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Three talented composers reveal how Chinese culture and tradition inform their music and how it can have global appeal

才華洋溢的作曲家揭示融入中國文化和傳統的音樂如何打動全球樂迷

TEXT/撰文 PERCY MAK / 麥慰宗

"It is expressed naturally in my music. I don't have to make an effort to present it," says Ng of his Chinese heritage

伍卓賢在談及中國文化背景時說：「不用特別去想也會自然地在音樂中流露出來。」



Melody maker

A multi-talented instrumentalist who studied music at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Ng Cheuk-yin's work includes classical, traditional Chinese music, pop, jazz and musicals. He also composes for theatre, dance performances, films and TV shows.

For some, listening to Chinese music is an experience to explore 5,000 years of Chinese history and culture. But Hong Kong-born Ng is more interested in what his compositions generally express than the cultural context of Chinese instruments. To deliberately think about Chinese culture when composing is too much of a burden for him.

"I'm Chinese and Chinese culture forms part of my day-to-day life," says Ng, who is often commissioned by the Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra. "It is expressed naturally in my music. I don't have to make an effort to present it."

For Ng, the term "traditional Chinese music" calls to mind Chinese operas with a strong regional flavour and Chinese percussion music, which is one of his strengths. These elements occasionally feature in his work, but only in terms of the underlying concept rather than the music per se.

For example, in his first *sheng* ensemble *July*, he combined the traditional *chuida* (wind and percussion) technique and *sizhu* (string and wind instruments) music to present the Chinese perspective on life and death under the theme of the July Chinese Ghost Festival. Commissioned by the Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra, the piece was performed at the Hong Kong Art Festival in March as part of the festival programme *Music about China VI*. Ng was on stage to play the *sheng*, an instrument he has been playing for two decades.

Dating back more than 3,000 years, the *sheng* has the ability to provide two sounds at the same time, creating a harmony. Ng says he likes its strikingly clear, metallic sound, which is why the *sheng* is frequently featured in his works.

When composing a piece, Ng tries to dabble in new things, whether in terms of the musical form, harmony, style, tone or rhythm. "I mull over every aspect. For example, I will investigate whether certain fun ideas have been done by someone else or not."

All this hard work is driven by the young composer's desire to identify better and unique sounds. For Ng, composing is a thoughtful journey. The farther he goes, the more fruitful the journey gets.

笙歌妙韻

香港全能音樂人伍卓賢（別名伍賢）的作品類型繁多，包括古典、中樂、流行曲、爵士樂、音樂劇等，他又為劇場、舞蹈、電影及電視作曲。畢業於香港中文大學音樂系的他，師從陳永華教授，既是一位笙演奏家，亦擅長聲樂與填詞。

不少樂迷欣賞中樂時，往往愛在其中尋索中國味道，期望徜徉於悠悠五千年的文化中。伍賢多次獲香港中樂團委約創作，他關心表達什麼和音樂設計，多於探索中國樂器的文化背景。他說：「自己是中國人，平時接觸中國文化，不用特別去想也會自然地在音樂中流露出來。」他覺得刻意思考文化反會帶來包袱。

要說中國文化，從傳統到現在，有漢族又有少數民族的，豐富宏大。談到傳統，伍賢馬上想到他熟悉的打擊樂或富有地方色彩的戲曲，然而說到用於創作，他強調不會直接挪用，卻愛在意念和手法上運用。

如今年3月，香港中樂團為香港藝術節節目《樂旅中國VI》演出，委約伍賢創作樂曲《七月》。《七月》寫的是關於農曆七月的鬼節：「中國人想法中人鬼兩個世界的並存」，透視中國人的生死觀。這是伍賢的第一首笙協奏曲，亦由他親自吹笙，當中他運用了傳統中樂常用的吹打樂和絲竹音樂元素。笙這樂器已有三千多年歷史，早於殷代甲骨文（公元前15世紀）已有記載，它同時可以奏出兩音以上，故可吹奏和聲。笙在伍賢各種創作中經常出現，他笑稱這種聲音清亮，感染力強的樂器陪伴他20多年，必然「偏心」。

伍賢說每次創作都會作新嘗試，如曲式、和聲、風格、音色和節奏等。「其實在任何方面我都嘗試思考，例如有沒有一些得意的念頭是以前沒有人做過的？」出於一意孤行要找更好更特別的聲音，這位年輕作曲家視創作如有趣的思考之旅。盼望這位音樂旅人不斷出發，愈走愈遠，為樂迷帶來更多美妙的收穫。

Ng displays his prowess on the *sheng* during the *Music about China VI* performance in March

伍卓賢在3月舉行的《樂旅中國VI》展現其出色的笙樂造詣



East goes West

World-renowned Chinese composer Guo Wenjing was born in Sichuan Province and built his career in Beijing. Sichuan and other regional operas often feature in his works, which are characterised by a vibrancy and grandeur that transcends cultural barriers and have won the hearts of music lovers at home and abroad.

