Sheng Hua — the hero behind masks

Artist preserves Peking Opera treasures with paintbrush

By YU NAN
China Daily staff

Sheng Hua loves painted faces. On a wall of his living room, Sheng displays 200 colourful Peking Opera *lianpu* — all made by himself.

The vivid masks are *hualian*, stylized facial make-ups of *jing* (the warriors) and *chou* (the clown) in Peking Opera.

But that is not enough: Pictures on walls, egg shells in bookcases and even big fans hanging above the desks all feature various lively painted faces.

Peking Opera fans can easily figure out which characters they present, which repertoires they come from and what stories the scenes tell.

They could even recall what the characters would be singing and what would be their most impressive gestures, though they only see their "faces."

"Fantastic" is the common word used when people first see his myriad wonderful works, said Xu Qiudi, Sheng's wife.

Working at a real estate management company, Sheng has been indulged in drawing Peking Opera *lianpu* for 40 years.

Born in 1946 in Beijing with a talented and sound voice, Sheng entered Chinese Opera School aged 12, becoming one of the 60 children who were enrolled by the school out of 2,400 applicants.

"My voice helped me a lot in the exams," Sheng recalled. "I could sing louder and higher than others."

Sheng was chosen to specially learn the roles of *hualian* from the very beginning. "That's why I am so familiar with facial make-ups of *hualian*," he said.

Sheng's interests of drawing facial make-up began from his first attempt on his own face after one year's study at the school.

One day, when Sheng prepared to play a role of *jing* called "Putiandiao," his teacher gave him the brushes and pigments after he had helped him draw the left half of his face. "Finish the right half by yourself," the teacher said.

Sheng, only 13, looking at his left made-up face in the mirror and began to draw.

Cheeks, eyes, eyebrows, nose, forehead — a colourful integrated face gradually appeared under his slightly shivering hand.

"I worried I would make my face a mess," Sheng recalled, "but it turned out to be OK."

Sheng said it was the first time he realized facial make-up was not so easy as it looked. "Even a wrong eyebrow can ruin the whole face," he said.

This episode stirred Sheng's interest in researching the art of Peking Opera facial make-ups. After his first successful attempt, he insisted on making up his own face whenever he performed.

After two years of practice, he could skillfully finish a facial make-up like a veteran.

But he never imagined his life of Peking Opera would end so soon after his graduation in 1966 when the disastrous "cultural revolution" (1966-76) began.

"I didn't want to leave my beloved stage but I had no other choice," he said, adding his eight-year study left him only dreams of the artistic form.

"Fortunately, I can do something with the Peking Opera *lianpu*."

Like the singing of Peking Opera, the mask is stylized.

Establishing a silent language, the art of mask make-ups can describe characters, and exaggerate the personality of the role through symbolical and metaphorical forms by making them more attractive.

The colours of the painted faces can be an indication of their personality. Red indicates loyalty and uprightness. White is cunning. Blue means a vigorous, courageous nature, while yellow symbolizes intelligence. Black shows a sound and honest character, while brown is often the symbol of a stubborn and obstinate character.

The actors are literally "wearing their emotions on their faces."

Painting the masks demands artistic creation of an imaginative and hyperbolic nature, as well as a rigorous technique.

To master his skills, Sheng went to libraries and bookshops to find books and videos about Peking Opera masks.

"The more I learned, the less I felt I acknowledged the art," he recalled. He often practised drawing one mask over and over again until he was completely satisfied with the lines, the format and the colours.

"Drawing masks is like writing calligraphy," Sheng said. "You have only one chance to make each line perfect. Further remedies will make it even worse.

"For example, the mask of Zhang Fei — a general of the Shu Kingdom in the Three Kingdoms Period (AD 220-280) — should look like he is smiling, but if the line of his mouth is just out by 1 centimetre, he will look like he is crying or bored."

"And the wrong line cannot be corrected unless you draw a new face."

Sheng thought of drawing masks as a hobby before he met Liu Zengfu, who guides his drawing and study.

Liu, a famous physiologist, is also well-known for his expertise in Peking Opera masks.

