

# George Gao



Erhu soloist, composer

**1700 years old ancient scores  
discovered on the Silk Road now for  
erhu and symphony orchestra!**

Demo CD Inside:  
An-lun Huang's  
Four Ancient Scores from Dunhuang

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# Quotations

- "The sound was exotic, the style foreign, the repertoire esoteric. ... performed with mastery and expressiveness". –Wilma Salisbury, dance/music critic. *The Plain Dealer* (Cleveland, Ohio), Friday, April 1, 1988.
- "The four performer, all bearing impressive academic credentials from their homeland, ... their sense of ensemble was well-nigh perfect. They are obviously first-rate musicians well used to playing together. What is always so fascinating about the concerts are the combination of familiar and unfamiliar. The instruments -- the fiddles in particular -- make sounds unfamiliar to the western ears. They are more shrill in timber than western violins. But the music itself has some undeniably western sounding elements of rhythm, interval and cadence. ... One piece, a highly rhythmic thing called 'Da Qiban', might have been written by a Chinese Khachaturian; ... notably the **Erhu** ... Fascinating music with its recurrent small melodic and rhythmic cells." -- Robert Finn, Music critic. *The Plain Dealer* (Cleveland, Ohio), March 12-31, 1988.
- "... to hear the brilliant George Gao, the Royal Conservatory of Toronto's first Erhu teacher, ... was to appreciate how some instrument are best left to their time-tested inclination." -- William Littler, music critic. *Global Mail*, March 12 (or 13 14), 1994.
- "Any way you look at, George Gao's credentials are incomparable ...". CBC, *Global Village -- Canadian Artists' profile*. March 23, 24, 1996.
- "George Gao, one of the top virtuosos in the world ....", -- Andy Barrie, CBC, 1996.
- "... fusion of Chinese music and jazz, the Erhu master and composer, George Gao, has created a new genre ... ". Sing Tao Daily (Toronto, Chinese newspaper), 1996.
- "George Gao, le soliste étonne par son extrême virtuosité: sur cet instrument apparemment très fruste, le musicien, par une série de glissandos, de vibratos, d'effets techniques très recherchés, produit une musique immédiatement séduisante, très colorée et souvent riche en descriptions imagées. L'association de l'instrument traditionnel à un orchestre symphonique, bien loin de choquer, suscite l'intérêt et la sympathie du public, qui fut gratifié de deux «bis» joués cette fois sur le *erhu* seul....." –Gérard GOUTIERRE, Lille Métropole, LAVOIX DU NORD, Jeudi 17 Septembre 1998.

## Four Ancient Scores from Dunhuang

for Erhu and Orchestra

An-lun Huang, Op.53(1997)

Dunhuang is a small town in northwest China. This city is more than one thousand seven-hundred years old, and it sat on the border of a large desert, right at the end of the Silk Road. In 1900, a collection of ancient scores were found in a cave in the Dunhuang region. As they are more than seventeen hundred years old, these musical scores are no doubt the oldest musical scores of human civilization. This collection consists of 25 pieces composed for the pipa, one of the oldest Chinese plucked instruments.

Specialists around the world have tried to decipher the musical notation system used in the scores. They discovered that the strange symbols in the scores are actually instructions for the fingering for the pipa through each piece. As the performer would follow these finger positions, corresponding pitches would sound. However, the real difficulty of the deciphering was finding the suitable dynamics, articulations, rhythm and tempo.

Although the true interpretation of the scores will always be discussed and argued by scholars, many musicians have performed the different versions. Huang An-lun's "Four Ancient Music Scores from Dunhuang", written for the Erhu and Orchestra, is the latest attempt to interpret the scores.

The book "The Translations of the Music and Scores in the Tang Dynasty", by Professor Ye Dong of Shanghai Conservatory of Music, is one of the most influential published studies in this field. In order to structure a new piece for the erhu and the orchestra, Huang An-lun chose four Dunhuang ancient scores from this book. Since the scores only contained melodic notes, Huang had to use his imagination to create all the other elements of the music - the tempo, the articulations, rhythmic patterns among many others. Through his music, Huang had musically interpreted the essence of poems from the Tang dynasty. He had also intricately woven elements of both Western and Eastern musical traditions into his scores.

