

## Jazz In Beijing

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I received an invitation from the Beijing MIDI Contemporary Music School to perform in their 2004 Music Festival on May 1-3. You can imagine how excited I and the members of my ensemble were. Even though I visited the school in 1999 and 2001 during the summer vacation, this time I hoped to not only witness the bustling activities of the music festival hosted by the school but also experience the close interactions among students, faculty, staff, and our ensemble members during our two-week residency from April 27 to May 10.

After considerable planning with the MIDI School's director, Mr. Zhang Fan, the four members of my group were able to arrive in Beijing from different cities and were met by representatives of the school. Ethnomusicologist Weihua Zhang also joined our residency as an assistant and interpreter. I had previously given a workshop in August 1999 on African rhythms for drumset at the school when it was located at Shangti, a northern suburb of Beijing. The students and faculty were very receptive at that time and were interested in my subsequent return to their community. In July 2001 I returned with saxophonist David Bindman and contrabassist Wes Brown, performing in the Beijing area, and we visited the school for an open rehearsal in its new campus near the Fragrant Mountain. It was there that we met Liu Xiaoguang, a composer, saxophonist, and pianist. Mr. Zhang Fan had arranged for Liu to join our ensemble for some of our performances.

### The Ensemble

In our recent visit from April 27 to May 10, 2004, we had a very strong ensemble. It included saxophonist Hafez Modirzadeh, an ethnomusicologist and professor at San Francisco State University in California, whom I had met in New York saxophonist Fred Ho's Afro-Asian Music Ensemble and come to know in Wesleyan University's (Connecticut, USA)

Ph.D. program in World Music. Because of his interest in the temperament of Persian music and other world music cultures, he has also done research on the ancient Chinese theory of temperament and has applied the theory to his own playing. Through alternate fingerings, Hafez has transformed the western-tempered saxophone into a nonwestern temperament voice as an essential element of style.

Our group's pianist was Art Hirahara, who has been an official jazz ambassador sent by the U. S. to many Mideast and Southeast Asian countries. He has studied classical piano at Oberlin conservatory (Ohio, USA) and jazz and world music at CalArts, in Los Angeles, California. His piano artistry is conversant in European, African American, and many other world cultural traditions.

Contrabassist Wes Brown, another Wesleyan world music alumnus, has toured professionally with jazz legends such as pianist Earl 'Fatha' Hines, and also studied and played in many traditional African and African-Caribbean music and dance ensembles. Wes and I have been playing together since our Wesleyan years in the early 1980s, and we have a shared understanding of world music and the complex rhythms of Indian, African, and Javanese music.

### The Beijing MIDI School of Music

The expansion of the school since 2001 is very impressive. It presently rents the campus from the Institute of Forestry near the foot of the Fragrant Mountain, so the campus is situated within acres of saplings, orchards and grapevines, an inspiring environment for teaching and learning music and the arts. The two-story administrative complex one sees on entering the school grounds includes large classrooms and offices. To one side is

a cafeteria and kitchen, while behind the administrative/classroom building are several rows of smaller buildings that serve as practice rooms, classrooms, and rehearsal spaces. Across a spacious quadrangle between these buildings, an area dotted with trees, lies a large auditorium that is used for concerts, workshops, lectures, and rehearsals. From the early morning one can hear saxophonists, drummers, and guitarists practicing among the trees and in the practice rooms. The three-story student dormitory is a short distance from the main school grounds, easily accessible on a road surrounded by fruit tree orchards. The majority of the dorm is for male students, with a smaller wing for female students, a few staff members, and guests like us. We had simple but comfortable quarters and drinking water in the rooms, which had a striking view of the fragrant mountain area. The bathrooms are shared, and there was a canteen/store within the dormitory building, as well as a computer center on the top floor. At first the cook of the dining hall made special dishes for us but later we found the food for the students was quite good and we enjoyed eating with them. My wife joked that this is the "three together" (when she went to the countryside during the cultural revolution people should live together, eat together and work together).

The school now has 230 students divided into two classes, first and second year. The tuition is 13,000 Chinese yuan (approximately \$1,625) for one academic year including room and board. Tuition seems to be the sole source of income for the school because they have not received any support from the government or private donors.

