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AN ONGOING REPORT ON JAZZ IN BEIJING

By Weihua ZHANG and royal hartigan

This summer, we, royal hartigan and Weihua Zhang, returned to Beijing after a two-year absence.¹ Logistical considerations associated with the performances given by royal's own ensemble prevented us from fully exploring the current jazz scene in Beijing, yet our experiences covered other aspects worth reporting.

Just as the sun rises and sets, some of the jazz clubs we visited two years ago no longer present jazz. The most prominent among them, the CD Jazz Cafe, had discontinued its jazz policy and, as we found when we visited on the night of July 1, 2001, there was a rock group consisting of two guitarists, electric bass, a drumset, and a female singer singing songs in Chinese. The audience had also changed; it comprised mostly Chinese youth, including a group raucously celebrating someone's birthday. The reason for the change was that the former partner, jazz saxophonist Liu Yuan, had sold his share, and the new owner wanted to change the music in order to draw more customers. The cozy San Wei Bookstore, which used to have good-quality Friday evening jazz also cut its programs and is currently presenting only traditional Chinese music on weekends.

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The front door of the Loft

Liu Yuan himself started another club called the "Loft" on Gong Ti Guan Road near the San Huan Road not far from the CD Cafe. It is a large complex with a small café in the front, a performing stage and couches inside, a western restaurant in the main hall, and a beer garden at the back. The atmosphere is cool and funky. Liu Yuan Quartet plays on every Thursday, a Chinese band and a Filipino band play on Friday and Saturday, but not jazz.

Some encouraging news for jazz lovers in China and the world is that this autumn there will be three jazz festivals in Beijing and some others in Dalian, Chengdu, and Xi'an. The Beijing Jazz Festival began in 1993 and was suspended in 2000 due to lack of sponsorship. As of now, this festival will be resumed, still run by the Yi Ren Culture & Arts Exchange Center. An offspring of the Beijing Jazz Festival is the Forbidden City International Jazz Festival, presented by Logistix International. The organizer of this festival, Udo Hoffmann, formerly worked for the Yi Ren Company, is very experienced in running the festival. This year they plan a focus on Italian jazz. The third festival is run by the US-China Jazz Connection, with a focus on performances by American groups. One of the groups coming this year is the quartet led by renowned saxophonist Joshua Redman. Thus, American jazz musicians will have chances to visit China and show their Chinese audiences a wider variety of world jazz.²

In support of this expansion, the Beijing Midi Contemporary Music School, a hotbed for musicians in the fields of Chinese jazz and other popular music, has developed into a significant institution that provides professional education for students. According to its brochure, in the first two years, guitar, bass, drumset, keyboard, saxophone, and vocals, are taught as six majors, along with fundamental courses such as music theory, musical appreciation, *solfeggio* and ear training, vocal skills, and rhythmic training. Thereafter, students turn to studies of various performing styles, including blues, rock 'n' roll, jazz, funk, and fusion. On July 4, Weihua interviewed Mr. Zhang Fan, the founder and president of the school, at the campus located at Fragrant Mountain, Beijing. Zhang is in his mid-thirties.

He has achieved a high reputation among many young people in Beijing, due to his successful career as well as his personal integrity and charm. In this interview, he provided me a background for the creation of this school (Appendix 1).

During our four-day tour in Beijing, royal kept a journal on his seven performances in six different venues that reflected the scope of the jazz scene in Beijing (Appendix 2). The six venues include an art salon in the downtown area, a restaurant and two clubs in the embassy region, Chaoyang district, and a conservatory and a cafe in the university region, Haidian district. A talented and diligent young pianist, Liu Xiaoguan, joined some of the performances. Liu is a two-year graduate of the Beijing Midi Contemporary Music School. According to royal's account, Liu's playing in the group proved the quality and level of the school's graduates.

Audiences for these performances came from different social circles. Most of them were intellectuals. After each performance, they showed us their appreciation of the music. Among their comments were these:

"I am not familiar with this music, but the musicians have successfully transmitted their love and passion to me through the music."

"I can't say I understand the music. But, I can hear the culture of another people in the music."

