



INTRODUCTION TO CHINESE MUSIC

WITH GARAGEBAND FOR IPAD

Preview



Welcome...

In January 2016 a new version of Garageband was released. Hidden away in the settings menu, we were intrigued to find an option to 'turn on Chinese instruments'. Later, after a couple of hours of exploring the *pipa*, *erhu* and Chinese Live Loop sets, some youtubing, and several 'wow!' moments, the penny dropped: for the first time ever, any young person with an iPad has the potential to see, play, improvise and compose using Chinese instruments. What is more, these instruments won't go out of tune, need re-stringing, or take up space in the instrument cupboard!

So began the development of this four session project. My degree is in Ethnomusicology - the anthropology of music - and I am half-Chinese, but I will admit that my interest was never piqued by either Chinese classical or folk musics. Over the course of writing this project my opinion has changed, mostly because I have taken the time to listen to a great variety of Chinese music from many genres. The intricacy of melody, focus on evocation of mood through programmatic music, and rhythmic power of large ensembles playing a music structured so unlike what we are used to in the west is disarming, and extremely effective at what for me is the purpose of music: to search for and communicate the fundamental truths of humanity and the universe.

This teaching resource is designed for 10-14 year olds, and is comprised of **four lesson plans, four accompanying videos**, and this set of **guidance notes** for teachers. It assumes no previous knowledge of Chinese Music, and exercises have been designed to maximise creative music making whilst developing pupils' musicianship and theoretical knowledge. We hope it provides a springboard for harmonious journey into the music of the 'Middle Kingdom'.



What is Chinese Music?

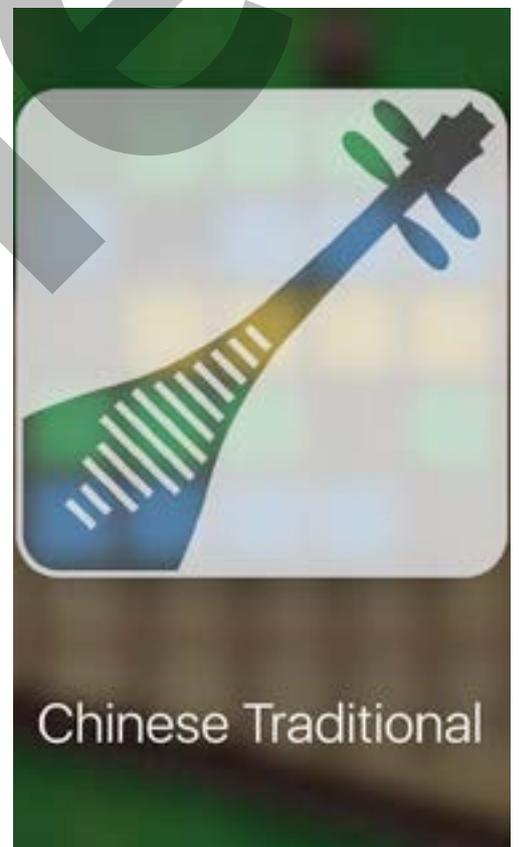
What, for that matter, is the Chinese language, or even the Chinese ethnicity? It is a testament to the strength of various Chinese dynasties that such a diverse set of ethnicities and subcultures – each with their own language, cuisine, belief system and, yes, music – has held (or been forced to hold) a collective identity as 'Chinese' for so many hundreds of years. As good Ethnomusicologists we must acknowledge this, but then turn our magnifying glass on specific traditions, musicians and repertoire that reflect some idea of the whole.

We have chosen to focus on traditional Instrumental Music, as played in the 21st century in the context of concerts, but often using repertoire derived from folk traditions. This allows us to consider the common instruments of Chinese music and utilise the many recordings made in this context, while finding echoes of the music that has been played in teahouses and royal courts for hundreds of years.

How to deliver the course

You may wish to deliver the course as a stand-alone unit or as part of a wider study of world musics or Chinese culture.

- + Each of the four **lesson plans** contains three exercises- a listening exercise, a playing exercise and a creative task. They also include links to youtube performances included in some of the tasks.
- + The accompanying [walkthrough videos](#), (password: *laotzu*) one for each lesson, guide pupils through the iPad-based tasks, as well as featuring an extended interview with master pipa player Cheng Yu, who explains various aspects of Chinese music from a musician's perspective. Note: the walkthrough videos focus on the practical tasks, and do not include details of all the tasks. Therefore, teachers should use the lesson plans as a guide to the overall structure of the lesson.



