

CHINA WATCH

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Reunited in symphonic excellence

U.S. orchestra's China visit 50 years ago relived

BY CHEN NAN

On the afternoon of Nov. 10 the National Center for the Performing Arts in Beijing, or NCPA, nicknamed the Egg, was bustling with visitors as usual.

Ranging in age from young students to seniors, they were eager to see the venue, which opened in 2007 and is known for attracting top artists from around the world.

In a VIP room, Zhu Xinren, 90, inspected photographs of musicians who once performed at the NCPA, which were hanging from the walls.

Rising early that morning to don a smart suit, Zhu was looking forward to meeting an old friend he had not seen for 50 years.

Sensing crowds entering the room, Zhu turned around and smiled, his face full of laughter. Reaching out, he shook the hand of gray-haired Davyd Booth, who said: "This is an incredible meeting. I am so happy to meet you."

Zhu replied: "I'm happy too. It's been 50 years, and I'm now 90 years old." Booth said: "I'm 73. You look great."

In 1973, under the direction of Eugene Ormandy, the Philadelphia Orchestra became the first orchestra from the United States to perform in China since New China was founded in 1949.

Since that visit the orchestra has returned 12 times, developing deep, impactful connections throughout China as a result of concerts and residencies that led to people-to-people exchanges.

Booth, who was 23 in 1973, was the orchestra's youngest violinist. He was not supposed to join the China tour in 1973,

until he received a phone call telling him he was needed as a replacement for a musician who could not make the trip. Booth was both surprised and thrilled.

During the tour, the Philadelphia Orchestra met and worked with musicians of the China National Symphony Orchestra, formerly known as the Central Philharmonic Society. Zhu was the Chinese orchestra's first violinist.

At their reunion, Booth and Zhu shared memories of the rehearsals they had together in Beijing, which included playing Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony* under the baton of Ormandy and Li Delun. They agreed that these rehearsals seemed "just like yesterday".

Booth said: "It (the meeting with Zhu) gave me goose bumps. This is the greatest thing. We have built relationships, we have built friendships with people for such a long time. This is definitely a highlight of my trip to China."

After their short meeting, they walked to the NCPA concert hall, where musicians from the China National Symphony Orchestra and the Philadelphia Orchestra were rehearsing for a concert that night.

Booth took out his violin and sat among the musicians from both orchestras on the stage, while Zhu sat in the last row of seats, watching quietly.

Musicians from the two countries performed Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony*, Leonard Bernstein's *Overture to Candide*, and Chinese works such as *The Moon Reflected on the Erquan Spring*. This work, arranged by Wu Zuqiang, was also played during the Philadelphia Orches-



A special concert to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Philadelphia Orchestra's visit to China at the National Center for the Performing Arts in Beijing on the evening of Nov. 10. PHOTOS BY SHEN HONG / XINHUA

tra's China tour in 1973.

At the NCPA, the musicians played under the batons of Li Xincao, chief conductor of the China National Symphony Orchestra, and Tristan Rais-Sherman from the U.S., who was named assistant conductor of the Philadelphia Orchestra in June.

In September the U.S. orchestra announced on the anniversary of its first concert in China 50 years ago that 13 of its members planned to travel to China for residency activities to mark the occasion. Booth is the only member of the latest tour who joined the orchestra's visit to China in 1973.

Matias Tarnopolsky, president and chief executive of the Philadelphia Orchestra, said: "Music has the power to connect and build bridges. We are

delighted to commemorate the orchestra's historic 1973 tour and our 50-year relationship with the people of China during this residency.

"The 1973 tour is remembered to this day by many in China as a symbol of deep musical friendship, and we hope that our music-making will continue to build bridges between our people and cultures."

A special ceremony took place before the concert at the NCPA on Nov. 10 hosted by China's Ministry of Culture and Tourism and organized by China Arts and Entertainment Group.

Tarnopolsky presented a complete score of Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony* to the China National Symphony Orchestra, which Tarnopolsky said was a symbol of gratitude. Rais-

Sherman presented Li Xincao with a baton.

"During their meeting in Beijing in 1973, the Central Philharmonic Society of China presented a beautiful gift to the Philadelphia Orchestra, a Chinese percussion instrument," Tarnopolsky said.

"Ormandy, our music director at the time, played Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony* after receiving that gift. Now, 50 years on, we would like to express our gratitude and give you this score in return."