"The musical idioms are different from classical music; nevertheless, the expression of the music can get through to me."

Some performances lasted until midnight or even past two o'clock in the morning, yet the audience was still enthusiastic.



A concert at the Art Salon: royal hartigan, Wes Brown, David Bindman, and Weihua Zhang

An Interview of Zhang Fan by Weihua Zhang

Date: July 4th, 2001

Place: Beijing Midi Contemporary Music School, Fragrant Mountain, Beijing

Q: Can you tell me something about your family background, personal history, and so forth?

A: I was born on December 14, 1967 in Beijing. My father is a research fellow at the Institute of Psychology, Academy of Science. My mother is a teacher at the affiliated middle school of the People's University. I entered University in 1986 and graduated in 1990. I worked at the Center for the Development of Film Culture for a year, and then I quit my job to work at the music school.

Q: Can you tell me about your first contact with music?

A: My father went to Australia in 1980 as an exchange scholar. He sent me many tapes of rock 'n' roll music.

Q: Oh, he liked that kind of music himself?

A: He is a scientist. He didn't know much about music. But, he lived in a professor's home in Melbourne. The professor had a large collection of LPs, which he often played for my father. Whichever my father liked, the professor would make a copy for him. So I heard the Beatles' songs such as *Yesterday*, *Sailing*, *Hey Jude*, and etc. The melodies of these songs are so beautiful, I was totally captivated. I treasured those tapes and listened to them over and over again.

Q: Did you have music classes in your secondary school?

A: Yes, we did. But the teacher only taught us European classical music. Li Delun, the famous conductor of the former Central Philharmonic in Beijing, came to our school several times to lecture on classical music and composers such as Beethoven. At that time, classical music performing groups were making an effort to popularize classical music. So, he never talked about rock music.

Q: Did you ever learn to play an instrument?

A: Yes, I started on guitar in 1983. My mother bought one for me at an exhibition. I just tried to pluck the chords on the guitar and sang with the tapes. I didn't take formal lessons.

Q: When you sang those songs, did you feel pressure from school or neighbors for the reason that these are not healthy styles of music?

A: No.

Q: And your parents were not against your interest.

A: No. Both my parents love to sing. Since my childhood I heard my mom's singing of Soviet Russian songs such as *Kachusha*, and *The Little White Birch*. She

has a very good voice. My father was the president of the students' association of Peking University. He was profoundly active in music and athletics. They both supported me.

Q: So, you are very fortunate to grow up in such favorable circumstances. Besides rock 'n' roll, had you also heard black music and known something about what black music is?

A: No. I have never had contact with black music. All I've heard were rock 'n' roll songs influenced by black music, such as those of Paul Simon and Art Garfunkel, and an Argentinean song *Don't Cry for Me*.

In the middle school, I set up a band of five guitars. We all played and sang. At that time no drumset or other instruments were available. Our school once organized a singing contest. I chose to sing those rock songs such as *One Way Ticket* in English. People welcomed us so much that we sang eight songs. We stopped only after the provost closed the curtain and shouted: "No more, time is up!" We won the first prize and were very encouraged. Many fellow students still remember that contest because it was the first time they heard English songs accompanied with five guitars. So, it was quite a sensation. In college, I composed songs myself and won two prizes again.

Q: Which college did you go to?

A: I entered the Academy of Economy and Finance. After graduation I worked in the Central Bank. I felt that the work was very boring. So, I quit and found a job at the Center for the Development of Film Culture. Its function was to import and translate foreign films. I thought that with this institute I would work on things related to culture. However, after over one year, I felt that I'd like more to work with music. So, I quit again. I was thinking of organizing a band to perform and compose our own music. But I couldn't realize my ideal immediately. So, I stayed home for a year.

Later, I found the Midi Company by chance. Their business was selling musical instruments and computerized music programs. I often went there to try their synthesizers and workstations. That was around 1992-93. At that time, the company also gave training workshops for people who bought instruments and music programs from them. A girl named Lulu was in charge of the workshop. It was her idea to transform the workshop into a rock 'n' roll school. But after six months Lulu quit because of some disagreement with the company manager. So, the manager asked me to work there and take over the school. I didn't promise anything immediately. But I was thinking if I were head of the school then I could play the synthesizer every day. So, finally, I agreed to accept the job.

