

SYCM 2nd International Percussion Festival

By Gregory Beyer and Robert Bridge

The 2nd International Percussion Festival of the Shenyang Conservatory of Music (SYCM) took place Oct. 11–18, 2010. Featured international guests included Michael Udow (USA), Sir Gert Mortensen (Denmark), Beverly Johnston (Canada), Lien Wei-Chen (Taiwan), the percussion duo NanaFormosa, (Taiwan), and the authors of this article, Gregory Beyer (USA) and Robert Bridge (USA). Other Chinese percussionists in attendance included Liu Guangsi (the first Western Percussion Professor in China) from the Beijing Central Conservatory, Zheng Jianguo from the Society of Chinese Musicians Association, LiuPing from the Tianjin Conservatory, and DuJuan from the Xian Conservatory. The festival also featured two concerts of music by the Shenyang Percussion Ensemble, also known as the Sticks Game ensemble. The percussion area of the conservatory is run by a father-and-son team, Lu Qingshan and Lu Zhengdao. Lu Qingshan is the festival's artistic director.

Shenyang is one of China's largest cities, with a population of approximately five million people inside its greater urban area. It is the capital city of northeastern China's Liaoning Province and enjoys a major role in China's regional trade with neighbors Russia, North and South Korea, and Japan. Its Conservatory of Music has a history dating back to 1938, and its current main campus (it has three other satellite campuses around the province)

features multiple buildings containing practice room facilities, faculty offices, classrooms, dormitories, Cadenza Hall—an elegant new recital hall—and its crown jewel, the beautiful glass-encased Concert Hall.

Monday, Oct. 11

The opening concert of the festival featured the Shenyang Conservatory percussion ensemble performing works by Michael Udow, who was occasionally a featured performer (playing the solo timpani part in "Apparition," for example) and performed a solo marimba work of his own, "Tennei-Ji." Udow had been in Shenyang one week prior to the official beginning of the festival, working on ensemble music with the Shenyang students. His amicable, warm, humorous, sensitive and gentlemanly personality shown through his performances and his interactions with the students, who looked up to him as a great master of the percussive art.

Tuesday, Oct. 12

The next day featured a composition forum with Udow discussing some of his compositions on the previous evening's program. His discussion began with thought-provoking questioning, encouraging the students to examine "why you choose to compose." It was clear in Udow's probing of the students that there was no established tradition of writing new music for percussion at the Conservatory. This was a surprise to us as guests of the percussion festival, as the percussion area of the conserva-



The Concert Hall of the Shenyang Conservatory



Festival Artistic Director and Percussion Professor, Lu Qingshan (right) with his former professor, Liu Guangsi



Professor Lu Qingshan's son and junior colleague, Lu Zhengdao



Michael Udow performing "Tennei-Ji"

tory is quite advanced. Udow encouraged the students to compose new music for percussion.

That evening, Beverly Johnston presented a program of solo works that revolved primarily around the marimba. Two of the featured pieces, "Fertility Rites" and "In the Fire of Conflict," were penned by her husband, Christos Hatzis, also in attendance. Johnston performed with passion and elegance. Her commanding performances of Harry Friedman's "Bones" and Chinary Ung's "Cinnabar Heart" were mesmerizing, the latter also revealing Johnston's ability to sing with haunting beauty. She also performed Frederic Rzewski's "To the Earth" on a set of gorgeous Chinese glazed pots.



Beverly Johnston performing Harry Friedman's "Bones"

Wednesday, Oct. 13

Johnston offered a marimba master class in which she explained specific techniques employed in some of her repertoire from the

previous evening. Students were interested in some of the quick texture changes from mallets to fingertips and body percussion employed in Friedman's work. Students from the Shenyang Conservatory of Music then performed for Johnston, who offered insightful suggestions and probing questions about the students and their repertoire choices.

In the Concert Hall that evening, festival participants and the public alike were witness to a spectacular concert by a formidable young percussion duo from Taipei, NanaFormosa. They began their program with a duo version of Thierry de Mey's "Silence Must Be." Yu-Ying Chang began in the spotlight, conducting a pattern of five in one hand and three in the other, then began articulating graceful and subtle rhythmic gestures and phrases with the left hand against the continuing meter in five. When this "silent" composition took a second pass, Ya-Hsin Cheng provided a percussive soundtrack to her silent partner's movements with a table of small percussion instruments of wood, metal, and glass.

The duo proved their synergy with a four-



NanaFormosa performing Jer-Hui Chen's "Between"



TUNING for Renowned Orchestras,
Universities and Professionals
World-Wide since 1973.



