East Meets West
Chinese New Year Concert

Saturday 28 February at 6.30pm
Arts Centre Melbourne, Hamer Hall
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I am pleased to send my best wishes to everyone attending the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra Chinese New Year Concert, East Meets West.

Chinese New Year is a time to gather with family and friends, enjoy good food and to anticipate and celebrate the year ahead.

As we welcome the Year of the Sheep, it is an opportunity to acknowledge the achievements of the past twelve months, and to look forward to a year of happiness and prosperity.

The Sheep symbolises success achieved through quiet fortitude.

This is true of the Australian-Chinese community which contributes so much to our national life.

China has been significant to Australia almost from our very beginning as a settled country. Thousands of Chinese joined the gold rushes from the 1850s. There were Chinese ANZACs at Gallipoli and on the Western Front. Today, China is our greatest trading partner, and our largest source of migrants and international students.

In every part of our national life, Australians of Chinese ancestry have helped to build our modern nation.

I wish everyone attending the East Meets West concert good health and prosperity for the coming year.

The Hon. Tony Abbott, MP
Prime Minister of Australia
In the air of the Year of the Sheep festivity, the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra Chinese New Year Concert 2015 – the MSO’s annual event presents once again an ‘East Meets West’ cultural feature in this cultural metropolis.

In collaboration with maestro Tan Dun, the MSO has turned the Chinese New Year concert into an annual cultural event and a shared celebration of artistic excellence, following a great success in 2014. The concert features great works from Western and Eastern traditions. Tan Dun’s work of Nu Shu: The Secret Songs of Women exposes the audience to a the diversified Chinese culture of unique traditions.

Chinese New Year is an auspicious occasion for family reunion and get-together among friends. As the Year of the Sheep unfolds, the concert will bring us a joyous and memorable experience. I believe the cultural exchange will further enhance the understandings and friendship between our two peoples.

Tonight, in welcoming you to the second Chinese New Year Concert, I point out that the year of the sheep is also known as the year of the goat. Whatever the animal, though, the people born in this year are, like sheep (or goats), tender, polite, filial, clever, and kind-hearted, with a special sensitivity to art and beauty. Among notable sheep are Michelangelo, Mark Twain and Nicole Kidman.

Chinese New Year has been an intrinsic part of Melbourne’s cultural tradition since the city’s earliest days. Last year, the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra honoured the Lunar New Year with the first of what we hope will become an annual celebration – a natural linking of eastern and western music.

This concert recognises the diversity and brilliance of music directly related to, or inspired by, eastern themes. We are particularly delighted to welcome back the great Chinese composer, Tan Dun, who is conducting tonight’s concert. The program includes one of Tan Dun’s most important recent works, Nu Shu: The Secret Songs of Women. In addition to other Chinese music, the program contains Ravel’s Boléro and Puccini’s immortal ‘O, mio babbino caro’, from Gianni Schicchi, with Chinese soprano Bing Bing Wang.

It is an exciting and culturally diverse program. I hope you enjoy it.

Special thanks to the Li Family Trust who have so generously supported this concert.

To those sheep and goats and all the other animals of the Chinese zodiac, I warmly say, Gong Xi Fa Cai!

On behalf of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, I welcome you to tonight’s Chinese New Year Concert.

In 2012, when I took up my appointment as the MSO’s Managing Director, I was immediately struck by Melbourne’s astonishing and vibrant cultural diversity.

As such, last season we inaugurated what is now an annual celebration of the Lunar New Year. After all, East and West have long been pillars of this city’s social, economic and cultural life. What better way to express Melbourne’s thriving global culture than through music?

Tonight’s concert, as you will see, is a tribute to East and West. It is conducted by the Chinese maestro and composer, Tan Dun, and features some extraordinarily evocative and challenging music – including, I am thrilled to say, one of Tan Dun’s most ambitious and moving works.