Q: It sounds like a sheer accident that you became the president of the Midi School, but I heard that you had training in both music and education.

A: My initial ambition was to organize an ensemble in order to write and perform music. So we could make recordings and become famous, as the dreams of many young people. Running the school appeared by chance. Before I took the job, I



Zhang Fan, royal hartigan, Wes Brown, and David Bindman

considered the matter seriously for six months. I thought that it would be a good thing to have a school for teaching popular and contemporary music because young people need that. Many people wanted to learn but had nowhere to go – no schools, no textbooks and no teachers. So, the longer I have worked at the school the more I thought that it is a significant career. If we

didn't provide the music education as it was, nobody else would. Since both my parents are educators and my mother is a most beloved teacher at her school, I favor education from my blood and feel that I have a responsibility for people.

Q: Now maybe you can tell me about the development of the school.

A: At the beginning, the Midi Company invested a hundred thousand Chinese *yuan* in equipment. Our schedule was in short-term sessions, each for three months. I spent some money to advertise in newspapers and music journals. Immediately, we had 130 students enrolled during the first term in early 1994. Our tuition was pretty low – 650 *yuan* per session at that time. But with 130 students, we could almost be self-sufficient.

Our school was located on the second floor of the Midi Company, with one classroom, a small recording studio, and an office of eight square meters. I, the president, was twenty-six years old. But from then on, the school has been being developed steadily.

Q: How much can a student learn in three months?

A: Three months was very short. But, at first, we didn't think we had enough material for yearlong study. In just three months, many students were introduced to this new realm of contemporary rock 'n' roll music. Most of the teachers were also pioneers of this new genre in China. They provided inspiration for students. Students focused on their main instrument only. After three months, we gave them material to continue their study by themselves.

Q: So, you have had a lot of graduates since then?

A: Yes, we have about two thousand graduates. At the end of 1996, we thought we should give the students more systematic training. So, from 1997, we changed the curriculum to a two-year period. At the same time we built new housing in Shangdi, the northern suburb of Beijing. We had classrooms, practice rooms, studios, rehearsal

halls, and students' dorms.

Q: How many students did you have then?

A: We still had about more than a hundred students for the two-year school. The tuition was raised to 7,000 *yuan* for two years.

Q: Are you still affiliated with the Midi Company?

A: No, we became independent. But the Midi Company still owns half of the stock in the school.

Q: After students' graduation, what kind of jobs are there for them?

A: They went in many different directions: Some of our best students organized their ensembles and played in hotel bars and clubs in Beijing. Some are working in recording companies. Some returned to the cities where they came from to teach. For example, there is a contemporary music school in Shanghai, staffed by the best of our two-year graduates. Many went back to their hometowns in the Northeast, Xinjiang and Qinghai minority regions to teach, by using textbooks and material from our school. Moreover, our graduates were hired by the Oriental Song and Dance Company and Beijing Song and Dance Company, since these companies also include contemporary popular music in their programs, instead of only performing classical music and folk music. Of course, some of the graduates didn't pursue a career in contemporary music. So, we are serving as an vehicle for the transmission of music.

Q: Are most students from the Beijing area?

A: No. Mostly, they came from other provinces. From the second year of their study, students are encouraged to form into groups. They have to play in jazz ensembles. The incoming students must pass an audition and then are divided into three classes A, B, or C, according to their level. Everybody must take large classes in theory, harmony, musicianship, and rhythmic training.

Q: Can you introduce some of your faculty members, since there wasn't any pre-existing faculty, graduates, or returning students from abroad.