There are four sections in this piece . They are:

- I Larghet, from No. 24 of the Dunhuang ancient scores, "Yi Zhou",
- II Allegretto, from No. 3, "Qing Bei Yue"
- III. Lento, from No.1, "Pin Neng", and
- IV. Allegro, from No.10, "Yiu Man Qu Zi".

This composition was completed in the summer of 1999. It was dedicated to the composer's close friend, Peter Tam, an erhuist in Hong Kong. The world premiere was performed by Ma Xiang-Hua and the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra, conducted by the composer himself, in 1999. The cadenza of the performance was composed by Ma's teacher - Professor Liu Chang-Fu.

This CD was recorded by George Gao and the Russian Philharmonic Orchestra of Moscow in 2002. It was conducted by Tak-Ng Lai.. The very unique cadenza in this recording was created by Gao.

Duration: 19 minutes.

George Gao, composer and Erhu soloist  
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## GEORGE GAO

George Gao is extraordinary Erhu virtuoso and an excellent composer who has had a tremendous musical influence in both China and here in Canada. Any way one looks at, George Gao's credentials for mastering the two-stringed instrument, Erhu, and the world music are incomparable: He was born in 1967 in China and started learning the Erhu at the age of six. After two years, his talent was revealed in his open performance as an Erhu soloist in a concert of performing arts organized by Gansu Province. In 1979, when he was 12 years old, he entered the affiliated secondary school of Shanghai Conservatory of Music, a prestigious school for talented children. He took Erhu as his major. Meanwhile he also learned piano and composition. In 1985, he was exempted from examinations due to his outstanding achievements and began his bachelor degree courses in the Shanghai Conservatory of Music where he studied both Chinese and western music as well as conducting. He graduated with honor in 1988. During the period 1979 – 1989, George won prizes in numerous competitions. Most notably were the three highest Prizes for Beijing China National Invitational Erhu Competition (1985) – the first prize, the best performance prize of compulsory works and the best performance prize of the optional works. He initiated his own music band “the Red Leave” and “Snow man”, during his stay in Beijing (1988 – 1991). He made Toronto, Canada, his home in 1991 and became a teacher of Erhu at the Royal Conservatory of Music. He has given numerous concerts and toured in a number of countries, including Canada, USA, China, Hong Kong, Japan etc. During the last 10 years he received numerous prizes and grants, including those from the Canada Council for the Arts and Ontario Arts Council.

In music composition, George has pioneered in introducing into the Erhu music a vast range of new musical influences which has expanded its musical horizons and helped extending its influence on the stage of world music. Since the years when he studied Shanghai Conservatory for Music, and in particular, since his settlement in Canada,

George has been experimenting with the fusion of traditional Chinese music and the western music styles, including classical and contemporary music, Pop, New Age and, most recently, jazz music. In the foreword of his newly-released album “George Gao: Chinese Classical, Jazz, New Age Pop”, George says: “Chinese folk song is the root of Chinese music. Jazz is the product of the combination of African and American music. Both Chinese music and jazz involve much improvisation, but with different methodologies. Chinese music stresses on the improvisation and variation of melody, while jazz stresses on the improvisation of harmonic functions. These similarity and differences make the combination of the two very meaning and interesting.” Indeed, the fusion of the two different musical traditions is challenging. George Gao has done an excellent job in this area. There can be no doubt that he is creating a new genre by melding the beautiful melodies of Chinese folk music with the colorful, richly harmonic and swinging rhythms of jazz, in which George has struck a wonderful balance between the richness of tradition and inspired spontaneity. After a number of TV shows, including CCTV's 1997 Chinese New Year program, which was watched by millions of people around the world, George's Chinese jazz pieces have aroused a tremendous response from audiences.

In recent years, George has composed theme music and soundtracks for several films, including the Canadian film "Yellow Wedding" directed by the award winning directors Yan Cui & Qi Zhang . His Erhu performances have been used in numerous films and TV dramas, in particular, for the popular sci-fi TV drama “Earth: Final Conflict” (by the award winning composers, Micky Erbe and Maribeth Solomon of Toronto, Canada), which has been nominated by EMMY as "Outstanding Main title Theme Music".