Our ambition is to secure the place of these annual concerts as among Australia’s most significant multicultural events. We are deeply grateful to our event partners and supporters who help make this initiative possible which this year includes ANZ, the East Meets West Consortium and the invaluable assistance of the Ambassador of the People’s Republic of China to Australia MA Zhaoxu and Consul General of the People’s Republic of China in Melbourne Song Yumin.

I am delighted that this concert is being broadcast to the rest of the nation on ABC Classic FM, as well as through China. This fulfills one of the MSO’s most important functions: to be Australia’s cultural ambassador.

Song Yumin
Consul General of the People’s Republic of China in Melbourne

Harold Mitchell AC
Chairman

André Gremillet
Managing Director, MSO
With a reputation for excellence, versatility and innovation, the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra is Australia’s oldest orchestra, established in 1906. The Orchestra currently performs live to more than 200,000 people annually, in concerts ranging from subscription performances at its home, Hamer Hall at Arts Centre Melbourne, to its annual free concerts at Melbourne’s largest outdoor venue, the Sidney Myer Music Bowl.

Sir Andrew Davis gave his inaugural concerts as Chief Conductor of the MSO in April 2013, having made his debut with the Orchestra in 2009. Highlights of his tenure have included collaborations with artists including Bryn Terfel, Emanuel Ax and Truls Mørk, the release of recordings of music by Percy Grainger and Eugene Goossens, a 2014 European Festivals tour, and a multi-year cycle of Mahler’s Symphonies.

The MSO also works each season with Principal Guest Conductor Diego Matheuz, Associate Conductor Benjamin Northey and the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra Chorus. Recent guest conductors to the MSO have included Thomas Adès, John Adams, Tan Dun, Charles Dutoit, Jakub Hrůša, Mark Wigglesworth, Markus Stenz and Simone Young. The Orchestra has also collaborated with non-classical musicians including Burt Bacharach, Ben Folds, Nick Cave, Sting and Tim Minchin.

The MSO reaches an even larger audience through its regular concert broadcasts on ABC Classic FM, also streamed online, and through recordings on Chandos and ABC Classics. The MSO’s Education and Community Engagement initiatives deliver innovative and engaging programs to audiences of all ages, including MSO Learn, an educational iPhone and iPad app designed to teach children about the inner workings of an orchestra.

The Melbourne Symphony Orchestra is funded principally by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body, and is generously supported by the Victorian Government through Creative Victoria, Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources. The MSO is also funded by the City of Melbourne, its Principal Partner, Emirates, corporate sponsors and individual donors, trusts and foundations.

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East Meets West
Chinese New Year Concert

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Melbourne Symphony Orchestra
Tan Dun conductor
Yinuo Mu harp
Bing Bing Wang soprano
Zhao Lei erhu
Yuan Li guzheng
—
LI HUANZHI
Spring Festival Overture
GRIGORAȘ IONICĂ DINICU
ARR. VENTOURAS
The Lark
GUAN XIA
Hua Mulan
GIACOMO PUCCINI
Gianni Schicchi: ‘O mio babbino caro’ (O, my beloved father)
MAURICE RAVEL
Boléro
—
Interval 20 Minutes
—
TAN DUN
Nu Shu: The Secret Songs of Women

About the Artists

Tan Dun is the winner of such prestigious honours as the Grammy Award, Academy Award, and Musical America’s ‘Composer of The Year’. As a composer and conductor, he has led the world’s most renowned orchestras including the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, London Symphony Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, Berlin Philharmonic, Orchestre National de France and BBC Symphony Orchestra among others. His compositions include Internet Symphony No. 1, the organic music trilogy of Water, Paper and Earth concerti; The Map, premiered by Yo-Yo Ma and the Boston Symphony Orchestra; and Orchestral Theatre: The Gate, which crosses the cultural boundaries of Peking opera, Western opera and puppet theatre traditions. Other projects include a percussion concerto for soloist Martin Grubinger, Nu Shu: The Secret Songs of Women, inspired by the calligraphy of Tan Dun’s home province of Hunan, China and the operas Marco Polo, The First Emperor, Tea: A Mirror of Soul, and The Peony Pavilion.