Additional Resources

[Music in China](#) by Frederick Lau – Comprehensive guide to music in China, with accompanying audio CD.

[Silk & Bamboo Ensemble School Project](#) – Created by the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London

The **Teaching Guide** offers concise and relevant definitions and elaborations on some of the concepts and wider cultural themes covered in the lesson plans, keeping you one step ahead of your most enquiring students!

Using Garageband

Compared to the time and focus needed to learn an acoustic instrument, getting your head around Garageband is a walk in the park. We recommend trying out each iPad-based exercise yourself before delivering in class. This should give you all the knowledge of the app you need. Enjoy learning like a young person again! However, those who require additional guidance should look at the introductory video tutorials on our website, or consider purchasing our 'Garageband for Key Stage 2/3' resource, which includes a complete iPad based curriculum.

How to share your work

Session 1 and 3 produce short compositions that, as well as being useful evidence for assessment, can be shared with the world! Garageband allows us to put songs on both Google Drive and Dropbox, but we recommend creating a class Soundcloud account, allowing family and friends to listen to and comment on the music. You can also use 'airdrop' to move compositions between iPads. Feel free to [get in touch](#) for more details.

Equipment List

iPads with Garageband installed // Amplification (e.g. classroom speakers) for pupil sharing // [Headphones](#) // [Headphone Splitters \(for pair work\)](#) // (Optional) A way for all students to see the iPad screen (e.g. [a connector between the iPad and your whiteboard](#)).



Teaching Notes

Lesson 1 – Instrumentation & Ornamentation

Begin the lesson with the accompanying video, available at www.transformancemusic.org/china (the password is: laotzu). Note that the second exercise does not have video accompaniment. You will need to pause the video and follow the link in the lesson plan to the [Beijing Traditional Music Ensemble](#) performance, before restarting the video to begin exercise 3.

Ornamentation

The 'decoration' of notes through the addition of extra pitches (slides, grace notes, trills) or the manipulation of existing notes (tremolo, pitch bending).

'One important method of embellishment results from the addition of extra notes to the melodies to elaborate them. This technique is generally called "adding flowers". The purpose of this is to enliven and enrich the original skeletal version with embellishments' from 'Music in China' by Frederick Lau

Tip: You can use your own instrument (including voice!) to demonstrate ornamentation in a western context (trills, vibrato etc).

Cheng Yu and the pipa

The *pipa* is one of the most popular and versatile instruments in traditional Chinese music. Often compared to the guitar in terms of both sound and function, it is used as both a solo and accompaniment instrument.

Pipa player Cheng Yu, featured in the videos, comes from a family of musicians that can trace their history back two thousand years. Born in Beijing, she grew up in the Gobi desert in Gansu, Northwest China, where her family was exiled during the Cultural Revolution. She began studying the pipa aged seven, and won several national awards on her way to graduate from the Xi'an Conservatory of Music in 1987. She has been based in London since 1990 and was awarded a PhD for her research on an ancient five-string version of the pipa. She is the founder of the UK Chinese Music Ensemble in London.



Pronunciation

Lesson 1 considers five instruments:
Guzheng, Pipa, Yangqin, Dizi, Erhu

In general:

'zh-' sounds like the English 'j', making 'Guzheng' sound 'guzheng'

'qin'- sounds like the English 'chin', so 'Yangqin' becomes 'yang-chin'

Pipa - 'pee-pa'

Erhu - 'are-who'

Dizi - 'dizzy'



Session 2 - Heterophony & the Pentatonic Scale

This session provides a great opportunity to develop a class performance! Note that the first exercise in this session is a listening exercise, and the accompanying video begins with exercise 2.

Purple Bamboo

Purple Bamboo is a folk song from south east China. It would originally have been sung and played by both professionals and amateurs in Tea Houses, the cultural equivalent of the pub in the UK, in an informal performance context not dissimilar from a traditional Irish folk session. More recently it has been adopted into the classical concert repertoire, including in the example given in the lesson plan.