As a scientist, Liu studied Peking Opera masks with scientific methods for a long time. His books on Peking Opera masks were collected by many famous libraries in the world as precious records of Chinese cultural legacy.

When aged 81, he accepted Sheng as his only student in mask painting.

"My teacher told me he was deeply moved by my enthusiasm towards Peking Opera masks," Sheng said.

The mask is not a lonely part of Peking Opera, Liu said, adding that the opera is a systematic and integrated one in which the mask, the costume, the scene and the character should be harmonious.

Furthermore, Sheng and his teacher are trying to rescue the art form because some character masks in Peking Opera have not been recorded.

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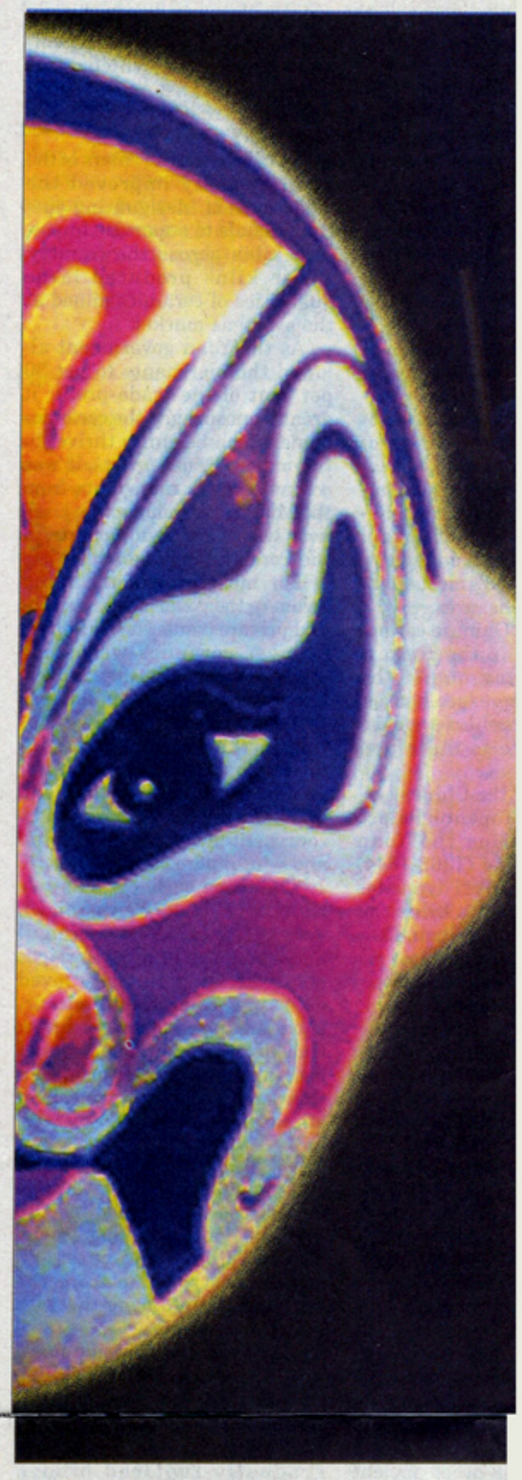

Decades-long dedication: Sheng Hua has devoted
with his brushes.

Graphics by WANG YAN/China Daily
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carry out extensive research using all kinds of relative ancient novels, as well as asking some experienced experts to make his masks match the real spirit of the character in history.

"Drawing masks occupies 90 per cent of his spare time," said his wife Xu Qiudi. "Everyday he works long into the night, and I have no time to chat with him.

"But I support him. What he is doing — preserving Peking Opera and Chinese traditional culture — is important."

There are still at least about 500 masks needed to be drawn, expected to be finished by Sheng within the next two years.