A: Our bass teacher Huang Yong, for instance, is a member of the Liu Yuan Quartet and a graduate in music education from the Capital Normal University. He started in playing this kind of new music in the early nineties, and he is also self-taught. Our guitar teacher, Zhao Wei, was a former clarinetist at the Military Band of PLA. He started to play in the rock music style quite early and has a Rock 'n' Roll Touring Group. Long Long, another guitar teacher, used to be a student violinist at the Central Conservatory of Music, and he is the first guitar player in the Baojiajie Rock Group. Our saxophone teacher, Mr. Lu, is from the Central Opera and Ballet Company. So, all of our faculty have a background in classical music. They switched into contemporary rock and jazz music after this music was imported to Beijing in the late 1980s. They became attracted to it and started to learn playing in these styles by themselves. Right now, they are the best crops of musicians in

the Beijing rock and jazz music scene. For drumset, we have a Japanese teacher, a graduate of the Berklee Conservatory in Boston. He has been playing in Beijing for many years. None of these teachers are full-time. They all have a performing career. So, they can teach students about the real music world and music business.

Q: How about your teaching materials?

A: Some of them were recommended by jazz musicians from abroad who visited our school during jazz festivals. We also bought textbooks advertised in contemporary music magazines to which we subscribe. We translated and distributed those materials to teachers and students. The teachers also benefit from these systematic materials – they improved themselves during their teaching.

Q: I saw on your brochure that many musicians and specialists from abroad have visited your school and gave master classes and workshops. Do you have a plan of inviting specialists?

A: No. During jazz festivals in Beijing, participants of these festivals usually visit our school. Sometimes, foreign embassies send musicians from their countries to visit us. These visitors are all volunteers. It is their pleasure to meet the new generation of Chinese musicians.

Q: Have you built systematic exchange programs with the same kind of schools abroad?

A: Yes. We have connections with schools in Denmark, Japan, Cuba, and England. We are going to send students to Japan and Denmark. There is a National Richmond Music Conservatory in Denmark, which will accept our students.

Q: Do they grant scholarships to your students?

A: Yes, In this way we send our best students or, sometimes, teachers abroad. The T City School in Tokyo will waive a half of the tuition to our students. In Spain, there is an excellent jazz school in Barcelona. We will send them two students in this fall.

Q: Are these students bound by some agreements that they have to teach for a couple of years after they finish their studies?

A: No. That is too far away. I assume that they will all come back since competition in the popular music realm is so keen. It is hard for them to survive abroad. The two students whom we will send to Spain are going to study percussion instruments. Their goal is quite clear. We hope, when they come back, they can teach more students what they learned abroad.

Q: It seems that your school is quite prosperous and successful. Are there many other schools like yours in Beijing?

A: Yes. But up to now the Beijing Midi Contemporary Music School is still considered the best. There is a Beijing Contemporary Music School established two years ago. One of their stockholders is a travel agent. Traditional music instruments are included in their curriculum and they are more involved within

Chinese popular music and popular songs. In addition, their teachers are from an older generation. So, up to now, we don't have a rival.

Q: Now you are building your new campus in the Fragrant Mountain area. So, I wonder what is your vision for the future of the Beijing Midi Contemporary Music School?

A: Our new campus will be finished before the fall semester. We want to increase the number of students to 500-600 and develop our programs aimed at this size. We also want to promote the school up to the level of an academy since we have had an adequate-sized campus, a seven-year history, and the high quality of teaching recognized by the Municipal Bureau of Education in Beijing. We are now preparing the teaching syllabuses for a two-year curriculum on new campus. We will select talented students through an entrance examination. Meanwhile, we will probably also open some classes for uninitiated beginners.

Q: What is the most difficult thing to deal with since you began at the helm of this school? For instance, do you have any problems in getting recognition from the wider society, the quality and careers of students, or sources of teachers?

A: I think the most difficult part is the funding. If I have more money, I can make the school more professional. Since the inception of the school, we have received no support. The development of the school is very slow. I cannot realize my ideas.

Q: Do you have a staff member dedicated to fund-raising and public relations?

A: No. None of us is good at that. I have hired Tara Shingle, [an American woman, a former English instructor in Dalian, who is fluent in Chinese and plays jazz piano], to work on fund-raising and copyright affairs of the textbooks. To build more exchange programs with foreign schools is also our goal in the near future.

Q: I was wondering why you have no relationship with any schools in the US. Have you been abroad to investigate their contemporary music schools?

A: I have been in Japan and Scandinavia to look at their music schools.

