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絲綢之路上的琵琶行

「大弦嘈嘈如急雨，小弦切切如私語。

嘈嘈切切錯雜彈，大珠小珠落玉盤。」

一首白居易的《琵琶行》，將中國傳統樂器琵琶的魅力描繪成一曲千古絕唱。我們將帶您走進著名琵琶演奏家吳蠻的音樂世界，撥動那繞樑的弦音。



現代琵琶的祖先是在公元4世紀時由波斯通過絲綢之路傳入中國的。

偶然點開了一個YouTube視頻，在一座似乎是教堂的建築中，兩位演奏家正在上演琵琶與笙的合奏。表演的曲目是中國民樂代表作之一《金蛇狂舞》。坐在大廳高高穹頂下的觀眾都是西方面孔，背景中的玻璃花窗投下五彩斑斕的光影。這位琵琶演奏家正是吳蠻，她與搭檔配合默契，技巧高超，神情沉醉在音樂的節拍和旋律中，仿佛已經完全融化在了樂音裏。一曲終結，臺下的觀眾顯然被臺上的表演深深感

染，掌聲雷動。隨他們一起被感動的，還有屏幕前的我。將中國傳統民樂表演帶到西方社會，並獲得了如此高的認同感，作為海外華裔，我為中華傳統文化和藝術得到弘揚而感動，也為吳蠻而驕傲。

作為一位旅居海外多年的民樂演奏家，吳蠻的音樂中似乎有著比中國當下許多演奏家更濃烈的中國韻味。好奇和感動之餘，我們向吳蠻發出了採訪邀約，希望能從她這裏探究到琵琶這件古老樂器的更多秘密。

Jade ThaiCatwalk/Shutterstock.com

Pipa on the Silk Road

A famous pipa player revives long lost melodies after leaving the mainland and discovers what it means to be a musician.

English text by J.H. White, Chinese text by Cherry Chen



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Opposite and above: The pipa passed from Persia to China. Like Wu Man's instrument, her story also unites the East and West.



Photo by by Call The Shots Photography

著名琵琶演奏家吳蠻將琵琶藝術介紹到了當今西方社會。
Wu Man is one of today's living pipa maestros.

Like pelting rain, the bass strings give a deep and raucous timbre,
Like a whisper, the treble strings spring a light and gentle tone;
Notes high and low a composition form as she played,
It was like countless beads large and small falling onto a jadeite plate.

—*Ode to a Lady's Pipa*, a play by 8th-century Tang Dynasty poet Bai Juyi

Wu Man has made a name for herself as one of the living pipa maestros of our time, and even though she left her birthplace of China years ago, her music continues to retain a more authentic, traditional Chinese character than many of the country's own performers today.

Growing up, Wu's love affair with the traditional instrument began in her hometown of Hangzhou, where she first began playing, and she would eventually attend the Central Conservatory of Music Middle School in Beijing.

In the 1980s, after China had opened its borders to foreigners, the Central Conservatory of Music (CCM) hosted a special open class with American violinist Isaac Stern, known for his mastery of the instrument as well as discovery of young talent such as Yo-Yo Ma.

The auditorium was packed; teachers and students from CCM and other art schools crowded outside the hall. Wu, still a high school student, was among those without a seat, though her excitement to hear from the music icon couldn't be dampened.

Master Stern didn't directly comment on the performances of the violin students on the stage; instead, he asked them questions that would forever alter Wu's life path.

He asked, "Why do you want to be a musician? When you played, did you feel the audience in the last row in the hall? What did you want to express to them?"

"I started learning the pipa at 9 years old," Wu says, "but I had never considered these questions. I only thought about going to school, taking exams, and looking for a job after graduating."

"Mr. Stern's questions made me feel that Western and Chinese musicians are very different. So I wanted to go abroad."

When Wu made the decision to go abroad, she says, none of her friends and family understood her choice, questioning what she, a traditional Chinese musical instrument player, would do outside of China. The doubts didn't deter Wu. Once she graduated with a Master's degree from the Central Conservatory of Music, she decided to give up a career of performing and teaching at the school. Instead, she followed her heart and left to explore music in the United States.

"I was mainly curious and wanted to know what a musician is," she says.

The quintessential Chinese feeling

After arriving in New York, Wu said she was like a sponge, absorbing different music styles and forms. She learned about freelancing and that musicians didn't have to belong to an institution or school. "They can be independent and do their own art," she says.

The openness and tolerance of New Yorkers allowed Wu and her pipa to find a home among them. She explored other music and art forms, coming into contact with artists from all over the world: Central Asia, Africa, Japan, and South Korea.

"By understanding their music, I could better understand what makes the pipa unique in contrast to other traditional ethnic instruments. I could better appreciate the pipa's unique qualities when compared to other plucked instruments, such as guitars and banjos," she says.