In addition to the physical campus the school's curriculum, teaching, and administrative staff have also grown. The president, Zhang Fan, now has an assistant, Zhao Jieyong, who is a graduate of the school. During our residence Zhao helped arrange logistics and transportation and served as interpreter. Since he is also a musician, his help to us was invaluable. Another example of the school's growth is a computer laboratory with twenty stations in the student dormitory available for their free use. The campus'

recording studios are equipped with state of the art sound systems and the school also owns many vehicles. Some of our performances were recorded with a digital camcorder and the school also made a professional DVD of my master class on drumset to be used for teaching after we leave.

### The MIDI Festival

The Beijing MIDI School of Music Festival was planned for May 1st to May 3rd, 2004. Originally, the first day was dedicated to rock'n roll, the second to blues and jazz (our group was scheduled to play as the featured ensemble), and the third to pop and other styles. However, on April 29, the school received a notice from the Bureau of Security, that the application for a permit to hold the festival was denied. The reason given was that a fatal accident happened in March at a similar festival in a neighboring county. An overcrowded bridge collapsed, drowning a few spectators. Since the MIDI School's festival is free, the officials were afraid too many people might attend and lose control, creating an unsafe situation. However, the notice was given so late that the school could not do anything to remedy the Bureau's fears, such as distributing tickets to control attendance. So to everybody's disappointment, the school made phone calls to cancel the more than forty groups that were scheduled to play in the festival, including one travelling from Japan. Email and other networking contacts were used to publicly notify thousands of prospective audience-goers.

From the beautifully printed program book of last year's festival, there were 44 groups that played, each one having 40 minutes playing time. The festival was held on Oct 1-3 with music from 2:00 pm to midnight each day. Many of the group members were graduates of the MIDI School, and musicians of different nationalities also joined the ensembles. I was told there were about six thousand people in the audience last year. The stage was located in the green quadrangle area surrounded by trees, allowing

enough room for the audience to walk around or stand in the shade during performances. Many in the audience were from other cities or provinces. Beside the open air festivals at the campus, the MIDI School also sends its student groups to perform in the Music Week festivities in the city of Beijing.

Because many people did not receive notification of cancellation for this year's festival, a number of listeners came to the school anyway, many from other cities. The MIDI School anticipated this and got approval from the Bureau of Security to hold an informal concert on May 1st at 2:00 pm, with some plainclothes policemen on the site. Beside my ensemble, two other groups were invited to play, one called Modern Bubbles, which consisted mostly of MIDI graduates, including Liu Xiaoguang on keyboard and tenor saxophone, Jia Yinan on guitar, Wang Dan on bass and Huang Jin on percussion. The other group is known as Wen Fang Si Bao (meaning ink, brush pen, paper, and ink slab, used for writing in ancient China). All its members are graduates of the MIDI School, and even though they are a rock group, one can hear a strong jazz influence in their playing. Both ensembles displayed precision and a good sense of interplay, with well-rehearsed original compositions and arrangements. It was a pleasure to hear these musicians play African American-based American popular styles with integrity, comparable to the rare if-ever occurring feat of Americans performing traditional Chinese music with stylistic success. The guitarist Jia Yinan is also a composer and has a wonderful sense of melody, saying he wants to express in his music the passion for life and hope in the future. Liu Xiaoguang, also a composer who played piano with my group in our 2001 Beijing performances, was impressive in his saxophone soloing. During our performance we invited Liu and Jia to join us in the song composition *All the Things You Are*. We felt right at home with these two artists joining our ensemble and they played with considerable skill. The audience was very encouraging and receptive to our music, with much applause and interaction when we spoke through an interpreter between pieces. The concert ended at 5:00 pm and we

stayed quite a while to meet and talk with listeners, other performers, and musicians who had come to hear us.

