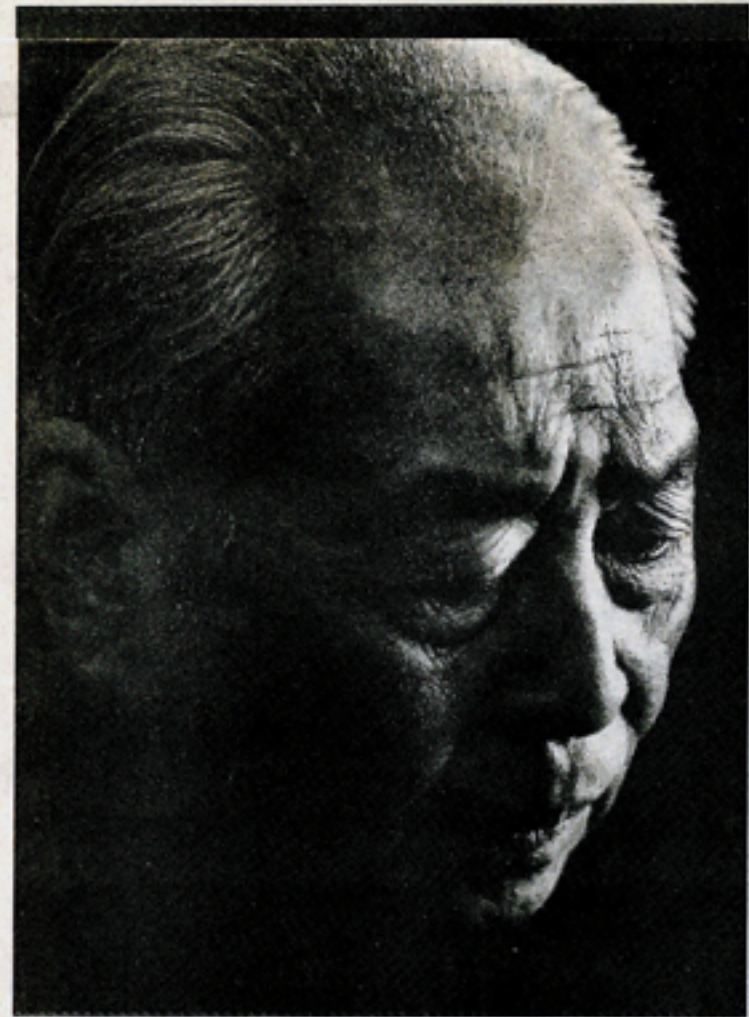
Their love and devotion for each other never faltered despite the hardships of their early years and the difficulties they would face together, he added.

Xin bid farewell to the stage problems and Wu spent much of his time caring for her. With the help of Wu, Xin not only learnt to read and write Chinese, but also became a well-known writer in her own right during the latter part of her life.

Wu's health dramatically deteriorated following Xin's death in 1998, said Wu Huan, their son. He said his father's life really ended with the death of his mother.

Many old friends suggested to Wu Shuang that a picture of the legendary couple should be on display at the forthcoming funeral service, in recognition of their inspiring and enduring love.

It was exactly five years to the day—April 19—that Wu's family held a memorial service for Xin. "Maybe it is just a coincidence and maybe it is a telepathy between them," remarked Wu Shuang.



Drama prodigy: Wright rose to fame at the age of 19 with a stirring work inspired by the Japanese aggression of China. Throughout his life he held a prominent position in China's contemporary literature history.

WANG WENLAN
China Daily

WHAT'S ON

STAGE

Symphonic Peking Opera: "The Royal Consort," a performance of symphonic Peking Opera, is performed by 300 performers pooled from Beijing and Shanghai. It tells the story of Yang Yuhuan, a favourite concubine of Emperor Li Longji of the Tang Dynasty (AD 618-907).
Time: 7:30 pm, April 18
Place: Poly Theatre, Dongshishitiao
Tel: 6506-5343

Operatic classics: Renowned opera professor Zhou Xiaoyan will lead her students in a series of excerpts from classic operas at the Shanghai Yihai Theatre.

