



LOCAL FAVOURITES  
BY THE  
SINGAPORE  
CHINESE  
ORCHESTRA

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Basically , Chinese musical instruments are categorised by the method of their sound production. Thus, wind instruments are blown, plucking instruments are plucked, string instruments are bowed and percussion instruments are struck.

It is interesting to note that Chinese musical instruments were once classified into eight families, depending on their material of construction- metal, stone, silk, bamboo, calabash, clay, animals and wood.

## WIND INSTRUMENTS

### Suona

This double reed instrument was brought to China by Muslim travellers 500 years ago. During that time, it was used mostly in the Chinese army. Later, its ability to produce both melancholy tunes as well as bright and lively sound was recognised and full advantage taken. As such, its use is now extended to funeral as well as wedding ceremonies. In an orchestra, the singing of birds is imitated by the suona.

Today, there are two versions of the suona. The adapted type has a key to modulate the tone unlike the traditional one which can only produce a sharp sound. This instrument's counterpart in the Western orchestra is the conical oboe.

### Sheng

By virtue of its construction, this is the only Chinese musical instrument capable of sounding various notes simultaneously. Music from this double-reed mouth organ is produced by blowing and sucking air through a whistle at the cap-like base that clasps the pipes. Historical records show that the instrument existed as far back as 3000 years ago when the Miao tribes of the Yunan province in South- western China sang and danced to it. The Chou Dynasty Book of Rites mentioned its use

during ceremonies performed for the four seasons and supplications for rain and a good harvest. The sheng is said to have been developed in imitation of the mythical phoenix Feng Huang. Again both the adapted and traditional forms are pictured. The newer has more pipes giving a better harmonic sound bamboo originally used by ancient herdsmen. Yet another version is the General Men Tien who lived during the Qin Dynasty (255-206) and built part of the Great Wall of China, invented this zither. As such, the instrument reached the height of its popularity during the period. Today, this horizontal board zither uses 16 to 25 strings. In the orchestra, the guzheng is employed when special effects such as the descending strains of cascading water are required.

### Ruan

A short necked lute, the ruan has a history of 1,600 years. Since then, its application has remained the same; that is, in orchestras and for the accompaniment of operatic performances. There are two types of this Chinese fretted instrument- the zhongruan which produces mid-tone sounds and daruan the much lower.

### Pipa

Imported from Persia in 140 BC, the instrument was introduced during the Tang Dynasty. With 2000 years of history behind it, the pipa is no doubt one of the most well known Chinese musical instruments. The 4 strings of the pipa produce sound of a highly expressive and dramatic tonal quality; thus use in the depiction of battle scenes. Unlike the pipa players of old, who depended on the plectrum to play the instrument, the preference now is towards the use of long finger nails

### Sanxian

The distinguishing characteristic of the Chinese lute is its long neck and three strings. 'San' when translated means three and 'xian' strings. It has a history of 3000 years. A snake skin membrane stretched over the resonator gives the instrument its rich, full, tonal quality and great volume. Because of its wide range, the sanxian is widely used for that accompaniment of orchestral solo performances. This instrument come in different sizes, small, medium and large. The small sanxian is used to accompany story-singing and music drama performances; and the large instrument to provide music for epic singing.

## STRING INSTRUMENTS

### Erhu

'Er' means two and 'hu' is a synonymous with barbarian, hence double-string barbarian fiddle. It is also known as the nanhu, because the Chinese musical instrument first became popular in southern China; 'nan' being south. A gentle and firm tone is produced by this, one of the most prominent instruments of the Chinese orchestra's string section. The erhu's capacity ranges from lyricism to dazzling displays resulting in its being employed in ensemble and theatre orchestras. Because ancient pictorial sources of the erhu are rare, the instrument's recent introducing can only be inferred.

### Gaohu

Used chiefly in Cantonese (Southern Chinese) opera, this instrument has a mellow, tonal quality. Its two strings when struck give a fine, delicate and graceful sound.

### Zhonghu

A part of the erhu family, the zhonghu distinguishes itself by producing music of a lower pitch but louder volume. The shape of the resonator varies from circular to octagonal. In western orchestras, this instrument's equivalent is the viola.