### Our Ensemble Teaching Residency

As part of our residency at the Beijing MIDI School of Music, we gave individual instrumental lessons, ensemble workshops, and master classes in jazz and world music performance styles. The first of these classes, primarily for the second year students, started on Wednesday 28 April, the first day after we arrived. My presentation on contemporary drumset performance started at 1:00 pm and was attended by more than twenty students, mostly drumset majors. I talked about four basic styles: funk, swing, bebop, and Afro-Latin. I tried to use the onomatopoeic syllables of Chinese characters to demonstrate the basic rhythm feel for various grooves, such as *ta-dong dong* for funk. I also asked students to come to the stage to play the grooves I had demonstrated. At first many were hesitant, but later they all wanted to take part, and everyone had a chance to play.

Since all the bassists and guitarists attended Wes' class, he worked with about 40 students. He discussed the importance of the circle of fifths in the choice of bass notes for playing walking bass lines, and emphasized the importance of rhythm, harmony, and melody for bass playing. Students tried to use the circle of fifths in playing the blues form.

Art had four piano students, including one female student. Female students are a rarity in the MIDI School, with only six students, less than 3% of the total student body. Art talked about how to practice harmonically extended chords while playing the root and how to choose notes from the blues scale while improvising. Each student played an improvised solo and Art gave comments.

At four o'clock all the students gathered for an ensemble workshop. Only five students brought their instruments, three bassists and two saxophonists. My trio (Hafez had not yet arrived from the U. S.) played and students later joined us to play a bebop blues piece, with a theme, solos, backgrounds, and four-measure trading. The students later said they were excited to be able to participate with a professional group. We also enjoyed working with them, and found the students open to the idea of improvisation and risk-taking necessary to play jazz.

Over the next two days we worked with the students individually in the mornings and gave general presentations in the afternoon. Thursday involved a two-part presentation for the whole school in the afternoon in the large auditorium: first, a concert with descriptions of our roles as jazz improvisors, and secondly, a lecture-demonstration by Art and Wes in using MIDI (musical instrument digital interface) for composition and performance. On Friday we held an open rehearsal with Hafez, who had arrived the previous evening, working on and explaining some of the new music we would be performing in our Beijing concerts. Master classes continued, with Hafez joining us to teach the saxophone students. He stressed developing one's personal sound, intonation, traditional and alternate fingerings, bebop vocabulary, and his original ideas on improvisation.

Beginning from May 1st the students had a week's holiday as part of the nation's celebration of Mayday. However, many students remained at the school because their homes are a long distance from Beijing. We gave lessons and workshops for them and some school graduates who had returned to work with us. In these sessions some students asked for advice on how to study and pursue a career. I was very moved to hear some students expressing their enthusiasm for jazz. Although they had very few opportunities to listen to live jazz and had not been exposed to the history of African

American music, they fell in love with jazz after listening to the CDs of John Coltrane, Thelonious Monk, Charles Parker, and Gerry Mulligan, CDs they bought from an underground market.

By the second week of our residency I would hear the saxophone students practicing outdoors each morning on my way to drumming workshops, working on the phrasing Hafez had taught them. When I arrived at the ensemble space, I was greeted each day by eager drum students. We worked on different African diasporic rhythmic styles during the sessions, which lasted from 10 am until 2 or 3 pm. I was impressed at their dedication, many not even going to lunch. **Our** focus was on the Gahu dance drumming of the Ewe people of West Africa, Brazilian Samba and Bossa Nova, Cuban Rumba Guaguanco and Rumba Columbia, Son Clave, and reggae. We approached each style in the same way: discussion of historical and cultural background, playing the traditional rhythms in an ensemble, my demonstration of the adaptation of the traditional rhythms and other elements to drumset and jazz ensemble, and the students playing the rhythms with me on drumset. Having two drumsets in the classroom allowed us to play together, one student at a time with me, and this made the workshop very efficient.

On our last Saturday at the school May 8, I met with the drum students for a final morning session that included a review of our previous work. Their earnestness and work ethic was inspiring, since these students do not have easy access to the live performances and materials more common in the West. There are a few performance spaces in Beijing that include jazz, but the music is for obvious reasons not as accessible as in the U. S. Despite this obstacle to live listening opportunities, the students' high degree of self-motivation and openness to my teaching and playing are remarkable, something I also find among many of the other young American, European, and African students I have worked with. Significant credit should be given to the MIDI



School and Zhang Fan for filling this vacuum and making the music accessible through a systematic process of teaching and learning, connecting these students to the many international musics of the world's peoples.