Q: In the US, even famous universities are always doing fund-raising. I think there are many corporations involved with audio and visual recordings that should be interested in sponsoring your school.

A: Many people told me that I should seek sponsorship from drum companies or publishers. We have been supported by the Mei Ying (Cherry Lane) Company, an American publisher who publishes a guitar magazine. Their CEO, Michael Primont, came to the inauguration ceremony of our school in 1994. Every year he grants scholarships to our students and releases copyrights of many textbooks owned by the Mei Ying Company to us for translation, including the drumset and the guitar textbooks.

We are very strict in the training of rhythm. Every student is required to have a metronome. We use the American textbooks to train students in rhythms of Latin, rock, jazz, and blues. Students have to be able to clap and sing the

polyrhythms. Our teacher of musicianship is a professor at the China Conservatory. Visitors coming from normal conservatories were often amazed at the complicated rhythms that our students had learned.

Q: You said that students can study a variety of musical genres — which one are most students inclined toward?

A: At the beginning, 90% of students like rock 'n' roll music. In the second year, probably one-third like blues, one-third like jazz, and one-third like rock and popular styles.

Q: Do you now regret that you gave up your original ideal of becoming a recording artist?

A: Absolutely. My wife and many friends asked me why I stopped my singing. I have many compositions for which I wrote both lyrics and music. But in all these years, the school occupied all my time and energy. I don't have feelings for my music anymore. Now my highest goal is to build this school into a real professional and high quality center. When the school gets on the right track I might have more time to go back to my first favorite activity - making music. To realize my dreams of making my own CD will not be a problem.

Appendix 2:

Journal by royal hartigan

I brought my jazz and world music group, the royal hartigan ensemble, to China during July 2001. The series of concerts and workshops was made possible through the efforts of my wife, Weihua Zhang, her son Yong Huang, Zhang Fan, director of the Beijing Midi Contemporary Music School (BMS), and Dr. Wu Wenguang, director of graduate studies at the China Conservatory of Music.

Weihua and I arrived on June 30 after a month at the National Institute for Traditional Performing Arts in Seoul, South Korea, studying traditional music and culture. Over the next three days, we visited venues throughout Beijing with Yong Huang, Zhang Fan, and Dr. Wu Wenguang to make arrangements for rehearsals, concerts, and workshops, as well as instrument use and moving.

After finding out that the primary jazz venues from our last visit in summer 1999 - the CD Jazz Cafe and the Sanwei Bookstore - no longer presented jazz, we set about arranging quality performance sites which would create a good audience atmosphere. We were fortunate that our Beijing colleagues and family had already made most of the contacts and we only needed to meet the presenters and finalize the details of each performance and workshop. Yong Huang had spent weeks making personal contacts and telephoning to set up our musical activities. Since I had

done a workshop in African drumming and jazz at the Beijing Midi School in 1999 at their former site, Shangdi, north of Beijing, Zhang Fan was a friend of mine and he personally arranged for space at the new location of his school just outside Beijing for rehearsals, use of a string bass, amplifier, and drumset, as well as a driver and van to transport us and our instruments throughout the city for our concerts. Dr. Wu set up two workshops, one at the China Conservatory and another at its middle school. For these events, he arranged publicity, use of instruments, and a mini-concert for both our group and advanced students at the conservatory.

On June 30 and July 1 we visited numerous clubs and concert spaces, and settled on three main concert venues in Beijing, the Roland Garros Restaurant and performance space, the Art Salon in the Crown Holiday Plaza located at Dengshixiko, and the Box Cafe, near the East Gate of the Qinghua University. Since our regular pianist, Richard Harper of New York, USA, was unable to join us, Zhang Fan suggested Xiaoguang Liu, an excellent pianist and composer who graduated from the Beijing Midi School.