The programmes include "Un Bel Di" from Puccini's "Madame Butterfly," "Nessun Dorma" from Puccini's "Turandot," the Overture to Rossini's "The Barber of Seville," "Toreador" from Bizet's "Carmen" and "Libiamo" from Verdi's "La Traviata."
Time: 7:15 pm, April 19, 26, May 3, 10, 17
Place: Shanghai Yihai Theatre, 499 Jiangning Lu, Shanghai
Tel: 021-6237-2595, 6486-9932

Monkey King: Two Peking Opera excerpts, one focusing on the Monkey King, are being performed every evening at the Zhengyi Theatre.

"The Broken Bridge" and "Eighteen Arhats Fight the Monkey King" are featured on Fridays.

On Saturdays, there is "Picking up the Jade Bracelet" and "Havoc in the Dragon's Palace."
On Sundays, "Farewell My Concubine" and "Monkey King's

Havoc in Heaven" are the featured pieces.
Time: 7:30 pm, daily
Place: Zhengyi Theatre
Tel: 1362-119-5714

Ming-style theatre: The Lijuan Theatre presents traditional Peking Opera excerpts specially packaged in short programmes for foreign audiences in its original style.

The theatre revives the ambience of old Beijing by setting up Ming-style tables that enable guests to sample snacks during the performance.

With an interpretation in English, the performances are given by the Beijing Peking Opera Theatre.
Time: 7:30 pm daily
Place: Qianmen Hotel, 175 Yong'an Lu, Xuanwu District
Tel: 6301-6688 ext 8867

CONCERTS

Easter special: French master Gabriel Faure's "Requiem" is paired with his countryman Francis Poulenc's "Gloria." The concert, conducted by Nicholas Smith, is given by the International Festival Chorus, 70 singers from a dozen countries.
Time: 7:30 pm, April 19
Place: Forbidden City Concert Hall, Zhongshan Park
Tel: 6559-8285

Piano great: Acclaimed veteran pianist Fou Tsong is to play again in Beijing.

Born in 1934 and based in London since 1958, Fou took up the

instrument at the age of eight. While studying under renowned musicians in Italy and the former USSR, he was largely self-taught. In his youth he has won awards in Romania and Poland.

Programme: "Sonata" in G Major by Haydn, "Polonaise," "Mazuka" "Serenade" by Chopin, as well as works by Mozart and Debussy.
Time: 7:30 pm, April 25
Place: Poly Theatre, Dongshishitiao
Tel: 6506-5345, 8201-2775

EXHIBITIONS

Joint show: Five veteran Chinese artists hold a joint art show with their selected works of oil paintings and Chinese zhongcai (heavily coloured pieces characterized by fine brushwork) ink-and-colour paintings at the Wanfung Art Gallery in downtown Beijing.

Each with a unique personal style, artists Hu Yongkai, Qin Long, Gao Wengang, Ma Haifang and Li Guangping have created visually striking works, with a well-combined use of skills and concepts from both traditional Chinese painting schools and prints, oils and Japanese paintings.
Time: 9 am-5 pm until April 28
Place: Wanfung Art Gallery, 136 Nanchizi Dajie, Dongcheng District
Tel: 6523-3320

Heritage of China: The ongoing exhibition of Chinese natural heritage at the Nation Museum of China features a total of 28 miniature replicas of landscapes approved by the UN as world natural heritages across China. The

show allows people to "travel" all the scenic sites within an hour. In addition, cultural relics, sculptures and photos elaborating different spots are displayed.

Time: 9 am-4 pm until May 7
Place: east side of Tian'anmen Square
Tel: 6526-3355

Retro show

A retrospective exhibition highlighting the cultural

relics recording China's first steps into the world at the beginning of last century is on at the National Museum of China.

A total of 400 photos and nearly 300 artifacts related to the life of the Chinese who went abroad first are showcased.
Time: 8:30 am-4:30 pm until April 18
Place: east side of Tian'anmen Square
Tel: 6526-3355

Acrobatic & Magic Shows
Caoyang Theatre specializes in Acrobatics by top acrobatic artists from all over the country.
Time: 7:15-9:15pm, nightly
Magic Shows
Time: 6:00-7:00 pm; 7:30-8:30 pm, nightly
Venue: Caoyang Theatre, 36 Dongsanhuai Beilu, Chaoyang District, Beijing
Telephone: 6507-2421, 6507-1818

