



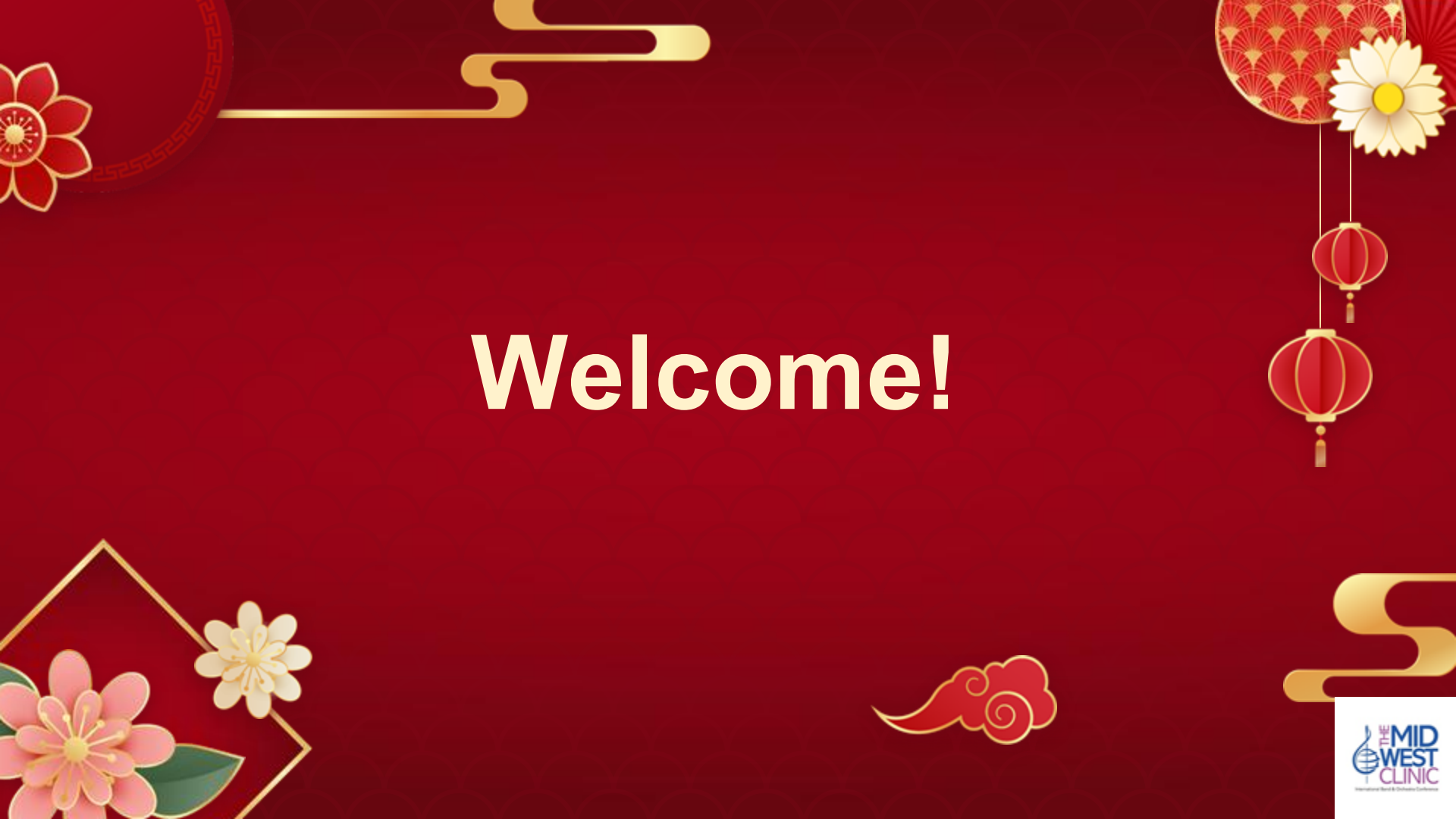
Beyond the Notes, Bridging Cultures: Interpretation Tips for Conductors Navigating Chinese-Inspired Repertoire



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Gao Hong, Chinese Pipa Master/Composer/ Improviser/Educator

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Welcome!

