

NEW WINE IN AN OLD BOTTLE ZHENG MUSIC FROM CHINA

LAS 7397

played by
WANG CHANG-YUAN



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(LAS 7397)

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The Zheng

Among the most ancient of Chinese instruments, the *zheng* - a zither also known as the *cheng* - has a history spanning at least two thousand years. Different from its seven-stringed, bridgeless cousin called *qin* (*ch'in*), the *zheng* has sixteen or twenty-one strings raised on movable bridges stretched parallel to the paulonia wood sound board. The strings are plucked by the thumb, first and second fingers of the right hand, either using natural nails or attached plectra. The instrument measures at least a meter, with modern examples about two meters long.

In old China the *zheng* was evidently not respected by the *qin*-playing literati, who considered the *zheng* coarse because it was associated with folk music. Nonetheless, an extensive solo repertory was developed, much of which is still played today. Traditionally, *zheng* music, like all other Chinese music, was regional in style, but these distinctions have mostly disappeared from modern compositions. The *zheng* underwent a revival in the 1920s and 1930s in China and later in Taiwan which continues today. The *zheng* might be compared to the piano in that instruments come in many sizes and qualities for both amateurs and professionals and the repertory extends from simple to virtuoso. *Zheng* music is commonly notated both in arabic numerals [*jian pu*] and staff notation, both of which are available in inexpensive editions.

The Performer Wang Chang-yuan

Miss Wang began her study of the *zheng* with her father, Wang Xunzhi, professor at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music and later graduated from this institution. In addition to having

performed *zheng* in China for twenty-three years and on tours throughout Asia, Europe, Europe, North and South America during the past ten years, Miss Wang has composed a number of works and arranged others. In China she has performed for many visiting heads of state and as soloist with China's leading orchestras. Her composition, "Battling the Typhoon" (track 8) has been performed in a piano-orchestra arrangement by the Boston Symphony. Miss Wang is China's leading *zheng* virtuoso and a skilled representative of the modern style.

The Techniques

The traditional *zheng* has sixteen metal strings (originally of silk) tuned pentatonically. They are plucked by the thumb and two fingers of the right hand while the left hand depresses strings to produce pitches outside the basic five, and to create subtle ornaments and tremolo. During the past twenty years or so the demands of modern Chinese music have necessitated expanding the instrument by adding a lower octave (making twenty-one strings), using greater tension in the strings, and substituting nylon for metal. The instrument Miss Wang plays on this recording is of the latter type and has a fuller sound than traditional models.

In addition, a number of traditional techniques have been expanded and new ones added. The use of the left hand has increased greatly, both to the right of the bridges, where it is used to create counter melodies or harmony, and left of the bridges, where it is used in addition to the traditional ornaments, especially for slides. In addition, the right hand is used close to the extreme right end of the instrument to create new sounds, as heard in "Zhan tai feng." Stylistically, modern *zheng* music tends to greater brilliance, is more complex because of the expanded left-hand use, and may involve harmony or counterpoint. When traditional pieces are played on the twenty-one stringed *zheng*, the lower octave as well as modern techniques are usually used. Because there is no one, correct, and fixed form of any traditional piece, these modernized arrangements remain in essence "traditional." In the case of modern compositions, however, most exist in finished and notated form and therefore do not vary from performance to performance in the traditional manner.

1. Chu shi lian [Lotus On Water]. Originally *zheng* music of the Kejia or Hakka people, this simple yet refined and ancient melody transmitted by Lue Jin-xiang derives from a poem portraying the flower "spotless while growing in the mud; elegant while bathing in the stream."

2. Huan le de ri zi [Happy Day]. This is a modern composition.

3. Gao shan liu shui [High Mountain, Flowing Stream]. Originating in Zhejiang province and transmitted by Wang Xunzhi, this ancient and well-known piece illustrates the impression of high mountains in the bass, and the feeling of flowing water in the vibrato and glissandi.

4. Hai qing na tian e [The Sea Bird Defeats the Crane]. Also from Zhejiang province, this piece originated during the Yuan dynasty (1279-1368 A.D.) and depicts graphically a fight between a large sea bird and a crane.

5. Mei hua san nong [The Plum Blossoms]. Adapted from the repertory of the *qin* and dating from the Jin dynasty (265-420 A.D.) it depicts the falling of plum blossoms to the ground.

6. Yanbian de ge [A Song of Yanbian]. An original arrangement of a melody from northeastern China near the Korean border by Wang Chang-yuan and Pu Qizhang.

7. Ying Tao ji jie [The Season for Cherries] is based on a French folksong and, using Western harmony, was created by Wang Chang-yuan and Pu Qizhang.

8. Zhan tai feng [Battling the Typhoon]. Composed by Miss Wang in 1965, this programmatic piece, which includes new techniques, illustrates the heroism and noble qualities of new China's dock workers battling against a typhoon.

9. Han ya xi shui [Winter Ravens Sporting over the Water]. Among the best known of zheng pieces, this programmatic work of unknown but ancient origin illustrates the performance style of the Chao-zhou people, an ethnic subdivision of the Chinese living in eastern Guangdong province.

10. Su Wu si xiang [Su Wu is Homesick]. Originating in Henan province and transmitted by Cao Dongfu, this music illustrates the mood of homesickness and longing of the imprisoned Su Wu. Su Wu was an emissary of Emperor Wu of the Han dynasty sent to extend friendship to the nomadic Hsiung-nu, but he was detained by them for nineteen years. Because he remained steadfast to the Han court in spite of untold hardships, he is a symbol of loyalty and perseverance to all Chinese.

11. Heung hu shui [The Water of Heung Lake]. This is a recent composition by Miss Wang and Pu Qizhang based on a modern Chinese opera of the same name.

12. "Wu mu" yao lan qu [Lullaby on "Wu Mu"]. Based on a Japanese folksong, this composition by Pu Qizhang is here played by *zheng*, cello, *yang qin* (dulcimer), and percussion.

13. Oh! Susanna. Based on Stephen Foster's well-known melody of 1848, this arrangement by Wang Zheng and Pu Qizhang for a mixed ensemble has been a favorite with Chinese and American audiences since it was first performed.

Credits: Tracks 1-7, 9 and 10 recorded and mastered by John Reynolds of Kent State University's Center for the Study of World Musics.
Track 7 recorded at the KSU Folk Festival, 2/23/85 by WKSU-FM (Engineers: Michael Flaster, Peter Petto, and Paul Meadows).
Tracks 11-13 recorded in the People's Republic of China.
Calligraphy by Wang Chang-yuan.
Recording facilities of KSU's Center for the Study of World Musics.



Notes by Terry E. Miller
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