



Tian Jiaxin: Bring China to the World with Music

By staff reporter WANG WENJIE

FROM a little girl who cried at her first concert to a performer on the international stage, Tian Jiaxin, by realizing her musical dream, is making the world hear China.

On April 28, the "French Spirit" concert was held at the National Theatre for the Performing Arts to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Sino-French diplomatic relations. The French maestro Philippe Entremont and his Chinese student Tian Jiaxin brought the concert to its peak with their free-flowing performance of Mozart's piano concerto. Although they had collaborated before, it was the first time Tian performed with her French master on a Chinese stage.

"It is a great honor for me to participate in this activity as a representative of young Chinese pianists. I think the activity is a wonderful gift for the 50th anniversary of the establishment of Sino-French relations," said Tian. "I cherish every performance with Philippe. Besides playing techniques, he teaches me how to become a true artist," she added.

New Star Rising

Upon meeting the young Beijing girl, most visitors get a first impression of confidence, open-mindedness and maturity. Face-to-face, she is warm and affable. Onstage, she projects a strongly personal vision of music. "Through the language of music," she

wrote in her first album *Piano Music from the Heart*, "I would like the audience to experience the emotions deep in my heart and let them appreciate the beauty of music." Tian's music has since been heard throughout the world.

Tian's accomplishments have been celebrated through many awards at domestic and foreign piano competitions. In December 2011, she won first prize in a competition for her interpretation of Mozart's *Piano Concerto No. 20 in D Minor, K. 466*. Her success allowed her to meet Philippe Entremont, whom she has come to respect as "the great master."

"Philippe was the designated cooperation partner of the winner of the competition. In February 2012, I felt like the luckiest person on earth," Tian said. "That was our first collaboration. He inspired me and influenced my performance in later years."

Philippe respects the young Chinese woman and speaks highly of their work together. "After five seconds, I knew that I liked this girl and her sound," Philippe said several years later.

Tian speaks warmly about her French maestro. "When I had my concert at Carnegie Hall in February 2013, Philippe didn't tell me he was in the audience. It was such a big surprise. After I returned to the stage and finished playing *La Campanella* by Liszt, Philippe came onstage to hug me. Then he held up my arm and smiled at the audience. I was so flattered. His silent encouragement was more powerful than words. During the media interview after the concert, Philippe said, 'This girl deserves a great

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master.' At that time, Erica Mason, an American who has treated me as her own daughter, was sitting beside us. She asked Philippe which master would teach me. Philippe smiled and pointed to himself. That was how I became his student," Tian said.

"Philippe often travels around the world for performances. When the occasion permits, he meets me and gives me lessons. In October of 2013 he came to New York for a concert, and taught me for a whole afternoon," Tian recalled. "He sat with me and shared his views on musical works. He also showed me how he would play the concerto. The lesson was significant for me, because I was preparing for my performance at the Lincoln Center. That performance, together with my concert in Carnegie Hall, was part of the 'Happy Spring Festival' activity held by the Chinese Ministry of Culture. Thanks to the relationship I built with the Ministry of Culture, this time I got the chance to perform with my master in the 'French Spirit' concert," said Tian.

Strenuous Efforts

Tian began to learn piano at the age of three with Professor Huang Peiyang at the Central Conservatory of Music. As she prepared to take the university entrance examination, she also studied piano under Ms. Luo Fang of the Central Conservatory of Music. Tian passed the entrance examination with good results to enter the Shenyang Conservatory of Music, where she continued her study with Professor Wei Danwen.

Tian bears a deep respect for every teacher that has helped and instructed her. "Everyone of them has played a crucial role in different stages of my life. I visit them every time I go back to China. Without their help I could never have achieved success today," said Tian.

Tian considers herself to be born with the passion for music. Fond of piano since childhood, she would practice voluntarily. "I was different from the children who play piano because their parents made them. I truly love piano with all my heart. My

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parents are the ones who had the greatest influence on my personality. My mother was a soprano and my father was a composer. So my childhood was immersed in music. When I was small, my father took me to piano lessons by bike. The tuition of RMB 200 per hour was a lot back then," said Tian.