### Banhu

Its sound box is covered with a thin slice of wood instead of a skin membranes as with the other members. Consequently, a clear and articulate tone suitable for accompanying operatic performance is produced by it. Because this instrument is more tone coloured with bigger and sharper sound volumes, it is the only one of its kind employed in Chinese orchestras.

### Gehu and Beida Gehu

These are the Chinese equivalents of the cello and double bass. Both have four strings and can be played either by bowing or plucking. These instruments which support the rest of the string family became popular in China during the Sung Dynasty (960-1279 AD).

## PERCUSSION INSTRUMENTS

### Gu

This is the drum and has been in existence since 2079 BC. Then, its function was to indicate attack during battles. There are various kinds of gu- the twirling drum, the hanging drum, the type suspended on a foot frame to be beaten with two wooden hammers and the drum on a pedestal.

### Luo

A popular folk music instrument, the sound from the luo or gong is produced by the mallet hitting the metal plate. It is usual to see this instrument used in Chinese theatre musical productions and ceremonial events, often in temples.

### Bo

These cymbals were used in ancient times and, to some extent still today, by the Chinese medicine men to peddle their wares. Like the luo, the bo is principally used in the theatre and on ceremonial occasions.

NATIONAL LIBRARY  
SINGAPORE

16 MAY 1995

Chinese instrument music is soothing, enchanting and pleasant to listen to. As part of our 25th Anniversary Celebrations in 1995, we have specially arranged for some of the popular community and Chinese songs to be played in a musical style that has pleased emperors and ordinary folks over the centuries. These songs are performed by the accomplished Chinese Orchestra under the Peoples' Association.

We hope that you will enjoy the new arrangements of these familiar songs. There is also a segment demonstrating the sounds produced by the different instruments of the Chinese orchestra, with an explanation of these instruments.

We hope that you will find this to be educational and interesting as well.

Happy Listening.

Tan Kin Lian

Chief Executive Officer

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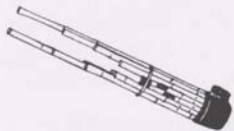
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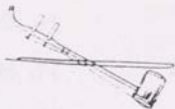
SANXIAN



GU



SHENG



ERHU



LUO



RUAN



GAOHU



BO



PIPA



ZHONGHU

1. Singapura
2. Chan Mali Chan
3. We are Singapore
4. Flower In Spring 春天的花朵
5. Tong Yao 童謠
6. Di Tanjong Katong
7. Rasa Sayang
8. Hu Ji Hua 胡姬花
9. Wu Suo Nan Yang 霧鎖南洋
10. Samsui Lady
11. Nan Er Dang Zi Qiang 男兒當自強
12. Good Morning Teacher
13. Count On Me Singapore
14. Stand Up For Singapore
15. It's a Little Thing
16. Cradle Song
17. Munneru Valiba
18. Enggal Singapore
19. Chinese Musical Instrument - Di 笛
20. Souna 嗩吶
21. Yang Qin 揚琴
22. Liu Qin 柳琴
23. Pipa 琵琶
24. Zhong Ruan 中阮
25. Zheng 箏
26. Er-Hu 二胡



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By The  
Singapore Chinese Orchestra

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Compact Disc  
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INCOME

National Library

- Singapore - Asian Star - We are Singapore  
Flower In Spring 春天的花朵 - Tong Yao 童谣 - Di Tanjong Katong  
Rasa Sayang - Hu Ji Hua 胡姬花 - Wu Suo Nan Yang 焉叻南洋  
Samsu Lady - Nan Er Dang Zi Qiang 男儿当自强 - Good Morning Teacher  
Count On Me Singapore - Stand Up For Singapore  
It's a Little Thing - Cradle Song - Munneru Valiba  
Erigal Singapore - Chinese Musical Instrument - Di 笛  
Souma 唢呐 - Yang Qin 扬琴 - Liu Qin 柳琴  
Pipa 琵琶 - Zhong Ruan 中阮  
Zheng 筝 - Er-Hu 二胡

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