As an aside, it is interesting and ironic that many people in the U.S., including most of jazz' practitioners, have observed that jazz and other creative artforms are far less accessible even in America, both presently as compared to past times, and as compared to other locations - such as Europe and Japan. They feel that this is due to a commodification of the music as a profit-making venture, unrealistically high CD and ticket prices, stressing titillating marketing image over substance, and a business mentality rather than an artistic/humanistic sensibility governing the music's production, presentation, and teaching.

Following this session, I spent the afternoon and early evening working with Zhang Fan and his staff in the production of a digital video disc (DVD) on drumset for the school's students and possible distribution throughout China. The session involved considerable technical preparation and coordination, including multiple audio and video recording sources, lighting, timing, even the uncomfortable detail of having a staff member hold an extra camera high over his head for hours while we recorded in order to get a different viewing angle. (We joked that he would not be able to bring his arms back to a normal position once we completed our session!)

We recorded from 3:30 until 8 pm and I covered four drumset topics: first, the history of the drumset from its African backgrounds and 19th century precursors, through New Orleans, swing, and other early jazz styles, to bebop, Latin jazz, and the more experimental approaches current today. Secondly, drumset techniques using brushes and sticks, and performance practice in African American idiomatic styles such as bebop, swing, gospel, rhythm and blues, funk, hip-hop, reggae, calypso, rumba, salsa,

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soca, and African highlife. My third topic was independence and unity among the drummer's four limbs and how to use this coordination in playing situations. The final area in the DVD was new ideas, including the adaptation of African rhythms to drumset and playing in unconventional and asymmetric meters such as 7-, 11-, or 15-pulse time cycles.

## Repertoire

We had prepared for our concerts with a varied repertoire of original compositions by Hafez, Art, and I, adaptations and arrangements of traditional world music melodies from Africa, China, and the Middle East, and arrangements of traditional African American jazz standards. The first group consisted of five compositions. Art's *Peace Unknown*, *Lament for Palestine* features a rubato melody and solos with a meditative and mournful feel that progresses through a series of melodic, harmonic, and dynamic changes. Hafez contributed three pieces, the first based on a Persian sensibility in a seven-beat time cycle entitled *Tabriz*. It moves through a relaxed feel in the rubato a *capella* saxophone introduction and opening ensemble theme in time, through solos intensifying into both triplet and double time feels, toward a return to the relaxed opening theme. *Mystic Monk* employs a melody reflecting that of Thelonious Monk's composition *Mysterioso*, but placed over the harmonic progression of the bebop piece *Cherokee*. It features an opening theme in a rubato dialogue format between saxophone and rhythm section (piano, contrabass, and drumset), stop time, and sudden explosion into a fast bebop swing groove that is maintained through the solos,

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concluding with trading eight measure sections with drumset and a return to the opening theme. Hafez' third composition was *Makam*, which included an opening theme played over a rhythm section dirge. This mournful feel is maintained and expanded through the saxophone solo by means of a fragmentation of the eventual fast swing groove that evolves into the piano solo. A return to the theme connected to a coda with a new melody and dramatically changing *accelerando* and *ritardando* inspired by Beijing Opera concludes the piece.

I contributed one composition and one arrangement inspired by my research, living, and playing in Ghana, West Africa and study with master artists from Africa in the U. S. Both were composed and played with the permission of the *Ewe* and *Asante* people with whom I had lived and studied. The first was *Wadsworth Falls*, an original melody over a twenty-four measure minor blues structure and based on supporting drum, bell, and rattle rhythms from the *Akom* spiritual music of the *Asante* people of central and western Ghana. It moves from a medium tempo four-beat meter including theme and solos to a soloistic and intensified coda in a fast three-four/six-eight time cycle. These two rhythmic structures reflect the ensemble rhythms for different sections of *Akom* dance drumming. My second offering was *Ewe*, an arrangement based on the traditional master and support drum rhythms for the *Agbekor* warrior music of the *Ewe* people of southeastern Ghana, Togo, and Benin. It includes a traditional song melody and drumset-contrabass dialogues reflecting *atsimevu* master drum episodes for specific dance movements.