The China National Symphony Orchestra gave the U.S. ensemble a complete score of the classic Chinese work *Ode to the Red Flag*, and a vinyl disc of the Chinese piano concerto *The Yellow River*.

Tarnopolsky said: "It's exciting to see musicians from the two countries playing side by side. We are unified, and music is truly a universal language."

During the recent China tour, which started on Nov. 9 and ended on Nov. 18, the Philadelphia Orchestra visited Tianjin, Shanghai and Suzhou, Jiangsu province.

Early this year, the Philadelphia Orchestra partnered with the iSING! Suzhou International Young Artists Festival to present ancient Tang Dynasty (618-907) poems set to new works by young composers from around the world.

During the concert on Nov. 10, the orchestra also performed selections from those works related to Tang Dynasty poems, such as *Drink to Me* by Li Bai and *Upon the Crane Tower* by Wang Zhihuan.

It's all very healthy, if you get the point

BY YANG YANG

For thousands of years the Chinese have relieved pain and cured disease through acupuncture. Evolving from the discovery that using stone needles to prick specific points on the surface of the body could relieve pain and symptoms, acupuncture has become an integral part of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), in line with the philosophy that promotes the harmonious coexistence of humans with nature.

According to *Records of the Grand Historian*, written by Sima Qian about 2,100 years ago, Bian Que, a physician during the Warring States Period (475-221 B.C.), was renowned for having saved a prince's life by using needles to stimulate the Baihui acupoint on the head of the unconscious man.

According to TCM, there are a dozen meridians in the human body, where the *qi*, or life energy, circulates to nourish the organs. Cold, infections or diseases can result in the blocking of the energy, so stimulating the acupoints is said to unblock stagnant *qi*, restore normal circulation and improve health.

In 2010 UNESCO inscribed acupuncture and moxibustion of TCM on the Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Yet the practice is not just cultural and historical, but also a medical technique widely used and researched today.

Despite the clear therapeutic effects of acupuncture in treating many diseases, there

were few convincing studies that explained how acupoint stimulation worked, or what meridians were anatomically speaking, so the technique always seemed somewhat mysterious. However, as scientific research of acupuncture has grown in recent years, producing better quality results, the technique is being more commonly used worldwide.

Through studies conducted over the past century, scholars now have a deep understanding of the working mechanisms of acupuncture, said Jing Xianghong, director of the Institute of Acupuncture and Moxibustion at the China Academy of Chinese Medical Sciences. Chinese scientists have accumulated a great deal of information in the study of acupuncture analgesia, the sensitization of acupoints, and the effects of acupoint stimulation, she said.

In TCM, acupoints reflect the body's internal condition. When diseased or injured, corresponding acupoints become sensitized, displaying effects like expanded receptive fields, heightened pain perception and increased heat sensitivity, which gradually disappear as the body heals.

In 2021 Ma Qiufu, a professor at Harvard University, co-authored a paper, titled *A Neuroanatomical Basis for Electroacupuncture to Drive the Vagal-Adrenal Axis*, with researchers from China including Jing, which was published in the journal *Nature*.

Since then, basic scientific research on acupuncture and moxibustion has once again drawn the attention of

researchers, Jing said.

Based on existing studies it is possible to conclude that the transmission and integration of the nervous system are essential for acupuncture to work, she said. The neuro-endocrine-immune network serves as the primary carrier for acupuncture's modulating effects, and molecular biology provides the material basis for explaining the effects of acupuncture.

More simply, the studies show that the nervous system plays a crucial role in acupuncture. It relies on a network that involves the nervous system, hormones and the immune system. Molecular biology also helps explain how acupuncture works.

According to a report by the World Health Organization, acupuncture is the most widely used traditional medicine practice globally.

Between 2002 and 2012 in the United States the number of patients receiving acupuncture grew 50% and the number of licensed acupuncturists doubled, Jing said.

It is now used in 183 countries and regions, and 59 have licensed it legally, according to a development report on acupuncture as a discipline between 2013 and 2020, compiled by the China Association of Acupuncture-Moxibustion.

In clinical practice guides from more than 40 countries and regions, including the U.S., the United Kingdom and Japan, acupuncture is one of the recommended therapies for certain diseases and for conditions such as pain and depression, the report said.



From left: Children learn about acupuncture in Shijiazhuang, Hebei province. LI MINGFA / FOR CHINA DAILY
A foreign student practices acupuncture at a hospital in Lanzhou, Gansu. CHEN BIN / XINHUA

