

The Performers

Chi Li graduated from the China Conservatory of Music in 1982 and performed for several years as erhu soloist with the National Traditional Orchestra of China. She has concertized and recorded widely in North America, mainland China, and Taiwan, and currently directs several Chinese music groups in California, including the UCLA Chinese Music Ensemble.

Hsin-chun Tasaw Lu earned her Ph.D. in ethnomusicology from UCLA in 2007 with a dissertation on Burmese classical musicians, from whom she also learned instrumental performance; she is now an assistant research fellow at the Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica, Taiwan.

Peter Marsh is assistant professor of musicology and ethnomusicology at California State University, East Bay. He has written extensively on musical tradition and modernity in Mongolia, and learned morin khuur in Mongolia.

Helen Rees is professor of ethnomusicology at UCLA; her research has concentrated mostly on traditional musics in Yunnan and Shanghai. She studied Chinese flute performance at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music over 1987-89.

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University of Washington,
East Asia Center presents



*Asian Musical Crossroads:
China and Inner Asia
China and Southeast Asia*

7:30 pm

October 30, 2009

Brechemin Auditorium, UW School of Music

Program

"Erquan yingyue" (Moonlight reflected in the Second Spring)

Chi Li, erhu

Hua Yanjun (1893-1950)

This piece and five others were recorded from the playing of blind folk musician Hua Yanjun, a.k.a. Abing, shortly before his death in 1950. All six pieces have since become staples of the modern Chinese instrumental repertoire. This *erhu* (2-string fiddle) solo uses traditional variation techniques; its main theme is believed to derive from folksong and theater music popular in the southern Yangtze River region (near Shanghai). It is usually interpreted as expressing the sadness of someone who has suffered an unhappy life—as, indeed, did Abing—but who nevertheless maintains his aspirations for a better future.

"Yu da bajiao" (Raindrops falling on the banana tree)

Chi Li, gaohu

Played on the quintessentially Cantonese two-string fiddle *gaohu*, this is a well-known piece from the traditional style of Cantonese music, which originates from Guangdong Province in southeast China (the region around Hong Kong). Banana leaves are spattered by the rain and tossed around by gusts of wind; after the rain, the sky is clearer and everything looks sparkling fresh. The lively melody seems to express the enjoyment of watching and appreciating the work of nature.

"Zhonghua liuban" (Moderately decorated six beats)

Chi Li, erhu, and Helen Rees, xiao

One of the "Eight great pieces" of the *Jiangnan sizhu* ("silk and bamboo from south of the Yangtze") repertoire, "Zhonghua liuban" is played daily by instrumental ensembles in the Shanghai region, often in teahouses or private homes. Its curious title refers to the fact that it is a version of a simpler tune, "Old six beats," expanded by adding a moderate amount of musical ornamentation to the basic melody. Here it is performed by two regular members of the Jiangnan sizhu ensemble, erhu and *xiao* (endblown flute).

"Shanpo yang" (Goat on the mountain)

Helen Rees, dizi

This version of a melody found in many parts of China comes from the Tibeto-Burman Naxi ethnic minority of Lijiang County in Yunnan Province, southwest China. Its style is surprisingly similar to that of the Jiangnan sizhu piece before, for good reason. As Han Chinese left eastern and central China to migrate to the southwestern frontier—a process that peaked between 1700 and 1850—they brought their rituals and music with them. By the 19th century, Dongjing associations (*dongjinghui*), musico-ritual societies that used Buddhist, Taoist, and morality scriptures to worship major Han deities, were established in over a hundred counties in the southwest, primarily in Yunnan. Their musical repertoire and playing style are remarkably similar to eastern China's "silk and bamboo" (*sizhu*) music. Dongjing associations and their music spread to the bicultural Naxi elite, who added some distinctive local instruments and characteristics, such as a rather heavy vibrato. Normally this piece is played by a small ensemble of flutes, strings, and percussion, but tonight it is performed as a *dizi* (transverse flute) solo.

"Met kwat koe sha" (Search for the forgotten lover)

Hsin-chun Tasaw Lu, Burmese mandolin

This is a famous song performed by Burma's most prominent classical vocalist, Daw Mar Mar Aye. It falls within a musical genre called *khit-haung*, meaning "songs of the old time." This style is often referred to as "traditional in a modern way," since its musical idioms derive from the precolonial court traditions of Burma, yet it also incorporates European musical ideas and instruments. The version played tonight is

an instrumental solo on the Burmese mandolin, an instrument that is adapted and thoroughly indigenized from the European mandolin that reached Burma over a hundred years ago. The original lyrics depict a girl's deep longing for her former lover.

"Daban cheng de guniang" (The girl from Daban City)

Hsin-chun Tasaw Lu, Burmese mandolin

Originally a folksong of the Turkic Uyghur people from Xinjiang in China's far northwest, this song was collected and adapted into a Chinese-language version in 1939 by noted composer Wang Luobin. In this sinicized form it became nationally popular as an icon of ethnic minorities in northwest China; it was later brought to Burma by Chinese immigrants. This version is an instrumental rendition in Burmese classical style, created in the 1980s by Burmese mandolinist U Kyaw Lwin.

Bielgee dances from western Mongolia

Peter Marsh, morin khuur

The pieces played here are part of a vast repertoire of western Mongolian dance-tunes known collectively as *bielgee*. The music of the *morin khuur*, Mongolia's famed horse-head fiddle, was proclaimed a UNESCO Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity in 2003.

"Yaozu wuqu" (Dance of the Yao people)

Chi Li, erhu

Liu Tieshan (1923-) and Mao Yuan (1926-)

Composed in 1952, this piece is one of the early examples of modern Chinese compositions that draw from and celebrate the music and dance of China's ethnic minorities. The composers take inspiration from the drum dance music of the Yao ethnic group of northern Guangdong Province to give a lively picture of Yao festival celebrations. With its attractive melody, "Yaozu wuqu" remains extremely popular and is often programmed in concerts in both China and the Chinese diaspora. Here it is played as an erhu solo, although it is more commonly heard performed by an ensemble.

"Caoyuan shang" (On the grassland)

Chi Li, zhonghu

Liu Mingyuan (1931-1996)

This piece was composed in the early 1950s and was the first solo ever written for the low-pitched 2-string fiddle *zhonghu*, whose tone color resembles that of the Mongolian morin khuur. It borrows techniques from the morin khuur, such as the wide trill over the interval of a third, and draws very successfully on melodies from the Mongolian folk repertoire. This music depicts the vast expanse of the grasslands and portrays an idyllic picture of the herders' pastoral lifestyle.

"Sai ma" (Horse race)

Chi Li, erhu

Huang Haihuai (1935-1967)

Naadam is the annual Mongolian festival that showcases wrestling, archery, and horse racing. Composed in 1959, "Sai ma" is a very popular erhu piece that depicts the excitement of a Naadam horse race. The lively melody, quick rhythm, and various special playing techniques capture the thrill of the race, including the shrill neighing of the horses. Again, the morin khuur inspires this Chinese composer.
