

# Program Notes

## Chapel Hill Philharmonia

Hill Hall — University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

3:00 p.m. Sunday, February 14, 2010

*“From Folksong to Concert Hall”*

Evan Feldman, Guest Conductor

Wolfgang Amadè Mozart (1756 -1791)

Overture to *Der Schauspieldirektor* (The Impresario)

Xiǎn Xīnghǎi (1905 -1945)

and the Yellow River Composer’s Committee

Yellow River Concerto (1969)

Alice Tien — piano

with Jennifer Chang — *gǔzhēng*

*Yellow River Boatman’s Song*

*Ode to the Yellow River*

*Wrath of the Yellow River*

*Defend the Yellow River*

Intermission

Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904)

Symphony No. 8 in G major, Op. 88

*Allegro con brio*

*Adagio*

*Allegretto grazioso — Molto vivace*

*Allegro, ma non troppo*

## From Folksong to Concert Hall

Music is integral to every culture, inseparably linked to our humanity. So it is no surprise that, since the emergence of formal 'art music', composers have drawn on a rich, accessible resource — everyday songs and dances handed down in oral tradition or compiled in printed collections. Domenico Scarlatti in the Baroque era embraced the Moorish-influenced folk music he found upon moving to Madrid to serve the Spanish court. A contemporary observed, "There are many passages in Scarlatti's pieces in which he imitated the melody of tunes sung by carriers, muleteers, and common people." Joseph Haydn, the "Papa" of Classical forms, was the son of a rural wheelwright who played the harp for family sing-alongs. Haydn borrowed from folksong of many nationalities — Ukrainian, Scottish, German, Sicilian, Spanish, and Russian — and owed a special debt to the Gypsy musicians employed by his patron, Hungarian Count Eszterházy. From the Romantic era into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, musical nationalism became a dominant theme. Ranging from Russia (the "Mighty Handful", including Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov and Alexander Borodin), westward through middle Europe (Bohemians Bedřich Smetana and Antonín Dvořák, Hungarians Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály), to the British isles (Ralph Vaughan Williams, Australian-born Percy Grainger), and across the Atlantic to the United States (Aaron Copland, George Gershwin), composers consciously incorporated the distinctive sounds of the folk music native to their regions. Politics also seems a human constant. Choices of musical sources and textual language can be driven purely by artistic concerns, but also may reflect a political agenda. The works on today's program illuminate the intricate interplay of folksong, politics, and individual genius.

**Wolfgang Amadè Mozart's** short operetta *Der Schauspieldirektor (The Impresario)* has no discernible source in folk music. Charles Rosen in *The Classical Style* suggests a reverse flow. He argues that, uniquely in history, Haydn and Mozart created "a popular style which abandons none of the pretensions of high art," so that "the utmost sophistication and complexity of musical technique existed alongside — or better, fused with — the virtues of the street song." Regardless of artistic 'pretensions', these composers were motivated to write music that patrons and paying audiences would value. Cornell musicologist Neal Zaslaw depicts Mozart as a "working stiff" who composed primarily to "pay the rent and...put bread on the table." Accounts of his high outlays for light and heat while living in Vienna from 1781-91 verify that Mozart literally burned the midnight oil, churning out works to support an upwardly mobile lifestyle. Among Mozart's Viennese supporters the most powerful was the Holy Roman Emperor himself. Joseph II, a keen amateur musician, recognized the composer's talent and saw to it that he was awarded commissions by the

