

Great Wall Youth Orchestra and Chorus – Media Kit

Our History

In 1995, Sherlyn Chew, a musician and elementary school teacher, founded a Chinese music program at Lincoln Elementary School near Oakland's Chinatown. This began with a sad occasion and an unexpected opportunity. Chew went to Southern California for the funeral of her former music teacher, Pei Chang Sun.

While assisting his widow with his belongings after the funeral, Chew found a closet full of Chinese instruments. The widow explained that her husband had ordered them from Taiwan twenty-five years earlier with the thought of creating a Chinese orchestra in California. Sadly, he had not fulfilled his dream. The widow could see no reason for keeping the instruments, but Chew came up with an idea. She realized that, with these instruments, she could start a Chinese music orchestra at her elementary school. The widow agreed to sell the instruments to Chew for \$4,000, the original sum that her husband paid for them.

Chew returned to Oakland and immediately started raising funds. She set aside \$500 from her Mason McDuffy Excellence in Teaching Award, obtained a \$1000 grant from the Marcus A. Foster Foundation and received \$500 in donations from Chinatown's Wah Sung Service Club. Motivated by Chew's efforts, the parents of the Lincoln Elementary School children scraped together the remaining \$2,000. A month after Chew was inspired to start a youth orchestra, she drove down to Southern California. The musical instruments she carried back were the beginnings of the unique Chinese music programs for inner-city children in Oakland.

Over the years, the Purple Silk Music Education Foundation (PSMEF) and Laney College have played an increasingly important role in securing funds and resources for Chew's first-of-its-kind music education programs especially in the aftermath of cut-backs to California's public school arts programs. The National Endowment for the Arts, California Arts Council, the City of Oakland's Cultural Funding Program and Philanthropic Ventures Foundation are some of Great Wall's valued supporters.

Today, these contributors assist more than 700 students per year from Oakland and the greater Bay Area to obtain a music education. Lincoln Elementary School serves as a “feeder” for the core music education program – the Great Wall Youth Orchestra & Chorus. This repertory orchestra and chorus hold rehearsals in the evenings and on weekends at Laney College. The students are taught by Chew and a group of skilled Chinese musicians. The program at Laney serves students grades 1-12 and participating students are concurrently enrolled at the college, allowing them to gain college credits. Upon graduating high school, students can continue their studies through Laney’s undergraduate Chinese music programs or other music department offerings. This system makes it possible for a student to receive seamless instruction in Chinese music from elementary school through college.

In November, 2004, Great Wall was featured on the front page of the Wall Street Journal as an innovative model for music education and for promoting cross-cultural understanding. The article focused on Tyler Thompson who was then a nine-year-old African-American boy who sang Chinese opera for the Great Wall Youth Orchestra & Chorus. The article resulted in a flurry of media interest from CNN, CBS Sunday Morning, ABC Good Morning America and KQED SPARK, among others.

In May, 2005, Great Wall celebrated its Tenth Anniversary with a sold-out concert at the Calvin Simmons Theater in Oakland. One hundred fifty students from the Great Wall Youth Orchestra & Chorus performed in the event. In July 2005, the Great Wall Youth Orchestra & Chorus performed at the Japanese Cultural Center in Los Angeles, its first performance outside the San Francisco Bay Area. Great Wall produced its first CD, *Joyful Journey*, in August, 2006.

Great Wall performs at many local venues throughout the year. Increasingly, they are invited to perform outside of the San Francisco Bay Area, even abroad. Great Wall welcomes these invitations as potentially life-changing experiences for the children. Yet it continues to be enormously challenging to raise funds for touring, as many of the children’s families fall at or below the poverty level. We hope that more audiences will listen to the music, attend concerts and support these remarkable young musicians.

Founder & Artistic Director

Sherlyn Chew

Sherlyn Chew was born in Oakland, California, and grew up steeped in traditional Chinese music. Her father, Poon L. Chew, a music history professor and a musician, began training her in music when she was three. She studied the pipa and guzhen under her father, as well as other musicians from Hong Kong and Taiwan who had immigrated to the United States. She also began studying Beijing Opera at age 14. After graduating from University of California, Berkeley, with a double major in social science and languages, Chew went to Taiwan to further her music studies and to perform.