Guo's music covers a wide spectrum of genres, from opera (*Diary of a Madman*, *Night Banquet*, *Fengyiting* and *The Poet Li Bai*) and symphony (*Shu Dao Nan*) to symphonic poetry (*Suspended Coffins on the Cliffs in Sichuan*). Many of his creations have been performed abroad, perhaps most notably *Diary of a Madman*, which was the first Chinese-language opera produced in Europe, and four other operas that have made it to the West. Solo concerts featuring his scores have also been staged in Beijing, Hong Kong, Edinburgh, Paris, Cologne and Amsterdam.

"I consider the strength and weakness of Chinese instruments and work out how to play up the strength and play down the weakness," Guo says of his creative process. "I will rethink whether a weakness is really a weakness or has been misunderstood as such. I ask if it is actually a special feature that can help me compose."

Guo believes Chinese music is a fascinating stew of influences and its tradition is a reflection of everything that has happened throughout the history of Chinese music. Over the years, he has explored potential sounds for instruments and the sound effects of different ensembles.

Another big feature of Guo's music is percussion, which he says has been an integral part of Chinese ensemble music since ancient times. "In Western instrumental ensemble music, it wasn't until the 18th century that a small number of percussion instruments came into being and they became important only in the 20th century," Guo says. "In China, percussion was the protagonist of ensemble music in and outside the imperial court during the Shang [1766-1122 BC] and Zhou [1046-256 BC] Dynasties. The sounds of bell, chime, drum and cymbal are all very typical in Chinese ensembles."

As a prolific composer, Guo is never short of ideas and his source of inspiration has a moral dimension to it. "I draw inspiration from the flux of emotions in my heart triggered by goodness and evil," he says.



Guo Wenjing's World of Chinese Music was a big hit at the 37th Hong Kong Arts Festival

在第37屆香港藝術節，《郭文景的中樂世界》廣受樂迷歡迎

東風西漸

世界知名的中國作曲家郭文景在四川省出生，在北京建立他的音樂事業。他的作品養分大多取自四川及地方戲曲，風格鮮活獨特，又具大氣，超越文化界限，大受國內外樂迷喜愛。

郭文景的作曲範圍非常廣泛，體裁包括歌劇（《狂人日記》、《夜宴》、《鳳儀亭》、《李白》）、交響樂（《蜀道難》）和交響詩（《川崖懸葬》）等。他的四齣中文歌劇作品屢見於西方舞台，其中《狂人日記》更是首齣全由歐洲製作的中文歌劇。在國內外也經常有樂團演奏他的其他音樂創作；除了北京和香港，愛丁堡、巴黎、科隆、阿姆斯特丹等城市都曾舉辦過與他相關的個人音樂會。

這位被譽為多產的作曲家進行創作時，會作一連串思考。「我要考慮中國樂器的特點，怎麼揚長避短？」郭文景說：「更進一步，我會考慮這真的是短處？還是人們對它有誤解？會不會所謂短處其實是特點，可作為我的一個創新點？」

他又會考慮中國樂器合奏的發展歷程，看看還能創出什麼獨特設計。郭文景認為中國音樂應該用海來形容，它在歷史演進中海納百川，而郭文景覺得所謂中樂的傳統就是中國音樂歷史上發生的一切。面對創作，非傳統和創新是郭文景對自己的基本要求，他做過不少嘗試，如擴展樂器的可能性及創新合奏的整體音響效果等等。

熟悉郭氏作品的人經常在樂曲中找到扣人心弦的打擊樂，打擊樂是他愛用的元素嗎？作曲家卻說那是中樂合奏常用的。「在西方的器樂合奏中，到18世紀才開始出現極少量打擊樂器，直到20世紀才在西方合奏中成為重要樂器。」郭文景解說：「在中國，從商周開始，打擊樂就是合奏中的主角，不論宮廷民間，莫不如此，因此鐘磬鼓鉦之聲是中國式器樂合奏的典型特徵。」

產量豐沛，哪來源源不絕的靈感？作曲家說：「我的靈感來自善和惡在我内心所激發的情感之湧。」

Photos: Arts Festival Gothic Heart - HKCO

Guo Wenjing's ground-breaking *Diary of a Madman* was the first opera in which European actors all performed in Chinese

郭文景的《狂人日記》成為首齣由歐洲演員用中文演出的歌劇



"I draw inspiration from the flux of emotions in my heart triggered by goodness and evil"

「我的靈感來自善和惡在我内心所激發的情感之湧」



Jeffrey Ching's *Horologia Sinica* revels in its multicultural roots and allusions to Northern Song Dynasty history

莊祖欣的《渾天昏君》取材自北宋歷史典故，並貫徹其多元文化根源

Mix it up

Composer Jeffrey Ching's multicultural background plays a vital role in shaping his music. Born to a Chinese Buddhist family in the Philippines, he studied music and Sinology at Harvard University, and philosophy and composition at Cambridge and London Universities. A British citizen, he currently lives in Germany.

