

Beethoven in Beijing Lesson Plan

Before Watching

Historical Background

The first half hour of *Beethoven in Beijing* recounts the experience of the Philadelphia Orchestra's momentous 1973 trip to China. Students should be familiar with the Cultural Revolution as well as the following ideas before viewing the film:

- Diplomatic relations between the United States and People's Republic of China (PRC) had ceased in 1949 when the Communist Party led by Mao Zedong took over the country and the defeated Kuomintang fled to Taiwan.
- In 1971 National Security Advisor Dr. Henry Kissinger made a secret trip to Beijing to arrange a week-long visit to the PRC by President Richard Nixon.
- When staunchly anti-communist President Nixon announced that he would be visiting the PRC, people were stunned. The term "a Nixon to China moment" is used as a political metaphor for a leader taking a bold action that, on the surface, appears to run counter to their ideology.
- President Nixon traveled to the PRC in February 1972. His entourage included Dr. Henry Kissinger and U.S. diplomat Nicholas Platt. President Nixon met with Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai and Communist Party Chairman Mao Zedong. First Lady Patricia Nixon toured schools, factories, and hospitals. Extensive media coverage in the United States gave Americans their first glimpses of China in over two decades.
- The visit to China is considered a significant foreign policy success of the Nixon administration. The trip drove a wedge between the PRC and the USSR, America's rival in the Cold War. Trade and cultural exchanges were launched, and in 1979 the United States and the PRC established full diplomatic relations.
- The Philadelphia Orchestra's 1973 trip to China was an important follow-up to President Nixon's visit.

Key Terms

Reviewing the following may be helpful to students:

Yannick Nézet Séguin - A Canadian conductor, he serves as Music Director for the Philadelphia Orchestra, Quebec's Orchestre Métropolitain, and the Metropolitan Opera in New York.

Lang Lang - A renowned Chinese pianist who has played with major symphonies throughout the world.

National Center for Performing Arts (aka "the Egg") - The largest performance space in Asia, known for its modern architecture, unique shape, and enormous size. (For more, see [NCPA Slideshow](#))

Tan Dun - An innovative Chinese composer, he won both an Oscar and a Grammy for the music featured in Ang Lee's 2004 movie, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. He also wrote music for the awards ceremonies at the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

Eugene Ormandy - The Hungarian-born conductor of the Philadelphia Orchestra from 1938 to 1980.

Stradivarius – Stringed instruments made in 17th or 18th century Italy by the Stradivari family. Considered the best in the world in terms of sound quality, they are worth millions of dollars.

Setting the Stage

Share the following quotation from Eugene Ormandy, “I’m a firm believer that music, great music is universal and through great music many people become friends who were originally hating enemies.”

Ask students if they agree with this idea and if they can think of any examples of music bringing people together across barriers such as age, race, nationality, language, etc. Can they also think of examples of music driving people apart?

Viewing the Film

Explain that the film will show examples of music both bringing people together and causing conflict. Ask them to keep track of examples as they watch. (See below for possible responses)

Music Bringing People Together	Music Causing Conflict
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In opening scenes, people of different races, ages, and nationalities are among both the performers and the audience. • Jindong is immediately taken with Beethoven’s music when his friend plays it for him on his gramophone. • When Tan Dun first hears symphony music in a rice field, he is “seduced” by the Philadelphia Orchestra. • The 2016 reunion of American and Chinese musicians illustrates the close bonds between the musicians. • An American oboe player gave a Chinese player a box of reeds. • Eugene Ormandy guest conducted the Central Philharmonic during rehearsal; a Chinese musician recalls how he could communicate with just a gesture or a look. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Western music banned during Cultural Revolution. • Red Guards burned music and instruments. • Madame Mao wanted the Philadelphia Orchestra to play Beethoven’s 6th Symphony (the pastoral) rather than the 5th (about fate).

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An American musician gave a Chinese musician a complete set of the sheet music for Mendelsohn’s string quartets. • At a concert attended by Madame Mao, the Philadelphia Orchestra played both a Chinese march and “Stars and Stripes.” 	
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After Watching

Reviewing the Content

In pairs or small groups, have students share their notes on music as the source of harmony and of discord. Then, pairs/groups will share whether they agree with the Ormandy quotation. They should be able to support their view with specific examples.

For Further Discussion

Toward the end of the full film, Yannick Nézet Séguin wonders aloud what Beethoven, who lived in Germany and Austria from 1770 to 1827, would make of his music being performed by an American orchestra, accompanied by a Chinese chorus, led by a Canadian conductor, and performed in a Chinese concert hall. What do you think might please or displease Beethoven about this scenario?

Primary Source Activity

Show or hand out copies of the program for the concert given by the Central Philharmonic on September 13, 1973, attended by members of the Philadelphia Orchestra. The selections must have been chosen with extreme care, given that this would be the first activity for the newly arrived Americans. Additionally, culture in China was tightly controlled by Jiang Qing (Madame Mao).

https://web.archive.org/web/20181026182516/http://www.library.upenn.edu/images/exhibits/music/ormandy_china/7_1a.jpg or see pages 6-8.