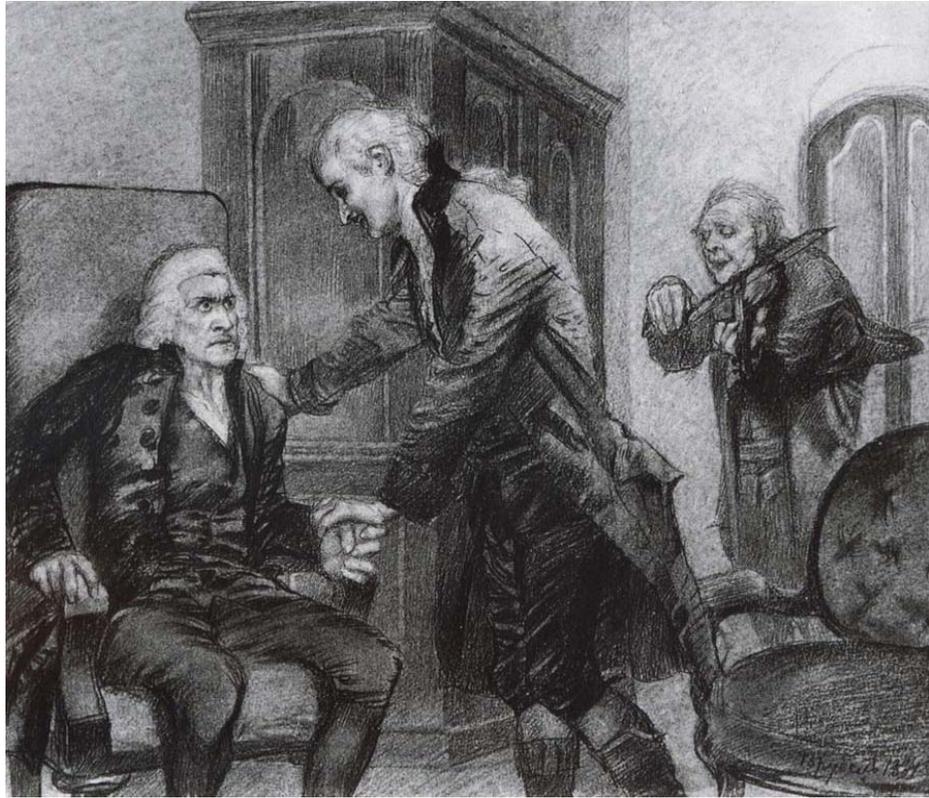
Imperial Court Theater's two ensembles, the Italian Opera and the German *Nationalsingspiel*. The latter was Joseph's pet project, established to produce popular opera with spoken dialogue in Austria's own tongue.



Joseph II at piano, with his sisters

The *Nationalsingspiel's* greatest original success, before folding in 1783, was Mozart's *Die Entführung aus dem Serail (The Abduction from the Seraglio)*. Several years later, when the Emperor took another opportunity to commission a *singspiel*, he logically chose Mozart to compose the music. The occasion was a "pleasure festival" held at Vienna's Schönbrunn Palace on February 7, 1786 to entertain visiting dignitaries from the Netherlands. Joseph had the notion to stage a contest – think of it as a musical boxing match – pitting a one-act German opera against another in Italian. The assigned subject for both was backstage rivalries in the theater. In Mozart's corner for this pugilistic battle, to write the German libretto, was Gottlieb Stephanie (Jr.), his partner from *Seraglio*. The adversary facing Mozart in the *mano-a-mano* combat was...drum rolls...quick cut to [Amadeus film trailer](#)... court composer Antonio Salieri, Vienna's reigning heavyweight champion of opera. Salieri, six years older than Mozart, had been one of the Emperor's chamber music partners for 20 years, and would soon receive a lifetime appointment as imperial *hofkapellmeister* (court music director, 1788-1824). For the Schönbrunn event Salieri composed an *opera buffa*, *Prima la musica et poi le parole (First the Music and then the Words)*.

Although he surely wished to outshine his highly ranked opponent, Mozart could not make *The Impresario* his top priority. Other projects pressed, especially *The Marriage of Figaro*, due to open in three months, and three piano concerti for an upcoming Lent season concert series. Mozart's total effort for *The Impresario* comprised about 25 minutes of music, an overture and four singing numbers, sandwiched in with a surfeit of Stephanie's dialogue. The story was low comedy, a behind-the-curtain intrigue with premonitory hints of *American Idol*. Stephanie, once an actual *Schauspieldirektor* for the imperial theater, played the Impresario,



“Mozart and Salieri Listening to a Blind Violinist” (1884)

Illustration by Mikhail Vrubel for the drama by Alexander Pushkin which popularized the myth that Salieri murdered Mozart

Frank, who is building a repertory troupe for a trip to Salzburg (Mozart's home town, implicitly spoofed here for its provincialism). In assembling his cast, Frank must balance between artistic ideals and commercial appeal. He also has his arm twisted by his main financial backer, a banker, who insists that Frank find a starring role for an over-the-hill actress — the banker's mistress. In the opera's vocal numbers, two soprano *divas* face off in arias of contrasting style, then quarrel over who should get top billing. A tenor tries to keep the peace. The frustrated Frank threatens to resign. Finally, all come together in a “Vaudeville”, in which they observe that every artist would like to hold the stage alone. Thin stuff, a mere potboiler, but Mozart's orchestral **Overture to Der Schauspieldirektor** is a small masterpiece. It is built around a vigorous fugue, and, like the contemporaneous overture to *Figaro*, mixes frothy lightness with lyrical themes.

