

# Wǔ Xíng

- Gong Linna** • *lead vocals*
- Robert Zollitsch** • *zither, vocals, composition*
- Qiu Ji** • *guzheng*
- Xiong Junjie** • *yangqin, vocals*
- Martin Kälberer** • *keyboard, vocals*
- Nora Thiele** • *percussion*

The six musicians of the 'Sino-European Sound Factory' Wu Xing strive for a unique blend of East and West. Their starting point may well be familiar ground: the group's three Chinese members, professionally trained in the realms of zheng (zither), yangqin (dulcimer) and Chinese vocal music, grew up with a great deal of Western(-influenced) music in their ears, while one of the group's German members, Robert Zollitsch, got his fair share of Chinese music during repeated work visits to China since the early 1990s.

But all the players cultivate a joint interest in the hidden innovative possibilities of genuine Chinese traditional music. Their idea is not to create slick polished 'arrangements' of Chinese folk, stuffed with standard grooves, which tend to dominate the present-day music scene in China so much. The group aims for a truly distinctive sound, with the 'five elements' (wu xing) of the ensemble's name much in evidence: in the fire and vocal versatility of lead-singer Linna, in the earthy drumming and keyboard playing of Martin and Nora, and in the pure metal and sturdy wood of Qiu Ji's and Junjie's string playing not to forget Robert's unique use of the Bavarian zither and his essential contributions as a composer.

Wu Xing, scheduled to appear on various Chinese and European stages in 2005, offers no easy cocktail of Chinese and European ingredients, but strives for an adventurous journey into new musical territories, in the end neither 'Eastern' nor 'Western', but simply human.

**Gong Linna**, first appeared on stage at the age of five. At 16 she began her studies at the Chinese Conservatory of Music and has been a soloist with *Zhongyang Minzu Yuetuan*, China's most renowned traditional music orchestra for the past two years. In addition to many other awards, she won the Chinese National Singing Competition in 2000 as best female singer, including the Special Audience Award, gaining the audience votes of over a million Chinese television viewers. With her more recent projects, Linna is pioneering a new development in the Chinese music scene, exploring various alternatives to pop and state folklore. She brings with her a fascinating blend of traditional vocal styles and modern musical forms.

**Robert Zollitsch**, started with the age of 10 to play the Bavarian zither. He studied Music theory in Berlin before leaving for the Shanghai Conservatory of Music to study the Chinese Zither "Guqin". Since that time his work is coined by

cross-cultural activities with special focus on Asia. For many years he worked as bandleader and composer for Mongolian songstress Urna, published a CD of his Tibetan field recordings of authentic folk music from the Himalaya plains, and recently revitalizes the Chinese music scene with his project WU XING.

Robert has established himself as a noted composer and producer. His work encompasses compositions for Radio and Film, orchestra compositions for Chinese instruments, arrangements, productions and recordings for Chinese instrumentalists and singers. Robert's style of playing the Bavarian zither is clearly marked by his wide musical experiences. His vocal experiments range from the throat singing he has mastered following many trips through Mongolia and Tibet to the Bavarian yodelling of his cultural heritage. Robert was the recipient of the German Folk Award 1999 and the Berlin World Music Award Musica Vitale 2000. Since 2003 Robert lives in the Chinese capital Beijing.

**Qiu Ji**, began her studies of the Guzheng (Chinese zither) with her uncle Qiu Dazheng, one of China's most famous Zheng-players of the last century. In 1996, right after she graduated, she was invited as teacher to the Chinese Conservatory of Music in Beijing, China's most recognized School of Music. Besides the Guzheng, Qiu Ji also learned the Japanese Koto and the classical Chinese zither Guqin. During the past years, she has toured Asia and Europe, and is recognized as an outstanding interpreter of contemporary music for Guzheng.

**Xiong Junjie**, studied Yangqin (Chinese dulcimer) at the Conservatory of Music in Wuhan, continuing with a PAD at the Chinese Conservatory of Music in Beijing where he also is teacher now. Junjie is a perfect representative of the emerging generation of young Chinese musicians, who possess not only enormous virtuosity on their instrument, but the desire to combine the traditional with the contemporary and thereby create their own individual styles.

