cd **Mei Han on the 92CD:**
Purple Lotus Bud; Through the Waves; The Greening; Dragon Dogs

A foremost zheng virtuoso broadens the scope of her ancient Chinese instrument to embrace Asian, Western, composed, and freely improvised musics

reinventing tradition

the past, present, and future of mei han

AN INTERVIEW BY JOHN OLIVER

MEI HAN IS AN EXTRAORDINARY VIRTUOSO who plays the zheng (pronounced "jung" with a hard "j" like "jar" and German "u"), the traditional Chinese zither with twenty-one strings and movable bridges. In the nine years since she came to Canada, she has established enduring musical relationships with a broad range of artists—from improvising musicians to jazz artists, world musicians, and classical groups. She began her epic journey growing up during the Chinese Cultural Revolution, came to a threshold as a graduate student of ethnomusicology at the University of British Columbia, and was transmogrified with her discovery of the creative-music and world-music scenes in Vancouver. From a frightened propaganda-pushing youth, chanting the praises of Mao, through the experience of Tienanmen Square, to a free and expressive artist who now sings her heart and soul through her zheng, she continues her journey with us in Canada, an artist still young and full of brilliance.

vancouver: the early days

JO: In Vancouver we have had the good fortune to hear you play every kind of music from traditional Chinese to improvised contemporary music. What were the circumstances that bought you to settle in Vancouver and who were the first musicians you worked with here?

MH: I came to Vancouver in 1996 as a student at the University of British Columbia, to do my second masters degree in ethnomusicology. Although I already had a masters degree in China in the same discipline, I found the Chinese approaches and the concept of ethnomusicology different, due to lack of access to Western scholarship.

By its nature, ethnomusicology is a Western discipline. Because the school workload was heavy, I didn't have a chance to perform with local musicians for about a year and a half. The first public performance I did was in the Further East, Further West series presented by Vancouver ProMusica in January 1998. I played a piece for zheng and marimba, written by a friend who was also a student of mine, Siao Kin Lee.

Then, after I graduated, I was debating whether I should go on to a PhD, or whether I should do performance. They were equally attractive, but I decided on performance. The first thing I did was to make a phone call to Randy Raine-Reusch, a local Vancouver musician, because I had often heard about him, and he also plays the zheng. I asked him if he would be interested in working with me, although I had no clue what we would do together. I just wanted to get together to have a talk.

His initial reaction was quite negative. He said, "I have worked with Chinese musicians and they don't seem interested in doing contemporary music. So I'm not interested anymore." I said, "I heard that you did some new stuff on the zheng. So maybe you can show me what you have done."

We made an appointment and I came to his house. The first thing he did was not to play the zheng but to put on a CD. He said, "Okay, listen to this CD and let's see what you say."

So I listened to it. It was a free-improv CD by Randy with Barry Guy and Robert Dick, called *Gudira* (1999 Nuscope Recordings, USA). He put on the third track, which featured the zheng. My first reaction was that it was very heavy: something like an earthquake that shook me. And second, I felt that it was very refreshing—I could see a kind of brightness in that music which I had never seen in any zheng compositions. Randy stopped the CD and asked me what I thought.

I said, "Wow, I like it!"

He said. "You must be very unique. You are the first Chinese musician I have met who likes this kind of music."

He immediately changed his attitude and became very interested and showed me his collection of instruments, and talked about Chinese music, about Western new music, about world music; it was as if he wanted to tell me everything he knew. Finally, he said, "Why don't we try some improv?"

"Improv? I know the word," I said, "but I don't know how."

"Just play," he said, "Play."

"But if I don't have music with me, how can I play?"

"Music in your heart: you don't have that?"

"No, I only read music. Everything has to be on a piece of paper, has to be scored, for me."

He retuned the zheng from the pentatonic scale to some kind of atonal scale, then he said, "Okay, imagine you are playing a traditional piece that you know. Use the same fingering."

But of course it sounded different because the tuning was changed. So that immediately broke through the wall that I had. Then I played something, and he asked, "How do you feel?"

"This is so different." And all of a sudden I felt a kind of freedom I had never felt, and something connected with my heart, with my soul, that I did not have before. I knew that I had found a tool that would allow me to express myself. That was the beginning of the journey.

china: the early days

JO: I'd like to go back to what you broke away *from*. Can you tell us what it was like to study music during The Cultural Revolution?