People from both Chinese and western traditions listening to George’s performances experience something familiar and new, yet magnificent and exciting. It is thus not surprising that George has been recognized as one of the most innovative and exciting musical talents in the world today.

# Symphony sets table with some rare China

BY GEOFF CHAPMAN  
MUSIC CRITIC

Reach out and hug someone — or at least reach out and play to a different audience.

That's what the Toronto Symphony is doing to restore its battered image and to earn a higher profile with communities not usually found in Roy Thomson Hall seats.

Our world is getting smaller, and cultural possibilities correspondingly bigger, so the Symphony ventured last night to the mainstage of the Performing Arts Centre (which you may remember as the Ford Centre's Apotex Theatre in Drabinsky glory days), to play works by two leading Chinese composers and showcase 13-year-old pianist Simon Ng.

The TSO under Boris Brott, in its venue debut, put on a fascinating show — what a treat for an audience to hear serious music again in this excellent theatre — as prolific composers An-Lun Huang, founder of the Canadian Chinese Music Society (and involved in the musical *Tiananman Dreams* that played Toronto) and Wen-Jin Liu, president of the China Opera and Dance Drama Theatre, displayed their wares.

The concert, begun by Brott with welcoming words in Chinese, opened with Huang's *Two Pieces In Saibei Folk Style*, music from north-western China beyond the Great Wall. It was full of abrupt melodic shifts, with the first piece a gentle sustained soundscape over which solo instruments

made delicate statements before strings deepened the palette of instrumental colours. Then came a sprightly folk piece with universal rather than regional appeal.

Putting these creations before the slightly-built Ng worked over Mozart's radiant *A Major Piano Concerto* was not a great idea. The mood change was too severe but the St. Michael's School student showed a solid grasp of fundamentals.

Unsurprisingly, he was short on expression and inhabited a narrow tonal and dynamic range but he handled the fleet sections with some aplomb.

The night's highlight was Liu's four-part *The Great Wall Capriccio*, which celebrates China's history, power and people. It often delivered like an epic movie score, with thunderous climaxes, but it was soloist George Gao who stole the show. He's a master of the erhu, a traditional two-stringed instrument with a very real bow that has the standing of the violin in Western music. Gao superbly exploited its haunting sound that's close to the human voice. The instrument has no fingerboard, which makes it hard to play but allows greater versatility, so that in the third movement, Gao delivered whistling sounds, pained cries and even barks as well as dramatic, emotional phrasing as pleasing as any violin virtuoso could create. The work as a whole was absorbing.

The TSO clearly won new friends with this project. Let's hope it's not the last of its kind.

# Soggy symphony

But nasty weather couldn't sink SUTS

by Jerry OZIPKO

If nothing else, this year's Enbridge Symphony Under the Sky Festival presented not only the usual variety of music, but variety weather as well.

The highlights were not unexpected, but there were a few surprises and challenges as well. Canadian soprano Agathe Martel, who performed Richard Strauss' *Four Last Songs* during the opening night, possesses a powerful voice of astonishing variety. These songs plumb the depths of vocal technique and of human emotion, and Martel demonstrated a command of her instrument which one is hard put to compare with any other singer of her calibre.

Friday evening's mainstage concert included an unusual diversion. The first work following intermission was Leopold Mozart's *Cassation in C Major* (a piece which had formerly been attributed to Franz Joseph Haydn as his *Toy Symphony*). Conductor David Hoyt had previously arranged for local celebrities, representing several of the various sponsors of the festival, to perform on toy instruments in front of the orchestra. Because one of the celebrities previously called upon to perform this task failed to appear, one member from the

**R** Symphony Under the Skies  
Aug. 30 - Sept. 3  
in Hawrelak Park

audience who bore some previous experience with the ESO was called upon, with barely two minutes notice, to blow a toy trumpet.