TODAY'S RADIO

FM 87.6 MHz (all stereo)
11:00 Radio Drama
14:30 Celebrity Profile

FM 97.4 MHz (all stereo)
13:00 World Classic Concert
15:00 Music Saloon
20:30 Beautiful Life
22:30 New Music Magazine

FM 90.0 MHz (all stereo)
08:00 Auto CD
09:30 Chinese songs by popular singers
11:50 Music
12:00 Happy 30 Minutes
17:00 Radio songs

AM 603 kHz
07:00 News
08:30 Reading Time
10:00 Community & Life
18:00 Travelling Guide
20:10 English pop songs

TODAY'S TELEVISION

CCTV-1 Channel 2
09:20 Man and Nature
11:20 Chinese Ethnic Groups
17:00 World Express
19:00 News; Weather
20:06 31-part serial: Granary of the Country (19)
21:25 Documentary serial: Xu Xiangqian (2)

CCTV-2 Channel 8
09:10 Business Bridge
10:30 Road to Health
12:00 Happy Family
13:10 Economy 30 Minutes
17:05 China Market Update
20:00 Life
22:05 Finance Today

CCTV-3 Channel 15
16:33 Symphony World
18:30 Elementary Art
19:30 Music and Paintings
20:33 Dream Theatre
21:35 Arts Scope

CCTV-4 Channel 32
11:20 China Wind
12:30 China Report
17:20 Sports World
19:30 Chinese Art
20:45 Chinese History
21:00 China News

CCTV-6 Channel 18
14:16 US movie
18:34 Documentary: Sound of Music
19:45 Movie
21:44 US movie

CCTV-8 Channel 29
14:09 Serial
19:00 Animal World
21:48 Jiayi Drama
23:38 Theatre

CCTV-9
15:20 Music Box
17:00 Shanghai Today
20:00 Culture Express

BTV-1 Channel 6
13:50 Toshiba Animal Paradise
17:45 Beijing Express
18:30 News; Weather
20:08 Serial: Dr Sun Yat-sen (4)
22:36 Hello the World

BTV-2 Channel 21
11:27 Culture Express
12:05 Serial: Maids in Foreign Families (5)
18:20 Top Chinese Music
21:48 Global Music
22:46 Concert Hall

BTV-3 Channel 27
19:30 Science Unlimited
20:05 Gourmets Across the Country
21:00 News
21:45 Hong Kong drama: The Legendary Four Aces (20)

BTV-4 Channel 17
12:00 Serial: Sister Ma (231)
18:00 630 Theatre
18:35 Movie Saloon
19:10 Entertainment Live
21:39 Serial: Hong Wending (11, 12)

BRIDGE (By Phillip Alder)

The final of the 35th Bermuda Bowl, held last November in Paris, pitted Norway against USA-2. After 112 of the 128 boards, Norway had a huge two-point advantage. But with seven boards to go, the U.S. team had taken a 12-point lead. Then this deal settled the match.

Look at the West hand. After an artificial auction, you know that North will club) with 8-10 high-card points, one ace and no kings. All you know about South is that he has at least 17 high-card points and wants to play in six hearts.

In the other room, Chip Martel and Lew Stansby had made four hearts with two overtricks.

Peter Weichsel had to lead. He requested a bathroom break. The other players got up and stretched their legs. Eventually Weichsel selected a trump (which is "normal" when an opponent has a 4-4-4-1 shape). The Americans cheered.

Without a trump lead, declarer ruffs his four low clubs in the dummy and has 12 tricks. Even after the heart lead, declarer needed either a 4-3 club break or, when clubs were 5-2, hearts 2-2 and the opponent with the long clubs having the diamond king so that he could be endplayed.

North
♠ A J 10 7
♥ J 8 5 4
♦ Q 7 6 5
♣ 7

West
♠ K Q 8 6
♥ 9 7 2
♦ J 10 9 2
♣ K 9

East
♠ 5 4 3 2
♥ 3
♦ K 8 3
♣ Q J 8 6 3

South
♠ A K Q 10 9
♦ A 4
♣ A 10 5 4 2

Dealer: North
Vulnerable: Both

South	West	North	East
		Pass	Pass
1 ♣	Pass	2 NT	Pass
3 ♣	Pass	3 ♦	Pass
3 ♥	Pass	3 NT	Pass
6 ♥	Pass	Pass	Pass

Opening lead: ??