MH: I began elementary school in 1966, so all my basic education took place during the Cultural Revolution [1966-1976]. That had a very strong influence on my early mentality—culturally, socially, politically, and musically. As a child I listened exclusively to revolutionary music: songs to praise Mao, the Communist Party, the working class—including soldiers, workers, and peasants. We had specific songs for every political propaganda, but we never had any abstract instrumental music. Music to express feeling, emotion, was considered feudal, for the older society, for the rich people, for the scholars. And those were "unhealthy" feelings.

Not only was the music banned, but most of the traditional scores were burned as well. On the radio I lis-

Mei playing zheng in China, 1981

tened to eight model Beijing operas, and two model ballets—every day, for many years, until I could practically recite the words and the music backwards. That's how limited our sources were.

Growing up in that kind of political and social environment, you saw lots of cruelty around you. People were pitted against each other … in China we called it class struggle. And so, as a young child there was lots of horror in my life, to the extent that from the age of eight, for about seven years, I couldn't sleep: I was so horrified by what I saw, by what I heard, and so worried about the future. So music did not calm me down, or bring me a sense of peace. No, it did not have that function. The music was technical, loud, high pitched, and it was … [sings loudly, "bong, bong"]: the only power it gives you is the power to fight with somebody. [This kind of life and musical style are accurately portrayed in the movie *The Red Violin*.] That's what I experienced until I was eleven years old.

first experiences with the zheng

Mei Han was introduced to her first zheng at age eleven at the Xi'an Conservatory. She had been studying violin for six months but was only permitted to play open strings and scales, reading from Western notation. Becoming increasingly bored, she asked to change instruments. A sixteen-string steel-string zheng was brought to her and she was asked if she would like to play this instrument. "It sounded really sweet and soft, and I had never heard this kind of sound in my life. All of a sudden, I just fell in love with the instrument." She remembered having heard, as a young child, quite a different sound: a 1965 zheng piece by Wang Chang Yuon called *Struggling with Typhoon* that is typical of the revolutionary music of the period.

MH: *Struggling with Typhoon* describes people who work on the docks. A typhoon comes. They struggle with it and finally they win. Blue skies come, and everything is fine. In that piece you heard lots of contemporary techniques and lots of harsh banging on the instrument. That's my first impression of the zheng.

From age 11 to 16, Mei Han studied at the Xi'an Conservatory with Gao Zicheng, a master folk musician who was brought to the conservatory to teach when the People's Republic of China was established in 1949. Since he did not read music, Mei learned by ear the folk music of Gao Zicheng's home province in Northern China. Toward the end of her studies, Gao introduced her to other teachers and recent compositions (all with political titles and meaning), and also to new techniques.

Exercpt from
Purple Lotus Bud

In 1975, Mei was accepted into a professional musical group in the northeastern Manchurian province of Liaoning. Because the group was not very busy, she continued her studies in Shandong province for a year with Zang Yan, the best contemporary zheng player at that time. It would be several years before she came to know anything of music outside China.

JO: Tell us how you came to learn about Western music.
MH: As a musician in China you have to learn Western classical music and it has a strong Russian influence. In the 1950s, all of the major Chinese conservatories hired Russian instructors to teach Western music, and there were lots of Chinese students who went to Russia to learn Western music, and then came back to teach. So what we learned was very much the Romantic Tchaikovsky style. That gave me the chance to learn harmony, counterpoint and structure. I had already learned staff notation—but as a professional musician, not at the conservatory. When I joined the Manchurian group in 1975, I had to learn staff notation because that's what the group read from. Since I was a newcomer, they had me copy parts for the more important musicians in the group. And I learned more while preparing for the entrance exams for the master's "ethnomusicology" program in Beijing, as well as during the program itself.

vancouver: liberation and the new music

JO: So, coming back to the moment where we began—your discovery with Randy Raine-Reusch of a new music where you were liberated from the written score—can you tell us something about the music that came after that event, the music you create, the music you commission, and the groups that you play with?
MH: In Vancouver you can pretty much find musicians that play any kind of music from any culture. So when I started to know the community better, I had more opportunities to hear different kinds of music I had never heard before. In China, we did not have any access to any other world-music styles. There are two kinds of music: Chinese Han music, and Western classical music.
JO: So, for example, the music of India would be completely unknown in China.
MH: Exactly. I had never heard Indian music, or gamelan music, not to mention African music, Persian music … nothing. A very interesting thing: although I studied ethnomusicology in China, none of my courses offered any information about these world musics.
JO: They only teach ethnic music from the different regions of China?
MH: Yes, that's true. But we also studied Western classical music as part of our ethnomusicology studies.
JO: And your courses at UBC?
MH: UBC, was a shock: to start with, a 300-level course called World Music Introduction, in which I had to learn African rhythms, Indian ragas, and gamelan playing. That was totally overwhelming! Especially rhythmically. The traditional zheng music is squared, always in duple metres. All of a sudden to break into an unknown rhythmical world, it was very frustrating and scary.
JO: So, freedom is scary …
MH: It is, it is. When you have just started to walk and then you are given unlimited space to walk in, it is really hard to take the first step. So I find all these world-music genres fascinating, especially Indian music and Persian music. I also find there are so many techniques that I can borrow: probably I'll never have enough time to learn all the techniques!