On July 2 we met with Dr. Wu, who had arranged two workshops at the China Conservatory and its affiliated middle school. Since all of our ensemble members – contrabassist Wes Brown, saxophonist David Bindman, and myself, as well as my wife, and Dr. Wu – had met at Wesleyan University (Connecticut, USA) and were graduates of its world music program, we shared a common love and commitment to the music cultures of the world as performers and scholars. Dr. Wu is a master *gugin* artist, as well as a poet, scholar, painter, calligrapher, and photographer. All of us have studied the music traditions of Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Americas at Wesleyan with master artists from India, Indonesia, Ghana, and other cultures. This gave our trip to China an added dimension of a personal homecoming and the excitement of bringing a style of African American jazz music rooted in world traditions to a vast country with an ancient heritage.

On Tuesday, July 3 I met my two American group members, David Bindman and Wes Brown, at the Beijing International Airport. We rehearsed during the afternoon the next day, Wednesday, July 4, at the BMS in their new campus, near the beautiful Fragrant Mountain in the suburbs of Beijing. We greeted Zhang Fan and played for four hours in a breezy, open air space amidst groves of trees and rolling green hills and mountains. After working on our own trio repertoire, we met Xiaoguang and went over some bebop-style compositions. Although this was his first time playing with us and had not seen any of our arrangements before, he brought a quiet feeling of seriousness and personal warmth to our music that gave us an instant connection to each other, in addition to the musical materials that we were playing. We do not speak Chinese nor play traditional Chinese music. So it was very moving emotionally to see and experience a Chinese person who had never been to America nor perhaps heard much jazz live, playing with heart and integrity in this African American jazz tradition which is a center in our lives. Xiaoguang proved to be an excellent soloist and accompanist who listens to the rest of the ensemble and interacts with the spontaneous directions the music takes.

We hope to perform with him again on future trips to China or in the US.

Our repertoire included three types of compositions as the basis for improvisation in an African American jazz style. The first kind were pieces derived from or inspired by world music cultures, and included *On the Gold Mountain in Beijing* from Chinese traditions; *Eve*, a West African-inspired piece from the *Eve* people of Ghana and Togo in a twelve-eight meter and built on rhythms reflecting master drum language and dialogues; *Dagomba*, employing drum rhythms of the Dagbamba people of northern Ghana; Juan Tizol's and Duke Ellington's *Caravan*, set in a fifteen-pulse meter; and Dizzy Gillespie's *A Night in Tunisia*, arranged in a seven-pulse time cycle. Both *Caravan* and *Tunisia* employed introductions which paralleled the open timeless introductions found in Middle Eastern and Indian music.

The second compositional type included our original pieces, which also were inspired by world traditions. They included David Bindman's *Threads*, in an eleven-beat meter and moving through African American jazz, gospel/funk, and reggae styles; Wes Brown's *Form* in three-four time; my own *Wadsworth Falls*, using *Akom* drumming rhythms from the *Akan* people of western Ghana; and my *Tala Vadyam*, related to the *solkattu* rhythmic practices of south Indian *karnatak* music I learned from master Indian percussionist Tanjore Ranganathan.

The third group of compositions we played were standard pieces in the African American song form tradition played in a bebop-derived style. These included the fast-tempo AABA form *Anthropology*, *Oleo*, and *Confirmation* made famous by 1940s and 1950s saxophonist Charlie Parker; and 12-bar blues-form works including *Bessie's Blues* by saxophonist John Coltrane, Parker's *Now's the Time*, saxophonist William Barron's *Variations in Blue*, and pianist Thelonious Monk's *Straight, No Chaser*. Bassist Charles Mingus' multi-sectional work *Fables of Faubus* and pianist Fats Waller's *Jitterbug Waltz* were medium-tempo pieces, and slow ballads included *You Don't Know What Love Is* and Duke Ellington's *In a Sentimental Mood*. We did not simply imitate traditional or historical renditions and styles, but in the spirit and essence of the African American jazz tradition we constantly recreated each piece spontaneously as we performed from night to night, altering form, instrumental texture, timbre, harmonic movement, rhythmic style, and tempo.

Our presentations began on the morning of Thursday, July 5 with a workshop at the China Conservatory middle school. Dr. Wu introduced Wes, Weihua, and I to Prof. Jiao Shanlin, who is a professional percussionist and director of percussion studies at the affiliated middle school. We were greeted with a unique concert by percussion students who played at a high level of excellence, higher than most American students of the same age. They performed original compositions, western classical pieces including marimba and piano accompaniment, cross-cultural works employing traditional Chinese instruments (such as *ban* and *danpigu*), and Afro-Caribbean styles employing hand drums.