China National Acrobatic Circus
China National Acrobatic Circus was the first State-level acrobatic troupe of New China and has won lots of gold medals in various well-known international acrobatic contests in places such as Monaco, France, Hungary, Russia and Italy. Now the star-studded cast are exhibiting the charm and elegance of the most professional contemporary acrobatic art every night. Integrating superlative juggling, unicycling, balancing and jumping through hoops with the finest ancient Chinese dancing, the award-winning variety show will amaze you at every turn.
Time/Dates: 19:15 - 20:30, every evening
Location: Universe Theatre, 10 Dongzhimen Nandajie, Dongcheng District (100 metres north of Paly Plaza)
Tel: 6502-3984, 6502-2649, 6416-9893 Fax: 6500-2743

Kung Fu Show
The 70-minute performance displays dazzling skills of mysterious Chinese kung fu in a hero-plus-beauty story. Fifty kung fu masters amaze the audience with bare-handed practice, one-to-one competing and weapons practice.
Presented by Beijing Dejian Shunyi Culture Development Co., Ltd.
Venue: Xin Rong Theatre (16 Baizhifang West Road, Xuanwu District)
Time/dates: 19:30, nightly
Tel: 8354-0774, 8354-0775

Hidden Dragon
Crouching Tiger

TODAY'S RADIO

FM 91.5 MHz	12:00 Happy 30 Minutes
09:00 Easy FM	17:00 Chinese Top 10
14:00 Keith & Liqian Show	19:00 Songs of the Century
15:00 Music Sans Frontiers	FM 87.6 MHz
21:00 Joy FM	10:30 Around Beijing
FM 97.4 MHz	13:30 Joyful Sound
08:00 Around Russia	16:30 Entertainment News
11:30 Modern Life	20:30 Dinner Music
15:30 Charming Opera	23:00 Music Online
19:00 Journey of Jazz	AM 640 kHz
20:30 Greetings from Tokyo	09:00 Reading Time
FM 90.0 MHz	09:30 Sounds of Health
07:00 Classic & Pop	19:00 Happy 30 Minutes
10:30 Songs of the Century	23:00 Radio play

TODAY'S TELEVISION

CCTV-1	22:01 US comedy
10:23 World of Arts	CCTV-9
11:20 Half of the Sky	10:30 Around China
12:40 Law Report	13:00 Financial news
13:05 Oriental Horizon	18:15 Music Zone
20:05 Serial: The Republic (7)	20:15 Travelogue
22:00 World Report	21:30 Centre Stage
CCTV-2	BTV-1
10:30 Road to Health	11:30 Beijing Express
17:05 China Market Update	18:30 News; weather
19:00 Job Market	19:41 Focus Today
19:30 China Business Report	20:02 Amusement Park
20:00 Life	20:38 Serial: Kickoff (7, 8)
20:40 Frontiers	23:28 Common Ground
22:10 Quiz Show	BTV-2
CCTV-3	09:57 Performing Arts
10:44 Foreign Arts	14:28 Concert Hall
13:07 Behind the Scenes	18:23 Chinese Top Music
18:30 Elementary Art	21:45 World Screen
19:31 The Same Song	23:22 Current Popularity
21:16 Art Life	BTV-3
CCTV-4	12:00 Legal Times
10:05 Across the Straits	17:00 Serial: Delicacy (1)
14:55 Chinese Civilization	19:00 Saga
16:10 Oriental Horizon	20:00 Supertasters
18:30 About Taiwan	21:35 Science and Technology
20:05 China Showbiz	22:10 44-part serial: The County Magistrate (36, 37)
CCTV-6	BTV-4
14:40 US movie	12:00 Serial: Everyone Loves Rose (4)
18:11 Animation Theatre	13:05 Star Profiles
19:08 Documentary: France (28)	19:02 Entertainment Live
19:45 Chinese movie: Zhen Zhen	
21:24 Watching and Talking	

BRIDGE (By Phillip Alder)

There are many bridge wives and a few bridge husbands, left at home while their spouses play the game. Sandra Penfold, twice a silver medalist for Great Britain in the Women's World Team Olympiad, made an amusing comment about her bridge husband—see below.

North opened an anemic one diamond. East overcalled with an absurd one heart. South, Penfold, made a negative double to show exactly four spades. West, who wondered if there were 50 points in the deck, bid one spade. After two passes, Penfold took a shot at three no-trump.

Knowing South had the spade queen, West led her fourth-highest club. Penfold won the trick, realizing that if she ducked, East would shift to a spade. Declarer played a diamond to dummy's queen and cashed the diamond ace to check that that suit was worth five tricks. Then, aided by East's bid, Penfold played a heart to her 10. (Yes, she could have run dummy's heart eight, but she wasn't going to risk West's having a singleton nine.)