The weather during the first two evenings could be described as ideal. Saturday evening proved to be something else. The evening opened with a pre-concert performance by Edmonton's own Pre-Tenors — three members of Pro Coro Canada who have already gained an international reputation for giving an irreverent take on the performances of the Three Tenors (Luciano Pavarotti, Placido Domingo and José Carreras). Their wonderfully artistic and musical parody had the audience in stitches throughout their all-too-brief appearance. On the heels of Naida Cole's magnificent performance of Maurice Ravel's *Piano Concerto in G Major*, a fierce storm began to build and blow into the amphitheatre with sudden and almost frightening speed and

force, causing the remainder of the concert to be cancelled.

Sunday was another beautiful day which produced a phenomenon of a different sort. Local prodigy Jessica Linnebach, now a young woman with a wealth of musical maturity, was brought back home from the Manhattan School of Music in New York, where she is currently a student, to perform the Beethoven *Violin Concerto*. In the midst of the final cadenza in the third movement of the work, Linnebach, who had up to that time delivered a beautiful and relaxed interpretation of the piece, had to stop suddenly to retune her instrument. One of the pegs had popped loose — likely a combination of the sudden change in temperature as the sun was setting and her vigorous bowing. She handled the situation with great professionalism and completed the work as though nothing had happened.

As expected, the highlight of Monday afternoon's concert was guest artist George Gao, who dazzled both the audience and the orchestra with his superb performance of Pablo de Sarasate's *Zigeunerweisen (Gypsy Airs)*, and Chen Yao Xing's *Gallop of the Horse*. The latter piece, an eastern work combines the *William Tell Overture*, *The Flight of the Bumblebee* and *The Theme from 'The Green Hornet'* in its musical depiction of a herd of galloping horses, including whinnying and neighing. This mesmerizing performance brought the audience spontaneously to its feet.

## FESTIVAL D'ÉTÉ DE QUÉBEC



LE SOLEIL - JEAN MARIE VILLENEUVE  
George Gao donne trois spectacles aujourd'hui.

GEORGE GAO

## Le monde sur deux cordes

REGIS TREMBLAY

*Le Soleil*

QUÉBEC — Sur deux cordes, il fait vibrer toutes les musiques de la planète ! George Gao a donné au erhu, un filiforme instrument régional chinois, une résonance mondiale ! Il n'est pas étonnant de retrouver le virtuose du erhu au Festival d'été, qui fait une place de plus en plus grande aux musiques de notre petite planète.

George Gao ne se contente pas d'exporter la musique traditionnelle chinoise, celle dont les accents aigus et tenus célèbrent avec ferveur et retenue les beautés de la nature. *Sables battus par les flots... Lune printanière sur la rivière... Fleuve de cif argent...* Ces titres évocateurs, qu'ils soient des airs anciens ou des compositions originales de Gao, reflètent fidèlement l'idée que l'on se forge de la Chine éternelle. Mais il y a plus...

Ceux qui ont vu et entendu George Gao, en début de semaine, à Place d'Youville, jammer avec le guitariste Bob Brozman, ou se joindre à des musiciens traditionnels venus de l'Inde, ceux-là n'en reviennent toujours pas ! Quant à ceux qui préfèrent entendre un Gao plus traditionnel, au sein de son Silk Ensemble, ils ont encore la chance de le faire cet après-midi, alors qu'il donne trois autres spectacles, en trois endroits différents : à 12h30, il est à Place d'Youville, puis se dirige au parc Montmorency, à 14 h, avant de se rendre au parc de l'Esplanade, à 16h30.

La grande ouverture musicale de George Gao vient de loin. Né en 1967 dans la province de Gansu, il joue déjà du erhu à six ans. Il lui faut seule-

ment deux ans pour devenir soliste, sur son gracieux instrument. Plus tard, au Conservatoire de musique de Shanghai, il étudie également le piano et la composition. Fait important, il y aborde tant la musique chinoise qu'occidentale. On ne compte plus les prix et les distinctions obtenues par Gao dans son pays natal.

En 1991, le musicien fait un autre pas dans sa mondialisation artistique en s'installant à Toronto, où il devient professeur de erhu au Conservatoire royal de musique, mais où il s'imprègne aussi de la musique populaire occidentale. Voilà

pourquoi le Silk Ensemble vous réserve des surprises. Parmi les compositions de Gao, certaines mélangent intimement les phrases musicales traditionnelles chinoises à d'autres accents qui nous sont étrangement familiers : jazz, classique, new age...