Oh...who won the big fight, you ask? Mozart received 50 ducats, not a bad payday, but Salieri got 100 ducats. Whether the greater purse was fair recompense for a larger amount of music composed, or represented the winner's share for a TKO scored over Mozart by the Italian fighter in the green-white-red tricolor trunks remains moot. (To judge for yourself, check out Salieri's *Prima la musica et poi le parole* at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XAYyrV11IPc>).

The **Yellow River Concerto**, based on a cantata by **Xiān Xinghǎi**, embodies both of our program's themes, folksong and politics. As described in notes by Alice Tien, this work is tied to the history of China in the 20th century, from the period of the Nationalist Revolution (1928), through the rise of the Chinese Communist Party and its victory over the Kuomintang in a Civil War (1949), to life under Chairman Máo, and the Cultural Revolution (1966-76). The Concerto draws from patriotic songs of the Chinese Revolution and from the folksong of people who have lived and died according to the Yellow River's natural cycles, through thousands of years of human settlement along its banks. [see box on Yellow River Concerto]

## Yellow River Concerto

China's *Huáng Hé*, Yellow River, runs roughly west to east for 3,300 miles. Although the *Yángzi* River is even longer, the Yellow River is more famous since that is where Chinese civilization started, and because of the devastating floods, in contrast to the *Yángzi*'s calm. To the Chinese, the Yellow River is both their nation's pride and sorrow.



*Wrathful Yellow River*



*Xi'an Xinghai statue*

The **Yellow River Concerto** is by far the most celebrated piano concerto from China. In 1939 during the Sino-Japanese War, the composer **Xi'an Xinghai** heard a grand, patriotic poem by Guang Weiran (1913-2002). Xi'an was so inspired he wrote music to the words, which became the *Yellow River Cantata*. The cantata sounds partly European because Xi'an had lived in France for five years and studied composition with Vincent d'Indy and Paul Dukas.

During China's Cultural Revolution (1966-76), the government strictly prohibited almost everything non-Chinese. However, Jiāng Qīng, the last wife of Chairman Máo Zédōng and an important political figure in her own right, loved the piano and wanted a concerto to inspire pride in China and in Communism. Xi'an had died in 1945, so a group of composers was assigned to spend three months converting his cantata into a concerto. They were Yīn Chéngzōng, Chu Wanghua, Liu Zhuang, Sheng Lihong, Shi Shucheng, and Xu Feixing. Yīn had studied in Europe and tied for second prize, behind Vladimir

Ashkenazy, in the Tchaikovsky International Piano Competition of 1962. In the debut performance of the *Yellow River Concerto* on May 1, 1970, Yin served as soloist, and did so again in 1973 with the Philadelphia Orchestra, led by Eugene Ormandy, during their historic visit to China.

The *Yellow River Concerto* blends Chinese and Western music and uses two Chinese instruments, the *pípá* (lute; movements 1, 3, 4) and the *dízi* (bamboo flute; movement 3). For today's concert guest artist Jennifer Chang will play the Chinese zither, *gǔzhēng*, in place of the *pípá*. CH Philharmonia principal flutist Denise Bevington will play the *dízi*, which she learned for this occasion.

Boatmen singing and struggling against the River inspired Xi'an to compose the first movement, "Song of the Yellow River Boatmen." He thought of their efforts as representing China's battle against Japan. The second movement, "Ode to the Yellow River", describes scenic views of the river and achievements of the country's people. The *dízi* begins the third movement, in the style of folk music from northwest China. Next the piano plays a peaceful melody, originally a women's chorus in the *Yellow River Cantata*, which soon turns into the turbulent "Yellow River in Anger" or "Wrath of the Yellow River." The final movement contains three patriotic songs, "Defend the Yellow River," "The East is Red" (*Dōng Fāng Hóng* – the Chinese national anthem, extolling Chairman Máo, during the Cultural Revolution), and the very end of the *Internationale*, a song used by Communist and socialist nations, based on a poem about resistance against oppression, written by Eugene Pottier of France in the early 1800's. The *Yellow River Concerto* closes in triumphant victory.



*Xi'an Xinghai (wearing shorts) rehearses Yellow River Cantata with Art College students, 1938*

— Alice Tien

**Antonín Dvořák** was born in Mühllhausen, Bohemia (now Nelahozeves, Czech Republic), not far from Prague in the provinces of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. He is known as a Czech nationalist whose composition drew strongly from the folk music of Bohemia, Moravia, and Slovakia. However, in contrast to the overtly political composers of the Chinese Revolution, Dvořák expressed his patriotism in an “unselfconscious” way. (Harold Schonberg) Widely viewed as a genial, rather simple man (his greatest delights included beer, trains, and pigeons), Dvořák’s gift for charming melody can disguise his deep musical sophistication and emotional range.

