

HITTING RARE NOTES

A music teacher is working to make the ancient Chinese zither popular with young people. **Chen Nan** reports.

The world premiere of seven musical pieces by Chinese composers was at the concert *Music Contemporary From China 2018* at Alice Tully Hall of the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts in New York in late January. The composers are all faculty members of the Beijing-based Central Conservatory of Music.

The piece, also performed by musicians from the conservatory, featured both traditional Chinese instruments and Western instruments.

"The new works have different styles and *guzheng* (Chinese zither) is capable of making versatile sounds," says Ji Wei, a player of the instrument and an associate professor at the Central Conservatory of Music.

"I was very excited and couldn't wait to share the new music with the audience in the United States," Ji says of her preparations in Beijing before the concert of Jan 27.

Ji, 39, began to learn the ancient plucked instrument as a child and recalls how audiences were curious about *guzheng* when she first performed abroad in Japan and the United States in the early 1990s.

"Even while I was in an elevator with my *guzheng* placed next to me, people who entered the elevator would ask me about it," Ji says.

Now, she says more composers are interested in the instrument and are willing to write music for it, which has kept *guzheng* alive as well as expanded its repertoire in recent times.

Before the concert in New York, Ji had performed with the Vienna University Philharmonic at the Musikverein in Vienna on Dec 11 in a concert, which was the European premiere of composer Vijay Upadhyaya's new work, the 75-minute *Chang'an Men*. Upadhyaya, an Indian-born, Vienna-based composer was commissioned to produce the piece by the China National Symphony Orchestra.

Speaking about Ji, Upadhyaya says: "She is one of the most accomplished and professional *guzheng* players in China and the world. I was lucky to have her as a soloist in my composition. Actually, I needed to consult her sometimes regarding the technical details of the instrument while composing."



“I am interested in working with musicians of different styles.”

Ji Wei, *guzheng* player

Left: Ji Wei holds a solo concert at Beijing's Forbidden City Concert Hall in 2009.

Above: Ji performs with her *guzheng* ensemble at the Beijing Concert Hall in 2013.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Meanwhile, the Chinese musician has been delving into traditional music as well as finding new sounds for her instrument.

Speaking about her work, Ji says: "What I want to do is to

display the beauty of the instrument by playing classic *guzheng* pieces, such as *A Moonlit Night on the Spring River*, *The Evening Song of Fishermen*, *High Mountain and Flowing Water*, and to

bring the modern side of the instrument to people, who may have ignored its potential."

In 2005, Ji made history when the classical recording label Deutsche Grammophon

published its first-ever *guzheng* piece *At Night on the Lake Beneath the Maple Bridge*, featuring her performance with world-renowned Chinese pianist Lang Lang. Ji has also recorded

dozens of solo albums and has authored textbooks and played with top ensembles around the globe.

Born in Shijiazhuang, Hebei province, Ji started to learn to play the instrument at the age of 5 at a local art training school as her working-class parents wanted their only child to receive art education. Then, the *guzheng* was not commonly seen in cities in China.

"The instrument was expensive and my mother drew the strings of *guzheng* on a piece of paper for me to practice at home. I could only play the real *guzheng* at the school," recalls Ji. "For me, a shy young girl then, the instrument was very expressive."

In 1992, she was admitted to the middle school attached to the China Conservatory of Music in Beijing and Wang Zhongshan, one of the best-known *guzheng* musicians, was her teacher. After graduation she obtained her master's degree from the Central Conservatory of Music in 2004 before starting to teach there.

Ji was interested in blending the traditional instrument with modern sounds even as a student.

"I am interested in working with musicians of different styles and that's the best way to promote *guzheng* as well as discovering the potential of the instrument through collaboration," says Ji, who has participated in workshops held by international conservatories.

Before her master's degree was complete, Ji was invited to perform in a concert with French electronic music artist Jean Michel Jarre at the Forbidden City in Beijing.

To popularize the instrument among the young, Ji initiated a *guzheng* ensemble in 2008, which has since gathered students from the Central Conservatory of Music and gives performances at venues like the National Centre for the Performing Arts and Beijing Concert Hall.

"I decided to become a teacher when I was a young student. I want to inspire my students, too. It can be very exciting to challenge them to find something new while remaining rooted in traditional Chinese music," she says.

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Ongoing temple fair offers business and fun

By **YANG JUN** in Guiyang
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The wish tree, candied haws, clay figurines and lantern art all bring back childhood memories of Spring Festival.

The monthlong Temple Fair and Lantern Show, which began on Jan 26 in Guanshanhu district of Guiyang, capital of Southwest China's Guizhou province, is therefore the place to visit while celebrating the Chinese New Year, which fell on Feb 16.

