



Qi Shanyun conducts the Dream Voice Women's Chamber Chorus during a rehearsal. At 71, the Shanghai native has inspired many people to appreciate music, or simply sing along in a chorus. — Sun Minjie

If music is the food of love, there is no stopping

Zhu Yuting

Qi Shanyun has made conducting a permanent feature of her life. At 71, the Shanghai native has inspired generations of people to take up music, appreciate it, or simply sing along in the chorus.

"It gives me great satisfaction to see more and more people, especially the elderly, enjoy, love and benefit from music and chorus," she remarked.

Qi was a performer in a Jiangxi Province art group before moving to Shanghai as a music teacher in 1984. She studied music at Shanghai Normal University to strengthen her skills.

She taught music at Shanghai Shibei High School for more than 30 years and was hailed as the city's finest and a nationally notable teacher.

She took up the baton in 1992 when the school set up chorus classes. She never let it down, even after retirement.

During her tenure as a teacher, she took this group of school kids on an international tour that included a performance at the Golden Hall in Vienna, Austria.

"I saw so many of my students become more upbeat and self-assured because of their involvement with the

chorus," she said.

"There is an old wooden chair with chipped paint in the practice room at Shibei High School," Qi said. "I sat on it for over 30 years."

She joined some social chorus organizations and met more people with an interest in music there.

It led to the formation of an all-woman, 100-member chorus group in 2007. Most of the participants were simply interested in singing. Some of them were entrepreneurs, managers and executives from various trades and industries.

"In my team, everyone forgets about their social status, age and job, and just tries their hardest to sing every song well. I welcome anyone who enjoys music and singing," Qi insisted.

After retirement, she began to involve more elderly people in singing, devoting more time to social choirs.

In 2015, she led the Shanghai Elderly Chorus Troupe to an international chorus competition in Sochi, Russia.

The average age of these members was over 70, and some had never left the shores of the country.

"Some of them told me after the competition that the trip had fulfilled their dreams, and their lives became more

meaningful because of the music trip. I was deeply moved," Qi said.

"During rehearsals, I had the feeling that I was performing with a group of young people rather than a group of grandmas and grandpas," she explained. "I felt a lot younger."

Qi is not content with competing in only one world-class competition.

She founded the Dream Voice Women's Chamber Chorus last year, which is supported by the Mingyuan Charity Foundation.

"Elderly members are still the backbone of my team because they have more time and are more motivated to participate in daily practice," she added. "I also invited some of my former students, who are now music teachers, to join in."

During the pandemic outbreak, the group still managed to find time to practice.

"We moved our practice online, and I assigned 'homework' to team members each week," she explained.

Members took part in rehearsals by recording videos and posting them to their WeChat group.

"Everyone actively turned in their 'homework'."

During each practice, she carefully



Qi Shanyun (right) with her mentor, Ma Geshun, who was one of the founders of chorus art in China — Ti Gong



Qi Shanyun, 71, has a deep love for music and conducting. — Sun Minjie

observes each member's expression. Accordingly, she breaks down a difficult song into sentences to explain and teach singing techniques ranging from tone and intonation to facial expressions and every relevant detail.

The Dream Voice team has enrolled for this year's World Chorus Competition, which is being held in South Korea from July 10 to 14.

"Now I'll be able to fulfill one of my dreams: to bring a well-prepared chorus team to an international competition and see our five-star red flag hoist over the international stage," Qi said, her face lighting up with excitement.

Her students say guessing Qi's age can be difficult.

"My mentor, Ma Geshun, one of the founders of China's chorus art, passed away when he was 102 years old," Qi told the Shanghai Daily. "When we went to see him on his 100th birthday, he still conducted a choir."

"He is my inspiration. Following in his footsteps, I will never leave my 'chair' until the end of my life."