There are several sets of lyrics associated with the song. This is one popular translation:

*One straight purple bamboo
For my precious one to make a flute
Put the flute to your lips,
Your lips to the flute
The flute blows out new melodies
My little precious one
Yu-ti-yu-ti you have learned it now!*

Purple Bamboo

Introduction

Main Melody

G D G D

Pipa

6 A D G D A

11 D A G D G D A D

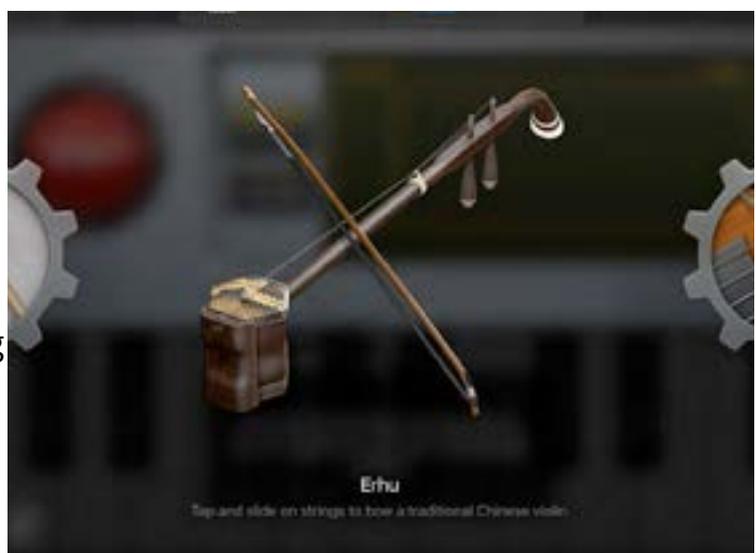
The Pentatonic Scale

The pentatonic scale is often associated with Chinese music. It should be noted that many genres of Chinese music, as well as the numbering system of written Chinese music, use heptatonic (seven pitch) scales, but it is true that many common Chinese melodies are rooted in the pentatonic.

Numbers have a deeper significance in China than in the west, with some numbers more auspicious than others, and different meanings attached to various numbers. Five is considered important, as it is the sum of two and three, which represent yin and yang respectively. This is further reflected in the groupings of five elements (wood, fire, earth, metal, water), five grains (soybean, wheat, rice, millet, hemp) etc. Five reflects balance and completeness, and the pentatonic scale fits in with this system.

Heterophony

When playing in heterophony (from the Greek 'different voices'), musicians perform multiple variations of the same melody at the same time, using contrasting timing and ornamentation. Heterophony is common around the world, including in Jewish klezmer music, jazz and 20th century western classical music. Chinese musicians would not distinguish between heterophony and the ornamentation process,



but when thinking structurally we can see that the latter leads to the former when played in an ensemble setting. We have included it here as a new approach to classroom ensemble playing and improvisation, and a way for pupils to break out of the idea of a clear 'correct' and 'incorrect' rendition of a melody.

The erhu

The *erhu* (pronounced 'are-who') is a two stringed fiddle and probably the most ubiquitous traditional Chinese instrument, with comparisons made to the western violin. Like the violin, the *erhu's* bow is traditionally made of horse hair, but unlike the violin the *erhu's* resonating chamber is to this day usually covered with python snake skin. Also unlike the violin, the bow sits in-between the two strings.

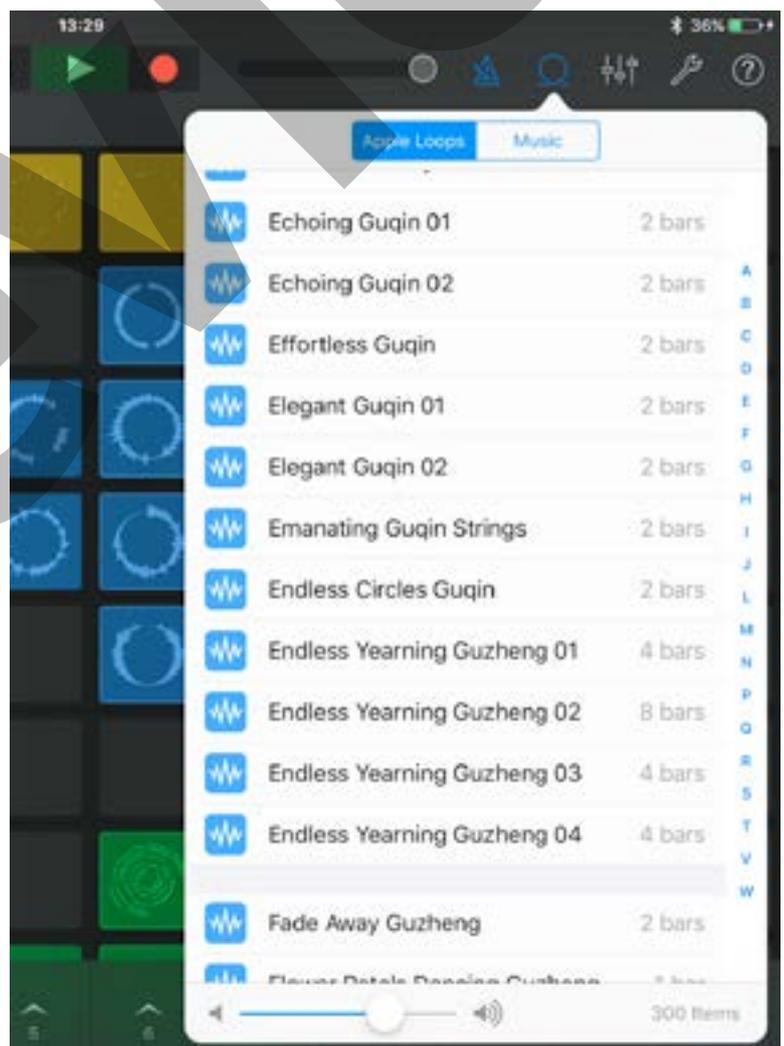
The sound of the erhu is well demonstrated in [this video](#), which also shows the incredible expressiveness of the instrument.