We followed their recital with a workshop in African music. My Ghanaian

teachers had given me permission to share African traditional music with others, and we presented the *Gahu* recreational music of the *Eve* people of Ghana and Togo. All the students, recital performers, and faculty present participated, and it was an intensive session in *Gahu* song, dance, and drumming. Despite the fact that this was their first experience with African music, everyone worked hard and became acquainted with the traditional styles of music making. After our workshop, Dr. Wu, Prof. Jiao, and their colleagues hosted us for lunch at a restaurant. As we would soon find out, each time we performed, our hosts would bring us to a banquet. This created a social atmosphere which made our musical experiences all the more memorable. We all realized from this experience that if food – like music – is an expression of culture, then China must have the most diverse, numerous, ancient, and highest-quality culture on the planet.

Later that day we set up and sound-checked at the Roland Garros performance space in Chaoyang Park near the East 4th Ring Road. We returned that evening and were treated to a French dinner by the owner, Mr. Ran Rong. We played two sets, integrating our trio compositions with mainstream bebop pieces which included pianist Xiaoguang Liu. While we were originally unsure if Chinese audiences would respond to our original works in asymmetrical time cycles and extended harmonies, we found them to be very open to our explorations, and this gave us a surge of energy to our playing. After traveling halfway around the world, it felt good to play from the heart and connect with the people listening. Mr. Ran suggested we play at another establishment he owns, the Nashville Club in South



A trio at Nashville, Beijing: David Bindman, royal hartigan, and Wes Brown

Bar Street, Sanlitun, late the following evening after an earlier concert we had scheduled. Nashville usually features country music. We left the Roland Garros at around midnight and realized we were near the Big Easy in the same park, a New Orleans-style restaurant, bar, and performance space which in 1999 presented jazz every night but now featured a mixture of rhythm and blues, pop, jazz, and funk styles. We stopped by and were greeted by saxophonist Sum Jin, who invited us to play a set with him. We played jazz standards and were also joined by French pianist Christophe Lier. There was a celebratory mood in the Big Easy, as it was also a beautiful summer's evening outside with a moon overlooking the great city. As we departed around 1:30 a.m., the air was fresh and full of anticipation for our upcoming experiences.

On Friday, July 6, we presented a workshop in Indian, Middle Eastern, and African music and the adaptation of their elements and those of Chinese percussion sounds and melodies in a jazz style at the China Conservatory. We rehearsed the *Eve* warrior drumming *Gadzo* with Prof. Jiao and Conservatory percussionists who had performed for us the previous day. *Gadzo* is a difficult dance drumming including multiple layers of time and rhythm, and Prof. Jiao and his students played with intensity and rhythmic precision. It was again uplifting to be performing and sharing this ancient African world music culture with people halfway around the world, who themselves are part of an ancient heritage. We introduced Middle Eastern and Indian elements with asymmetrical time cycles, having the audience perform hand-counted *tala* time cycles from India and hearing *usul* time cycles from Turkey. We then showed how these rhythmic perspectives are adapted into the African American tradition in my arrangement of *Caravan* in a 15-beat meter, and *Tala Vadyam*, in an 11-beat cycle. We were joined by Weihua Zhang on piano as we next performed my arrangement of the Chinese traditional song *On the Gold Mountain in Beijing* using traditional percussion instruments *daluo* (large gong), *xiaoluo* (small gong), and *naobo* (hand cymbals). I was curious about the reaction of the Chinese audience, many of whom were accomplished performers, teachers, and scholars, to my use of traditional instruments in a cross-cultural style. It was an emotional experience for me as I felt a deep connection to the people listening while we played. After an intermission we continued with a question-and-answer session, and I asked for their reaction to my use of Beijing opera percussion. The people greeted this arrangement warmly and I was gratified to see my percussion teacher from our last visit, Prof. Li Zhenggui, in attendance. It was an honor to play for him, and I heeded his advice to balance the dynamics of the gongs with the piano, bass, and saxophone in ensemble playing.