**Martin Kälberer**, studied Jazz Piano at the Conservatory of Music in Graz, Austria and now works from his own studio as an independent producer and composer. A multi instrumentalist, Martin is equally at home with Keyboards, Accordion, Mandolin, Percussion, Bass and Udu. He has toured extensively in Europe with bands such as Raiz de Pedra (Brasil), Carola Grey's Noisy Mama (Jazz), Wolfgang Schmid's Kick (Fusion), Klaus Doldinger's Passport (Fusion) and La Bouche (Pop). He has played on more than 40 LPs and CDs and has composed, arranged and recorded musical scores for over 20 German films.

**Nora Thiele**, grew up with European classical music and learned Piano from her early childhood. With the age of 16 she participated in a percussion workshop and discovered her rhythmical talents and ambitions. Since 2000 she is a student at the Music Conservatory of Leipzig, studying world percussion and drums. She has been playing in various different musical projects and styles, encompassing Medieval European music, West-African drums, Folk-Jazz and Drum'n'Bass. Still very young Nora is already playing a mature style of percussion, combining world percussion and drum set in a creative personal way.

*Wu Xing (Chin.) = Five Elements (metal, wood, water, fire and earth)*

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# Wu Xing - History

- February 2002: Robert Zollitsch travels to China to set up a new ensemble. With Xiong Junjie, Gong Linna and Chang Jing he finds enthusiastic partners for the realization of this idea. First rehearsals, recordings and compositions.
- May 2002: the German Musicians Martin Kälberer (keys) and Andreas Keller (drums) complete the ensemble.
- November 2002: Robert travels to China again, beginning the recordings of the first WU XING album, first recording the parts of the Chinese musicians Linna, Chang Jing and Junjie.
- Dezember 2002: Andreas, Martin and Robert record their parts of the CD in Germany.
- February 2003: first “united” rehearsal and concerts in Germany (Ingolstadt, Frankfurt and Deggendorf). The first concert is recorded by Bavarian Radio (BR).
- May 2003: Mix and mastering of first album
- Jun 2003: two musicians leave, two new musicians join: Qiu Ji at the Guzheng and Nora Thiele at the percussion.
- July 2003: WU XING performs on the Bardentreffen Nürnberg/Germany and the Festival Mediteran in Izola/Slovenia. Both concerts are recorded by National Radio.
- October 2003: WU XINGs debut-concert in China. The concert hall in Fuzhou is sold out and the Fujian-TV produces a feature about WU XING and the concert.
- November 2003: In the meantime Robert lives in Beijing. The Chinese musicians and he are guest in various TV-shows; CCTV produces a documentation about the ensemble.
- December 2003: the first CD is being published on CRC (China’s national record company).
- August 2004: Concerts in Guizhou/China, production of first Live-DVD.
- October 2004: Showcase on WOMEX in Essen/Germany.

# China and World-Music

Singing is popular throughout China. Meeting in a Karaoke-Bar is common today even for businessmen. But only imagining a rotten place with squeaking speakers and singers out of tune is far from reality. You can find Karaoke-Bars on highest level, including computerized audio and video equipment, international menu and perfect service. Chinese also love to sing at home: every home-hifi-system includes at least two microphone-inputs for karaoke. And songs of popular films and soap operas are sung by a few million Chinese.

Singing divided in China in three sections traditionally, popular and "west classically". The organization originates from the 1980<sup>th</sup> as the Chinese television began to align large singing competitions. The sense of this organization is to be doubted. If music is not clearly assigned to one of the sections, then it hardly finds a place in television programs (the basis for popularity in China). Today one can study traditional Chinese instruments and singing in China at many music conservatories. For "traditional singing" and "western-classical singing" there are separate classes. The sound ideal differs clearly. Western-classical singing is studied at most, since a high education prestige is connected with it. However in the musical life in China it plays only a minor role. Since the places in choirs are limited the graduates of this technique mostly change profession or work as teachers. The "traditional singing" again experienced a strong "academisation" at the music conservatories and has only little in common with the numerous singing techniques of the different Chinese regions and cultures. In Chinese culture, education is connected with high prestige. As a result this "academisation" radiates into the actually alive regions of folk music. A non-trained singing voice in academic circles is called "large white". Outstanding "folk singers" suffer from lack of self-confidence as they have no professional training. So they begin to copy the academic style. Only few singers succeed in connecting professional singing training and the natural sound of traditional Chinese singing techniques.