Behind every success are painstaking efforts unimaginable to most people. After finishing elementary school, Tian's parents decided that Tian should continue her studies in a middle school instead of a musical conservatory. "Despite the heavy curriculum, I never gave up playing piano. Every day I tried to finish my homework at school so that I could practice piano in the evening after I got home. I practiced until the neighbors fell asleep. Because I wouldn't waste a single minute of piano practice I often had dinner at 9 or 10 pm, and then I took care of my school work," said Tian.

Although Tian was finally admitted into the Shenyang Conservatory of Music, the process didn't go smoothly. Two months before the final exam, her hands were injured. "For a while after I got hurt I could not play the piano. But one thing happened later that decided me to give it a try. On January 17, 2006, my parents and I went to Lang Lang's concert at the Great Hall of the People. I wondered why Lang Lang was so successful and why I hurt my fingers when I decided to pursue my music dream. I told myself I had to play piano. So on the next day after I returned from school, I bandaged my fingers and tried to practice. I said to myself: 'I can't miss the final exam in February.' So I resumed practicing and kept encouraging myself. My doctor also helped me recover quickly," Tian recalled. Relying on her unyielding will, Tian passed the exam.

Lighting Up Dreams with Music

Tian chose the Shenyang Conservatory of Music because of her respect and adoration for Professor Wei Danwen. "Professor Wei is the last student of the virtuoso pianist Vladimir Horowitz. I really wanted to learn with him," she said. "Professor Wei opened a window to the international stage for me. He taught me to open my mind and cultivate an international viewpoint, which greatly affected my future development. Under his influence I decided to study abroad instead of pursuing postgraduate study in China," said Tian.

Tian's choice of a foreign music graduate school involves an interesting episode. "Normally students make contact far in advance with different teachers who they want to study with, and visit the different universities to expand the field of choice. But I didn't contact any masters in order to save money. After the last test in New York, I flew back to China. It had never occurred to me that I would meet anyone special on the plane. While I was waiting for the bathroom, I started talking to a lady who was waiting with me. I found that she was a professor of violin at the Manhattan School of Music, where I had just taken the entrance exam," Tian said. "What is more

Tian Jiaxin with French pianist and conductor Philippe Entremont at the "French Spirit" concert.



amazing is that after hearing I wanted to learn piano, she asked her husband to come. Her husband is Jeffrey Cohen, who is exactly the one I wanted to study with. Although many other schools sent offers and provided scholarships, I still chose the Manhattan School of Music because of that chance encounter on the plane. I think we were predestined to meet.”

Days of studying abroad were full and intense, with pain and sweat, but also joy and emotion. In three years, Tian earned two degrees – Master of Music and Professional Study, as well as many opportunities to perform with masters of international reputation, including Philippe Entremont, who has only worked with one other Chinese pianist. When she graduated in May 2013, Tian won the Harold Bauer Award, the highest honor at the Manhattan School of Music.

After receiving her master’s degree, Tian held her first recital at the Beijing Concert Hall. She played the *Yellow River Piano Concerto* and Mozart’s *Piano Concerto No. 20 in D minor K.466* respectively during the first half and the second half of the recital. Zhou Guangren, the famous Chinese music educator and pianist, who was over 80 years old, said that Tian had “revived” Mozart.

During the summer of 2012, Tian Jiaxin recorded her first album, *Piano Music from the Heart*, which was released in 2013. With good talent and unremitting efforts, Tian’s career advances.

Making People Like China

While pursuing her music dream, Tian has a credo: the East and the West must be fused. “My piano study in China laid down a good foundation, while travel abroad has made me a true pianist. I like to inject my personal understanding in performances. How to express the charm of classical music to audience is the question that is always on my mind,” said Tian. She believes that a true master must not only possess technique, but also transfer the cultural significance of the music.

“As a pianist on the international stage, I try my best to present Chinese culture to my audience, letting people understand and like China. In my two concerts in the U.S., I chose modernist pieces by Chinese composer Zhang Shuai. Zhang is a young composer whom I appreciate very much. My first album includes his works. I hope to cooperate with different Chinese musicians and present their works to the audience. I really want the world to see that China has many excellent musical works besides the traditional ones,” said Tian.

“I hope to show different aspects of China through my hard work. Maybe my individual power is insignificant, but I keep trying to present works of different areas and create more cross-border cooperation,” said Tian. To celebrate China through her piano performance is Tian’s biggest dream. She expects to hold more concerts and release albums that make people understand, like and remember China. ◻