Outre Gao et son erhu, le groupe comprend Wei Zhou et sa flûte dizi, Xue-Ying Guo, avec sa mandoline chinoise nommée pipa, Shang-e Fan, virtuose du zhieng, un instrument apparenté à la citare, et Jenny Zhang, dont la voix cristalline se marie si bien aux fines sonorités des instruments.

# Ancient erhu crosses over

## World Music Reviews

GEOFF CHAPMAN

### GEORGE GAO

#### *Erhu Places (Roi)*

This is real crossover music, basically jazzy versions of Chinese folk tunes that also incorporates classical, pop and new-age accents.

The classically trained Gao is a master of the ancient erhu — a two-stringed instrument that's played with a bow or plucked — and he gets effective back-up from the voices of wife Zhang Hai-Jing and Steven Ambrose, Michael Fonfara's piano and electronic doodads.

The erhu is difficult to handle because it has no fingerboard, yet Gao achieves very passionate sounds as he exploits the instrument's expressive range with adroit variations and ornamenting skills most apparent on "Blue Little Flower" and the chirpy "Herding The Flock."

Intriguing titles include "Sewing The Purse" and "Little Cabbage."

*Le Duo Fang-Gao au Festival de musique de la baie des Chaleurs*

# Un concert de sonorités prometteuses

CAMPBELLTON - Dans la série Classique du monde du Festival de musique de chambre de la baie des Chaleurs, on peut s'attendre à une soirée sous le signe de la musique traditionnelle chinoise. C'est précisément ce style de musique que George Gao, du Duo Liu Fang-Gao, a indiqué qu'il allait jouer.

**Steve Hachey**

**L'Académie NOUVELLE**

George Gao, un Canadien d'origine chinoise, joue un instrument méconnu en Amérique du Nord, le erhu. Le erhu est un genre de violon, datant de 1 500 ans, avec seulement deux cordes d'acier et dont le caisson de résonance est recouvert de peau de serpent. Selon le virtuose du erhu, la peau de serpent est très importante pour la sonorité de l'instrument. L'archet quant à lui est fait de bambou et de crinière de cheval.

«Le son du erhu ressemble beaucoup à une voix humaine, avec beaucoup de modulations, de mouvements possibles. Le erhu peut jouer de la musique traditionnelle chinoise, mais on peut aussi s'en servir pour jouer d'autres styles de musique, comme le jazz, la musique populaire, etc. Le erhu est vraiment populaire en Asie», a expliqué le musicien lors d'une entrevue téléphonique.

«Je joue un peu tous les styles avec mon erhu, mais cette fois le concert en sera un de musique chinoise traditionnelle. Quelques pièces proviennent de l'ancien temps et on ne se souvient même plus qui les a composées et d'autres ont été écrites par des

compositeurs contemporains. Émotionnellement la musique varie du dramatique au plus joyeux. La sélection des pièces, varie dans les styles et dans les émotions», a révélé George Gao.

George Gao a commencé à apprendre à jouer le erhu à l'âge de 6 ans. À 11 ans, il s'inscrit au Conservatoire de musique de Shangai. Depuis cet âge il a commencé sa carrière professionnelle pour finalement devenir, à 32 ans, un musicien de renommée internationale. Malgré tout, M. Gao reste modeste.

«Vous savez ce sont les autres qui disent que j'ai une renommée internationale, moi je ne peux pas dire. Je sais que je joue beaucoup à travers le monde mais je ne sais pas si je suis vraiment renommé.»

«Pour moi, le erhu me permet d'exprimer mes sentiments intérieurs quand je ne peux le faire par la parole. Quand je joue pour un auditoire, il y a une sorte de communication qui s'établit entre l'auditoire et moi-même et ça me procure énormément de satisfaction, partage-t-il.»

«Je dirais que je suis un musicien versatile. Mes racines sont surtout traditionnelles mais j'essais aussi de jouer de la musique classique occidentale, de la musique populaire, du jazz, enfin un peu de tous les styles», a-t-il noté.