XYLOPHONES • MARIMBAS • VIBRAPHONES • GLOCKENSPIELS • CELESTAS
www.marimbas.com • bill@marimbas.com
585-394-8280

RETUNING • REPAIRING • REFINISHING • REPLATING • REPLACEMENT BARS

hand marimba arrangement of J.S. Bach's "French Overture" (BWV831), and then a duo version of Andy Pape's intricate drumming quartet, "Ca Dance." Humor and virtuosity were on display in "Between," a work by their teacher in Taiwan, Jer-Hui Chen. In this piece, the duo "faced off" on both sides of a single quasi-drumset and displayed perfectly synchronous passagework on cowbells, guiro, and pedal-controlled tambourines, gourds, and drums. The duo studied the zarb together in Paris, and brought Jean-Pierre Drouet's "L'attraction" intermezzo to the stage with humorous and virtuosic theatricality. Their excellent zarb playing accompanied their own dancing and singing in a joyful end to the first half of their program.

The duo invited Lu Zhengdao to the stage for performances of Thierry de Mey's "Table

Music" and an arrangement of the second movement of Ravel's "Piano Concerto in G." The program ended with a final display of keyboard virtuosity in Jan Van Landeghem's "Concertino for Two Marimbas and Six Percussionists," with NanaFormosa flanked by six students from the Sticks Game percussion ensemble.

Thursday, Oct. 14

Rob Bridge traveled to the conservatory's education school campus and gave a class on marching percussion. The students were a mixed group of percussionists and wind players. Rob led them through a series of exercises designed to address the areas of technique necessary in today's marching ensembles. The students played reasonably well but had very



Sir Gert Mortensen coaching Shenyang Conservatory percussion student Jiang Zhao on Per Nørgard's "I Ching"



Robert Bridge performing Steven Stucky's "Isabelle Dances"



Greg Beyer performing Alexandre Lunsqui's "Diogenes' Lantern"

basic questions about marching technique—highlighting how new marching is to China.

That afternoon, Sir Gert Mortensen of the Royal Danish Conservatory offered a class that focused on a work taken from the bedrock of his repertoire and his reputation, Per Nørgard's, "I Ching." Gert taught about the compositional aspects important in movements III and IV. He worked with students showing them compositional aspects and technical points to be considered. Then he gave a stunning performance of both movements. He ended his class with a virtuosic rendering of Áskell Másson's "Prim."

On Thursday evening, Greg Beyer's concert showcased instruments and composers from around the world. He opened with "Temazcal" by Javier Alvarez. Next, he traded his maracas for an udu, conga, caxixi and berimbau in a performance of Alexis Bacon's "Cowboy Song." Greg kept his berimbau, and added two more, for "Hollow" by Jeff Herriott. The first piece on the program that did not include electronic accompaniment was Alexandre Lunsqui's "Diogene's Lantern" for solo marimba. This was followed by Roberto Sierra's "Bongo-0" and then a return to the marimba for three movements of Jacob Druckman's "Reflections on the Nature of Water." The final composition performed was Iannis Xenakis' "Rebonds."

Friday, Oct. 14

Beyer's class focused on the global aspects of percussion and percussion performance. Using material from his concert as a jumping-off point, he discussed practice techniques (and his use of technology), instrument specific techniques, his extensions of traditional techniques, historical considerations, and avenues for further study. The class ended with everyone dancing as three volunteers played berimbau

alongside Greg as he sang a traditional Brazilian song.

The Friday night concert was titled "Inter-coastal Percussion Interaction," a reference to Taiwanese, Chinese, and western percussion music and musicians working together on the same program. It featured students from the Shenyang Conservatory and soloists. The concert opened dramatically with "Overture for Six Drummers" by Ya-Wen Lien followed by Rudiger Pawassar's "Sculpture" for three marimbas. Professor Lu Zhengdao joined his students as soloist for a splendid performance of "Night of Moon Dances" by Eckhard Kopetzki. The percussion ensemble retook the stage for a well-choreographed and virtuosic performance of the marimba quartet "Square Dance" by Takayoshi Yoshioke.

After intermission, Wang Xiaoming and senior percussion professor Lu Qingshan gave an energetic performance of "Recital Duo for Drum Set" by Dan Knipple. The final selection of the evening was "Concerto for Timpani, Strings and Percussion" by Ya-Wen Lien with the composer as timpani soloist.