In late 1998 I began working with the Orchid Ensemble, a group that first started with Chinese musi-

cians, then settled into a mix of Chinese instruments and Western instruments. In terms of composition, it's a combination of traditional Chinese music and newly commissioned Canadian world music. Besides working with the Orchid Ensemble, I started working with Randy on structured improvisation. And later, new music and classical music. On March 2, 2003, I premiered the first original concerto for Zheng and Orchestra called *When Cranes Fly Home* by John Sharpley (with the China Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Yang Yang, Beijing); and last July [2004], I premiered your piece, *Purple Lotus Bud* for zheng and string quartet—also the first composition for this kind of instrumentation—at the Vancouver Chamber Music Festival. I have been looking to broaden the language, the vocabulary on this instrument, so I can express *feelings*, not just *red*, not just black, not just white: not just sweet or sad.

My next project is to record a CD with jazz pianist Paul Plimley. That will be another interesting direction for the zheng.

JO: You've just described a number of different people that you work with, from string quartets and orchestras to creative jazz musicians and improvisers. What is the common musical thread?

MH: My experience of learning music in Canada started with improvisation. That was not a conscious choice, but it was a choice that somehow fate decided. If I had come from Chinese music, suddenly to, say, a European style of scored new music, I would have simply jumped from one box to another. So I think free improv is a bridge and also gives me the tools, the vision, the options, so I can go from there to anywhere I want.

I listen to a lot of music. Minimalism is very attractive to me; the message is so *detailed*. You can almost say that it does not have a clear message, to tell you what this phrase is, what that is. This connects with Chinese music, especially the music written in the last fifty years which was all about political messages.

Also, John Cage's music. I actually first heard his *Three Dances* played by a koto group in Japan. I found that fascinating, because koto is very close to the zheng; in fact, it is a descendant of the zheng. So I thought, If the koto can pick up this kind of composition so naturally, what were we missing, when we didn't even know that John Cage existed? So I started to listen more to this kind of new music; and of course the older style of European new music, which is more … [sings, imitating serial music] "ding, gong, gong, gong"—that kind of … not random sound, but more, to me … more aggressive. I found all of them were very helpful, very educational for me.

JO: Tell us more about these different projects. How did you deal with the huge difference in sound between the Western orchestra and the relatively small sound of the zheng in the concerto? Did you amplify the zheng?

MH: Yes, it was amplified. But let me tell you an interesting story. The zheng was not amplified in the rehearsal, and during the break a couple of Chinese players came to look at it. "Where is this instrument made? This instrument doesn't sound like any zheng we have heard. It's so loud!" To them, it was inconceivable that a good zheng could be made anywhere than China. I explained that my instrument was made in Shanghai; it was loud because I play it that way, a result of developing a very different approach than the traditional one. I play with more energy and strength.

JO: How did the composer deal with this difference between zheng and orchestra?

MH: Sharpley did not specifically think of the difference between Chinese and Western instruments. He used the zheng as a vehicle to express what he wanted to express in the piece. He was not restricted by traditional zheng idioms, tuning, or technique. But because

Sharpley has lived in Singapore for almost twenty years, the music reflects his knowledge and experience of Asian music.

JO: I'd like to share with the reader our own experience writing and performing *Purple Lotus Bud.* When you approached me to write this piece, I remember you provided me with several recordings of zheng music—particularly some of your own performances of traditional and new music for the zheng. Among those was the ancient piece *Pink Lotus in Many Modes,* which I took as the skeleton for the opening of my own composition, to create a kind of genetic link between an ancient piece I love and my own new cross-cultural creation. What was it like to play a familiar ancient piece in this new musical context?

MH: You are a very sensitive composer. You chose the most wonderful traditional composition in the entire zheng repertoire. And personally, this is my favourite piece.

