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Historical China

project/InterArtes performance

Comments

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- Deborah Broderick (& Debra King)
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- Dr. Ronald Senator
- Susie Wong of The Chinese Cultural Centre
- Mick Wright

N.B. Addresses and telephone numbers have been blanked out for privacy.

From Mark Argent

Cambridge

15 November 1991

The Editor,
The Independent,

Dear Sir,

I am interested to learn from a review in your paper of the existence of *two* concert rooms in London called the Purcell Room, and that, by the most amazing coincidence, these two rooms should have *both* been used by groups called Inter-Artes for concerts on October 24th, and that both groups should have performed works with the same titles, with composers of the same names. There the similarity ended. Had your reviewer attended the same concert as me, in the Purcell Room next to the Queen Elizabeth Hall in the concrete bunker (I hope there is only one of those), he would have had a rather more pleasureable evening, and encountered the sort of programme to which I would like to take all the people who tell me that there is no such thing as good modern music – to give them a pleasant surprise.

I should begin by declaring an interest. I was asked to help publicise the Cambridge performance of this concert, which meant having my name linked with it by promoting it as professionally as possible, but being unable to answer for its quality. When I heard the programme in London I heaved a sigh of relief, for it was better than anything I could have imagined; in the day between the London concert and the Cambridge one, I went round most of my friends in Cambridge trying to encourage them to go, because the concert was, in my opinion well worth attending.

Richard Stoker's *Chinese canticle* is a hauntingly beautiful peace, with a richness and atmosphere which hung in the air in a manner Debussy would have admired. In a tasteful piece of programme-planning this was followed by Robert Sherlaw Johnson's *Monuments of the emperor Chin* which is another piece by an Englishman where the appropriation of Chinese sounds goes far beyond mere pastiche. It is scored for clarinet and flute and exploits the rich sonorities available from unaccompanied wind instruments when they are allowed to speak unmasked by orchestral colleagues; to write a musical monument to China's first emperor for such small forces sounds strange, but only until it is set in the context of oriental music – where, for example, the Japanese can encompass the universe in the music of a solo shakuhachi. Paradoxically the Chinese composer Qu Xiaosong's *Mists* was the only piece on the programme which can be seen in the context of the western avant garde, but only just, for it spoke the language of the avant garde with a chinese accent as loud as the Russian accent in the music of Schnittke. For me, the most striking piece on the programme was Ho Wai-On's *The story so far*, a music theatre piece representing the Chinese tradition through the eyes of a modern Chinese woman. Unfashionably, Ho does not thump the tub of communism, anti-communism, imperialism, or any other ism, and instead speaks of the richness and sadness of modern China with impressive honesty. The presentation has to be seen in the context of oriental music theatre, – not entirely separate from the Japanese Noh and Kabucki which has been a welcome addition to our stages and airwaves of late. I wonder how many Englishmen today could write a 40 minute piece for two singers and ensemble saying what the English traditions mean to them without lapsing into naïvety or jingoism. Of all the pieces on the programme, *The story so far* most clearly deserves a place in the mainstream repertoire; it will never be a piece for performers to toss off lightly, or to approach with less sincerity than its composer has shown, but it is a piece which will be well worth their efforts.

Yours sincerely,

Mark Argent

D R Broderick

London SW13

26 November 1991

Ho Wai-On

Dear Wai-On,

Both Debra King and I very much enjoyed our evening at the Purcell Room hearing the Inter Artes programme. I was fascinated by the concept of juxtaposing eastern and western compositions, of pieces by western composers using eastern texts, of giving an historical/musical view of China.

I personally enjoyed most the music of Qu Xiasong - but perhaps that is just personal preference. I found his music tremendously exciting and moving. I want very much to hear more of it.