Yinuo Mu
harp

Principal Harpist of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, Yinuo Mu is the winner of numerous music awards and solo competitions including Grand Prize at the American String Teachers Association National Solo Competition and American Harp Society’s Ann Adams Award, and has appeared with the Boston, Houston, and San Diego Symphony Orchestras and Florida Grand Opera as well as many leading state symphony and opera orchestras in Australia. Recent performance highlights include performing at the BBC Proms and at music festivals at Edinburgh, Amsterdam, Germany and Copenhagen as part of the MSO’s 2014 European Tour, Melbourne Ring Cycle with Opera Australia in 2013 and the Malthouse Theatre’s award-winning production of The Bloody Chamber.

This concert has a duration of approximately 1 hour and 50 minutes including one 20 minute interval.

Tonight’s performance will be recorded for future broadcast around Australia on ABC Classic FM on Sunday 1 March at 1pm.

ABC Classic FM
Chinese soprano Bing Bing Wang has appeared in opera houses in Europe, the United States and Australia, in such roles as Liù (Turandot), Nedda (Pagliacci), Micaëla (Carmen), Musetta (La bohème), and Adina (The Elixir of Love).

Her engagements in 2015 include Beethoven’s Symphony No.9 in Guangzhou, China, and performances in Italy at Teatro Massimo Bellini and the Taormina and Pompei music festivals.

Other recent highlights include concerts at the Atlanta Symphony Hall and Opéra-Théâtre de Metz, France, her debut as Nedda with the Haifa Symphony Orchestra in Israel, Adina at Slovene National Theatre Maribor and Latvian National Opera, Serpina (La serva padrona) at Macau International Music Festival, and a concert in the Venetian Theatre in Macau with the China National Symphony Orchestra and China’s Three Tenors.

Zhao Lei started learning the erhu at the age of six, studying under renowned erhu educators Lin Ximing, Wang Yongde and Huo Yonggang. When he is not honing his skills on the erhu, Zhao devotes himself to promoting Chinese folk music, which includes researching, writing and conducting the seminar series Overview of Chinese Folk Music since 2012.

He has collaborated with many performing arts masters and famous performers, including Japanese gagaku master Hideki Togi, Japanese modern dance master Kazunori Kumagai, British electronic music group Shine, and ten-time Grammy Award-winner Bobby McFerrin.

Zhao was also invited to compose, arrange and perform his work Erhu Wu Xian Dong at the opening of the Chinese Night at the 66th Cannes Film Festival in France, and has performed and toured extensively across Asia and internationally.

Yuan Li is the best guzheng solo player in China today. She played guzheng in Tan Dun’s film scores to The Banquet, and Shaolin Temple Ceremony. She also recorded and played The Song of Yue People and High Mountains and Flowing Waters in Sweden and Germany, which were also created and conducted by Tan Dun.

In 2008, working with the composer and conductor Guan Xia, she played guzheng in the Symphony Hua Mulan. She has performed for the former President of China, Hu Jintao and the President of the International Olympic Committee Jacques Rogge during the Beijing Olympic Games.

Yuan Li has also performed guzheng duet for US President Barack Obama in the Great Hall of the People during his visit to China in 2009.
ABOUT THE MUSIC

This evening marks the second time that Tan Dun has conducted the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra in a Chinese New Year concert. Chinese New Year, or the Spring Festival as it is known in China, takes place over 15 days. Houses are swept clean of evil spirits, red and gold decorations (symbolic of good fortune) are hung, and family get-togethers are celebrated with symbolic food.

Li Huanzhi
Spring Festival Overture
The Spring Festival Overture (1956) provides a fitting opening to tonight’s celebration of Eastern and Western culture, as it is capable of being played on Western or traditional Chinese instruments or combinations of both. Its composer, Hong Kong-born Li Huanzhi was an important figure in Chinese music and founded the China Central Chinese Orchestra in 1960. For listeners of Western classical music, the pentatonic flavour of Spring Festival Overture may call to mind Dvořák’s folk-influenced works. The overture may have local associations but in 2007 it was one of 30 musical selections beamed back to Earth from China’s first lunar-probe satellite in time for the Lantern Festival, the formal end to the Lunar New Year holiday.