Dvořák first learned music from his father, an innkeeper and butcher who played the zither, an instrument common to folk music around the world (e.g., the Chinese *gǔzhēng*, heard in today’s concert). While still in elementary school, young Antonín played violin in a local band that performed dances and marches customary to a rustic village. He was sent to larger towns to study music and also German, thought essential for his professional progress. At age 16 he entered the Organ School in Prague, the center of Czech culture, but considered a backwater by sophisticates in the German-speaking cities of the Empire. Dvořák graduated in 1859 with high marks, but failed to land a job as a church organist. Instead, he became a viola player in a popular dance band that eventually morphed into the orchestra for a new Provisional Czech theater in Prague. Elevated to principal violist, Dvořák was exposed to a standard canon of symphonic works (mainly German) and operas (mainly Italian), occasionally conducted by famous guests such as Richard Wagner. Moreover, the theater had a mandate to produce Czech language operas and plays, and when Smetana, Bohemia’s leading musical figure, became its music director in 1867, he added many national works to the repertoire.

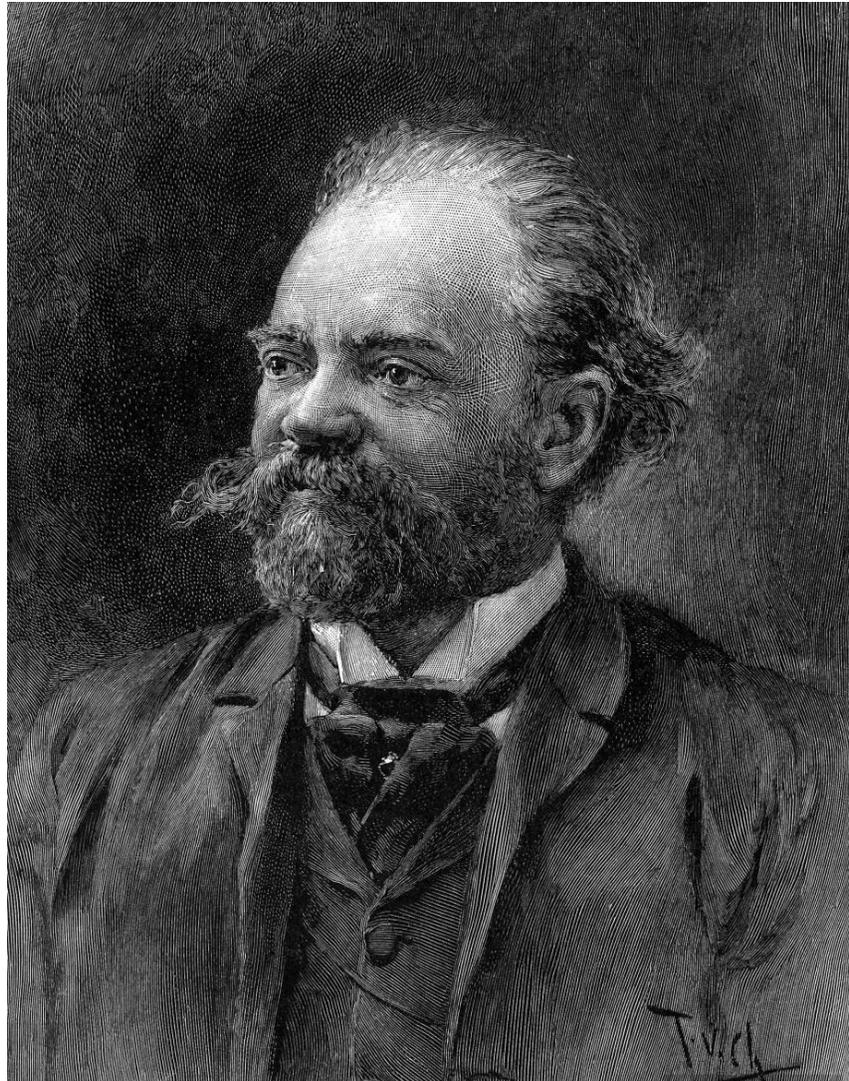
The contact with Smetana helped stoke in Dvořák a burning ambition to become a composer. In 1871 he quit the orchestra to focus on this goal, although it left him barely able to eke out a living by teaching piano. Initially influenced by Wagner and the “New German School”, Dvořák soon turned “instead to a new classicism of form and content, with elements of Slavonic folklore, of which he made a special study”. (Grove Dictionary of Music) In 1875 he won the first of a series of Austrian State grants for “young, talented and poor artists”. His work especially impressed Johannes Brahms, a member of the award jury, who became a lifelong supporter and friend. In 1878 Brahms recommended Dvořák’s duets for two voices, influenced by modal Moravian melodies, to his publisher, Fritz Simrock. Mindful of the commercial success of Brahms’s *Hungarian Dances*, Simrock commissioned from Dvořák a set of *Slavonic Dances* for piano four-hand and in an orchestrated version. After a rave review in a Berlin newspaper, this sheet music began to fly out of shops and, Susan Boyle-like, Dvořák found himself an overnight sensation. Orchestras and chamber groups around Europe, and even the United States, rushed to perform his compositions.