So, USA-2 luckily gained 13 imps. If the slam had been made, Norway would have gained 13: a difference of 26 points. And the final score was only 286-265 to USA-2.

Congratulations to Rose Meltzer-Kyle Larsen, Chip Martel-Lew Stansby and Alan Sontag-Peter Weichsel. Meltzer is the first woman to win the Bermuda Bowl — and on her birthday!

WHAT'S ON

Acrobatic Show

Chaoyang Theatre is a theatre which specializes in acrobatics all the year round. Many top acrobatic artists from all over the country are invited to perform for the Chinese and foreign tourists.
Venue: Chaoyang Theatre, 36 Dongsanhuan Beilu, Chaoyang District, Beijing
Time: 7:15 pm, nightly
Telephone: 6507-2421, 6507-1818

STAGE

Joyful jugglers: The China Acrobatic Troupe is staging a nightly variety show at the Tiandi Theatre, where the seemingly impossible is made real.

Spinning plates, juggling umbrellas, contortionists and acrobats fill the air. Integrating superlative juggling, unicycling, balancing and jumping through hoops with the finest ancient Chinese dancing, the star-studded cast will amaze.
Time: 7:15 pm, daily
Place: 10 Dongzhimen Nandajie, Chaoyang District, Beijing
Tel: 6502-3984

First China tour for Moscow artists: The Moscow State Song and Dance Theatre will make its first tour of China in mid-February to perform in both modern and classical styles.

The troupe has integrated the European modern style with the Russian classical style.

The theatre's Beijing show will be made up of two parts. The first, "You are Welcome Good People!", is permeated with strong Russian traditional customs. The theme centres on music, songs and compositions based on the folk art of different Russian regions. Real events, typical scenes of folk trades and the rich spiritual world of Russians are all revealed as the show progresses.

The second section, "We Present Our Love to You," sees the use of modern rhythms and contrasts with the first part.
Time: 7:30 pm, February 13-17
Place: Beizhan Theatre, Xizhimenwai Dajie, Xicheng District
Tel: 6567-5049, 6567-5149, 6567-5930

Russian ballets: The ballet troupe of the Russian State Theatre stages a series of classical ballets in Beijing.

Founded in 1946, the troupe keeps its principle of protecting the art of traditional Russian classical ballet while exploring and developing new dancing forms.

The cast coming to Beijing this time mainly consists of the troupe's group of talented young performers.

The show includes a number of classic pieces set to Tchaikovsky's music, including "Swan Lake." Also featured will be "The Nutcracker."
Time: 7:30 pm until January 31
Place: Poly Theatre, on northeast corner of the Dongsi Shitiao Viaduct
Tel: 6500-1188 ext 5176

Korean art show: An ensemble from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea is to bring a flavour of the country's performance art to Beijing.

Established in 1971, the ensemble was named the Blood Sea Song and Dance Ensemble after its first performance, which was of the classic Korean novel "Blood Sea." Since then, the troupe, which boasts more than 600 artists, has performed many operas, dance plays and musicals.
Time: 7:30 pm, February 2, 3
Place: the Grand Theatre of the Cultural Palace of Nationalities, Xidan, Xichang'anjie
Tel: 6602-2530, 6602-2770

CONCERTS

Chinese 'Carmen': Chinese vocalists will again present the classical opera "Carmen" as a celebration of the Spring Festival.

The opera will be performed by a number of top vocalists from the Central Opera Theatre, such as Liu Shan, Liu Weiwei, Song Xuewei and Huang Lili.
Time: 7:30 pm, February 1-3
Place: Tianqiao Theatre
Tel: 6303-2315

Russian sounds: The Russian National Orchestra will give two concerts under the baton of Mikhail Pletnev at the Great Hall of the People.

Founded just 11 years ago, the Russian National Orchestra has firmly established itself among the best symphony orchestras in the world under the leadership of its artistic director Pletnev.