Speakers



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Why This Topic Matters

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- Students need culturally diverse repertoire to grow as global musicians
- Chinese-inspired works bring new stories, and new learning opportunities
- Conductors play a key role in interpreting unfamiliar musical languages
- Understanding cultural context leads to more authentic performances
- Expands programming possibilities beyond Western traditions and existed repertoire



Target Audience

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- Wind band conductors & music educators looking to authentically interpret culturally diverse works
- Conductors seeking practical insights on phrasing, articulation, and tone color in Chinese-inspired music
- Composers interested in writing for wind bands and orchestras and working with conductors
- University and high school band directors looking to expand their repertoire
- Students, especially female composition and conducting students seeking mentorship and representation
- Advocates for gender diversity in wind band leadership and programming



Why This Matters for Conductors



How Chinese Musical Traditions Shape Wind Band Composition

Melodic, Harmonic, and rhythmic characteristics

Melodic Characteristic

- Influences of **Geography, cultural background, dialect, and personality**
- **Pentatonic Scale**
 - Most traditional Chinese melodies are based on a five-note (pentatonic) scale: gong 宫, shang 商, jue 角, zhi 徵, and yu 羽 (similar to do, re, mi, sol, la).
- **Melodic Contour**
 - Melodies often follow a rising and falling shape, reflecting natural patterns of breathing and phrasing found in poetry and spoken Chinese.
- **Ornamentation and Grace Notes**
 - Chinese melodies are richly ornamented with slides, bends, trills, and vibrato to express emotion and imitate speech inflection.

Harmonic Characteristic

- **Monophonic Texture**

- Chinese music usually features a single melodic line, without Western-style harmonic accompaniment or chord progressions.

- **Heterophony**

- When multiple instruments play the same melody but with slight variations in ornamentation or rhythm, creating a rich, shimmering texture rather than harmonic chords.

- **Modal Harmony**

- Instead of major/minor tonality, Chinese music uses **modes** such as *gong*, *shang*, *jue*, *zhi*, *yu*, each producing different emotional colors and tonal centers.

Rhythmic Characteristic

- **Flexible rhythm**
 - Chinese music often emphasizes **free rhythm** rather than strict meter, especially in solo instrumental or vocal works. The performer may stretch or compress time to express emotion (*rubato style*)
- **Speech rhythm influence**
 - Because Chinese is a tonal language, musical rhythm often follows **the natural cadence of words and phrases**, giving the music a conversational, fluid quality.
- **Percussive richness**
 - In ensemble or opera music, **drums, gongs, and clappers** create strong rhythmic energy. Rhythmic patterns (called *ban* and *yan*) form the foundation of musical organization
- **Balanced structure**
 - Many traditional pieces use **symmetrical rhythmic patterns** (such as 2, 4, or 8-beat phrases), reflecting the Chinese aesthetic of balance and harmony.



笛子 Dizi (Chinese Flute)



鑼 Gong



Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra 香港中樂團

Two Chinese-Inspired Wind Band Works by Gao Hong

Celebration 歡慶

- Full Wind Band
- Full Orchestra
- Chamber Winds



China Breeze 中國風

- Chamber Winds - Wind Dectet





Celebration

University of British Columbia Concert Winds
Conducted by Dr. Meijun Chen



CELEBRATION

PT. 2: JOY AND CELEBRATION

Celebration

“Joy and Celebration”

***By “President’s Own” Marine
Band, conducted by Captain
Darren Lin***

***“THE PRESIDENT’S OWN”
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Performed by
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UNITED STATES MARINE BAND
Composed by Gao Hong





Celebration

**University of British Columbia Concert Winds
Conducted by Dr. Meijun Chen**





Tips for Interpreting *Celebration*

Celebration is joyful and uplifting: play from the heart, imagining people celebrating with friends and family. Keep phrases long and flowing, let ornaments float naturally within the pentatonic scale, and focus on conveying happiness and excitement.



Don't be intimidated by the “Chinese style”

Pedagogical Guidance for Conductors

Teaching Chinese-Inspired Repertoire in the Band Room



Introduce cultural context before or at the first rehearsal.



Demonstrate ornamentation vocally or with analogy (speech, breath, sighs), encourage students to listen horizontally (for heterophony).



Connect students to primary sources: recordings, language, Chinese musical instruments. Discuss timbre goals.



Use composer's program notes, recordings, or interviews.



Avoiding misinterpretation, avoid assuming one piece represents an entire culture, and over-Westernization of Chinese elements



Do not frame the music as “exotic” or “other”.

Fostering Composer- Conductor Collaboration

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- Commissioning new works that reflect diverse cultural voices
 - Forming consortiums to share costs and build community
 - Communicating early about tone color, phrasing, and cultural intention
 - Avoiding assumptions: ask composers about style, imagery, and meaning
 - Supporting women and underrepresented composers
 - Bringing composers into rehearsals when possible
- 



Women in Wind Band Composition and Conducting

Representation, Inclusion, Mentorship

- Promote women composers in wind band world, including Asian voices
- Teach students how culture influences compositional choices
- Engage students in conversations about representation through repertoire
- Encourage exploration of Chinese instruments, stories, and history
- Prepare ensembles to approach unfamiliar styles with respect and curiosity
- Build mentorship pathways for young composers interested in cross-cultural writing



Closing Remarks

- Encouraging conductors to embrace diverse repertoire and approach Chinese-inspired music with authenticity and sensitivity
- Through shared understanding, we create harmony, in music and beyond.





Thank You!

Do you have any questions?

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