The Story So Far was, I think, excellent in conception. That is, I think that your ideas - were potentially excellent. That evening's production could have been better - probably with more time and rehearsal. (I am aware of the problems of lack of time, and you told me of some of the other problems you had in rehearsal.) The idea was unusual, well-portrayed in general and gave a positive, but not extreme, feminist portrayal of events. The acting asked of the singers was simple, yet effective. I felt uncomfortable with the speaking/singing of the instrumentalists - perhaps this was because they were uncomfortable doing it.

I would have preferred less tonality in your music (that is really a personal preference!) I realise that you wanted to use pentatonic sounds, as those are part of traditional Chinese music. I would be interested to hear more of your compositions, so I could have a better idea of your personal style without the imposition, if that is what it was, of tonality.

I would be very pleased if you would send me a cassette of your music. I would like to include it in the Women in Music Listening Exhibition library. Also, if you would send me a photograph (5x7 or 8x10) and some CV material, photocopies of a few pages of score and a quote about yourself, your music, being a woman in music, etc. I would be able to include it in our exhibition some time in the future.

Although I have written this as a personal letter, I have read it to Debra King, and she agrees with the substance of what I have said except that she very much enjoyed the tonal aspect of your music.

I look forward to seeing and hearing more of this kind of programme and I hope that you get all the encouragement - personal and financial - that you need to carry on.

Yours,

Deborah Broderick

Deborah Broderick

London

E11

Powell Room - 24th October.

The Story So far - Ho Wai-On.

I enjoyed the performance of this composition and found it very interesting musically, especially the blending of the vocal and instrumental tone colours.

The simple dramatisation made the somewhat uninspiring text more alive and acceptable to the listener.

The performance was very well executed by both vocalists and instrumentalists.

Denise Deery.

Tim Francis

The concert of new music around the theme *Historical China*, given at the Purcell Room on 24 October, was an promising venture. Works by four composers - two British, two Chinese - were represented (in that order) making for the interesting contrast of the outsiders' and insiders' view.

Richard Stoker's *Chinese Canticle* comprised three sung narratives with a largely unobtrusive instrumental accompaniment. It was clearly intended that the narrative should be intelligible, but as normally happens, it wasn't. The tenor was particularly difficult to understand. Richard Stoker is fascinated by the character of Zhang Liang, whose portrait resembled a pretty young woman, yet who attained a position of some considerable power within the Qin Court. This was due not only to certain timely machinations, but the assistance of heavenly magic on the part of an old man he himself had helped out. Courtesy, respect and patience pay off. These more gentle feminine virtues typically come over in Chinese portraiture: the surprise comes only to the Western eye.

The optional dancer's part was omitted and this was a pity. Throughout the piece I felt that music and narrative were successively losing my attention - and I found myself flitting between the two, both eventually losing out. On first hearing, at least, it was a fairly low-key and unconvincing work. But it had a rather even-tempered and unassuming Chinese feel to it. I would ultimately reserve judgment without a second hearing.

Robert Sherlaw Johnson's shorter piece for flute and clarinet, *The Monuments of the Emperor of Chin*, was better inspired, I felt, and was certainly more immediate and convincing in performance. Though, with a pinch of imagination, it may have been possible to hear the ancient *suona* and *di* playing at court, there was little in the music that was directly attributable to China. The metaphor of the emperor's struggle to win command over his subjects gave the piece its strength and supplied the sort of hazy programme which lies behind Chinese instrumental music.

The first of the Chinese pieces provided the most successful performance of the concert. The interest was largely timbral and there was a clarity and vitality which belied its title *Mists*. The extra-musical intention of the piece unfortunately eluded me. I did not, however, glean any dim romantic view of history from Qu Xiaosong's musical idiom, which was confident, personal and firmly rooted in the present. It was an interesting composition to come from mainland China and unlike anything else I have heard.

Hou Wai-On's *The Story So Far* was the largest, most ambitious work and most problematic at least from the performance side. Unlike the first piece, this should have been a semi-theatrical piece. But apart from a series of distracting costume changes, this aspect was seriously underdone. The programme notes were rather loosely related to what went on, it seemed to me, and it was difficult to make out what it was all about and the tensions, drama, humour, were all lost. Hou Wai-On's musical idiom contains recognizable Chinese elements. These are natural and in-built: there is no feeling of musical parody - it is a mature and convincing music, but in performance it was rather tame and lifeless.