At the concert on February 3, the orchestra will perform Rossini's "Gazzal Ladra Overture," Chopin's "Piano Concerto No
Tchaikovsky's "Sym

The second day
include Tchaikovsk
and Sibelius's "Sym

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young but talented
who won the first p
International Chopi
Warsaw in 2000.
Time: 7:30 pm, Febru
Place: The Great Hall
Tel: 8528-2264, 8528-

EXHIBITIONS

Ink works: To c
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Art Gallery will featu
ink paintings. Artist
Daohong, Feng Lin
and Du Yingqiang,
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Time: 9 am -5 pm, Fe
Place: 136 Nanchizi D
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Tel: 6523-3320

Oil show: The
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Brothers' best: Famous book binding and layout master Zhang Shouyi and his brother, china specialist Zhang Shouzhi, will share their extensive collections at a special show. Both are dedicated to the collection of folk articles in their spare time and the exhibition will display around 200 items including drinking utensils, chinaware and toys.
Time: February 8-March 3
Place: 9 Huizhong Lu, Chaoyang District
Telephone: 6491-2902

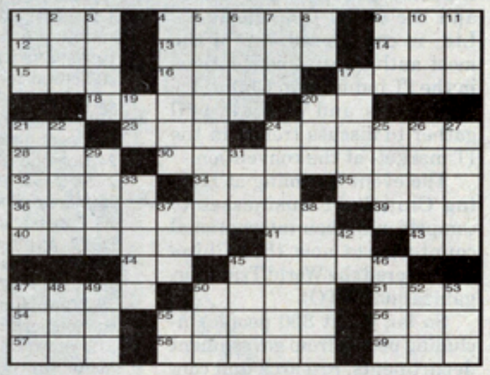
Iraqi oil paintings: Artists from Iraq are displaying their oil painting creations at the Cultural Centre of Dongcheng District in Beijing.

The exhibition, which shows around 70 of their paintings, is being sponsored by the Chinese Ministry of Culture and is being organized by the China International Exhibition Agency as a major cultural exchange project between China and Iraq.
Time: 9 am-5 pm, January 29
Place: 111 Jiaodaokou Dongdajie
Tel: 6401-5552

Russian oils: Contemporary Russian oil paintings are being shown at the Art Gallery of the Beijing International Art Palace.

The exhibits are selected works from the collection of the Fine Arts Foundation of Beijing International Art Palace. The exhibition features works by some young and middle-aged artists who are the main active force in Russian art today.
Time: 10 am-6 pm until February 5
Place: 48 Wangfujing Dajie
Tel: 6513-3388 ext 1208

CROSSWORD (No 6505)



ACROSS
1 Topaz or opal
4 Roof part
9 Greet a dog
12 Western Indian
13 Glimmerings
14 Before, to Wordsworth
15 Gullet
16 Silly
17 Harmful thing
18 Reading aids
20 Derek of the movies
21 Ocean-liner letters
23 Poker winning
24 Beethoven's "Moonlight –"
28 Dinner check
30 Protect
32 Baseball's Moises
34 Early jazz
35 Wave away
36 Sort of notebook (hyph.)
39 Cry audibly
40 Make angry
41 Leaf vein
43 Gym class
44 Monopoly start
45 Erie or Suez
47 Arid
50 Can't stand
51 A Gershwin
54 "Now – seen it all!"
55 Metal filaments
56 Rdr.'s hangout
57 Marker
58 Breadmaking need
59 Tic-tac- –

DOWN
1 – up (ruin)
2 Flight board info.
3 Whimper softly
4 Thinga-majigs
5 Flexible
6 Franklin and Jonson
7 Place
8 Plural ending
9 Green shade
10 Queen Aleta's son
11 Pipe joint
17 Extra
19 News agcy.
20 Cranberry site
21 Musty
22 Beauty parlor
24 Divides
25 Contented sighs
26 Flock
27 Sun-dried brick
29 Oaf
31 Ally opposite
33 Practice
37 I, to Claudius
38 Most outstanding
42 College deg.
45 Irene of "Fame"
46 Cheerful tone
47 Use a straw
48 Night before
49 Stimpy's buddy
50 Go very quickly
52 Ipanema's city
53 Jurist Fortas
55 Cheyenne's st.

Solution to No 6504

A	S	H	■	S	U	N	S	■	L	O	T	S
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