Over the next decade, Dvořák achieved international stature for his symphonic pieces, chamber music, and, to a lesser extent, opera. Indeed, “in the 1880s and 1890s, Dvořák was as popular and successful as any living composer, including Brahms.” (Phillip Huscher, Chicago Symphony Orchestra program annotator) Nevertheless, anti-Slavic prejudice constrained critical acceptance and performance of his work in parts of the Empire, particularly Vienna.

Dvořák won special acclaim in England, and in 1884 made the first of nine trips there to conduct his own music. “The importance to Dvořák of his success in England can scarcely be overestimated: at a time when political feeling was detrimental to the reception of his work in Germany and Austria, England...appreciated him properly as an artist and contributed greatly to the growth of his international fame.” (Grove Dictionary) Music historian Leonard Botstein compares the public reception of Dvořák at packed concerts in London’s Royal Albert Hall to the massive popularity of Michael Jackson in our own time. Dvořák’s prestige grew further in 1891 when he received an honorary doctorate from Cambridge University. (The down-to-earth composer commented, “Nothing but ceremony, and nothing but doctors... All faces were serious, and it seemed to me as if no one knew any other language but Latin.”)

Brahms encouraged his now famous colleague to join him in Vienna and take a position at one of Europe’s leading conservatories. However, Dvořák resisted the gravitational pull of the capitol that had often snubbed him. In 1890 he accepted a professorship at the Conservatory in “provincial” Prague and seemed settled for life. Yet, an unexpected opportunity soon lured Dvořák far from home. Jeannette Thurber, president of the recently founded National Conservatory of Music in New York City, wished to promote a new school of American composition. In Dvořák’s embrace of indigenous Czech music, Thurber saw a model for the development of art music inspired by our own country’s folksong.

Motivated in part by a 25-fold salary raise, Dvořák accepted the challenge: “The Americans expect great things of me. I am to show them the way into the Promised Land, the realm of a new, independent art, in short a national style of music!” During the three years he spent in the U.S., the plan appeared to benefit all parties. Dvořák helped spawn a new generation of American composers, but in turn created several of his most enduring compositions: his final *Symphony No. 9 “From the New World”*, the *String Quartet in F*, nicknamed “the American”; and the *Cello Concerto*. In 1895 he returned to Prague. His later work focused increasingly on programmatic music based on folk-style ballades, along with chamber music and opera. Dvořák died in 1904 and his funeral became the occasion for a great outpouring of Czech nationalist feeling.



Antonín Dvořák, 1894

The *Symphony No. 8 in G major* was Dvořák’s last prior to his American adventure. It acquired the nickname “The English” because a dispute with Simrock led Dvořák to offer the work to the British publisher Novello, and

performances conducted by the composer in England in 1890 and again during ceremonies for his receipt of the Cambridge doctorate proved wildly successful. The music, however, is decidedly Czech in spirit.

Dvořák’s 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Symphonies share a strong debt to folk music, the former from his own country, the latter from African-American and Native American music, as the composer perceived it. (At least two movements of the “New World” Symphony derive programmatically from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s epic poem *The Song of Hiawatha* and incorporate Native American elements.) Dvořák wrote the 8<sup>th</sup> in the autumn of 1889 at a beloved country retreat in Vysoká, Bohemia. This Symphony’s outpouring of gorgeous tunes leads Huscher, among many, to describe it as Dvořák’s “most bucolic and idyllic — it is, in effect [alluding to Beethoven’s 6<sup>th</sup> Symphony], his Pastoral”. Yet the work’s sunny aura should obscure neither its sophisticated structure nor its deeper emotional undercurrents.