When that won, Penfold claimed nine tricks (three hearts, five diamonds and one club) for plus 600.

At the other table, West made four spades by finessing twice in trumps. She lost only two diamonds and one club: plus 420. So, Penfold's team gained 14 imps to win by five.

By Phillip Alder

North
♥ 8 7 6 2
♦ A K Q 10 9
♣ 10 3 2

West
♥ A K J 8 3 2
♦ J 6
♣ K 8 7 6 4

East
♥ 10 9
♦ Q J 9 5 4
♣ 8 5 2
Q J 9

South
♥ Q 7 6 5
♦ A K 10 3
♣ 7 4 3
A 5

Dealer: North
Vulnerable: North-South

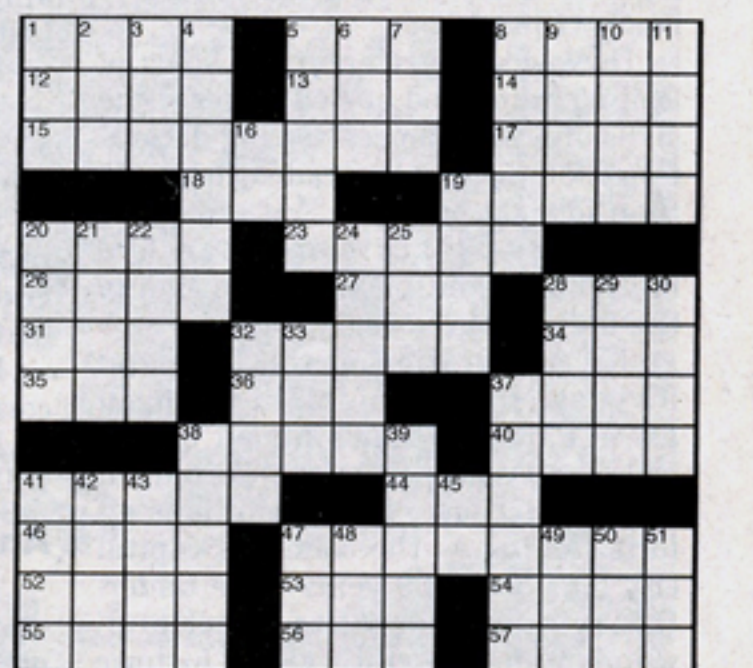
South West North East
Dbl. 1 ♠ Pass Pass Pass
3 NT 1 ♠ Pass Pass Pass

Opening lead: ♣ 6

CROSSWORD (No 6868)

ACROSS

- Leaf's rib
- glance
- Summertime
- Name in essays
- Run into
- Piccadilly statue
- Courier
- Reindeer herder
- Weep
- Gracie or Woody
- Dr Zhivago's love
- Warm up for a bout
- Jacob's twin
- Sally Field role Norma
- Car-buyer's concern
- Sports nut
- Kahuna's hello
- Subject of an ode
- Miner's need
- Pantry item
- Strong cheese
- Agreed
- Yodeler's home
- Chewed the fat
- Autumn mo.
- Purposes
- Bowed down
- Jokes with
- Ever, to
- Byron
- Zero
- Smooth the way
- Like some humour
- Arrogant person
- Churchill gesture
- House shader
- Big Ben numeral
- Cruise stop
- Haik wearers
- Pothole filler
- Jo's sister
- Sets
- Europe-Asia border range
- Slangy refusal
- Cable channel
- Therefore
- General vicinity
- Departed
- Big — elephant



Solution to No 6867

WIG KICK WALL
ATE ICON OREO
NET TIRED OF IT
EMOTE BRAZZ
UN DAD I SAK
BET NIL AERIE
EL VET HUR DP
ALGAE FRAG OAT
DEEM FEW GP
OLAF I OTAS
UNPOPULAR INN
RBIS NECK ONO
LAINE AXES NOW

22 Scream and shout

24 Liable

25 Pleased sigh

28 Ruminate

29 Kind of school

30 Lions' prey

32 Etching fluid

33 Test tube locale

37 Maestros' sticks

38 Helms or Owens

39 Bride's portion

41 "Box Baby"

42 Where Japan is

43 Gets hitched

45 Mass.

47 London's — Gardens

48 Above, in verse

49 Pallid

50 Tokyo, formerly

51 Smidgen