The concert was, as I said a promising venture, much of it quite impressive - not least of which Hou Wai On's programme notes. For me, however, there are always problems with concerts of new music. While I can say that such pieces might clearly deserve another hearing, or that a second hearing or a different performance is needed, it is just as clear that the great majority of the audience will never hear any of the music again and all the efforts will be forgotten about. The thematic focus of the concert, though it was rather loosely interpreted, could well be a step in the direction of popularization, but it will certainly be inadequate to give new music the revitalization it so clearly needs.

INNOVATIVE REVIEW OF CHINA'S PAST

by E. C. Goh

INTER-ARTES, an innovative group founded by Miss Ho Wai On to promote multi-cultural understanding, put on an imaginative programme at the Purcell Room on October 24, 1991.

It featured world premieres of music theatre and concert pieces by Chinese and British composers inspired by China's history.

My favourite piece ~~was~~ probably Richard Stoker's Chinese Canticle, Op 68 for soprano, baritone and chamber ensemble, with texts from Szuma Chien's Records of The Historian. The music allows listeners to follow the ^{unusual} life of Chiang Liang, Marquis of Liu -- and how he changed the course of Han Dynasty.

Robert Sherlaw Johnson's The Monuments of the Emperor of Chin for flute and clarinet took his inspiration from the stele to mark the rule of China's First Emperor.

Qu Xiao Song's Mists was ~~garbage~~, worse than the wind whistling down my chimney. This is the type of work that gives contemporary music a bad name -- and then promoters wonder why few people go to such concerts or have little interest in modern composers.

China-born Mr Qu, ~~now~~ in New York on an exchange visit, allegedly based his work on the suffering of poetess Chai WenJee near the end of the Han Dynasty -- I felt the same when I heard this work. I am glad that Mr Qu was the only one in this programme to get a Greater London Arts-funded commission, sorry for better composers still waiting to be heard.

It was therefore most refreshing to come to Miss Ho's The Story So Far for soprano, baritone and chamber ensemble. This music theatre piece, comprising a woman's view of Chinese history, rightly questions the sexist attitudes and the direction that China is heading. In fact, the programme book and notes, an obvious labour of love by Miss Ho, give a marvellous instant insight into the Middle Kingdom.

But it would probably be better if this work was sung straight, as in Mahler's Das Lied von der Erde, than performed with stylised hand gestures as it is hard for ~~European~~ Westerners to convincingly perform Chinese theatre -- or vice versa -- because they ~~are~~ distracting rather than enhancing Miss Ho's message. There were also 10 items squeezed into her work and much was probably lost on listeners unfamiliar with their historical context.

With her bilingual skill and deep knowledge of Chinese culture, Miss Ho is the ideal person to help British-born Chinese discover their roots and promote Anglo-Chinese understanding. ~~ing~~ ~~May~~ she build many more bridges in future concerts.

NEW DECADE

DIRECTOR: EDNA GRAHAM


Ilford.


HISTORICAL CHINA

THE PURCELL ROOM OCTOBER 24th. 1991.

This was an interesting and unusual evening, and the underlying idea is wholly admirable. All the performers were excellent and should be congratulated on their handling of these very difficult scores. The two singers were particularly impressive.

I did not really enjoy the two pieces by English composers, "Chinese Canticle" by Richard Stoker, and "The Monuments of the Emperor Chin" by Robert Sherlaw Johnson, finding the idiom rather old-fashioned and, to be honest, boring, although both were well performed. "Mists" by Qu Xiaosong, was much more to my taste, making fascinating use of the excellent voices and formidable techniques of the soloists, and rising to exciting heights in the sections dealing with the grief and madness of Chai Wenjee. I would be interested to hear this again.