- Note that the concert opened with a Chinese chorus singing *America the Beautiful*. Why might have they chosen to open with an American song? Why *America the Beautiful* rather than *The Star-Spangled Banner*, our national anthem?
- Distribute copies of the lyrics to *America the Beautiful* and ask students to name aspects of the United States that are highlighted in the song. List responses. (Possible answers include scenic beauty, natural abundance, brotherhood, freedom, rule of law, heroic sacrifice/patriotism, cities, worthiness of God’s grace.)
- Then, ask students to work in pairs or small groups to examine the song titles and sources in the rest of the program. What aspects of China are emphasized? (Possible answers include natural beauty of the landscape, traditional folklore, communal farming, reverence for the Red Army and Chairman Mao.)

- As a whole class, or in pairs or small groups, make a Venn Diagram comparing the American and Chinese themes evoked by the Central Philharmonic concert. What conclusions can be reached about the differences and similarities between the two nations? Why might the Chinese have scheduled this concert as the Philadelphia Orchestra's first activity after arriving in China?

Written Response

Students will write a journal entry or letter in the voice of a member of the Philadelphia Orchestra who participated in the 1973 tour of China. They can write from the perspective of either an American or Chinese musician. Questions to be addressed may include:

- What most surprised them about how they were received in China?
- How has their encounter with Chinese people changed their perspective on the country? Have their political views changed?
- What did they think of the performances they heard by Chinese musicians and how Chinese reacted to their performances?
- What were the best and worst aspects of the experience?
- What are their greatest hopes and worst fears about the future relationship between the United States and the PRC?

For further information about China 1973 Philadelphia Orchestra trip, see:

<https://www.nytimes.com/1973/09/15/archives/philadelphians-a-big-success-in-their-first-concert-in-china.html>

<https://www.inquirer.com/arts/philadelphia-orchestra-china-tour-1973-mao-beijing-20190509.html>

https://web.archive.org/web/20181024015151/http://www.library.upenn.edu/exhibits/music/ormandy_china/

<https://whyy.org/articles/cranes-bicycles-and-beethovens-6th-philadelphia-orchestra-remembers-1973-in-beijing/>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/08/world/asia/08orchestra.html>

<https://americandiplomacy.web.unc.edu/2012/06/the-philadelphia-orchestras-1973-china-tour/>

For images of early 1970s China:

<https://cross-currents.berkeley.edu/e-journal/issue-23/chen>

Article by Daniel Webster, a journalist who traveled with the Philadelphia Orchestra *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Sunday, October 7, 1973

CONCERT

PRESENTED BY
THE CENTRAL PHILHARMONIC SOCIETY
September 1973 Peking

PROGRAMME

1. Chorus

1. America the Beautiful *Samuel A. Ward*
2. Young Guard *Soviet song composed during
the period of the October
Revolution*
3. Song for Motherland *Wang Sin*

Conductor: Yen Liang-kun

Piano accompaniment: Hsu Fei-hsing

Wood-pipe

2. Sheng Solo

1. The Red Flower of Ta-Chai
Type Blooms Everywhere *Music by Hu Tien-chuan*
2. Patrol on the Grasslands *Music by Yuan Yeh
Hu Tien-chuan
Wu Juei*

Soloist: Hu Tien-chuan

3. Er-hu Solo

1. River Water *Folk tune of the Northeast*
2. Delivering Public Grain Joyfully *Music by Ku Wu-hsiang
Meng Ching-ching*

Soloist: Ming Whei-fen

4. Cheng Solo

1. The Evening Songs From
the Fishing Boats *Ancient Melody arranged
by Lo Shu-hua*
2. Celebrating Lantern Festival *Folk tune of Honan Province*

Soloist: Wang Li

5. Piano Solo

1. Flower Drum *Music by Chu Wei*
2. The White-haired Girl *arranged by Liu Shih-kun*

Soloist: Liu Shih-kun

6. Vocal Solo (Selections from the Peking Opera "The Red Lantern")

1. My Path Forward for Ever
2. Hatred in My Heart Sprouts a Hundredfold

Soloist: Li Wei-kang

Suo-na obbligato: Sung Pao-tsai

~ ~ **INTERVAL** ~ ~

7. Pan-hu Solo

1. The Red Army Has Come Back *Wuan Wuan Tone—tune of the folk opera of Northern Shensi*
2. The Grand Opening *Pang-chi music—tune of the folk opera of Honan Province*

Soloist: Liu Ming-yuan

8. Pi-pa Solo

1. Liu Yang River *Folk tune of Hunan Province*
2. Ambushes on All Sides *Ancient melody*

Soloist: Liu Teh-hai

9. Set Chairman Mao's Five Poems to Music

(Chorus and symphony orchestra) *Music by Tien-Feng*

- 1) Snow
- 2) Against the First "Encirclement" Campaign
- 3) Loushan Pass
- 4) Mount Liupan
- 5) The Capture of Nanking by the People's Liberation Army