Grigoraş Ionică Dinicu
The Lark
The second half of this concert pays tribute to an 800-year-old regional culture which has stood distinct from the Chinese mainstream. There are pockets of non-mainstream European culture, too. Composer of The Lark, Romanian violin virtuoso Grigoraş Ionică Dinicu, was born into a family of lautari (gypsy professional musicians). Many of his arrangements, such as 1906’s Hora staccato, were written for violin and piano, but can also be heard in various arrangements. Jazz violinist Stéphane Grappelli was a great admirer of lautareasca music and Yehudi Menuhin considered it a musical link to India.

Guan Xia
Hua Mulan
In a concert which celebrates East and West, it is significant that Guan Xia, current executive director of the China National Symphony Orchestra, has struggled with the question of bridging Western and Chinese forms in works such as Earth Requiem and the operas Sorrowful Morning and Mulan Psalm. The story of Hua Mulan taking her aged father’s place in the army has always been a favourite subject of writers and composers. This work by Guan Xia for guzheng and orchestra opens at an unhurried pace with a unique folk song-like melody. Through the expressive use of the guzheng, it exquisitely portrays Hua Mulan’s love for her father, before invoking the glorious spirit of courageous warriors charging into battle. The piece is infused with the classical aesthetics of theatrical music, noble and lyrical, never losing its elegance even in its livelier moments.

Giacomo Puccini
Gianni Schicchi: O mio babbino caro
There is often a Puccini-esque lyricism in contemporary Chinese music for orchestra. In Puccini’s only comic opera, Gianni Schicchi, Schicchi is summoned by relatives of the wealthy Buoso Donati to help them falsify Buoso’s will so that they, rather than the church, will inherit his money. Lauretta, Schicchi’s daughter, is in love with young Rinuccio Donati. When Schicchi gets into an argument with Zita, the head of the Donati family, and refuses to help them, Lauretta attempts to change her father’s mind. O mio babbino caro is an appeal from Lauretta to her father.

Ravel’s Boléro was originally composed as a ballet for Russian actress and dancer Ida Rubinstein.

Text: Giovacchino Forzano
Translation: Symphony Australia/ Matthew Absalom © 2009
Maurice Ravel

*Boléro*

Ravel composed his *Boléro* for the Russian dancer, Ida Rubinstein. As a ballet it was first performed at the Paris Opéra in November 1928, with sets and costumes by Alexandre Benois.

The scenario: on a table in a Spanish inn, a woman begins to dance. She dances quietly at first to a simple rhythm. But then, gradually and beguilingly, the dancer winds the spectators up into a frenzy of turmoil and confusion. The music reflects the simplicity of the plot. It is all really one long crescendo. The rhythm of the snare drum is constant and the sinuous melody is repeated again and again, with different orchestrations – flute at first, then clarinet, then bassoon, E flat clarinet, oboe d’amore, flute and muted trumpet, tenor saxophone, soprano saxophone (with soprano sax finishing the phrase as it drops below the range of the soprano) … building and changing colour all the time. Japanese composer Maki Ishii once said that nowadays percussion instruments ‘do more than merely mark out a rhythm when hit with a stick’, but *Boléro*, where the most exhilarating crescendo in orchestral literature is underpinned by the repetition of a simple rhythm, shows how exciting that straightforward function can be.

**Tan Dun**

*Nu Shu: The Secret Songs of Women*

Tan Dun is well known to the world for his film scores: *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000), *Hero* (2002) and *The Banquet* (2006). Last year in Melbourne Tan himself conducted his Pipa Concerto and the *Triple Resurrection*, a work which continues Tan’s interest in the combination of film and music but this time with music prompting the visuals.