Hafez also contributed an arrangement of a traditional Chinese melody from Yunnan Province to our repertoire.

During our stay in Beijing he heard a song melody that caught his interest, asking my wife, Weihua Zhang, its name. She sang and played *Xiao He Tang Shui* ('Flowing Stream') on piano and helped him to transcribe it during one of our rehearsals. After a few days, Hafez adapted the melody with an original harmonic structure into a piece including a collective ensemble introduction in a timeless feel, statement of the traditional theme without harmony, a restatement with the new harmonies, followed by individual solos in a loose flowing time feel and a return to the theme. This piece was one of our most interesting, since we hoped our efforts would be well-received by Chinese audiences and we wanted to keep its timeless flowing quality in our arrangement as an expression of our experiences in this ancient land and culture.

In our musical introductions and transitions between pieces during performances, Hafez referred to Persian melodic practice in his playing, embellishing traditional modal structures in nonwestern temperament. He is the only saxophonist who has developed the ability to perform extended improvised solos in nonwestern temperament through the technique of altered fingerings on the western-tempered saxophone, in effect transforming the instrument's sound, tonal palette, and feel.

Our arrangements of traditional African American jazz standards included seven compositions. I arranged trumpeter John Birks 'Dizzy Gillespie's *A Night in Tunisia* in a fast seven-eight time cycle that included sections with Afro-Cuban *rumba* rhythms, swing, and Indian *capu tala* structures, all in the fast seven feel. I also adapted pianist Fats Waller's *Jitterbug Waltz* in a changing feel that included both swing and hip-hop/ funk styles while retaining the three-four/ twelve-eight meter. We joined pianist Edward Kennedy 'Duke' Ellington's ballad *In a Sentimental Mood* with the standard *Tenderly* in a suite that honors our ancestors. I arranged *Tenderly*, commonly played at a slow tempo, in a driving fast swing groove with many accented motives of five and seven eighth-note durations. At the conclusion of *Sentimental Mood*, *Tenderly*

is introduced with repeating sections in twenty-four eight time (5+5+7+7) felt as twelve- four that returns in the suite's coda section.

I arranged trombonist Juan Tizol and Duke Ellington's *Caravan* as a fifteen-pulse time cycle inspired by North African, Indian, and Middle Eastern hand drumming. It included metric modulation among fifteen, seven-and-one-half-, five-, and three-beat feels in constantly changing textures. We also adapted Thelonious Monk's *Well You Needn't* into an alternating swing and hip-hop/funk style. Finally, we played saxophonist William Barron's *Variations in Blue* as a series of duo, trio, and quartet conversations that moved from a literal to an abstract expression of the underlying swing feel. We also played many other standard jazz compositions in our first evening's trio concert at the CD Jazz Cafe and when guest artists joined our ensemble. Most common among these were *Oleo*, *I'll Remember April*, Charles Parker's *Now's the Time*, and Thelonious Monk's *Straight, No Chaser*.

### Ensemble Performances

Before we arrived in Beijing, Zhang Fan had made large posters of our group and posted them in many major clubs. He also booked nine performances for us in four different Beijing performance spaces.<sup>2</sup> Two of these, the Loft and the Nameless Highland, were new to us. We had previously performed in the Big Easy and I had played at the CD Jazz Cafe, which is now a new branch of the original venue. Our first performance was on Wednesday evening, April 28, at the CD Jazz Cafe, located at the Dongsanhuan Road (East Third Ring) in the Chaoyang District. It is an intimate space and when we played there as a trio on the first night (piano, bass, and drumset, since Hafez would not arrive until the next evening) we experienced a most devoted audience. There were almost no talking and drinking noises, and we were so inspired,

we gave a sensitive and elevated performance. Many people in the audience stood in front of the bar or in the back and listened so attentively that it seemed electricity was passing between the performers and the audience, bringing the music to a deeper level. During the second set two professional musicians of high caliber sat in with us (jazz terminology meaning they joined our performance): saxophonist Atsushi Ouchi, a Japanese American from Oregon who lives in Beijing, also known as Dane, and Wen Zhiyong, a trumpeter. The intensity of our playing continued with these two guest artists, and we achieved a collective interplay that moved the audience. Since renowned saxophonist Liu Yuan is part owner of the Cafe and his quartet is the house band of the Cafe, it is understandable why the audiences there are so cultivated toward jazz. We had wanted Mr. Liu to play with us on our first Beijing performance, but were told that he was still on tour in the U. S., performing with the famous Chinese rock singer Cut Jian, and would soon return to Beijing.<sup>3</sup>