THE STORY SO FAR. Ho Wai-On's composition, which was the second half of the programme, presented much attractive and appropriate music, and more fine singing and playing, but perhaps the story of so vast and complex a culture cannot be told in so short a time. I felt that the episodes were not evenly balanced, and that they all need stronger lyrics, especially the final scene. The message is clear, of course, but there is a banality in the text which is unfortunate, and even the powerful performance of Roger Langford could not disguise it.

While I understand and accept completely the convention of visible costume changes, I feel that, for a Western audience, this could be better managed, either by a more choreographic and stylised presentation from both singers and dresser, or even, if custom does not speed up the process, --- music to bridge the gaps, --- if this would be in the tradition of the Chinese Theatre. The lighting was all that could be expected in a concert hall, and it would be interesting to see what use the Director would make of a full range of equipment.

I am told that "The Story So Far" should be sung from memory, but the use of copies did not bother me. They were very neatly managed and the diction was excellent. Obviously one does not expect to hear every word the first time, in such involved music. If I may be allowed a quibble, in one or two cases the choice of costume materials created problems, -- creasing, for instance, which can be avoided in many

modern fabrics, and the tinsel strips which were so difficult to handle. When so much care, time, and trouble has been taken with this production, it seems a pity to detract from the effect in this way. This criticism may seem trivial, but it is surprising how distracting these details are to members of the audience whose interest in the staging is equal to their care for the music.

The talented and energetic Director of Inter-Artes is developing a most interesting and worthwhile theme, which deserves great success, although this concert leaves me with a strong feeling that Chinese composers are rather better at writing on Chinese subjects than their British counterparts, I suppose that this is only to be expected!

I look forward to hearing more of Ho Wai On's work and possibly that of Qu Xiaosong.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Edna Graham". The signature is fluid and elegant, with long, sweeping lines.

Edna Graham.



THE GREAT BRITAIN – CHINA CENTRE



25 October 1991

Ho Wai-On



President

The Lord MacLehose of Beoch KT GBE KCMG KCVO

Vice Presidents

The Rt Hon The Lord Callaghan of Cardiff KG

The Rt Hon Edward Heath MBE MP

Chairman

Graham C. Greene CBE

Dear Ho Wai-On,

This is just a quick note to day how much I enjoyed the Inter-Artes concert last night. Thank you very much for the ticket. I do not often go to concerts of contemporary music but I enjoyed all the items last night, particularly *The Story So Far*.

I thought it would be interesting to include something in the next issue of our newsletter about Inter-Artes and what you are trying to do as well as a review of last night's performance. Do you know of anyone who was there last night (or in Cambridge) who would be able to write an informed review? And would you be able to write a short piece on Inter-Artes and its objectives? Since our last newsletter has just gone to the printers we would not need copy until early December.

On another matter have you been in touch with British American Arts about funding? If you ever consider performing or visiting the States they may be able to help you. I have met a couple of people from there and they are enthusiastic and keen to support new initiatives.

With best wishes,
Yours sincerely,

Nicola Macbean
Director

A REVIEW OF THE INTER-ARTES 'HISTORICAL CHINA' CONCERT:
Purcell Room, 24th October 1991 and the Old Library, Pembroke
College, Cambridge, 26th October 1991.

By Loretta Myers B.A.

Venues and Audience

The Purcell Room was a perfect venue for the chamber-music scale of ensemble involved in the concert. The raised stage enabled easy viewing by the entire audience throughout. The availability of sophisticated lighting facilities enhanced Ho Wai-on's music theatre, complimenting its drama with an array of sympathetic colours. In contrast, the Old Library at Pembroke College had no such lighting or stage; this reduced visibility, and consequently, some of the impact of the theatre. A few people had some problems seeing, due to the fact that the requested seating arrangement was not adhered to. The dull lighting caused a few problems for the instrumentalists, who had to employ a standard lamp.

