

110th Anniversary of the Birth of Xian Xinghai

Xian Xinghai is one of China's most outstanding musicians of the 20th century.

He was born in a poor fisherman and sailor's home in Macao on 13 June 1905. With his father having passed away before he was born, he was raised by his maternal grandfather. At age 7, he moved with his mother to Singapore and studied at a primary and secondary school set up by Chinese emigrants. By 1920, he was recruited as an outstanding overseas student to Lingnan University in Guangzhou, where he became a student-worker for 6 years. During that period, he participated actively in music activities in the school, playing the violin and clarinet and serving as a conductor.

In 1926, he joined the Music Faculty of Beijing National Arts School managed by Xiao Youmei, to study violin. In the summer of 1928, he went to Shanghai and joined the National Shanghai Conservatory of Music to major in violin and minor in piano and musical theory. While in Shanghai, he met Tian Han and participated in the drama activities of the "Southern Drama Society". He published the essay "The Universal Music" at the time, which urged people studying music to take up the heavy responsibility of rescuing the depressed Chinese nation, firmly establishing his musical direction.

In the winter of 1929, Xian Xinghai travelled to Paris to study violin, music theory and composition from renowned experts such as Paul Oberdoeffler, Noel Gallon and Vincent d'Indy. In 1934, he was admitted to Paul Dukas' advanced composition class at the Paris Conservatory to continue his studies. During this period, he composed the piece "Wind", "Violin Sonata in D Minor" and other works.

In the autumn of 1935, he returned to Shanghai to provide voicework and compose music at "Electric and Musical Industries Ltd" and the "Xinhua Film Company". At the same time, he participated in progressive music institutions such as the "Songwriters Association", joined the anti-Japanese movement and composed National Salvation Songs and progressive film music pieces such as "Saving the Nation", "Song at Midnight", "Hot Blooded", "La Li Song", and "March of the Young People".

After the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese war in 1937, Xian Xinghai joined the "National Salvation Choral Society" and the "Drama Community National Salvation Association" in Shanghai. In 1938, he was jointly responsible for the musical movement against Japanese Aggression in Wuhan with Zhang Shu and created many widespread anti-war songs such as "Protect the Marco Polo Bridge", "Children of the Motherland", "Guerrilla Song", "Going Behind Enemy lines" and "On the Taihang Mountains".

In November 1938, he accepted the invitation of the Lu Xun Institute of Arts in Yanan to teach courses on the theory of composition, music history and conducting. At the same time, he also provided guidance to musical activities in the Yanan area and hence, started a new artistic life. During this period, he created large-scale vocal divertimentos such as the "Yellow River Cantata", the "Production Cantata" and "September 18 Cantata" which roused the spirit of national liberation and had a tremendous impact.

In May 1940, he went to the Soviet Union with the Yanan movie delegation and completed the "National Liberation Symphony" and the Orchestra Suite No. 1 "Home Front" in Moscow. When the Soviet-German war broke out in 1941, he was forbidden from returning home and forced to drift between Mongolia and Kazakhstan. In these most difficult times, he composed the suites "Mu Ma Ci" and "Man Jiang Hong", the symphony "Sacred War", the tone-picture "Chinese Life" and the symphonic poem "Amangeldy", in addition to many other songs and dance music. He died in Moscow due to overwork and ineffective treatments.

This year is the 110th anniversary of the birth of Xian Xinghai. In order to commemorate this great Chinese musician, the Macao Post issued a set of four stamps and a souvenir sheet, which showing Xian Xinghai's forty glorious years. The following four stages of his life were chosen for the four stamps: His birth in Macao in 1905; His studies in Paris in 1934; His time as a conductor in Yanan in 1939 and His passing in Moscow in 1945. The emerald green, olive green, vermilion and purple background colors, respectively, help highlight Xian's different body postures. Then, the superimposition of the figures of the stamps on the souvenir sheets on the four-colored connected background gives prominence to the musician's heroic posture of holding the baton in hope of giving people the feel of the Yellow River's magnificent and imposing rhythm and melody.