The next evening we performed at the Big Easy performance space that also houses a restaurant and bar in the Chaoyang Park area near the 4th Ring Road. It has a New Orleans-style decor with a second floor, outdoor patios, and upstairs porches that allow the audience to be in close proximity to the stage. We played as a trio for the first half of the evening, as saxophonist Hafez Modirzadeh arrived at Beijing International Airport at the time we began our performance. Despite the fatigue of a long flight, he came directly to the Big Easy and joined us in the middle of a bebop composition, surprising us and creating a mood of celebration among the ensemble and audience. In contrast to the previous evening's subtle intimacy at the CD Jazz Cafe, we primarily played bebop style pieces in a hard driving feel to match the space's size and crowd.

On Friday and Saturday evenings, April 30 and May 1, we performed for the first time at the Loft. It is located on Gongtiguan Road in a busy and noisy area with many

nightclubs and restaurants nearby. Facing the street is the Loft Restaurant and our posters were placed in an eye-catching spot. Since it was transformed from an old factory into a futuristic complex of glass and multidirectional lighting, the Loft includes a long bar and a spacious interior, with a large stage and audience seating area. After the manager, Andrew Chen, learned that we needed an acoustic piano, he moved a grand piano from the ballroom upstairs to the main stage for our Saturday concert. The crowd both evenings included many jazz fans and musicians, and we were inspired to play at a high degree of intensity. The audience gave us such support, applauding after each solo, and offering exclamations at climactic points, that the large venue seemed to become a small intimate space with no performer-listener separation, the ideal for improvised music in the African American and other African diasporic traditions. As with all our performances, Zhang Fan's MIDI School staff transported us to and from the hall, helped with moving, setup and take down of our instruments, lighting, sound, and, on many evenings, video recorded our music. They were an invaluable part of the performances, workshops, and rehearsals that we conducted and made our work easy. Zhang Fan took time out from his busy schedule as MIDI School director and attended many of our concerts, including the Loft.

During the Saturday Loft performance we invited two outstanding Beijing tenor saxophonists, Du Yinjiao and Liu Xiaoguang, to join us at the end of the second set. We performed *Straight, No Chaser, I'll Remember April*, and *Now's The Time* together, including individual solos, two- or three-saxophone background harmonized melodies created spontaneously (as is traditional in the jazz style) under solos, and trading of improvised eight-, four-, and two-measure sections within the form of each piece. This created a large ensemble sound, and brought the music to a high level as a fitting conclusion to the two nights of diverse musical composition, style, and improvisation. Unable to sleep after this experience, we joined some audience members and spent the late evening and early morning discussing music and culture at a local eatery, part of

Beijing's nightlife.

After two days of visiting historic Chinese landmarks, including the Great Wall, Tiananmen Square, and Forbidden City, we resumed our performances and workshops. On Tuesday May 4 we performed at the Nameless Highland, another venue we had not visited before. The manager said they usually book rock groups and this was the first time they tried to present jazz music. It is a medium-sized space and its walls and ceilings were covered with photographs, posters, antiques, and other unusual items that give the impression of an art collection. This is juxtaposed with a large screen behind the slightly raised stage that showed videos of jazz performances and artistic color montages when we were not performing. The exterior of Nameless Highland includes neon and other lighting that attracts the eye and reflects the interior video color motifs. The two levels for seating allow the audience to be in close proximity to the stage, creating an atmosphere of intimacy. A few people videotaped our performance with our permission, one woman asking if she could tape for her boyfriend since he had another performance and could not attend. A number of Beijing area musicians attended, as word of our group's playing circulated among professional musicians.

