

## Viktória Herencsár: Education of Cimbalom in Beijing

The China Conservatory of music invited me as a guest professor in 2005 during the 8th congress in Beijing. So I went to Beijing in autumn of 2006 to teach. The Yangqin (Chinese cimbalom) is very popular in China. Prof. Xiang Zhuhua, one of the famous professors at the Chinese Conservatory of Music in Beijing said that they have about 20 million Yangqin players. They have basic, middle and high schools, where they can learn this instrument. They teach Chinese folk and classical music. The basis of their classical music is their folk music. In the last few years (because of the function of the CWA) the Yangqin players thought that they would like to learn some European music. The Chinese players, teachers and students encountered the European classical style of music at the congresses and at international competitions. They became acquainted with the methods of tuition and techniques. This information they applied to the yangqin. The instrument makers made bigger yangqin with bass strings. Over and above small and pretty yangqin there appeared big instruments with big voices. These instruments have the same volume as the Hungarian cimbalom. They also have pedals. These new developments gave the teachers in China the idea to invite me to teach how to play on this big instrument. Professor Li Lingling, who teaches at the Chinese Conservatory of Music in Beijing, bought a Hungarian type of cimbalom some years ago. The Conservatory of Music also bought a Hungarian type of cimbalom from Mr Vsiansky (instrument maker in Brno, Czech Republic). These two instruments gave the possibility to begin to teach the big instrument. I accepted this kind invitation and I taught the European classical style of music and Hungarian folk music for about 3 months. The Chinese teachers and students gave me a warm welcome. The Conservatory has more than 1000 students. The Conservatory is located in a residential district. There were buildings for the lessons, for practice and for the accommodation of students and teachers with their families. I got a furnished flat, too. The fact that the teachers and students are living very nearly so close together gave a very friendly atmosphere. I never before felt such a nice atmosphere between the teachers and students. The lecturers and the lessons were in the lecture building, but some teachers gave lessons in their own flat. The practice of the instruments did not disturb anybody, because everybody had to practise. There was a practise building, which was used by the students who didn't have a big room in the student's hostel. Sometimes the teachers used also these practice rooms, if they didn't want to disturb their family or they needed a very quiet place. The lecturer's rooms were provided with electronic equipment. The concert hall of the Conservatory has 200 seats for the audience. It is not big enough, so now a new concert hall with 1000 seats is being built, which will be ready this year. Between the buildings are gardens, flowers trees and a small lake, which give good spirits. The Conservatory has two big sports grounds, where the students and the teachers and their families can do gymnastics and play. Once a week there is a cinematographic performance on the sports ground. Life is very quiet. The teachers have time to practice and prepare themselves for the lectures. The students are very diligent and assiduous. They have positive thinking, which helps them to learn quickly and accurately.

I had eight students, who were teachers and final year students. They learnt to play on the Hungarian cimbalom in postgraduate training. The lessons were open for everybody to observe. Sometimes there were about 30-40 students in the room. I also held seminars about the history and education of cimbalom and about Hungarian folk music and European classical styles of music. The students had a very good basic technique, so they had no problem playing the cimbalom. My technique of playing is similar to the Yangqin technique, they had no problem adapting to the wooden sticks after bamboo sticks. What they had to learn was the playing technique using the pedal. A few years ago the Yangqin makers began to add pedals to their instruments. However, how to use it? They didn't know. The Chinese pedals are not as effective as the Hungarian pedal. Because the Yangqin has more bridges than the cimbalom, building a pedal is very complicated. It needs more small pedals in the middle of the instrument, which gives many difficulties. I taught the pedal technique on the cimbalom. What they learnt they tried to use on their own instruments, too.

They had difficulty in understanding the music styles in Europe. The writing of the notes is different in Chinese classical music. They don't have heads on the notes, they write numbers. The music marks are different, too. The musicians over 30 years old don't read European scores very well. If they have such scores, first they translate to their writing system. The young musicians have already

learnt European music notation. However, they don't know the international music language very well. First I taught them these. After I had to work with them to feel the pulses of different styles of the music. As we don't understand Asian music, they don't understand European music. I think the basic problem is the different pulses of the languages. The Chinese speech has a wave motion. The end of the wave is up. Here in Europe speech is mostly in descending phrases and the end of the sentence the melody of speech is down. The melody of the Chinese speaking is continuous. We have accents, which is very important in our languages. In addition, our music is like our language. The Chinese music has wave motion, arches, continuous flow and the end is open. The European music has accents and its pulse is definitive. It is very difficult to feel these accents if you are not used to the accents, and your music is normally free and continuous. It needs longer than two and half months. The Chinese students understood most the old style of Hungarian folk music, because it is pentatonic, and its interpretation is parlando, rubato (free).