Session 3 - Programme Music

"The use of programmatic titles is an important feature in Chinese music. Programmatic music is music that narrates a story or refers to something concrete in reality, such as scenery, nature, a flowing stream, a flock of flying geese, and high mountains. It can also be poetic in tone and can depict historical events, human emotions, or states of mind"
- Frederik Lau, *Music in China*

The example used in this lesson, "[Spring Flowers in a moonlit Night on the River](#)", is a good example of programme music as defined above. You could use this session as part of a wider project on programme music in western classical music, taking further examples from Mendelssohn and Messiaen. More information:

[BBC Bitesize - Programme Music](#)
[Credo - Programme Music](#)





Session 4 - The Rhythm of the Lion Dance

The project ends with a session that can easily be developed into a high-impact (and loud!) performance. Note that the the first two exercises do not use iPads, and the accompanying video begins with exercise 3.

Chinese Percussion Ensembles

Percussion is an important element of Chinese music, with *luogu* – gong and drum ensembles – an important part of parades, folk dances and theatrical productions. One such parade is the Lion Dance, the contextual focus of this session. Each ensemble will include at least three types of percussion -

1. a *dalü*, a large gong played with a padded mallet*
2. *bo*, comparable to western cymbals
3. a *dagu*, a large single headed drum played with two sticks. The *dagu* player usually leads the ensemble.

Additional instruments, including hand bells and woodblocks, are also common. Rhythms are usually based in a duple (2/4 or 4/4) rhythm, though most rhythms include syncopation.

Bo (Cymbal)

Dalu (Gong)

Dagu (Bass Drum)

Tip: 'dà' means 'big' in Chinese. 'Gǔ' means drum, making 'dagu' big drum, or bass drum. 'Xiǎo' means small. Opening the 'help' menu on the Chinese drums interface gives further examples of "dà' and 'Xiǎo' instruments.

*On the Garageband Chinese drum kit, we will use a larger cymbal instead of the dalu. This is just our personal taste, so feel free to use the original!

The Lion Dance

The Lion dance is a form of traditional dance among many ethnic groups in China, and involves one or two dancers wearing an elaborate Lion costume and mimicking a Lion's movements to the accompaniment of a *luogu* -gong and drum – ensemble. Also popular in Chinese diaspora communities, the Lion Dance can be seen at parades, restaurant openings, temple consecrations and weddings in addition to its traditional role at Chinese New Year and other annual festivals.

Youtube is full of examples of Lion Dances, in addition to the four examples detailed in the lesson plan. We are yet to have a class make their own lion to dance in, please [let us know](#) if you do!

End of teaching notes.



Additional Resources & Training

As stated in the introduction, this resource part of our wider mission to 'develop musicianship through creativity', with the iPad as the tool and a lifetime love of creative music-making as the goal. To this end, we have a comprehensive range of teaching resources available on our website, www.transformancemusic.org. Ben and the Transformance Music team also offer training and classroom projects worldwide.

About the Author

Ben Sellers is a teacher, songwriter and Lead Musician at Transformance Music. He is the author of 'Teaching Music with Garageband for iPad' and 'Garageband for Key Stage 2 & 3'. Like his music workshop heroes, he sees the music workshop/class as a space for personal and societal transformation. He plays clarinet and saxophone, and prefers seagulls to cats.