Despite these differences in the facilities, the Old Library proved to be a successful venue - it was much more intimate in nature than the Purcell Room and the music was consequently more easy to grasp and understand; as the players were closer, their performance seemed to be more personally directed at members of the audience, instead of being played to a darkened, abstract crowd. Communication was considerably heightened.

Unfortunately, audience attendance was not as large as it could have been. This was not due to lack of publicity, but rather, in the case of the first concert, to the staging of a contemporary opera on the same evening next door in the Queen Elizabeth Hall. I'm convinced that many members of the opera audience would have attended the 'Historical China' concert if the events had not been scheduled at the same time.

PROGRAMME:

Richard Stoker: Chinese Canticle op. 68

This piece told the story of Chang Liang and the old man who dropped his shoe. The excellent singers, Mary Wiegold and Roger Langford, relayed the meaning behind the words very well, and portrayed their characters expertly. Richard Stoker's melodic lines drew much on speech melody and rhythm, with the phrases often giving the impression of sprechgesang. These vocal lines were superimposed upon a general wash of instrumental sound that undulated and pulsed in throbs rather than phrases or arches. Successions of fourth- and fifth-block chords in the harp gave a Chinese flavour, as did the quality of model scales employed. This piece relied more on the variations of texture within a fixed continuum rather

than the alteration of timbre to depict changes of mood. Overall, Stoker's Chinese Canticle washed over the audience like a piece of flowing silk, which finished rather abruptly with the phrase ...'marvels do take place', accompanied by a harp ascending scale to an ensemble unison.

[It would be interesting to see the piece performed with the 'optional dancer' another time].

Robert Sherlaw Johnson: The Monuments of the Emperor of Chin for flute and clarinet.

The composer tells us that his clarinet represents the Emperor Chin, whilst the flute portrays his subjects. These are sensitively chosen instrumental similes of his characters: the dominant, rich and strident tone of the clarinet as compared with the more submissive, softer, less arresting tones of the flute.

The piece begins with a forceful clarinet statement, which was played with brilliance by Philip Edwards; this is the Emperor's theme. The flute is here only allowed interjective material which conflicts with the overawing presence of the clarinet. The composition is an expertly constructed dialogue of timbres: the two instrumentalists react against each other with a dazzling display of virtuosic wind writing; yet never is this display merely for show. Each phrase is worked out - each is a musical metaphor of the historical story the composer is portraying. Here, words are unnecessary to convey emotion.

The players communicated closely, both with each other and with their audience, their separate personalities shaping their characteristically differing roles. This was a very impressive work.

Qu Xiao-song: Mists

The Purcell Room concert saw the world premiere of this piece, the most innovative and avant-garde work on the programme. The three major sections depicted, firstly, the uncertainty of Chai Wenjee and her misery. The soprano Mary Wiegold was magnificent in her role, milking the pathos of the arching moans with a touching sympathy. These wailings punctuated occasional explorations of isolated pitches on various instruments, starting with the cello. Qu Xiao-song makes much use of space and silence, the two phenomena combining to produce a huge unsounded intensity. Each pitch or phrase

fragment was carefully deliberated and beautifully placed; the audience had time to digest an idea before another was offered.

This haze of timbral resonances heightened as the suffering increased. The baritone's shouts grew more anxious and insistent as the escalation of emotional intensity of the second movement was portrayed with quicker instrumental interjections; space and silence were rejected in favour of a denser, more polyphonic texture, with sometimes painful declamations from the extreme registers of the piccolo and the soprano. This contrasting middle section accelerated into a frenzied and often violent depiction of pain, as the metaphorical portrayal became a real one for the listeners, whose physical pain levels were tested to their limit. The versatility of the instrumentalists was also called on in this passage, as the composer makes use of wordless experimental utterances from all the participants; hisses, splutterings and shouts combine to create a new vocal soundscape.

'Mists' ends with the mood of the beginning, yet even more hopeless and resigned. With the storm of the outburst over, the soprano can barely muster her cat-like moans.