After her debut concerts in Asia and Southeast Asia, Chew returned to the United States and did her graduate work at UC Berkeley in Curriculum & Instruction with emphasis on Music Instruction and bilingual education. Soon afterwards, she began teaching third grade at Lincoln Elementary School and Chinese Music at Laney College. Chew received numerous honors for her teaching, including the Oakland Business Council's Arts Advocate Award (1994) and Mason McDuffy Excellence in Teaching Award (1995). She was chosen by the Marcus A. Foster Institute as one of two Distinguished Educators in Oakland.

Chew performed in 1995 in Europe for the opening of the International Peace University. The concert marked the 50th Anniversary of the end of World War II. Also in 1995, soon after acquiring her first Chinese instruments, Chew became a full-time music teacher at Lincoln Elementary School and started the Purple Bamboo Orchestra & Chorus. She also started the Great Wall Youth Orchestra and Chorus at Laney College. In 2005, Chew expanded the music program at Lincoln Elementary School to the International Community School. In the summer of 2006, Chew retired from Lincoln Elementary and International Community School to teach music full-time at Laney College. Victor Siu is her successor teacher at these elementary schools.

Chew's orchestras and choruses have performed in many local venues, including schools, art openings, state fairs, churches and professional sports events. They have performed with the Oakland East Bay Symphony and the San Francisco Symphony. They have been featured on the Wall Street Journal, KQED's SPARK! Program, CNN, CBS Sunday Morning, ABC Good Morning America, San Francisco Chronicle and Oakland Tribune.

Conductor and Music Coaches

Conductor

Wanpeng Guo

Wanpeng Guo studied at the China Conservatory of Music. He is an expert player of the Sheng, Suona, Guanzi and Dizi. He studied under the Sheng master, Professor Xhongfu Wu and became the principal Sheng player of China's Central National Orchestra. He has performed throughout Asia, Europe and the US with this orchestra. Guo was also a member of the Asia Orchestra, an ensemble composed of top-level musicians from Japan, Korea and China. This ensemble has performed with cellist, Yoyo Ma at Carnegie Hall in New York and throughout the US. Guo's experience and virtuosity make him an ideal conductor for the Great Wall Youth Orchestra.

Coaches

Xian Lu

Xian Lu specializes in Chinese wind instruments, the Dizi, Xiao, Bawu and Xun. He studied flute with Chenglong Zhou of the Shanghai Folk Music Orchestra, flutist Jingsheng Dai and Professor Chunling Lu, the renowned flutist of the Shanghai Conservatory of Music. In 1979 Lu entered the Nanjing Normal University's Music Department and continued his studies under the tutelage of the famous flutist, KerenLin. Xian Lu has performed in many countries, including Australia, the Netherlands, Belgium, Sweden, Russia and the United States. He has an exceptionally pure tone that is as moving as it is artistic, particularly when he interprets the folk music of China's southern provinces.

Xiao Feng Zhang

Xiao-Feng Zhang specializes in the Chinese two-stringed violin, the Erhu. She studied Erhu with the famous Erhu professor, Liu Zhen Hua. At the age of 17, Zhang was accepted into the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing. She was a member of the National Traditional Orchestra of China. Zhang has performed with renowned orchestras, ensembles, and as a soloist all over the world.

Hecheng Liu

Hecheng Liu is a Pipa virtuoso. He began studying music when he was five and at age 11, was accepted as a gifted student by The Junior Division of the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing. After graduating with honors, he continued to study the Pipa and the Gu Qin at the Department of Chinese instruments at Central Conservatory of Music. He earned his BA at the conservatory in 1984. Liu has taught and performed as a soloist around the world. His music has been described as a graceful combination of strength and emotion that touches his listener's heart and soul.