The events include the display of traditional customs, a food festival and cultural performances for different age groups.

Guanshanhu has hosted such events for the past eight years.

By taking part in the activities, visitors get the opportunity to know their culture better. For example, a special wooden hammer that is used to make *ciba*, a snack of glutinous rice, and is hardly seen in Chinese cities these days, can be viewed at the fair.

Also, the custom of making a wish and tying a red thread to a tree branch can be experienced.

More than 150 stalls from the mainland with food and beverages have been set up.



The temple fair in Guanshanhu district in Guiyang features a display of lanterns and traditional craftsmanship.

PHOTOS BY YANG JUN / CHINA DAILY

Rain brings sunshine to village in Southwest China

By **YANG JUN** in Guiyang
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Zuo Wenxue, the Party chief of Tangyue village, will attend the National People's Congress in March to share the village's progress in development with other delegates at the annual meeting in Beijing.

Once an underdeveloped place in Guizhou province, Tangyue has become a model of rural reform in Southwest China.

Tangyue, which is under the administration of Anshun city, used to be home to elderly and children as most of the working-age people had migrated to the coastal cities for jobs.

But in 2014, a rainstorm changed things there.

"The village was severely damaged by floodwater, and more than 1,000 people who had left to work elsewhere rushed back to rebuild their houses," recalls Zuo.

"That gave us the opportunity to unite the villagers to find a way to get rid of poverty."

Zuo proposed taking advantage of the central government's land-use reforms to turn the village's resources into assets.

The residents became shareholders by setting up a



Activities such as free health checks and performances are held to celebrate Spring Festival in Tangyue village, Guizhou province.

PHOTOS BY YANG JUN / CHINA DAILY

“More jobs are available now and many villagers who worked in cities are returning to the village.”

You Chengying, resident of Tangyue village

cooperative for agricultural products and using the land that had been left unattended.

Before the flood, more than 30 percent of the village land was unused as most people were working outside.

The cooperative has since converted about 250 hectares of land to agricultural use.

You Chengying, a resident of Tangyue, transferred 1.2 hectares of land to the Golden Land Cooperative owned by the village at the end of 2015. She received about 11,510 yuan (\$1,816) as a shareholder

last year, she says.

Agricultural production has helped the development of related industries. A cold storage facility and a transport team were set up for sorting and packing vegetables and selling them in markets outside the village.

"More jobs are available now and many villagers who worked in cities are returning to the village. My son and even my elderly mother have found jobs," You says, adding that her family of four now has an annual

income of 100,000 yuan.

Data shows that with the help of reform, the average annual income of villagers increased from less than 4,000 yuan in 2013 to 14,685 yuan in 2017.

The rapid increase in income is not the only change in the village.

A series of activities, including free health checks and distributing Spring Festival couplets, were held at the Tangyue Cultural Square ahead of Chinese New Year this year.

Huang Guoyuan, a teacher of Honghu Senior School near the village, came to write couplets for the residents along with nine other calligraphy amateurs. He says every year the Anshun Calligrapher Association sends its members to different villages in the area during Spring Festival.

He says he is surprised to see many young people returning to the village these days.

"I wrote 50 couplets for the villagers in two hours," Huang says.

As to the future development, the village officials are aiming even higher.

"By 2020, Tangyue's agricultural output value will increase from 5 million yuan to 20 million yuan and the per capita net income of the villagers will reach 20,000 yuan," Zuo says.

Agricultural development will also get a new look as the villagers plan to set up a system using automatic intelligence for watering and fertilization through big data, says Tang Congfu, the head of the Golden Land Cooperative.

"We are also building an e-commerce platform to increase sales channels for our agricultural products," Zuo says.

Zhao Yandi contributed to the story.

Speaking about the fair, Cui Shuzhi, a candy retailer from Heilongjiang province in Northeast China, says: "Guizhou is a potential market for our products."

Cui has been in the business for five years, and this is the first time she is selling her products outside Heilongjiang.

Even though she has to pay a daily rent of 620 yuan (\$98) for her stall at the fair, her candies fetch her nearly 4,000 yuan a day — a figure she didn't expect to reach, she says.

Guizhou has focused on the promotion of agricultural products in the past few years and launched a project called Qianhuo Chushan to help farmers in mountainous areas sell their products in cities. Data from the first half of 2017 shows the project generated a revenue of 3.7 billion yuan, an increase of 42 percent year-on-year.

With the fair, many locals are also able to access clients from outside the province.

And, other than food and customs, the fair has a large space for kids entertainment, where children can explore such activities as dancing, video games and virtual reality.

Chen Zhuo contributed to the story.