Ho Wai-on: The Story So Far

This music-theatre production was a beautifully selected ride through Chinese history from Confucius to the future, presented with impeccable stage presence by two actors. Variety was definitely the 'spice of life' here, with singing, narration, instrumental melodies and crowd participation from the players. Visually, the stories were presented as a succession of varying images, complemented by countless changes of costume and lighting, as a series of tableaux took the audience through the millennia of Chinese dynasties. Throughout, the emphasis was on simplicity - of language, music, imagery and message - so that the audience were never in doubt as to what was intended. The costumes were of strikingly contrasting colours and shapes: yellow robes for emperors, darker and less ostentatious ones for peasants, and a magnificent silver tattered robe to portray the ruined remains of the old regime. The actions, too, were direct and straightforward: each hand movement was carefully controlled with no extraneous gesture to detract from the message of that particular window into that particular moment in time.

The music was an exciting expression of the Chinese spirit of each era in miniature - ancient sounding melodic lines became abstract expressions of sorrow for the women of the Sung dynasty, which in turn developed into jazzy tunes for the 'corrupt' scenario.

'The Story So Far' is a celebration of China's history in emotion and mood displays, which also presents a serious educational overview of the thread of changing political thought of the land, ending with a resounding question mark over the future direction of the nation. It was left up to the audience to decide.

31 October 1991

Lyn Rogers

Ho Wai-on

SW11

Dear Wai-on

As a member of the audience, these would be my comments;

I don't know anything about contemporary music, but the idea of music reflecting, or inspired by, Chinese culture did attract my attention.

As I am also fairly ignorant about Chinese culture, the programmes notes were very useful and added to my appreciation of the pieces, I would have missed a lot of the significance of the music without them.

I enjoyed the way in which familiar instruments; the flute, the voice etc were asked to do unfamiliar things; new sounds, new uses.

Having works by more than one composer ensured musical diversity - I would have been wary of going to a concert devoted solely to one composer whose work I did not know.

I value going to this sort of performance because it introduces one to ideas - and sounds - one wouldn't encounter any other way.

I hope these are useful to you!

We are in town on the 17th November in fact, but this is because we are having a reunion with the people we were on holiday with in Italy in September. So we won't be able to make it, sorry. Could you come to supper with us instead - sometime during the week? (Weekdays are better for us) Give me a call to arrange.

See you soon,



USA

15-11-92

Dear Ms. Ho Wai-on!

I apologise for this belated letter. It is to praise the concert of music at the Purcell Room, with its genuinely revealing meeting of Eastern & Western... I compliment you on the concept & the actual choice of music & performers

I am, as I expect you know, a composer of some note, especially in the USA (a Pulitzer Prize), and I'd be happy to do something for this series. Perhaps we could talk about it... I do actually have already a song cycle - "Sun's in the East", settings of Chinese lyrics for soprano & guitar or piano - which Jane Manning premiered a few years back: you might like

to do that? - -

Anyway, good luck for the future.

Sincerely

12-11-71


(Dr.) Ronald Senator

Dr. Ronald Senator





1st December 1991.

Ho Wai-On,


Dear Ho Wai-On,

Inter-Artes 'Historical China' performance

I write to congratulate you for the most enjoyable concert in the Purcell Room on October 14. I would like to comment on the Mists by Qu Xiaosong & The Story So Far by yourself.

The Mists: I understand that the music is about the profound suffering of Chai Wenjee and the composer has certainly conveyed her agony and pain by the extreme sharp screams and piercing music. However, by listening to the music I cannot relate it to Chi Wenjee for she was renowned as a literati of high subtlety and gentility.

The Story So Far: This is the best of the whole programme. The music is pleasant, the presentation technique is unusual and unique, and the script is informative & interesting. I particularly admire your ability to write the music for Bao Jingyan's words as well as your philosophical ending. I think both Mary Wiegold and Roger Langford are marvellous.