Since the club's policy was rock music, we and the owner were unsure if jazz would be well-received. We played a mixture of styles ranging from hard-driving bebop through jazz funk to quiet ballads, and sensed from the beginning of our sets that the people were listening intently, catching every nuance and responding to our efforts with animated comments and applause. We were pleasantly surprised to find that the audience, which included rock, jazz, and other music aficionados, had come to hear creative music, and many came to talk to us on our intermission and after the performance. Earlier in the day we had met and spent time with members of Cold Fairyland, a rock ensemble from Shanghai that had been scheduled to perform in the



MIDIFestival. Miyadudu, the vocalist/keyboardist, along with the group's bassist and guitarist, accompanied us to the Nameless Highland and spent much time with us discussing music. They seemed intrigued by jazz and took notice of our concert interactions. They and the other listeners were as intense as any in the U. S., and this spurred us to play even harder. At the conclusion of the concert, we were so uplifted that we joined some audience members and continued our conversations at a late night restaurant until the early hours.

The next evening, May 5, we returned to the CD Jazz Cafe for a quartet performance. We had hoped to have the club's owner, tenor saxophonist Liu Yuan, join us, but when he met us, he had just returned from a U. S. tour and had not brought his instrument to the Cafe. He invited us to return on Saturday to join his ensemble in a jam session, and we told him we would. As with the previous week, the intimate space and jazz-familiar audience made for an electric atmosphere. As the evening progressed, the music became deeper, and the listeners reacted through their facial and body expressions, verbally, and screams and applause after each solo. The connection with us was so strong that it reached a performance ideal: they were part of the performance with us at each turn. Our quartet's interactions seemed to crystallize, as we continually brought new paths to the structures of each composition, improvising on all elements - melody, harmony, rhythm, form, dynamics, time sense, and feel.

We returned to the Big Easy Thursday May 6 and played in a more adventurous style than the previous week, mixing our original compositions with bebop style pieces. In our second set two saxophonists joined us, altoist Atsushi Ouchi, and tenorist Liu Xiaoguang, both playing with a high degree of virtuosity and sensitivity. In joining Hafez, the three-saxophone texture added to the piano, contrabass, and drumset rhythm section allowed for a larger ensemble sound that included more individual solos, two- or three-saxophone background harmonized melodies under solos, and

trading of improvised eight- and four-measure sections within the form of each piece.

Our final concert was a return to the Nameless Highland on Friday, May 7. As before, the evening included a mixture of styles ranging from hard-driving bebop through jazz funk to quiet ballads. We were met again by a large crowd listening intently, and responding to the music with movement, verbal expressions, and energetic applause. As with our other repeated performances in each venue, we found many of the previous week's listeners had returned, and the audience had grown with others who had heard about our performances. The listeners again included rock, jazz, and other music aficionados, some Beijing jazz musicians, and a few tourists, all seemingly inspired to hear creative jazz. Many who had attended our other concerts came to talk to us before and after the performance, as well as during the intermission.

After my DVD recording on Saturday May 8, Zhang Fan arranged for our ensemble and his staff to have dinner at his home, followed by a return to the CD Jazz Cafe to listen to and play with Liu Yuan and other Beijing musicians. We heard Liu Yuan and his ensemble, which included Kong Hongwei on piano, Huang Yong on contrabass and Beibei on drumset. They were all professional, extremely experienced, and excellent players. It was clear that his group had played together for a considerable time, showing a level of nuance and communication that come from long associations. After the first song in the second set, Liu Yuan asked Art on piano and me on drumset to join him on saxophone and Huang Yong on contrabass. Without any rehearsal, and never having played together before, we instantly connected, and the music felt strong. It is a testament to the African American jazz tradition that, given a common aesthetic and sense of style, a group of musicians from diverse cultures can make music together with integrity. After our first piece, trumpeter Wen Zhiyong, guitarist Jia Yi-nan, and a saxophonist originally from Minsk, Russia, but living in Beijing, also sat in. We played two more pieces and continued to interact through collective interpretation of themes,

improvised solos, solo backgrounds, and trading sections. Later, Wes on contrabass and Hafez on saxophone replaced Huang Yong and Liu Yuan. After the other artists completed their playing, Art, Wes, Hafez, and I remained on stage, and we wanted to conclude our playing at the CD Jazz Cafe and in China with a piece both inspired by and dedicated to the people of China. We played the Yunnan folk song *Xiao He Tang Shui* ('Flowing Stream') that we had adapted into a jazz style earlier in our visit. The audience immediately recognized it and we extended our improvisations into a free, timeless, flowing style that expressed our intense feelings for the people, culture, and musicians we had come to know. It felt like a prayer and there was a direct connection to the people listening.