JO: What was it like to have it reborn in this context?

MH: In playing this piece, it gives me a feeling like going back home: I'm very comfortable. And with the string quartet part added to this traditional melody at the beginning, it creates a sort of magical, sparkling atmosphere that I imagined the piece should have.

JO: I asked you to perform some new string-bending techniques in the piece. Can you tell us what you thought of these?

MH: It is very challenging. You are asking me to do the dominant seventh chord. It's not in the traditional scale. And bending three strings at the same time: this is unique, very new. And also the precision of the bending of the notes is challenging.

JO: And isn't there a piece by Hope Lee?

MH: Hope and her husband, composer David Eagle, are big supporters of my work. In 1991, my late teacher Zhang Yan commissioned Hope to write this piece, entitled *Hsieh Lu Hsing.* Zhang Yan passed away in 1996, the same year I came to Canada, and Hope has handed down this piece to me. I hope I will be able to bring it to life in the very near future.

JO: In 2001 you released a highly evocative duo album with Randy Raine-Reusch called *Distant Wind* (on Za Discs). Tell us something about how that came about.

MH: Creating that album was an unforgettable event because I was still experimenting with new sounds, new tunings, and new compositional structures. Since I had this newly gained freedom to create music, I really wanted to create my own voice and focus on moments, not on the "right note" or "wrong note." I had images, or ancient Chinese poetry, to relate to each piece. I think the titles give that away…*Forest Rain* (evoking rainforest in Vancouver, Malaysia, Japan), *Clouds in the Empty Sky* (a very Taoist title)…

china: after tienanmen square

JO: Returning again to your early days in China, you've described how a narrowly defined, codified, and ossified Chinese musical education resulted in a lack of emotional connection between musicians and their instruments, the ancient music, nature, place, and people—the real people, not the "idea" of people as promoted by the government. I see a similar lack of connection in our own culture between some new music and society. How do you keep that emotional connection alive?

MH: In my case, traditional Chinese music is the root and the most important source of my music. But my real love and knowledge of Chinese music came long after I started my professional musical career. The group I worked with in Beijing from 1980 to 1989 was part of the army. It has a big reputation, and lots of famous musicians and singers. But I found that again and again, we repeated songs composed to praise soldiers or certain political campaigns. We probably played only one tune in each concert composed for traditional Chinese instruments; and that piece was not even a traditional piece. I began to wonder: was this the only kind of music played in China for the last two thousand years? After all that time, is this all that is left? I started to question my knowledge of Chinese music and to feel unsatisfied with what I was doing.

And just at that time, in 1989, the Tienanmen Square incident happened. That was the turning point: I turned from a young person into an adult. That year is the line. Before that, I firmly believed in Communism, because that's the kind of family I come from. But, after seeing what the government did in that year, I totally lost faith in Communism, and in the future of China. I could not stand to be part of an army ensemble any more.

Culturally, that brought questions. If this is not the right thing, where is the right thing? And where can I find something to feed my soul and heal my heart? I decided to drop the performance career temporarily to study Chinese music. I went to the Chinese Music Research Institute and took three years to finish my first master's degree in ethnomusicology. I tried to bury myself in the books so that I would not feel the pain. In those years I learned a lot about Chinese music history and the philosophy behind the ancient music, considered to be the true "high art" in Chinese music.

At the same time, I also studied the music of China's fifty-five known ethnic minorities. I had done all this before I started to explore new music. Interestingly, while I was learning new music, I learned more and more about Chinese music. I'm saying this because I find that there is a connection between Western new music—especially new music developed in North America since the 1970s—and Chinese music, specifically the scholar's music, the qin (pronounced 'chin') music.

ancient chinese music to new music

JO: What relationship do you see between new music and traditional Chinese music?

MH: Qin is the Chinese seven-string zither. It was considered a scholar's instrument, and is thoroughly documented and studied in Chinese history. There are many articles and theses about qin philosophy, and how the music sounds, and where it comes from and what it symbolizes. In qin music the sound has different timbres. For instance, there are twenty-four different tone colours described in one book: you can't find a single English word to describe the equivalent of the Chinese word for each colour.

I find that lots of new music is about tone colours and texture. When I started creating new music, people would say, "Don't always do melody. Try to do something with texture." I would ask, "What is texture?" Except for melody, I didn't know what else music could be. Learning new music, and creating all kinds of sound textures, made me realize that, wow, this is what qin music talked about—different timbres. I never understood how that could be realized in practice. Because I had never listened to the sound so *closely,* of course I couldn't tell. But, doing new music, you can bring yourself so close to every detail of sound, including minute pitch changes … you are *inside* the music.

