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CHINESE CLASSIC

INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC

FW 6812

Folkways Records

New York

M
1804
C539
C539
1951

MUSIC LP

CHINESE CLASSIC

FOLKWAYS TV 6812

Chinese Classic

(Moonlight On The Ching Yang River, The Green Lotus,
The Reminiscence Song, Buddhist Chanting)

Illustrated Notes are Inside Pocket

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CHINESE CLASSICAL

INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC

Notes on the recordings
by HENRY COWELL

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The cultivation of delicately-balanced and highly organized formal music rose to fantastic heights in China during the T'ang Dynasty (7th to 10th centuries A.D.). Although the music was not composed in exactly the same relationship as exists between a western composer and his music, new developments and organizations in sound were the work of musicians whose names became famous, and the outline and description of whose works is still known. For ceremonies of state, orchestras of from 500 to 1000 musicians were employed, and orchestra conducting was first practiced, at first by the same motion as playing a set of tuned bells. For the temple, there was introspective, philosophical music for a few performers. This whole vast musical culture was lost after 906 A.D. vestiges of it may be observed in the old court music of Japan and Korea; in China it seems to have been completely wiped out. However, there has been a preservation on the part of certain highly cultured Chinese of playing



Reading, left to right: H. C. Hahn, H. K. Han, Chow Wei, S. C. Tsao, Sung Yue-tuh,
S. S. Sheng, C. C. Tsac, V. Y. Chu, C. F. Ju

on the old types of instruments; and in recent years, there has been an attempted revival of the T'ang Dynasty music by a small group of fine Chinese musicians whose greatest interest is in recreating the music of this period.

This can be accomplished after a fashion because while there was in old China nothing approximating western musical notation, the names of the notes in the melodies were written down as a succession of words, accompanied by signs indicating whether the

notes were to be fast or slow. So the melodic succession of tones, slow or fast, can be performed on the same old types of instruments. Unfortunately, however, all-important elements of style and manner of performance are lost. It is known that sliding tones played a very great part in the playing and singing, and there is every reason to believe that a highly nasal tone-quality was highly prized. It is not known in the least just how these elements were employed, nor what the rhythmic subtleties were, although these undoubtedly existed.

The present group of musicians play the traditional line of notes and use the traditional instruments, but these are frankly played with a leaning toward western tone-quality, eliminating the strident and nasal in favor of the rich and sweet, particularly in the bowing of the ehr-hu, a violin or 'cello-like instrument. The result is a fine new musical art, played well by skilled musicians, combining traditional melodies and instruments of T'ang Dynasty China with fairly recent western style elements.

The traditional instruments used in the recordings embrace the following:

PI-P'A - a plucked string instrument with a tone somewhat between that of a mandolin and a banjo.

HSIAO - a flute-like instrument, but with a somewhat more nasal quality.

T'I - a smaller flute-like instrument, in between a flute and a piccolo in sound.

EHR-HU - a bowed instrument with two strings, tuned a fifth apart, with a short bow permanently fastened between the strings. When the player presses the bow up-ward, the high string sounds, when the bow is pressed down, the low string is engaged. There are two forms - one high, in violin range, the other larger and lower, in 'cello range. The tone is more nasal than that of a violin.

SEH - a harp-like instrument with a resonating sound chamber, over which are strung 7 to 9 silken strings, which are plucked.

SHENG - a mouth organ with tiny high-sounding pipes enclosing reeds. It is notable that it is technically impossible to play the Sheng without sounding at least two different tones at once, and since the instrument is from ancient times it can be assumed that some ancient music held the germs of harmony and counterpoint as well as pure melody.

YANG-CHING - usually called a butterfly-harp, this instrument is very like the hammer-dulcimer used in England, and by our own north-west woodsmen, and also like the cymbalum of the Hungarian Gypsies. It consists of tuned metal strings strung between bridges, and played on by tiny hammers held by the performer.

YUAN - a low plucked instrument.

KU - Chinese-type drums, like large tom-toms.

RECORD
Side 1

MOONLIGHT ON THE CHING YANG RIVER
The music, attributed to Yo Su-Nan of the T'ang Dynasty, is in a five-tone (pentatonic) scale consisting of D, E, G, A, C, D. In the original music, D would have been the ending tone, but in accord with the western musical feeling for a tonic, or tonal center, the note G is the actual ending. The Pi-P'a and Ehr-Hu play the main melody in unison; this is embroidered on a higher tonal level by the Hsaio, which trills and ornaments longer notes.

THE GREEN LOTUS

The Green Lotus is attributed to Li Ta-Po of the T'ang Dynasty. The pentatonic scale is different in form, consisting of B, C#, E, F#, A, B. This is mainly a duet between Sheng and T'i - the Sheng playing in a succession of harmonic intervals, many open fifths and fourths, the T'i trilling, sometimes with fluttertongue, a modern westernism of the 20th century.

RECORD
Side 11

THE REMINISCENCE SONG

This is in the same temple style, as the Buddhist Chanting (last cut, description of which follows) but adds Sheng, T'i and Pi-P'a.

BUDDHIST CHANTING

In all temple music of China there are many percussion instruments; high metal bells and cymbals, small and large drums. Hsaio plays a high melody, later joined by Seh. There is yet another form of the pentatonic scale - B, D, E, F#, A, B.

The Chinese Cultural Theater Group

Performers
and the instruments they play

Hahn Chen-Han -- Ehr-Hu and drum
Sung Yue-Tuh -- Pi-P'a and Hsaio
Chu Ven-Yee -- Yang Ching and drum
Tsao Su-Chen -- Ehr-Hu
Hahn Chen-Kya -- Ehr-Hu
Chow Wei -- Ehr-Hu
Tsao Chen Chuan -- Yuan and Sin Se
Sheng Shek-Sing -- T'i

Recorded in San Francisco
by Raymond Wong