The pipa is one of the most representative instruments of Chinese folk music. Its length of three

「音樂是一種跨越國界的語言，你會從音樂中發現人類的共性，這讓你用更廣闊、更全局的視野來看待問題，尊重世界上所有的文明和文化。」

尋找內心的答案

琵琶是中國民樂中最具代表性的樂器之一，它長度為三尺五寸，三尺象徵著天地人三才，五寸表現五行，四根弦則表現四時，其中蘊藏著中國傳統文化的智慧。「琵琶是一種外來的樂器，它是從波斯傳到中國的。它可以激昂高亢，也可以婉轉優美，很戲劇化，有出色的表現力。同時，演奏起來也是最難的。」說起自己學習琵琶的經歷，吳蠻覺得是個自然又偶然的過程。她父親的朋友恰好是位琵琶老師，見小吳蠻挺有音樂天賦，便收了她當學生。誰知吳蠻就此愛上了琵琶，一路從家鄉杭州彈到了北京的中央音樂學院附中。

上世紀八十年代的中國，久閉的大門終於敞開。這一天，中央音樂學院的一個禮堂中座無虛席，許多學院內和從全國各地趕來的藝術院校的師生們甚至沒有座位，站在了禮堂後面。在攢動的人頭中，還是高中生的吳蠻滿臉興奮地等待著接下來可能是她人生中最重要的一課。這堂公開課是美國小提琴家艾薩克·斯特恩來中國訪問期間，特別在中央音樂學院與中國音樂家和學生們進行的一場近距離交流。

當斯特恩大師開口講話時，他沒有直接點評臺上幾位小提琴學生的演奏，而是問了他們兩個讓吳蠻從心底感到無比震動的問題。「你們為甚麼要做音樂家？當你們演奏時，感受的大廳裏最後一排觀眾了嗎？你想表達給他們甚麼？」

「我從八、九歲開始學習琵琶，一路走過來，從未思考過這兩個問題。就是上學考試，畢業找工作，斯特恩先生的這兩個問題，讓我覺得西方音樂家和中國音樂家很不同，我想走出去看看。」吳蠻回憶說，當她說自己想出國時，周圍很多人不理解。大家都覺得作為一位中國傳統樂器演奏家，到國外去能做甚麼呢？但吳蠻沒有受這些質疑的影響。數年之後，她拿到了中央音樂學院的碩士學位，卻毅然放棄了留校任教這樣當時看來最光明的前程，選擇奔赴美國。

民族的才是世界的

「我主要懷著好奇心，想知道音樂家到底是甚麼。」回憶起當年決定出國，吳蠻說自己的想法其實很簡單。

「如果按照那條按部就班的路走，那以後的人生會很無聊。我希望能獲得更多的營養、更多見識。」到了紐約之後，吳蠻形容自己像是變成了一塊海綿，全世界各種不同的音樂風格、音樂形式全部匯聚在了那座大都市裏，令她應接不暇。「我第一次知道了Freelance這個詞，原來音樂家可以是自由職業者，他們不一定非要屬於某個機構，某個學校。他們可以獨立一個人，做自己的藝術。」

紐約海納百川的開放與包容，讓吳蠻和她的琵琶在這裏找到了一席之地，並在與其它音樂和藝術形式的接觸和交流中汲取著全新的養份，不斷成長。「來到國外之後，我接觸到了世界各地的藝術家，有中亞、非洲的，也有日本、韓國的，正是通過和他們對比，我才明白了琵琶和他們其他民族傳統樂器相比，與眾不同的地方，讓我把它同吉他和班卓琴這樣其它的彈撥樂器區分開，我更理解了甚麼叫民族的才是世界的。」

聽過吳蠻演奏琵琶的人，除了讚歎她高超的技巧，更受打動的還是曲中濃郁的中國韻味，那是源於中國傳統文化和美學的獨一無二的民族特質，如水墨畫中的留白，清茶的餘香，瓷器的溫潤，在每個樂音之間穿行繚繞，久久回味。「我現在演奏《春江花月夜》和當年做學生時完全不同了，我可以讓自己安靜下來，去講求其中的意境、韻味、留白和空間的畫面感。讓別人一聽就想到亭臺樓閣、小橋流水，我彈的曲子是帶有銀色的水聲的，有一種潤的感覺在其中，這就是一種中國人的感覺。」

復活唐代古曲

目前流傳的琵琶古曲，主要是清代整理的，總共不過二十多首。在2010年，吳蠻錄製了一張名為《光之無限》的專輯，其中收錄了十四首珍貴的唐代古琵琶曲，堪稱世界首創。「這張專輯是與一位阿肯色大學教授合作錄製的，是唐代琵琶剛流傳到中國時所做的曲子，其中有一部份是在敦煌的石窟中發現的，非常珍貴。」

遇到吳蠻之前，這位教授研究唐代古樂譜多年，但因古時樂譜都是採用的奏法記譜法（Tablature），如果不會彈奏琵琶，那其中描述的要把手放在哪根弦上，甚麼位置，是無法實踐的。這讓教授始終聽不到樂譜中的樂音，心中非常遺憾，研究也很受侷限。直



Photo by Kuandi Studio

紐約的開放性和創造力幫助吳蠻打磨了真正的中國風。The openness and creativity of New York helped Wu cultivate her authentic Chinese style and sound.