The 8<sup>th</sup> Symphony commences with a somber introduction led by the cellos and low winds, perhaps evoking “an atmosphere of fairy tales and forest legends” (Richard Freed), followed by a “birdcall” theme in the flutes (later echoed by the English horn). The entire work flows organically from this opening, in complex variations. The first movement is divided into thirds, each set off by the initial melody. The intervening episodes shift deftly in mood and orchestral color, from playful innocence, to foreboding, to martial triumph, ending in a whirling celebration. The following slow

movement feels elegiac. An English reporter interviewed Dvořák after hearing the 8<sup>th</sup> Symphony's premiere and offered a tantalizing hint: "There is a story connected with [this movement] which, however, the composer keeps to himself..." Dvořák biographer Michael Beckerman believes it contains one of several "conspicuous unidentified funeral marches" present in the composer's later works. Musicologist Michael Steinberg finds contextual support for this idea in allusions to the *Marche funebre* of Beethoven's 3<sup>rd</sup> symphony: "Now we sense the long shadow cast by [the] *Eroica*, because the moment C minor [the key of that movement] is established, the music concentrates on gestures that are unmistakably those of a funeral march. A radiant C major middle section, introduced by a characteristic triple upbeat, makes the *Eroica* reference even more unmistakable, and rises to a magnificently sonorous climax..." The father of nine children, Dvořák lost three of them to illness in a short span, 12 years before he wrote the G major Symphony. Some speculate that his recurrent use of funereal music, even the *dumka*, a Ukrainian folk dance that features fleeting shifts between deep melancholy and exuberance, trace back to this tragedy. However, what specific memories might have evoked the nostalgic *Adagio* of the 8<sup>th</sup> Symphony, one can only guess.

The third movement begins with a waltz in minor key, more wistful than festive. The oboes introduce a warm *Trio* section, back in G major. After the waltz repeats, Dvořák tacks on a flippant coda quoted from his own opera *Stubborn Lovers* (also translated *The Pigheaded Peasants*) (1874), a rustic village comedy. Staid Viennese critics took this bit of folksy humor as a nose-thumbing insult. It leads directly to a rousing trumpet fanfare that opens the final movement, followed by an astonishing series of variations, all ultimately derived from the Symphony's introductory statement. These show off Dvořák's ability to build great melodies from simple fragments, sometimes taken directly from folksong, and his extraordinarily imaginative orchestration — including wildly flying flutes, stratospheric strings, and madly trilling horns. The work ends with a satisfying musical bang.

— Mark Furth

### Featured Artists

**Evan Feldman** is Assistant Professor of Music at UNC-Chapel Hill, where he directs the Wind Ensemble. Previously he was Director of Bands at the College of William & Mary in Williamsburg, VA. Evan has presented research on the wind music of Sergei Prokofiev, George Enescu, and Antonín Dvořák at major conferences, and published several arrangements of works by these composers (*Tierolff Muziekcentrale*, Netherlands). He earned the Doctorate of Musical Arts from the Eastman School of Music, studying conducting with Donald Hunsberger and Mendi Rodan.

**Alice Tien**, originally from Midland, MI, majored in piano at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music. She has played in master classes given by Menahem Pressler, Yo-Yo Ma, and James Galway, the latter two in Hill Hall Auditorium. Alice has taught her studio of 25-30 private students for over twelve years and has served as a pianist and instructor in the music departments of North Carolina Central University and UNC-Chapel Hill. With the Salvation Army in Durham, she co-established a program for children who otherwise could not take individual piano lessons. In the Chapel Hill Philharmonia Alice plays piano and percussion, and serves as coordinator for the Young Artist Concerto Competition. An avid gardener, she won her Durham neighborhood's "Yard of the Month" prize in July, 2008.

**Jennifer Chang** is known internationally as a performer and teacher, and has played for the emperor of Japan and former president Bill Clinton. She obtained degrees in traditional Chinese music and *gǔzhēng* performance from the Xī'ān Conservatory of Music in China's Shǎnxī Province. Jennifer moved to the U.S. in 2001, and now resides and teaches in Cary, NC. Locally, she was featured as soloist with the North Carolina Symphony in the *Butterfly Lover's Concerto* by Chinese composer Zhanhao He, introduced *gǔzhēng* to the ballet world with the Carolina Ballet, and has collaborated with the Raleigh Civic Symphony and Chamber Orchestra in several concert series on Asian music.

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