Ching recently penned the composition *Horologia Sinica* for the Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra, which premiered at the Hong Kong Arts Festival in March featuring Andiòn Fernàndez as the soprano soloist. It was an interesting experience for Ching as it revealed the “dichotomy” between the orchestra and Chinese culture. “China is an ancient civilisation facing modern challenges in the 21st century,” he says. “The Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra uses some traditional Chinese instruments to perform some highly challenging modern music from different regions. It was on this basis that I tried to create a dualistic quality for the piece – it should be both traditional and modern.”

Horologia Sinica is about three prominent cultural elements of the Northern Song Dynasty: the armillary sphere created during that era, imperial music and the “slender gold” calligraphy of Song Emperor Huizong, a talented artist who presided over the catastrophic collapse of the Northern Song.

One would expect the performance of a score about the Song Dynasty to feature instruments from that era. But because many such instruments have been lost to history, Ching had to think out of the box. For example, he used percussion to denote the sound of an armillary sphere and asked the orchestra to work from music scales similar to those used in Song music.

“These unexpected sounds are not Chinese at all,” he says. “Rather it’s a kind of Western avant-garde music. With a variety of features coming together, you can’t really define the composition as a traditional or modern piece.”

Ching says his creative style is marked by a sense of rootlessness. “Every composition has its own unique cultural background. I am carefree in my way of composing because I don’t have a single cultural background.”

Nevertheless, Chinese history and culture have been a major source of inspiration for Ching. His opera *The Orphan* is based on a play from the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368) of the same name, and the main tune of the symphony piece, *Echo of the Ming Pitch-Pipes*, comes from temple music in the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644).



Chinese history has been a major source of inspiration for Ching, seen onstage with the Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra

與香港中樂團同台演出的莊祖欣經常以中國風作為靈感泉源

多元創意

多元文化絕對是莊祖欣的個人優勢及創作特色。生於菲律賓佛教華人家庭的莊祖欣，先後於美國哈佛、英國劍橋及倫敦大學修讀音樂、漢學及哲學。擁有英籍護照的他，現時與西班牙菲律賓混血妻子旅居德國。

莊祖欣今年3月為香港中樂團譜寫中樂作品《渾天昏君》，他以此為例，暢談創作中樂的心得。作曲家覺得中國文化和香港中樂團具有二元對立特質，他說：「中國是個面對21世紀挑戰的古代文明，香港中樂團的傳統樂器則用於演奏各地難度甚高的當代音樂；因此想到這次創作也要擁有二元性—古今並存。」

由中樂團和女高音費安倫合演的《渾天昏君》取材自北宋時建造的渾天儀、當時的宮廷音樂及徽宗的瘦金體書法。宋徽宗是出色的藝術家，但背負亡國之責，樂曲以此定名。由於宋代樂器失傳，作曲家用敲擊樂呈現渾天儀的聲音，用自創幾何公式轉化書法為旋律，並要求中樂團調出與宋樂相若的音階。「創作出不少意料之外的聲音，不是典型中樂，卻有點似西方前衛音樂，這些特色共冶一爐，難以界定樂曲為全然古代或全然當代。」莊祖欣笑說。

莊祖欣在菲律賓及美國成長，兩地都是沒有獨特古樂的多元文化熔爐，這位華裔作曲家慶幸自己因此不受約束。由於成長於大城市，小時從未聽過任何民謡，遑論中國的，不過由於家人信佛，反而受到梵唱薰陶。莊祖欣打趣地說：「當今有多少位歐洲或中國大陸作曲家小時候聽過這些？」他認為自己的創作方式傾向於無根。「每項作品都創出自己獨有的文化背景，我任意發揮，因為我正是沒有單一的背景。」

縱然作品流著多元文化血液，中國風經常是莊祖欣的靈感泉源。歌劇《趙氏孤兒》取材同名元代雜劇，交響曲《明律回音》主旋律取材明代寺廟音樂。音樂本是國際語言，具有多元文化背景的音樂更具宇宙性。■