Also, I find a similarity of structure and form. For instance, lots of John Cage's pieces have very natural phrases. They're not metered, not eight-bar phrases. This is what the old qin theory talked about: the breathing of musical phrases is like the wind of nature. Wind can blow long or short, fast or slow—so that's very natural and very proper to do in new music. Again, that was in the qin music. So I find that, for instance, in some of the compositions I did with Randy, we did not use a strict meter, and immediately the connection between me and the music became very strong.

Another thing is space and silence. A natural space goes with the phrase, goes with your thought. It could be different from one time to the next. Silence, to me, is not a rest anymore: there's a musical *word* there, although there's no audio that you can hear. An interesting thing: Lao Tse, the founder of Taoism, said, "The normal sound is human music; the better sound is the sound of nature; and the best sound is no sound." I'm not saying that John Cage's *4´33´´* is the best compo-

Mei and Randy Raine-Reusch in Osaka

sition of all, just that it shares that concept of not being afraid to include silence as part of music.

JO: Lao Tse, Cage, and others, remind us that listening is the best music we could all experience. It leads me to my next question: what role has Taoism had in this post-Cultural Revolution path that you've taken?

MH: To me, the best music is when you only produce sound, or play a note when it's absolutely necessary. In some of the compositions I played in the 1970s—for instance, in *Struggling with Typhoon*—there are lots of notes, often just to show how fast a player can play, and how good her or his technique is. But is that necessary for the sound? When you listen to this kind of composition, you feel that there are lots of sounds, but no music. So the contrasts of bigger sound and lesser sound, and lots of notes and few notes: that kind of contrast is closer to human feeling. Because you have different moods: sometimes you want to be really passionate, and sometimes you want to be calmed down. That is the kind of freedom I learned from making new music.

Another way I find new music is related to qin music: many times the music does not give you a direct message. It's a kind of metaphor to suggest some kind of feeling. For example, minimalist music is more about colour than melodies. So that leaves the audience to feel, to think, to taste the sound.

JO: Is there a parallel sense of individuality between qin music and new music?

MH: In qin music, each musician is supposed to have his own interpretation of a known score. We have the same title of a piece, but totally different music comes out. And in new music, each composer tries to create his or her own voice, not to copy something else. So I like to explore different combinations of zheng with existing Western instruments—such as your and my classical-guitar-and-zheng duo project, Siao Kin Lee's piece for zheng and marimba, new work for steel-string zheng with harpsichord by Vancouver composer Janet Danielson, and the Paul Plimley CD. Each combination of instruments is an individual voice.

JO: Tell us more about the Paul Plimley collaboration, and the new work with harpsichord. You seem to be pairing yourself with the titans of equal temperament in Western Music. What's the attraction?

MH: Paul and I played a live Web concert together before we decided to record an album together. I find Paul is an extremely exciting and sensitive musician. We are both very melodic, but as a jazz pianist, he also has such a huge palette of tone colours and rhythm that add so much to our compositions. Piano might not be necessarily the most suitable instrument for the zheng, because of the tuning. Also it can be too loud and stiff—although it isn't when Paul plays it. Anyway, in this case, I think I chose the musician, not the instrument.

Initially, it was Peter Hatch's idea to have a composition for zheng and harpsichord. After Peter saw my concert at the Vancouver New Music Festival in 2002, he wanted me to play at his Open Ears festival. Because zheng and harpsichord were both considered female instruments in the European and Chinese imperial courts, and they both have served similar social and musical functions historically, it would be interesting to put the two together on stage. I think the two instruments work together well because harpsichord has a metallic plucked sound, similar to the steel-string zheng, which was popular in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in China. The zheng can create long sustained notes and highly bendable notes to extend the harmonic colours that the harpsichord creates.

JO: What were your thoughts during the time we formed a duo and you asked me to write a piece for us to play?

MH: I wanted to perform pieces for these two instruments that are radically different, yet sometimes quite similar. Zheng and guitar share similar right-hand techniques; we can make a great variety of percussive plucked sounds. But the guitar has chordal and chromatic flexibility in the left hand that makes up for the limitations of the zheng. What I did not expect was that I would play a blues tune with you in our program. For me, twelve-bar blues was just so far away from my world, but it sounded so natural on the zheng, mainly because of the pentatonic scale and the dominant seventh chord.