Actually I went to the concert with the view that all new music would not be enjoyable and I expect to leave the concert hall before the show is over. In fact I stayed to the end and enjoy every minute. The Chinese community is fortunate in having someone of your obvious gifts in it. I look forward to your next new composition and production.

Yours sincerely,


Susie Wong.

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Norman Reddaway CBE
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MINE THEATRE
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Correspondence:



The Chinese Cultural Centre Ltd
is a registered charity in England
295069

[REDACTED]
London, UK

December 1st 1991.

Dear Wai-on,

Just a short and, I'm afraid, very belated note. I've been meaning to write to you for some weeks to say how much I enjoyed the concert you put on at the Purcell Room in October. It provided a most pleasant, stimulating and informative evening.

I have, though, to start with a confession. I didn't listen to Richard Stokes's Chinese Cantata at all well: on several occasions my attention wandered from the text to the instrumentalists and I lost the gist of the story, which was a pity. I'd very much like to hear it again.

I recognised the pianist, Rowland Suberland, from one of your previous Inter-Artes concerts, and enjoyed his performance, with Philip Edwards, of Sherman Johnson's piece. Looking back on it now I'm not sure that I appreciated its Chinese-ness, but my memory may be playing tricks (it does increasingly; probably the onset of senility).

Qu Xiaosong's "Mists" was an intriguing, dark and haunting piece, reflecting well, I thought, the outline given in the programme notes. (I found these most useful generally). I don't recall hearing anything quite like Mists before. The two vocalists sang their parts very well, I thought, nor that I'm an expert of these matters.

And so to "The Story So Far". It was a good idea to rearrange the programme so that it formed the second half; it rounded off the evening splendidly. It must have been very difficult to pave down about three thousand years of history into such a short work. I thought it worked very well. It was good to see the rich colours of the costumes and even a touch of acting from the two vocalists. In this respect, I particularly enjoyed the very last part where the baritone is extolling the importance and awareness of China, and the soprano, leaning against the back wall, throws a number of timely spanners into the works.

It was a shame that you didn't have a larger stage which would have allowed more movement and dance perhaps. It was also a pity that the South Bank programmed a "competing" event on the same evening as the

Q.E.H. You would probably have had a much larger audience had they not done so.

Anyway, going back to "The Story So Far", the piece inevitably ends with a question mark as to the future. It strikes me that looking at China's history it reflects, in essence, the history of mankind generally. We have learnt nothing from our past. We pride ourselves on the 'progress' we have made but the advances are not nearly as great as some people like to believe. Admittedly we have better health care, better homes and more luxuries, in the West at least, but in terms of the way we treat each other very little has changed. Everybody, including the Chinese as you point out, wish, reasonably, to share in the benefits of a higher standard of living, but the costs are high. We pride ourselves on our civilisation, meanwhile the Serbs are slaughtering the Croats, and vice versa, in Yugoslavia; the Protestants shooting the Catholics and vice versa in Ireland; and everywhere all kinds of atrocities are common-place. Sadly, I think that all we can learn from the past is how to continue in the same way. What is needed is some kind of radical and wholly fundamental change in each and every one of us; tragically this seems very far away.

This is becoming too gloomy, so I'll stop. Thank goodness for music and musicians in the world who can transcend the barriers between us. In the last few years I've realised that of all the arts, music has the most important rôle to play and the best chance of promoting goodwill and understanding between people. It seems to me that your project to promote Anglo-Chinese understanding is a small but important contribution and I hope very much for its success. With an increased awareness and comprehension of the different cultures of the world we are far less likely to fear them. In this respect musicians have a very valuable rôle to play and are likely to be far more beneficial than, say, the politicians, who, I'm afraid, cause more problems than they solve most of the time.

So, congratulations to you and to all of the fine musicians you assembled. It was a most enjoyable evening. It was also good to see Nancy again: do you have her present address?

Best wishes

Mike.