We then focused on African drumming, introducing West African *Gadzo* music with the assistance of Prof. Jiao and his students. The audience responded to the vitality of African drumming, and we then adapted the language-based drum dialogues to a jazz ensemble context in my arrangement of traditional music known as *Eve*. The audience and participants stayed long after as we talked and worked with students on piano, bass, saxophone, and drumset. We were hosted at a University



A concert at the China Conservatory, Beijing. royal hartigan, Wes Brown, David Bindman, and Weihua Zhang (hidden by the piano).

restaurant following the workshop by the President of the China Conservatory, Prof. Yang Tongba. We were given gifts and invited to return to the Conservatory in the future to continue our workshops. One fertile avenue of performance that we would like to pursue on our next visit is individual and group lessons and clinics in world music and jazz and cross-cultural collaborations with Chinese traditional artists such as Dr. Wu and Prof. Jiao.

Our group then went to the Crown Holiday Art Salon, a concert space in downtown Dengshixikou. We presented an early evening concert featuring mainstream bebop with Xiaoguang Liu and our own original works with world music influences. The room was set up so that the audience was close to the performers, and the stage was low, creating an intimate connection. There seemed to be no audience-performer separation, an ideal situation for improvised jazz. The music felt very explosive, as we had just arrived from a three-hour workshop, and we were connecting with the listeners. We performed my arrangement of *On the Gold Mountain in Beijing* with pianist Weihua Zhang, including a poem spoken in Chinese by Yong Huang's wife, Yang Bo.

After the concert, we immediately left for the Nashville club, a restaurant, bar, and performance space in the South Bar Street, where we played two late sets, finishing at 1:30 am. Unlike all our other audiences, which were primarily Chinese, the Nashville listeners were a mixed group of Europeans, Americans, and Chinese. The Nashville's decor was American, featuring country and other popular music,

and we at first wondered if the people would respond to jazz. We played a direct and strong mainstream bebop style, and the crowd was very appreciative. The owner Mr. Ran Rong provided us with dinner during the intermission and was very hospitable to us.

On Saturday, July 7, we began with a second Crown Holiday Art Salon concert in the early evening, where we played a similar mixed repertoire of mainstream and world music-influenced jazz styles. The listeners again greeted us warmly. Following this concert we departed for the Box Cafe, arriving by 11 p.m. Being in the Tsinghua University area, the space was filled with books, photographs, drawings, poetry, and other creative works that stimulate artistic consciousness. As soon as we entered the cafe, the people and the feeling inside were like electricity, and we began playing at 11:30 p.m. The music and connections were the deepest in our experiences that week, and each nuance of performance was greeted with applause and encouragement from the audience. After an intermission in which the owner, Mr. Xiao Ran treated us to a dinner, we played a second set, finishing by 2:30 a.m. In the feeling of the moment, we could have easily played all night long. The interactions among the David, Wes, Xiaoguang, Weihua, and I were pure intensity and spirit. We felt we had made a profound connection to the listeners that evening.

The next few days we visited historic sites such as the Great Wall, the Summer Palace, the Ming Tombs, Forbidden City, and Tian An Men Square, before David and Wes returned to America. Weihua Zhang and I continued on to Yunnan province to study the music of minority peoples there. On looking back at our tour, we were blessed to have the honor to perform and interact with people in China, bringing ancient and sacred world traditions from Africa, the Middle East, and other parts of Asia to share, and in the process, begin learning and adapting the beauty and power of traditional Chinese music into our African American jazz heritage. With the personal and musical relationships we have cultivated, we will return to this great and vast land, to continue to learn and perform. With each music culture that we have lived in, we have found another means to connect our humanity among the world's peoples. As one of my African teachers told me as I was drumming all night in a Ghanaian village, "We are one."

Note:

¹ Weihua Zhang, "Notes on the Current Jazz Scene in China." *Journal of Music in China* 2, no.2 (2000): 265-272.

² At the time of this edition, this festival is postponed to 2002.

(All photographs are provided by the authors.)