Le concert du Duo Liu Fang-Gao aura lieu le samedi 10 juillet, à 20 h, à l'église Our Lady of the Visitation, à Benjamin River. Liu Fang quant à lui joue du pipa et du zheng et l'artiste invité Ye Xu-Ran est un maître du pipa.



George Gao et son instrument, le erhu.

# LAVOIX DU NORD

*Orchestre national de Lille*

JEUDI 17 SEPTEMBRE 1998

Premier concert réservé aux abonnés hier soir au Nouveau-Siècle

## Sur un air de erhu

Les visiteurs qui se sont déjà rendus dans le *China-town* de Londres ont peut-être eu l'occasion d'assister à des concerts de rue où des musiciens chinois prêtent de jolies mélodies sur un tout petit instrument à deux cordes, au son frêle et aigrelet. Cet instrument très populaire dans certaines régions de Chine, le *erhu*, est celui que les auditeurs de l'orchestre national de Lille ont pu découvrir hier soir au Nouveau-Siècle, lors d'un concert organisé un an après celui que l'orchestre de Lille avait donné à Hong Kong même, au *Midsummer Festival*. Le chef chinois Henry Shek avait ac-

cueilli les musiciens lillois ; Jean-Claude Casadesus le reçoit à son tour pour deux soirées réservées aux « abonnés privilégiés » de la nouvelle saison.

George Gao, le soliste (qui dut remplacer le musicien initialement prévu, Chen Jun ; ce dernier, cadre de l'armée a été réquisitionné par les autorités chinoises afin de participer à la lutte contre les inondations qui ravagent le pays) étonné par son extrême virtuosité : sur cet instrument apparemment très fruste, le musicien, par une série de glissandos, de vibratos, d'effets techniques très recherchés, produit une musique

immédiatement séduisante, très colorée et souvent riche en descriptions imaginées. L'association de l'instrument traditionnel à un orchestre symphonique, bien loin de choquer, suscite l'intérêt et la sympathie du public, qui fut gratifié de deux « bis » joués cette fois sur le *erhu* seul.

Changement complet de décor en seconde partie avec la quatrième symphonie de Brahms ; l'excellent chef Henry Shek fait preuve d'une direction chaleureuse, d'une grande lisibilité, rendant à ce monument de Brahms toute sa grandeur, parfois entachée d'un certain pathos.

Gérard GOUTIERRE



En répétition, le joueur de erhu George Gao, avec le chef chinois Henry Shek : l'association de la musique populaire traditionnelle et d'un orchestre symphonique. Ph. Luc MOLEUX

# Lille - Métropole



# Provocative Chinese music entices

By ROBERT FINN  
MUSIC CRITIC

82, 12-31

Every two or three years, thanks to the interest of a small but totally devoted group of local enthusiasts, Cleveland gets to hear the exotic sounds of authentic Chinese music played by expert native musicians on their own instruments. It never fails to be an ear-opening, mind-stretching musical experience.

It happened again Wednesday night at the Cleveland Museum of Art. Four fine musicians from the Chinese Music Ensemble of Shanghai presented a free concert to a large and delighted audience. Heard were the eerie wails of various types of Chinese violins, the soft impulses of what might irreverently be described as Chinese lutes and banjos, the plaintive tones of a Chinese zither, the solid thwack of beautiful Chinese drums and the brilliant clashing of Chinese cymbals and gongs.

The four performers, all bearing impressive academic credentials from their homeland, were two men, Li Minxiong and Gao Shaoping, and two women, Zhou Lijuan and Wu Qiang. The men were dressed in sober black, the women in brilliant red. Together with their visually beautiful instruments, they made an arresting stage picture indeed.

The music was a collection of short pieces, some solo and some for small ensemble. A few pieces amounted to miniature concertos for a soloist with the backing of three colleagues. As seems usual with Chinese music, the pieces bore wonderfully picturesque titles: "Rain on the Banana Trees," "Ducks Quarrelling," "Moon Mirrored in the Clear Pool."