Among interpretations of the classical styles the romantic was the closest to them because of the free interpretation.

I gave concerts also in Beijing. Of all the concerts the most interesting for me was the concert with



compositions by Béla Bartók (Hungarian composer). This concert was supported by the Hungarian Embassy in Beijing. The teachers and students of the China Conservatory took part on this concert. The cymbalom and Yangqin had the biggest role. I played solo also, but to play together with the Chinese Teachers and students gave me a big exercise and experience. I played with prof. Li Lingling details from the "For Children" and from the "44 duos for two violins" by Bartók. First Li Lingling played on the Yangqin and I played on the cymbalom. By the last piece we changed instruments. With this situation we

demonstrated that the two instruments are from the same family.

I arranged "Rumanian Dances" by Bartók for cymbalom and strings.



The music education at the China Conservatory is for the Chinese national instruments. From September 2006 they opened facilities for international instruments. First, they opened the possibility to study string instruments (violin, violoncello, viola, contrabass). In the next school year the education for wind-instruments will begin. I taught the first year students to play Bartók's music. It wasn't easy to teach the students the difficult rhythms, because they had many technical problems on their instruments, too. In addition, we did not have as many rehearsals as we needed. But the students

were very enthusiastic and enjoyed playing with me. The performance was very good. The audience was very content with his production on two concerts.

With the clarinet teacher from the college, professor Yi He, I played “Dances from Bihar” by Ferenc Farkas. This piece was written by the composer direct for the clarinet and cimbalom. Yi He lived in the USA for 16 years. He learnt the classical styles and then he played with different orchestras. He already played works by Bartók and Kodály with the orchestras, so he very quickly learnt this piece, too. This example and the example of a 15 year old student showed that we can learn every style, if we work hard.

The last production of the concert was the program of the choir of the Conservatory. Professor Mrs Wu, the leader of the choir some years ago was in Hungary to study the Kodály Method. She teaches with this method now. She gets many invitations to join the jury of different choir competitions and festivals. She asked me to teach the Hungarian text for the members of the choir. Some of the students learnt the pronunciation very quickly. More students had difficulties with the Hungarian text. We have some letters, which aren't in the Chinese language. These letters gave many problems. The Chinese people have a good ear for music and imitative aptitude. They learn with pleasure by ear. I experienced this in the cimbalom lessons.

During my trip in China I visited the other Conservatory in Beijing (Central Conservatory of Music) and also the Conservatory of Music in Shanghai. Most Yangqin students are in the two Conservatories in Beijing. They have 4 teachers of the Yangqin and about 50-60 students in one conservatory. In Shanghai they have 2 teachers and about 25 students.

Because I'm a cimbalom artist at the State Opera in Budapest, I was interested in the Chinese opera. It was a great experience! The auditorium has two parts. In the first are tables with chairs and you can drink and eat cake, like in a cafe. The other part is like a normal theatre, but you can take your drink and food in with you. The prices of the ticket are very high for the Chinese. In the first part the ticket is about 100 USD. The cheapest ticket is about 50 USD. The auditorium was full of Chinese people. Only about 4 foreigners were with me and with Johannes Fuchs, who was also in Beijing to take part at the International Yangqin week. The orchestra of the opera has a small place. The instruments are traditional Chinese instruments. The performance was very interesting in spite of the fact that I didn't understand anything of the Chinese text. The reaction of the audience was different to my country.

Before returning back home we organized a final concert where my students showed what they learnt from me. Some students played excellently. In addition, I could see that it was a very short time to attain a foreign style. It needs more time, maybe years. I teach at the Academy of Arts in Banska Bytrica, where I have students from different countries. They come with different habits, and with a different frame of mind. I'm used to it and I have experience in this case. I knew when I agreed to teach in Beijing, it would be not easy. But I had a very big surprise and a learning experience, that the Chinese students were very open for everything. They didn't resist anything, for new ideas. They did everything I asked them. They have a strong will-power to learn everything. They have persistency. These things aren't present in European students. I think, with this mentality, the Chinese students will become more knowledgeable and skilled like European students.

During my trip to Beijing I not only taught, but I learnt many things, which I can use in my job.





With the students



The last dinner together