Lu Peng

Lu Peng specializes in the Yang Qin, the hammered dulcimer. She began performing at the age of six and in 1978 entered the Shanghai Conservatory of Music secondary school, then continued her studies at the Conservatory of Music under Professors Guo Minqin and Hong Shengmao. In 1984 she participated in the Fourth Shanghai Festival of Spring and her performance of Petrel was broadcast by both Radio Beijing and Radio Shanghai. Peng has performed widely in the United States, from Walt Disney World to Carnegie Hall. She has also performed with the Taipei Symphony Orchestra and with the Traditional Orchestra of Hong Kong. Her performance style is lyrical and elegant.

Tao Shi

Tao Shi began studying the Erhu at the age of seven. In 1990 he earned his bachelor's degree with honors from the prestigious Nan Jing Normal University where he majored in Erhu and piano. He won many national awards in China for his Erhu performances. Tao Shi moved to the San Francisco Bay Area in 1999 and has performed as a Erhu soloist in many local community performances, including his July, 2000 recital at Yerba Buena Center and his May, 2001 performance at Cathedral of St. Mary of the Assumption for the remembrance of the victims of the Nanjing Massacre.

Victor Siu

Victor Siu recently graduated from San Francisco State University with a major in music. His life-long study of music is reflected in his mastery of Chinese music, Western classical music and jazz piano. He has taught Chinese music to children, K-12 at the Hip Wah Summer Camp and has many private piano students. His extensive knowledge of Chinese music makes him an ideal assistant coach. Siu teaches music at Lincoln Elementary School.

Jing Liang

Jing Liang was born into a family of Cantonese Opera performers and appeared on stage as a child actor in the 1940's. In 1950 she became a member of the Guang Dong Chinese Opera Company and soon rose to principal performer and director. She later joined the faculty of China's renowned Fu Shan Cantonese Opera Institute and was awarded the prestigious Gold Star Award in 1983. That same year, Sifu (Master) Liang moved to the San Francisco Bay Area to teach a new generation of Cantonese Opera performers. She is the Founder and Artistic Director of San Francisco's Red Bean Cantonese Opera House.

Man Cheng

Man Cheng specializes in the guzheng, the 21-string zither. He studied music under three masters: Cheng Dook Jak (percussion), Chung Hsiao Jun (guzheng) and Yu Po (san hsien). From 1970-84, he taught at Hong Kong Chinese University, Hong Kong Baptist College and Hong Kong Music Institute. He is the founder and instructor at the Cheng Man Guzheng Institute. He has made more than 1000 recordings of Chinese Classical, Folk Opera, Popular Music and Cantonese music on such labels as Capital Records, CBS/Song Hong Kong Ltd., Blue Max Production Ltd. and Crown Record Company Ltd. Man Cheng has appeared on TV, radio and motion pictures. He currently teaches music at Lincoln Elementary School.

Quote from a Music Coach:

“What’s difficult and yet satisfying about your work?”

“It’s difficult to teach children of different ages and music backgrounds. We wish the teaching sessions were longer. I’m interested in watching some of the children learn music so quickly. This work is satisfying.”

Lu Peng

Yang Qin Specialist

Traditional Chinese Instruments

Dizi (flute)

Dizi is a transverse bamboo flute. Dizi has a membrane hole located between the blowhole and sixth finger hole. This thin membrane, which looks like rice paper, is made of bamboo. When the Dizi is played, the membrane vibrates, producing a sweet, bright tone.

Erhu (violin)

Erhu is a two stringed-violin. It has a long neck and a round hexagonal, octagonal or tubular body made of wood. The face of the body is usually covered by snakeskin. The bow used to play the erhu is made of horsehair tied to a stick of bamboo. It is a difficult instrument to play because it only has two strings and the musician has to work the instrument to play the high and low notes.

Liu Qin (small lute)

The Liuqin is shaped like a willow leaf and is like a small pipa. It is a plucking instrument used for playing high-pitched melodies.