What is always so fascinating about these concerts is the combination of familiar and unfamiliar. The instruments — the fiddles in particular — make sounds unfamiliar to western ears. They are more shrill in timbre than western vio-

lins. But the music itself has some undeniably western-sounding elements of rhythm, interval and cadence. In the middle of some picturesque Oriental-sounding piece, there will suddenly pop out at you a phrase or cadence that could have been written by any number of western composers. And the endings of many of these pieces have about them the definite sound of similar moments in western symphonic music.

One piece, a highly rhythmic thing called "Da Qiban," might have been written by a Chinese Khachaturian; and the pipa solo, "Ambush on All Sides" (played by Zhou Lijuan) was a Chinese version of the battle piece.

Instruments on which these virtuoso musicians performed included several varieties of fiddle, notably the erhu, banhu and zhonghu; the small, lute-like liuqin; the high-pitched jinhu; the large banjo-like ruan; the large pipa and the zheng, or Chinese zither.

The music was in no way monotonous. The players demonstrated expert command of dynamic subtleties and shifts, and their sense of ensemble was well-high perfect. There was evidently a large element of improvisation in what they played, and they coordinated tempo changes or sudden shifts of dynamics by eye contact. They are obviously first-rate musicians well used to playing together.

Li Minxiong is a percussion specialist and he had great sport as featured artist in several pieces. In "Fast Drum in the Palace" he was a kind of Chinese Gene Krupa; in the two big percussion pieces that ended the program he clearly challenged his colleagues to a kind of "duelling cymbals" competition.

Listening to this fascinating music with its recurrent small melodic and rhythmic cells, one was struck by some superficial parallels to the work of the western minimalist school, the Philip Glass, John Adams axis. Like their music,

these Chinese pieces might seem merely repetitive, but a little investigation shows that they really have tremendous variety of structure and dynamics. Like all really worthwhile music, Chinese music does not yield up all its secrets to the casual first-time listener.

There were no wind instruments on this program. They may be heard on the group's second free concert, scheduled for the museum on March 30. There will also be a free open discussion with these expert musicians at the museum on Thursday afternoon.

## Imaginative composer Schafer wins \$50,000

By WILLIAM LITTLER  
MUSIC CRITIC

R. Murray Schafer walked away from the Jane Mallet Theatre Saturday night \$50,000 richer, as winner of the 1963 Canada Council Malson Prize for distinguished lifetime achievement in the arts.

In making the presentation, the Canada Council's Andrew Hanson pointed to the Ontario composer's special interest in the interdependence of cultures, hence the appropriateness of handing him his award at the end of an Esprit Orchestra concert conducted by Alex Paak, titled *Oriens/Occident*.

Notwithstanding the post Rudyard Kipling's skepticism, East and West have been meeting this way, on the field of esthetics, since long before Debussy heard his first gamelan at the 1889 Paris World's Fair, with Schafer's own music regularly continuing the practice of multiculturalism.

His 1961 score *Gitanjali*, a setting of five ecstatic poems from a collection of the same name by the Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore, even brought Saturday's concert to a multicultural close.

It was interesting to hear the poems declaimed first without music, by Toronto actress Barbara Chiscott, the better to appreciate how much the imaginative composer's music segments them atmospherically. For Schafer's score is much more than an accompaniment to the words. His purely instrumental passages are as numerous as those in which he weaves arabesques around the voice.

The pure-toned lyric soprano of Donna Brown was the voice for which he wrote *Gitanjali* and it was her still pure-toned instrument that sang the music once again on this occasion, including the joyously rhythmic final song, in which she accompanied herself with rattles while

celebrating her singer's calling.

Equally celebratory were Manalita Thakkar's beguilingly performed dances to Tagore's songs about the seasons, though their inclusion on an already comprehensive program helped stretch its length to three hours.

Time does, of course, tend to pass in a more leisurely way in Eastern than in Western art, as the eight players of the Evergreen Club Gamelan Ensemble might easily have demonstrated, had their appearance not been confined to the presentation of *Poloce*, an almost tinseltastic piece written last year for their 10th anniversary by a former member, Jon Siddall.

By combining the use of all 13 pitches of the Western chromatic scale with the Balinese practice of creating a melody out of interlocking parts and weaving it through patterns of ornamentation, José Evangelista achieved even more of an organic synthesis of East and West than Siddall without using Balinese instruments at all in *O Boll*.