Born in Hunan province, young Tan grew up in a world where modern China intersected with indigenous traditions (shamans could communicate with the past and the present, with leaves and stones). After working as a rice planter during the Cultural Revolution and then in the Beijing Opera, Tan went to the Central Conservatory in Beijing and from there to New York where he studied composition at Columbia University with Chou Wen-Chung, a student of Edgard Varèse. Now based in New York, he is perhaps the most successful exponent of bringing non-Western cultures into orchestral music. This partly reflects his personal biography, and is partly due to his broad concept of counterpoint as reaching beyond sound to encompass the working together (or meshing together) of sound and image, West and East, nature and culture, past and future. *Nu Shu* is a case in point.

*Nu Shu: The Secret Songs of Women* originates in Tan Dun’s discovery several years ago that in the county of Jiang Yong in his home province there are women who have had their own means of communication since the 13th century. ‘Nu Shu’ means ‘women’s writing’. Advice, messages, instructional tales and life lessons have been passed down...
in song form and in a distinct form of writing from mother to daughter and sister to sister over the past 800 years. Nicknames for the script include ‘mosquito legs’ writing ‘to distinguish it from the square shapes of Hanzi, traditional Chinese writing. Tan prefers its other moniker, ‘music note writing’. The language has been the province of women only (often written on intimate items, such as fans), but is now under threat. Gao Yinxian, described by Tan as the most important woman in Nu Shu village, died some years ago, and Tan Dun promised the villagers that he would create an orchestral piece which might help position the language in the future.

It would be better not to think of Tan Dun’s Nu Shu as an anthropological record. His response to the Nu Shu culture is more poetic, but in creating this work, filming and recording the songs, he developed a vast archive that might assist in preserving the culture, an aim he regards among his highest. It is somewhat ironic that a man has finally stepped into this role.

The work sees an orchestral frame around traditional nüshu songs sung on film by women of the village (including He Jinghua, Pu Lijuan, Zhou Huijuan, He Yanxin, Jiang Shinu, Hu Xin, Mo Cuifeng, and Hu Melyue). Tan’s use of film is true to his concept of counterpoint, in this instance incorporating a counterpoint of time. The “archival” footage denotes nu shu’s past; the orchestra its future. Tan gave considerable thought to the medium which should serve as the bridge between these two dimensions and settled on the harp as being the most feminine instrument and one bearing likeness to a nu shu written character. At Nu Shu’s first performance the harp solo was played by Elizabeth Hainen, principal harpist of the Philadelphia Orchestra, which commissioned the work along with Tokyo’s NHK Symphony Orchestra and Europe’s Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Amsterdam.

Nu Shu has a very poetic structure which could be considered under the themes of women, weeping, rivers and song. Tan sees the work in six parts: Prologue; Mother’s Story (parts 2, 3 and 4); Nu Shu Village (part 5); Sisters’ Intimacy (parts 6, 7 and 8); Daughter’s Story (parts 9, 10, 11 and 12); and Epilogue (part 13).

Gordon Kalton Williams © 2014

Tan Dun’s own description of each of the 13 movements is as follows:

**Prologue**

1. Secret Fan: To express the love felt between mother and daughter, or among sisters, generations of women write in a common secret language, Nu Shu, on paper and fans. This forms the genesis of the ancient Nu Shu culture. The intimacy, compassion, and beauty of Nu Shu is a monumental tribute to women.

2. Mother’s Song: ‘Wisdom on educating daughters’, the holy scripture that has been passed down from mother to daughter through countless generations, preserves the cultural traditions regarding family, ethics and child-rearing, and what it means to be a woman.

3. Dressing for the Wedding: Girls are typically married as early as age 15. Their wedding day is the most beautiful day of their life. Sisters, on the verge of parting with each other, help dress the bride. Underneath the dazzling head piece and the gorgeous wedding gown, is a reluctant heart bearing the weight of farewell. The fully attired bride captures the monumentality of life.
Cry-Singing for the Marriage: The wedding tradition features three days of consecutive crying. The resulting tear-soaked scarf serves as a link between mother and daughter, as well as between generations. After the wedding, any communication between mother and daughter is conducted secretly through rewriting the “Wisdom on educating daughters”.

