

Dr. Mei Zhong
School of Music
mzhong@bsu.edu

The Development of Chinese Art Songs

It is noticed that there are increasing amounts of Western students studying Eastern music at universities in the United States, creating an interest that promotes cultural diversity. Many art songs in China are the equivalent of art songs in the West, but the history of Chinese art songs in China began much later in comparison with songs of Western origin. Early Chinese art songs were influenced by Western compositional techniques, although the musical style itself remained distinct: Chinese melodies are based on pentatonic scales with grace notes, and this distinguishes their musical style from those of Western melodies. Qing Zhu composed the art song *Grand River Gone East* (1922) which is considered representative of the earliest art songs with ancient poems in the Chinese art song history. A few years following the *Grand River Gone East*, another composer, Zhao Yuanren, composed the song *How Can I Stop Thinking of Him*. Following Zhao Yuanren, many other composers emerged, such as Huang Zi, and soon the Chinese art song genre grew. In this project, the development of Chinese Art Songs will be discussed.

The singing style of Chinese art songs displays features that merge the East with the West, such as Chinese folk with a strong influence of Italian *Bel Canto*. In the project, while examining elements of the influence of Western singing style in Chinese art song repertoire, I will also present several representative composers and their works from different time periods -- Chinese art songs ranging from traditional songs by earlier Chinese composers such as Huangzi and Qingzhu, to more contemporary songs written in 2006 by the composers Chin Chin Chen, Paul SanGregory and Derek Healey. Audiences will learn how the Chinese Art Song has developed over the course of history, as well as highlight a pattern of compositional development in the history throughout the past century with particular emphasis on cross cultural issues.

With 5,000 years of culture, China's history is a rich and valuable addition to the field of music. Many Chinese art songs are set famous poems Tang and Song dynasties, which are considered to be among the greatest achievements of Chinese culture. A portion of my project will be presented at the International Congress of Voice Teachers in Paris this summer, as a lecture-recital. My presentation would highlight the international character of BSU's own music faculty and the fact that the university values diversity and multicultural perspectives.

On April 22, I was interviewed by WFIU Public Radio at Indiana University, Bloomington, the article *Mei Zhong Brings Chinese Songs To The West*, aired at 7:00 P.M. May 12, 2009 on radio. I hope to introduce the beauty and emotion of Mandarin Chinese poetry and show how it can provide a wealth of ideas for exploration and development through the medium of the Chinese art song.