Saturday, Oct. 15

Bridge's recital of recent works from composers that he has developed relationships with in upstate New York was the final musical event during our stay at the festival. He opened with "Stick," a brand-new snare drum solo that Marc Mellits composed for the annual solo snare drum competition held by the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra. Rob then moved onto marimba repertoire by Dexter Morrill ("Sonata" for solo marimba) and Steven Stucky ("Isabelle Dances"). As lighter fare, Bridge performed two works of his own: a snare drum solo, "Beyond Tornado," and a piece for marimba, "Of Dances." These pieces were particularly attractive to the students at the Conservatory, some of whom asked for copies after the performance. To close, Rob invited Lu Zhengdao, the younger percussion professor at Shenyang, to the stage to join him in a performance of Marc Mellits' 2008 neo-minimalist multi-movement marimba duo, "Red." In this work Mellits uses language clearly inspired by Steve Reich, yet his own ability to push this language into other realms made the work particularly enjoyable and engaging.

Monday, Oct. 17

As an official close to the SYCM festival, the Shanghai Percussion Ensemble took the stage on Monday evening. According to Michael Udow, "The Shanghai Conservatory Percussion Ensemble played with focused conviction in every note they produced, performing works composed for traditional Chinese percussion, Western percussion, and blended works interlinking the varied timbres with memorable 'soundscapes.' The group played with superb precision and with a sense of dedicated re-

sponsibility to each work on the program. This ensemble had the ability to fill the concert hall with powerful energized sound while maintaining excellent tone. They also played sensitive delicate phrases that flowed like silk threads woven seamlessly into the fabric of fine cloth. Director Yang Ruwen performed a solo multiple-percussion work with great flair, utilizing an extremely large camphor wood temple block that barely fit onto a padded piano bench—a deep tone that conjured up 'the everything' and 'the nothingness' of existence. The ensemble's well-rehearsed setup changes created smooth transitions between the works, which created a sense of unity throughout the program. This is a group that plays with confidence, conviction and panache."

Closing Comments

Although we may have been speechless with positive emotion at the end of our stay, upon reflection we really cannot say enough kind things about the hospitality shown us in China. From little things like never being allowed to carry anything (be it percussion equipment or suitcases), to bigger issues of accommodations and meals, to incredible festival program books, posters, and programs, our hosts at the Shenyang Conservatory were incredibly gracious. Every detail was worked out in advance and our comfort was always the foremost concern. It was an amazing experience. ▀

SUMMER AT EASTMAN 2011

MICHAEL BURRITT



Stanley Leonard

Eastman Summer Percussion Institute

JULY 26–JULY 1

MICHAEL BURRITT, DIRECTOR

KEITH ALEO, LEE VINSON, BILL CAHN, JOHN BECK, GUEST FACULTY

Daily master classes and lectures with Eastman School of Music Professor of Percussion Michael Burritt and guests. Lecture topics will include:

- Musicianship
- Technique
- Interpretation
- Expression
- Performance anxiety
- Composing
- Choosing repertoire
- Physical awareness
- Listening sessions
- Pedagogy

Students will be required to have two major works from the standard marimba or percussion repertoire prepared for the week. Set up pieces will need to be approved by Professor Burritt for logistical issues. An opening concert features Michael Burritt, and the closing concert showcases the seminar students.

\$1150/1 credit \$560/noncredit

Also of Interest to Percussionists:

South Indian Percussion—Beginning and Intermediate

JULY 11–15

ROHAN KRISHNAMURTHY, DIRECTOR

Introduction to the Shona Mbira

JULY 11–15

GLENN WEST, DIRECTOR

www.esm.rochester.edu/summer

summer@esm.rochester.edu

585-274-1400 or 1-800-246-4706



EASTMAN
SCHOOL OF MUSIC
UNIVERSITY OF ROCHESTER

SUSTAINING MEMBERS HELPING PAS TO PUBLISH FEBRUARY PERCUSSION NEWS

AVEDIS ZILDJIAN COMPANY
BACHOVICH MUSIC PUBLICATIONS
BIRCH CREEK MUSIC PERFORMANCE CENTER
EASTMAN SCHOOL OF MUSIC
ENCORE MALLETS, INC.
FALL CREEK MARIMBAS
GROVER PRO PERCUSSION
INNOVATIVE PERCUSSION, INC.
INTERLOCHEN CENTER FOR THE ARTS
MARIMBA PRODUCTIONS
MEREDITH MUSIC PUBLICATIONS
MIKE BALTER MALLETS
PROTUNE CORPORATION
ROLL PRODUCTIONS
SALAZAR FINE TUNING
STANLEY LEONARD
TAPSPACE PUBLICATIONS
VIC FIRTH, INC.
WENGER CORPORATION
YAMAHA CORPORATION OF AMERICA

THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONTINUED SUPPORT