Pipa (lute)

The Pipa is a four-stringed lute and is one of the oldest Chinese musical instruments. The two Chinese characters “pi” and “pa” stood for plucking the strings forward and backward respectively. It is one of the most complicated plucking string instruments because all ten fingers are active. It is versatile instrument, describing the softest whisper of the wind and the loud roar of the ocean.

Sheng (Mouth organ)

The Sheng is the world's oldest free-reed wind instrument. It can play up to six notes in harmony. It sounds like a harmonica but unlike a harmonica, which produces a different sound when the musician inhales and exhales, the Sheng's note only changes when the musician moves the finger over the instrument. It is a solo as well as an ensemble instrument.

Yang Qin (hammered dulcimer)

The Yang Qin is the only hammered string instrument in Chinese traditional music. The Yang Qin shares the same origin with the piano but unlike the piano, which has one hammer per string, the Yang Qin uses two hand-held wooden or bamboo hammers to hit the strings. The hammers are padded with felt on one side. When struck with the padded side, the Yang Qin produces a soft sound; when struck by the unpadded side it produces a harsher metallic sound. The sound of the Yang Qin pulls all the orchestra instruments together.

Xiao Ruan (small guitar) & Zhong Ruan (medium guitar)

Ruan is a four-stringed, full moon shaped guitar with long and straight neck and frets. The Ruan consists of three parts: resonator, neck and head. It comes in several sizes according to their different ranges: soprano, alto, tenor, and bass. It produces a pleasing tremolo, a cyclic fluctuation of tone.

Yue Quin (moon guitar)

“Yue” means the Moon in Chinese. The instrument got its name from its full-moon-shaped sound box. The instrument is plucked with a plectrum. It is most often played in Beijing Opera rather in a Chinese orchestra. However, this is a good instrument for young children whose fingers are too small to play the Ruan. It has 3 strings and a short neck. It is the easiest instrument to learn but it is limited in its range. Children who start with the Yue Quin go on to play the Xiao Ruan, Zhong Ruan or Da Ruan.

Great Wall Music Repertoire

Chinese Folk Music

1. Cai Cha Wu Qu (Picking Tea Leaves)
2. Cai Mo Gu De Ziao Gu Niang (Picking Mushrooms)
3. Cai Yun Zhui Yue (Colorful Clouds)
4. Cao Yuan Qi Bing (Soldiers Galloping on the Grassland)
5. Cao Yuan Xiao Zhi Mei (Sisters of the Grassland)
6. Cao Yuan Zhi Ye (Night on the Grassland)
7. Chun Jie Xu Qu (Spring Overture)
8. Ge Sheng Yu Wei Xiao (Smile)
9. Hua Hao Yue Yuan (Beautiful Flowers Under the Full Moon)
10. Jiang Jun Ling (The General's Command)
11. Jin She Kuang Wu (Golden Snake Dance)
12. Kuai Le De Nu Zhan Shi (Happy Women Soldiers)
13. Mu Di (Shepherd's Flute)
14. Nao Yuan Xiao (Lantern Festival)
15. Shan Bei Hao (Wonderful Shanbei)
16. Tuo Ling (The Camel's Bell)
17. Wo Men Dang Qi Shuang Jiang (Boat Song)
18. Xi Xun (Good News from Afar)
19. Xi Yang Yang (Full of Joy)
20. Xiao Fang Niu (The Cowherd and the Young Maiden)
21. Xiao Song Shu (Little Pine Tree)
22. Xing Jie (Parade)
23. Xi Zang Wu Qu (Tibet Dance)
24. Yao Zu Wu Ou (Dance of the Yao Tribe)
25. Yu Zhou Hai Ge (Triumph Song)

World Folk Music

1. Darm Darm (Algeria)
2. De Colores (Mexico)
3. Guantanamo (Cuba)
4. In a Sentimental Mood (USA)
5. O Sole Mio (Italy)
6. Pachelbel's Canon in D (Germany)
7. Que Sera Sera (USA)
8. Sakura, Sakura (Japan)
9. Star Spangled Banner (USA)
10. Tartar Dance (Tartar)
11. The Entertainer (USA)