The technical level of instrumentalists and singers at China's music conservatories is outstanding and not to compare with the situation 20 years ago. Since Chinese traditional music historically was not very complex and technically fastidious, today exists a disproportion, which settles in a strange "over interpretation" of Chinese traditional music. Simple tunes and folk songs are overloaded with ornaments and affects and turn to kitsch. Copying the European Symphony orchestra, large orchestras with traditional instruments were created in China. The bass function, formerly not known in Chinese music, is taken over by the European bass or new creations following Chinese instruments. China's view into the west is coined by deeply rooted complexes and lacking self-confidence (developed in the last centuries), and the disorientation in the time after the culture revolution (a massacre not only at millions humans, predominantly intellectual ones and artists, but at the Chinese culture completely generally). Today in China everything has to be big, the orchestras have to be as large as possible, the sound as fat as it can. However since there was no such orchestra tradition in China, no genuine literature for the large orchestras is present. The arrangements of traditional tunes usually make it very clear that Chinese classical and folk music is not conceived for such ensemble and very rarely these arrangements work out. New compositions develop, but usually in European composition style. An own Chinese language for these orchestras is still missing. Nevertheless in China's politico-cultural circles one is convinced of the fact that China can internationally be represented by such "pseudo orchestras". The population joins the view, because Chinese television reports regularly of the "great success" of Chinese orchestras being on concert tours abroad. That it is only about a few presentations annually and that the European audience hardly takes notice of these presentations is conscious to the few.

China is a paradise of the most varied music styles. But if it concerns exchange between different traditions and cultures, and integration of new elements into the own traditions, then China is still a "world-musical desert". There are hardly concerts with music of other cultures and attempts for the renewal and opening of the own music are rare. In China was no concert tradition, comparable with Europe. Following the European concept first concerts for orchestras were aligned. In China it is still very difficult for small ensembles to give concerts, since an appropriate framework does not exist yet. In the last years the number of small ensembles working with traditional music is growing. The reasons for that may be found in the increasing prosperity combined with a slowly restructuring cultural identity. The changes can also be seen in architecture, fine arts and even furniture. More and more young musicians try to tie to their traditional roots and to play a new music. It is remarkable, how hard it seems to be for musicians and composers in China despite to open the own traditional music and to generate a new style from it. But viewing Chinese history makes it clear: for many centuries the Chinese music training was aligned to repetition and cultivation of the tradition, not at all to innovation. Today most ensembles are content with more or less successful arrangements of traditional songs, stuffed with electrical sounds and Grooves. A really new music language and a consciousness for alive music making rarely develop. An the working circumstances in China do not promote it: in November 2003 during a noted television broadcast about the music scene in China and their newer represents, all ensembles played playback (not only the singers, but all instruments!). Only the musicians of WU XING resisted the defaults of the television directors and played their music live.

Europeans miss the context to understand Chinese music presented in Europe. Usually they do not realize that it concerns centuries of repetition and cultivation of an old tradition; similarly as in European classical music. The ensemble WU XING wants to break through the repetition. After an intensive study of Chinese music traditions at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music and musical field research in Mongolia and Tibet, Robert Zollitsch's desire on experiments and a new handling of tradition began to grow. And with him some outstanding musicians of the recent generation of China decided – although they could have made career in the existing scene – for the more cumbersome however more exciting way of the innovation. WU XING thereby stands for a general opening of China, which became already more clearly visible within many other ranges. In painting and literature a pronounced and independent Chinese mode of expression already exists. In the art of music new ground must be walked on not only in music, but also carried out pioneer work in the kind, how such new music can be presented to a Chinese public. Appropriate structures do not exist yet and so each step is an experiment. For example stage technology is present, but it is missing at know-how to mix a good sound. Similar applies to logistics, concert program organization and PR work. In order to create a forum not only for the own ensemble WU XING, but to generally promote the idea of "world music" to China, Gong Linna and Robert Zollitsch founded the WU SHENG world music association. Robert's in his many different activities from bandleader to producer, from field researcher to event coordinator, acquired experiences, paired with Linna's reputation in and founded knowledge of the Chinese music scene, are most valuable for the agency in China, and so amongst the first jobs of the agency there is the consultation of a national radio program concerning world music and the programming of a world music festival in Beijing.

For Chinese ears the music of WU XING is a new and irritating experience. WU XING can not be placed in the existing categories and does not show off with blown up sound. But not only music specialists do hear that it concerns a vivid and new music event with deep roots in Chinese music. The Chinese public accepts this event gratefully, because consciousness for the need of innovation in the Chinese music is pervasive. The journey began straight only.

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