吳蠻與大提琴演奏家馬友友，和參加「絲綢之路」音樂計畫的音樂家們。 Wu Man and the Silk Road Ensemble with Yo-Yo Ma.

© Taeuck Kang

到認識了吳蠻，發現兩人簡直是天作之合，才終於讓這些埋藏千年的古樂曲重見天日。

「我們整整合作了八年。」復活古樂譜的過程並非一帆風順，古代的記譜非常簡略，每個音的長短，彈奏手法都沒有具體描述，需要反覆嘗試。更況且琵琶作為一種古老的樂器，歷史上一直在被調整改良。「琵琶一直都在變，現在看到琵琶頸部一根根叫做『品位』的橫樑，最初只有四根，現在已經加到二十二根了。儘管研究古曲曲譜的過程很不容易，但最終我們錄製成了這張專輯，真的非常激動。」

回想三十年前吳蠻初來海外時，她一定想不到會在北美找回了失落千年的唐代古曲，她更不會想到自己會與著名大提琴演奏家馬友友合作登上舞

臺，並共同組織了「絲綢之路」音樂計劃。此項目聯合了世界各地的藝術家，共同舉行音樂教學和演奏會等活動，以音樂為媒介促進文化交流。「我們沒有想到這個項目一做就是二十年，一開始就是純音樂的交流，後來越來越深入到文化中。音樂是一種跨越國界的語言，你會從音樂中發現人類的共性，這讓你用更廣闊、更全局的視野來看待問題，尊重世界上所有的文明和文化。」

接下來，吳蠻依然會不斷登上舞臺，為世界各地的觀眾們送上美妙的音樂。在當下這個瘟疫橫行的惶恐時期，也許在中國古代與「藥」字相通的「樂」會帶來某些神奇的心靈療愈功效，令人更有勇氣和意志去對未來懷有樂觀和積極的態度。

feet five inches represents the three realms—heaven, earth, and the underworld—and the five elements—wood, fire, earth, metal, and water, while the pipa's four strings represent the four seasons.

“Pipa is a foreign musical instrument. It passed to China from Persia. It can be high-pitched and high-spirited as well as graceful and beautiful. It is dramatic and highly expressive. At the same time, it is also very hard to play,” says Wu.

While Wu's mastery of the pipa places her at the top of her craft today, what really defines her style is an authentic Chinese sound and feel. Her music's cultural authenticity is like the rhythm of an ink painting, the aftertaste of good tea, or the warm feel of fine porcelain. The Chinese heritage in her music can be felt, lingering between each note, resonating.

“When I am playing ‘A Moonlit Night on the Spring River,’ my performance is completely different from when I was a student,” she says. “I want people who are listening to feel ancient buildings, pavilions, bridges, and flowing water. The piece I played is with a silver sound of water, a sense of moderation, the quintessential Chinese feeling.”

Reviving ancient Tang Dynasty melodies

Twenty widely known ancient pipa melodies hark back primarily to the Qing Dynasty. In 2010, Wu recorded an album called *Infinite Light*, containing 14 pipa melodies from the Tang Dynasty—China's Golden Age. This album—the first with pipa songs from this era—was recorded in collaboration with a professor at the University of Arkansas.

“They were melodies made when the pipa was first passed to China,” Wu says. “Some of them were found in the Dunhuang Caves and are very precious.”

Before meeting Wu, the professor had been studying ancient music scores of the Tang Dynasty for many years. These scores used tablature, a form of musical notation that marks the fingerings rather than note pitch. Since he couldn't play the pipa, he never knew how the ancient melodies actually sounded. Once he met Wu, they began the process of resurrecting these long lost compositions.

For eight years, they worked together, facing many challenges. The ancient music notation is very simple but lacks specific descriptions, such as the length of each note and the playing technique. Additionally, the design of the pipa has also been improved throughout history, slightly altering the sound.

“The pipa has been continually changing since ancient times. There were only four beams in the neck of the pipa at the beginning, but now there are 22,” she says.

Wu practiced the pieces over and over again, trying to unlock the intended melodies. “Although the process of studying the ancient music scores was not easy, in the end, we made it, and recorded this album. It's very exciting,” she says.

When Wu first travelled overseas 30 years ago, she never could have expected to revive ancient music from the Tang Dynasty while working in North America. Other unprecedented opportunities arose during her stay abroad, such as performing onstage with the famous Chinese American musician Yo-Yo Ma.

She and Ma and other musicians formed an ensemble called the “Silk Road Project,” which spanned 20 years, uniting artists from all over the world for joint activities such as music teaching and recitals, using music as a medium to promote cultural exchanges.

“We didn't expect to do this project for 20 years. At the beginning, it was just music exchanges. Later, it became more deeply about culture,” Wu says. “Music is a language that crosses borders. You will find the commonality of human nature in music, which makes you look at problems from a broader and more comprehensive perspective and respect all civilizations and cultures in the world.”

Wu will continue to step onto the stage, proffering the gift of her music to audiences around the world. In this stressful environment of the pandemic, she hopes the sound will bring society some much-needed peace and healing; a timely reminder of why, in ancient Chinese wisdom, the word “medicine” was synonymous with the word “music.”