Liu's group came back to conclude the evening. Afterward, our two groups' pianists, saxophonists, bassists, and drumset players all had personal conversations and exchanged mutual anecdotes and admiration. We also exchanged contact information and look forward to future reunions, both personally and musically. The members of my ensemble felt that the four musicians of Liu Yuan's group, and the others we performed with in Beijing, have achieved mastery of their instruments and are powerful soloists. They are sensitive to spontaneous interactions, musical structure, dynamic variety, and play with a personal sound and emotional depth. As in my previous visits to China, it was very moving to see and hear musicians play an art form - in this case African American jazz - that is not indigenous to China, has few possibilities for live experience, and offers little monetary or material reward, this last whether in China or the U. S. To do so with a high degree of ability as a result of years of hard work reveals the sincerity of these artists, choosing a way of life that is, as with the legendary saxophonist John Coltrane, one of spiritual commitment. They have, in effect, assimilated the deepest structures and meaning of the music, its function as an African diasporic expression to create a space for transcendence, self-discovery, and connection to others, nature, ancestors, and the spiritual.

These interactions with Chinese jazz musicians was a highlight of our visit, both on- and off-stage. Liu Xiaoguang, our acquaintance from 2001, joined us at the CD Jazz Cafe, The Big Easy, and The Loft. In 2001 we only heard him as a keyboardist but this time he played tenor saxophone as well. I felt his playing has deepened since 2001. He had told me at that time that our dedication and spirituality for the music greatly influenced him. He was an orphan, and left his home town in Inner Mongolia at the age of 15. He is totally self-taught in jazz piano and saxophone because he had no money for study. But now he is committed to dedicating his whole life to jazz because this music is a very deep path through which he can find joy, peace, and love. He and his group colleague Jia Yi-nan sat in with us many times, and we hope to continue these relationships in the future, both in China and the U. S.

Jazz and other African diasporic art forms have been a major influence on the world's stage throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In my visits to Africa, the Middle East, Europe, Asia, and the Americas, I have experienced their effect as a connecting and uplifting force among the world's peoples. In China, the people we met, including the jazz musicians we performed with, are bearers of an ancient and sacred cultural heritage that has its own role to play in this worldwide interconnection among peoples. One possible path is for the current and future generations of Chinese artists, many of whom have internalized the African American jazz art form, to create and develop an African Chinese style of jazz that, like African American jazz, reflects an indigenous contribution to cross-cultural world music.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> *Makam* is a modal/melodic system used in ancient Persia similar to the *raga* of India. In the Muslim minority of Xinjiang province 12 *makam* also exist in indigenous music, indicating a common heritage.

<sup>2</sup> Unlike our last visit in 2001, we were paid for our performances directly by the owners of each venue. Each performance space did not pay the same, but on average, each musician was paid the equivalent of 30-40 U. S. dollars per night. My ensemble members used the money to buy instruments such as *erhu* (two-string Chinese violin), saxophone, and melodica, since the Chinese-made instruments are not very expensive, but of good quality. They also bought Chinese fabrics and clothing for presents to their families.

<sup>3</sup> According to the *Singtao Daily* June 13, 2004 Sunday edition, Liu Yuan invested millions of Chinese yuan to remodel the CD Jazz Cafe to make it the equal of other international jazz clubs. Jazz clubs in Beijing are becoming more and more fashionable, even exceeding Karaoke, since many Haiguipai (people who came back to China after studying or working abroad) are used to this kind of lifestyle in the West, and even some movie stars such as Lu Yi and Xu Jinlei also frequent jazz clubs. Jazz Ya, Lushang, Success, and High Society are some other jazz clubs in Beijing.