

Liu Fang

Soloist for *pipa* (Chinese lute) and *guzheng* (Chinese zither)



Liu Fang, a foremost representative of the younger generation of ***pipa*** (Chinese lute) soloists, is regarded as one of the leading *pipa* players in the world. Celebrated in the press as the “empress of *pipa*” (L'actualité, 2001), “divine mediator” (World, 2006), “the greatest ambassadress of the art of the *pipa*” (La presse, 2002), Liu Fang is known as “possessing virtuoso technique, grace and a unique empathy toward the music she plays – whether it is a traditional and folk tune or a modern Western composition” (All Music Guide, 2003).

Born in Kunming (China) in 1974, Liu Fang started learning the *pipa* at the age of six and soon began to perform in public as a child prodigy, including a performance for the Queen of England in 1985. In 1993 she graduated from the Shanghai Conservatory of Music where she also learnt the ***guzheng*** (Chinese zither). Since moving to Canada in 1996, Liu Fang has given concerts all over the world and has been performing solo recitals at prestigious venues such as the Théâtre de la Ville in Paris, the Philharmonic Hall of Liège, Belgium (2006), BBC concerts in London (2003, 2007), the Bath International Music Festival (2004) and the York Early Music Center (2008) and so on. She has built a remarkable artistic profile by captivating audiences and critics with her masterful, rich and deeply-spirited *pipa* playing as well as a wide ranging repertoire that

features music from the Chinese classical tradition, including pieces rarely heard, as well as contemporary works by composers from both China and the western countries.

Chinese Classical music often has thematic, poetic or philosophical classifications and is typically played solo, such as on the *guqin*, a seven-string zither, with over 3000 years of history, or the *pipa*, a lute with over 2000 years of history. The instruments demand not only a mastery of technique but a high degree of sensitivity to evoke the subtle sonorities and deep emotional expressions that rely on the left hand techniques (through, for instance, sliding, bending, pushing or crossing of the strings to produce typical singing effects and extreme dynamic ranges), where synchronized ensemble playing is virtually impossible. Liu Fang transmits in an expressive and graceful way the beauty of the Chinese traditional classical music, while drawing out the subtle sonorities of the *pipa* and the *guzheng*. Through the power and sensitivity of her playing, she gives a renewed interpretations of the ancient repertory, of the poetic as well as the martial styles. The growing admiration from listeners, experts and novices alike attest to the great appreciation and respect paid to this highly talented musician.

Besides the due tribute paid to the Chinese classical traditional music through her numerous recitals, national and international TV and Radio appearances as well as the distribution of her solo albums, Liu Fang has premiered new works by a number of accomplished composers, often performing with symphonic orchestras, string quartets as well as various ensembles. In fact, she has appeared in the spectacular world premier of R. Murray Schafer's opera *The Palace of the Cinnabar Phoenix*, playing outstanding solos on both the *pipa* and the *guzheng*. She has also premiered works by accomplished Canadian composers such as José Evangelista and Melissa Hui, and has performed works by Tan Dun and Zhou Long for pipa and orchestra.

After having completed her studies in Paris with Prof. Tran Van Khe on the principles of improvisation in various musical traditions, thanks to the support of Canada Council for the Arts, Liu Fang set out to explore new possibilities through daring collaborations aimed at reaching new horizons through the meeting of distinctively different cultures,

of east and west as well as ancient traditions and modernity. Since 2000 she has produced a series of concerts on a yearly basis in her "Silk and Steel Projects" ('Silk' represents the traditional culture of China whereas "steel" is a metaphor for modernity and western culture) with special invited guests from a number of traditions, thanks to the supports from the Canada Council for the Arts and Radio-Canada in Montreal. For instance, she has collaborated with internationally renowned musicians such as Prof. Tran Van Khe (vocal and Dan Tran, France/Vietnam), Malcolm Goldstein (violin, USA/Canada), Yoshio Kurahashi (Shakuhachi, Japan), Debashish Battarcharya (hindustani slide guitar, India), Fahan Sabbagh (oud, Germany/Syria), Lise Daoust (flute, Canada), Oliver Schroer (fiddle, Canada), Pham Duc Thanh (Dan Bau, Vietnam/Canada), Ziya Tabassian (Percussion, Persia/Canada) and others. Early this year, CBC TV dedicated a one hour program to a documentary film (BravoCanada production) about Liu Fang's collaboration with internationally renowned Mongolian long song singer Khongorzul Ganbaatar and Montreal based cellist Yegor Dyachkov.

She has so far produced five solo and five collaborative albums. Her latest album entitled "Silk Sound" (under the French label Accords Croises, 2006) featuring musical dialogues with Alla (Algeria), Ballake Sissoko (Mali), and Henri Tournier (India/France) has won her the honour of the prestigious **French Academie Charles Cros Award** (the French equivalent of Grammy or Juno). In 2001, Liu Fang was the only musician to receive the prestigious '**Future Generation Millennium Prize**' awarded by the Canada Council for the Arts to three of the top artists of all disciplines under 30 years of age. The words of the jury summed up her achievements rather succinctly: "Liu Fang's mastery of the pipa and the guzheng has established her international reputation as a highly talented young interpreter of traditional Chinese music. She aspires to combine her knowledge and practice of eastern traditions with western classical music, contemporary music and improvisation, thereby creating new musical forms, uniting different cultures and discovering new audiences."

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