



HISTORY MAKING PRODUCTIONS  
presents

## *Beethoven in Beijing*

Produced by Sam Katz  
Co-directed by Jennifer Lin & Sharon Mullally

### **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 17<sup>th</sup> or 18<sup>th</sup> 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)

<b>Music Bringing People Together</b>	<b>Music Causing Conflict</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• In opening scenes, people of different races, ages, and nationalities are among both the performers and the audience.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Western music banned during Cultural Revolution.</li><li>• Red Guards burned music and instruments.</li></ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Jindong is immediately taken with Beethoven’s music when his friend plays it for him on his gramophone.</li> <li>● When Tan Dun first hears symphony music in a rice field, he is “seduced” by the Philadelphia Orchestra.</li> <li>● The 2016 reunion of American and Chinese musicians illustrates the close bonds between the musicians.</li> <li>● An American oboe player gave a Chinese player a box of reeds.</li> <li>● Eugene Ormandy guest conducted the Central Philharmonic during rehearsal; a Chinese musician recalls how he could communicate with just a gesture or a look.</li> <li>● An American musician gave a Chinese musician a complete set of the sheet music for Mendelsohn’s string quartets.</li> <li>● At a concert attended by Madame Mao, the Philadelphia Orchestra played both a Chinese march and “Stars and Stripes.”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Madame Mao wanted the Philadelphia Orchestra to play Beethoven’s 6<sup>th</sup> Symphony (the pastoral) rather than the 5<sup>th</sup> (about fate).</li> </ul>
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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](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://web.archive.org/web/20181024015151/http://www.library.upenn.edu/exhibits/music/ormandy_china/)

<https://why.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

# Ego Has Disappeared in China; Well, Almost Disappeared

By DANIEL WEBSTER  
*of The Inquirer Staff*

In the utopian society, ego will be only a dim echo in the memory of the oldest man. The need for the I will have disappeared as a society of equals evolves, and satisfaction at achievement will be overshadowed, replaced by the joy of group enhancement.

This is the society envisioned in the People's Republic of China, and how far that society has gone down the road of sublimated ego is a measure of the nation's religious adulation of Mao Tse-tung.

Many of the external expressions of ego have disappeared. Dress is nearly uniform. Men and women wear the dusty blue coats and trousers and caps to work and change to dark gray jackets and trousers for dress events. Visitors look in vain for some glint on the Green military uniforms for a sign of rank or citation for merit or bravery. Even corporate enterprise has lost the imaginative names that once graced their storefront. No longer can shoppers visit the east wind department store — it now is Department Store No. 6 or 16.

There remains the fundamental paradox of such belief. History, it is argued in China now, is the reflection of the masses. Emersonian replies that history may be the lengthened shadow of a man are brushed aside. Yet China's 24 year rise since the liberation appears to the west to be the enormously lengthened shadow of Mao.

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There is, in the Chinese mind, enough elasticity to absorb both concepts and balance them without sensing a crippling contradiction. Whether that elasticity can apply to Cma's artists remains to be seen.

During the Philadelphia Orchestra's 10-day stay in Peking and Shanghai, they were in close association with their counterparts in the Central Philharmonic Orchestra and the Shanghai Ballet Orchestra. Composers, conductors, instrumentalists, singers and principal dancers were their companions. The warmth and cordiality they showed brought players continually to the same question: how can the artist function while trying not to express himself?

The whole basis of western art is extension of individual perception. For the Chinese, the argument is neatly inverted. "For whom?" is the philosophical basis, and the answer is that art is for the masses. This implies that the ego has no place since the artist must be able to sense what the masses want and

simply be the channel for its creation.

For us, the argument doesn't wash. And for the Orchestra members, it was plain that the concept does not work in actuality. Yin Cheng-chung, the pianist who appeared three times with the Philadelphia during the tour, is a classic example. This 32-year-old virtuoso reminded them of Daniel Barenboim, both in temperament and pianistic flourish. He is simply a member of the Central Philharmonic, one of the performers when the ensemble goes out to the factories and the farms to play.

He is far from an ordinary performer. He began playing at six, following the example of an older sister, and did not have professional training until he was 12. "Very late," he agrees. "and I began when I was in a middle school attached to a conservatory in Fukien province."

He followed that with three years' study in Leningrad and stepped from there to a first prize in the Vienna Competition of 1959 and second in the Tchaikovsky Competition in 1962, sharing the prize with Philadelphia's Susan Starr.

"Before the cultural revolution, I had played in Finland, Austria, Eastern Europe," he said.

He had the usual repertory — Liszt, Beethoven, Rachmaninoff, Mozart. "I didn't specialize," he said.

But careerism is a word in China that implies the individual places himself above the masses, and Yin has, since the cultural revolution, devoted himself to composing.

"I did part of the 'Yellow River Concerto,'" he conceded. It turns out he was the composer, but members of the Central Philharmonic had helped orchestrate it.

"I'm trying to restore our ancient music in piano transcriptions. There is much there waiting for us. You see, we are trying to find our own way to a real Chinese music," he said.

He was careful to say that his appearances with the Philadelphia Orchestra excited him because it was a chance to promote friendship between the two nations.

Yin has had personal honors at home. His picture is on a postage stamp, playing for a singer, and his recording of



Yin Cheng-chung, the pianist who appeared with the Philadelphia Orchestra in China

his life is aimed toward taking the revolutionary Chinese music to the workers, a sublimation of self.

As China opens more and more to western cultural groups, it will be harder to maintain the selflessness of the Maoist position. The artist has always expressed, through his distinctive gifts and insights, a part of the emotion of his time. To abandon that responsibility to group creation or to use it to mirror a consensus may finally weaken the art beyond recognition. It is a central problem the Chinese musicians face as they work to define their own art and their place in it.

the "Yellow River Concerto," one of the great hits in China now, carries his picture on the jacket. He will play in Japan this fall, and his eyes lighted up at the suggestion from Eugene Ormandy and manager Boris Sokoloff that he visit the United States for concerts. "It would have to be arranged," he said, and the arrangements will reflect a governmental decision at a high level.

Philadelphia regarded Yin as a major talent. Like the other members of the Philharmonic, he does not play western music in public. He warms up backstage with Beethoven Sonatas. His short, thick hands barely encompass a ninth, but the unusual stretch between his index finger and little finger give him an agility that more than compensates for a short span.

For us the question was his ability to maintain the repertory when he does not exercise it in public. For him, the question was how his playing could enhance the masses — but he clearly wanted an invitation to play here.

His colleague, pianist Liu Shih-kun, was second in the Tchaikovsky Competition in 1958, the year Van Cliburn won. Liu made a significant gesture in the Orchestra's first day in Peking when he played Liszt's Sixth Rhapsody after doing two Chinese works. When had Liszt last appeared on a program? No one could recall, and his performance revealed how much a diet of popular Chinese music could weaken a performance of a western showpiece. If it was a sign that he and Yin could return to western classics, it left us hopeful, but these individual performers appear to be a long way from being able to take up careers of their own.

Conductor Li Teli-lun, also an alumnus of Russian training, is in a similarly difficult position. As a conductor, his role is to impress an interpretation on his players, itself a contradictory position in this society. Conducting is an expression of ego, yet Li writes in "China Reconstructs" that

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# CONCERT

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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