But perhaps the program's most daring exercise in cultural ecumenism found the sonorities of the 1,000-year-old Chinese bowed string instrument known as the erhu electronically altered for incorporation into the contemporary Western sound textures of He Xiantian's 1967 opus, *Four Dreams*.

*Four Dreams* certainly demonstrated how quickly today's Chinese composers have modernized since the Cultural Revolution, but to hear the brilliant George Gu, the Royal Conservatory of Toronto's first erhu player, depends in part on his first playing Tim-Han Liu's traditional, unaltered *Bird Singing On The Empty Mountain* was to appreciate how some instruments are still left to their time-honored traditions.

# Shanghai quartet casts spell

By WANDA BALLANTYNE  
DANCEMAGIC critic

The sound was exotic, the style foreign, the repertoire exotic. But the performance by the Chinese Music Ensemble of Shanghai was so communicative that it held a large audience spellbound for more than two hours Wednesday night at the Cleveland Museum of Art.

The second of two concerts presented by the museum in cooperation with the China Music Project, the program consisted of 18 short pieces with poetic titles such as "Moon Mirrored in the Clear Pool" and "Waves Pounding on the Sand." The only familiar piece, an arrangement of Rimsky-Korsakov's "Flight of the Bumblebee," was translated as "Wild Wasps Flying and Dancing."

The polished four-member ensemble played a variety of traditional Chinese instruments ranging from the gentle pipa (an Oriental

lute with silk strings) to the raucous suona (the Chinese oboe).

The music consisted mostly of pentatonic melodies played without accompaniment. Variety was achieved with expressive microtonal ornamentation, subtle dynamic contrasts and frequent changes of timbre. Introductory mood pieces were followed by lively numbers in march rhythms. Most of the music was performed with a feeling of sweet sincerity. Some pieces were laced off with dramatic flair.

Adding to the pleasure of the performance was the gracious stage presence of the musicians. The men wore loose black suits with mandarin collars. The women were in tight red velvet gowns slit to the thigh. The instruments were also a visual treat, especially the

pipa with its carved dragon's head. The evening opened with two pieces of silk and bamboo music.

In the first, Li Minxiang, percussion and wind teacher at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music and leader of the ensemble, provided rhythmic accents on delicate finger cymbals. In the second, he doubled the melody with the pure sound of the diu (the horizontal bamboo flute). In these pieces, Gao Shaoqing, a student at the Shanghai Conservatory, was introduced in his specialty, the erhu (Chinese violin). Zhou Lijuan and Wu Qiang, faculty members at the conservatory, played the pipa (pear-shaped lute) and ruan (round lute).

In the opening group, the piercing suona made its only appearance. Expertly played by Li in "A Single Flower," the noisy instru-

ment sounded as though it were intended to be heard in outdoor festivals.

In the solo pieces, each musician performed with mastery and expressiveness. Gao gave lyrical interpretations of "River Waters" and "Moon Mirrored in the Clear Pool" on the erhu. In "The Hills and Villages Have Changed," his refined tone was supported by the harplike quality of Wu's ruan and the rapidly repeated notes of Zhou's pipa.

Zhou played four pipa solos, ranging in style from the lyricism of "Waves Pounding on the Sand" to the aggressiveness of "Dragon Boat."

Wu, a versatile artist, contributed solos on three different instruments. On the luguin (a small willow pipa comparable to the mando-

lin), she played an exciting sword dance and the amusing Rimsky-Korsakov arrangement. On the zheng (an Oriental zither), she played a toy-like song from a southern province and a showy folk tune traditionally played on drums and gongs at festivals. On the ruan (the round lute), she played an unusual piece that included a passage in Western harmonies.

The ensemble gave its most vigorous performances in its drum repertoire. In "Deep in the Night," Li beat a small drum with brilliant showmanship while his younger colleagues played the melodic line on pipas and jinghu (a small violin). For the grand finale, the ensemble performed exciting drum and gong music with sharp discipline and expert technique.

Members of the audience listened to each short piece with breathless attention. At the end, they brought the ensemble back for an encore, another colorful percussion piece.

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