JO: In Vancouver we have a large Chinese-speaking population and a large population of European descent. Many want to preserve their cultural heritage as if in a museum. Others want to create a new music that reflects our place and our ideas—here, where we are now, infused with this spirit of a world music coming together. Is this a movement with legs that will last

two thousand years? Is it a new beginning?

MH: I wouldn't say it's a new beginning, because if you look at the history of music and civilization, this kind of movement has been going for thousands of years. I'm just doing things that my father's generation and the generations before that already did. I'm doing it in a different environment, but the spirit is the same. The museum type of music does not exist; it can't exist. When you breathe new air, new things come out. I tend to like extremes. I like extreme dynamics, I like extreme registers. I want to jump from two thousand years ago to tomorrow, as far as I can, to stretch. I think this is not something people should be afraid of. Musical culture, instruments, always travel; and the music expands as it travels, geographically and also timewise, from the past to the future, from east to west. So, what we're doing here in Canada will certainly become part of history. Who knows—a thousand years from now, Canada may be the international centre for zheng music.

I find that Canada has given me a second life as a person. The support of the multicultural policy is absolutely the best soil to nurture the kind of music I do. Here I don't have to be worried whether what I do is "correct" or not. Plus, there is government funding for individual artists. That does not exist in China at all. As an individual artist you will never get any funding. Individuality is not encouraged. So I think I'm very fortunate.

JO: We've been talking about Chinese music, Western music, Indian music, African music. And we always attach a nationality, a continent, in front of the word *music*. And that gives us an idea of the basic notions that this music is going to present to us, but your work is breaking down those notions and boundaries, and bringing in new ideas, and new materials in music, and becoming something else. Would you still call it Chinese music? How would you describe the music, other than using a nationalist terminology?

MH: It's very easy. I call it *zheng* music. It's not Chinese music. It's not Canadian music. It's zheng music. I use zheng as a tool, as a vehicle, to express whatever kind of feeling I want. But also I want to mention that Western listeners have a great respect for other cultures. I have never had such good audiences as those in the west. They really appreciate tradition from anywhere in the world. But I find they are also looking for something that relates to them. I can totally understand that. You know, Chinese food in North America is different from Chinese food in China. That's very natural because people have different tastes here. And as the cook, if you don't create a new flavour appropriate to your market, you can't survive. So I think it's very natural to create something using the languages that the audience here is already familiar with.

JO: To take it one step further, I'd say that what you bring to the music you make, makes it uniquely your own, and so I would call what you do "Mei Han music."

MH: That would be great if one day people would say that. I'm still quite new as a *real* musician, a musician with technique, with heart, and with soul. I've only been here for eight years, and so I consider my second life only eight years old. I'm eight years old, still very young.

discographic note

In early 2005 Za Discs released *Outside the Wall*, Mei Han's first solo CD, which mixes contemporary and traditional music. It includes pieces by Randy Raine-Reusch, Barry Truax, and Minoru Miki, as well as John Oliver's *Purple Lotus Bud* for zheng and string quartet.

***John Oliver** is a freelance composer based in Vancouver, who took his doctorate degree at McGill University. He came to international attention around 1988, when he won six prizes for five compositions ranging through chamber, orchestral, and electroacoustic music. He continues to write chamber and orchestral music—increasingly for Asian instruments—but also creates electroacoustic music, often for a mixture of live musician(s) and prepared audio and/or real-time processing. His Purple Lotus Bud for zheng and string quartet, was premiered by Mei Han and the Borealis String Quartet on July 21, 2004, at the Vancouver Chamber Music Festival.*

résumé français

Mei Han est une virtuose du zheng, une cithare traditionnelle chinoise qui compte 21 cordes et des chevalets amovibles. Depuis son arrivée au Canada, il y a huit ans, elle n'a cessé de nouer des liens avec de nombreux musiciens d'horizons variés – improvisateurs, musiciens classiques et de jazz, interprètes de musiques du monde. Au cours de cette entrevue réalisée par le compositeur John Oliver, Mei Han aborde notamment son enfance et son éducation durant la Révolution culturelle chinoise ainsi que les transformations qu'elle a vécues au contact des milieux de création et de musiques du monde de Vancouver. Ses commentaires au sujet des rapports entre la musique ancienne chinoise qin et la musique contemporaine, de son travail avec tant de musiciens d'horizons variés et du phénomène occidental de « world music » sont fascinants.