Nu Shu Village: Every race and culture has a Mother River. In Nu Shu Village flows such a river since the Song Dynasty. Beside the river the local women spend their lifetime nurturing their own language: Nu Shu. Nu Shu Village has never been relocated away from the river. The river has been serving as an emotional connection between mother, daughter, and sisters for generations.

Sisters’ Intimacy: Besides the relationship between mother and daughter, sisterly love is also featured prominently in this work. Singing songs that reminisce about sisterly love gives the woman a chance to be reminded of her innocent, happy childhood. This serves as an anchor for her navigation of her current state of loneliness.

A Road without End: The life of a woman contains endless alleyways. She meanders from one to another, searching for her childhood sisters. Household after household, gate after gate, river after river, dynasty after dynasty … the woman continues on her endless journey.

Forever Sisters: Reunion between sisters dissipates all the sorrows, leaving behind laughter at childhood memories and tears at understanding adult life. The compassion shared between sisters often accompanies them into their marriages, providing strength in moments of hardship.

Daughter’s Story: River, or a body of tears? Only the water knows the answer. River of Women is the river for daughters, mothers, and grandmothers of countless generations – as their tears form the melancholic melody on which float their boats of dreams.

Grandmother’s Echo: Gao Yinxiang was the most important woman of the Nu Shu Village as she helped pass down the language from generation to generation. Gao passed away at the age of 88. In her former residence, her granddaughter sits on the stool that Gao once sat on, as echoes of Nu Shu songs once heard by Gao as she sat there sewing come from afar …

The Book of Tears: Mo Cufeng cries on remembering her wedding 50 years ago, when she was once a daughter to her own mother. Half a century went by: her mother passed away; Mo’s tears remain.

Soul Bridge: A bridge where a daughter walks to remember her mother.

Epilogue: Despite the hardship encountered by the women of Nu Shu Village, why are their songs and lives filled with romanticism? That is because each day, when mothers, daughters and sisters gather together to sing, write and sew in Nu Shu, the happy time shared provides them with a wonderful, dreamlike reality.

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February — July

Bryn Terfel & Lisa McCune
SATURDAY 14 MARCH*
SUNDAY 15 MARCH
International superstar bass-baritone
Bryn Terfel joins Lisa McCune, Australia’s sweetheart of the stage,
for this thrilling night of Broadway classics.
*Official opening night of MSO season. Book for post concert cocktail party.

The Damnation of Faust
FRIDAY 20 MARCH
SATURDAY 21 MARCH
Don’t miss this definitive performance of Berlioz’s genre-defying “concert opera” based on Goethe’s legendary dramatic poem Faust about a man who sells his soul to the devil. Conducted by Sir Andrew Davis, and featuring Bryn Terfel as Méphistophélès.

Sarah Chang Plays Bruch
FRIDAY 10 APRIL
SATURDAY 11 APRIL
MONDAY 13 APRIL
Following her enormously popular concerts in 2013, celebrated violinist Sarah Chang returns to perform Bruch’s famous Violin Concerto in G minor. Conducted by MSO Chief Conductor Sir Andrew Davis.

Anzac Tribute
THURSDAY 23 APRIL
FRIDAY 24 APRIL
On the eve of the 100th anniversary of the Gallipoli landings, Diego Matheuz conducts Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony, and incidental music to Goethe’s Egmont. With the MSO Chorus and Australian and international soloists.

Beethoven: the 1808 Vienna Concert
SATURDAY 2 MAY
With a line-up of internationally acclaimed soloists and the Royal Melbourne Philharmonic Choir joining the Orchestra for this rare event, we invite you to sit back and relax in the company of one of music’s greatest creative minds.

Yuja Wang plays Prokofiev
THURSDAY 23 JULY
FRIDAY 24 JULY
SATURDAY 25 JULY
Chinese piano superstar Yuja Wang brings her acclaimed virtuosity to Prokofiev’s tempestuous Second Piano Concerto. Also featuring Tchaikovsky’s Marche Slave and Brahms’ luminous fourth and final symphony.

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San Francisco Chronicle

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