Bard College Conservatory of Music

Bard Chinese Ensemble

Presented by the US-China Music Institute

Jindong Cai, *conductor*

Wednesday, Oct 28, 2026 at 8:00 p.m.
László Z. Bitó '60 Conservatory Building

PROGRAM

Three Variations on Plum Blossom《梅花三弄》 — Traditional Chinese Music 中国传统古曲

Danni Chen, guqin
Kexilin Ke, konghou

Dance of the Yi Tribe《彝族舞曲》 — Wang Huiran 王惠然 (1936-2023)

Christine Zhang, pipa
Xintian Liu, pipa
Kendall Griffith, pipa
Wenjun Lu, pipa

Jian Dian Hua (The Snipped Indigo Flower)《剪靛花》 — Traditional Chinese Music

Jiaxin Yang, guzheng
Xiaoya Ni, guzheng

Jin Xiu (Splendid Brocade for Silk-and-Bamboo Chamber Ensemble)《锦绣》 — Su Xiao 苏潇 (b. 1980)

Lewanna Le, erhu
Kexilin Ke, konghou
Xintian Liu, liuqin
Christine Zhang, pipa
Jiaxin Yang, guzheng

Autumn Yearning on the Steppe《草原秋思》 — Luk Wai Chun 陸尉俊 (b. 1993)

Minghui (Mia) Wu, dizi
Yi Zhang, sheng
Xiaoyan (Zoey) Luo, pipa

Jiayi Sun, konghou

Xiaoya Ni, guzheng

Greta Hong, violin

Surina Pan, morin khuur

Mo Chen, cello

Yining Zu, Chinese percussion

Intermission (15 min)

The Silk Road《丝绸之路》 — Jiang Ying 姜莹 (b. 1983), arr. Xinyan Li 李昕艳

Oblivion · Libertango《遗忘 · 自由探戈》 — Astor Piazzolla (1921–1992), arr. Xinyan Li 李昕艳

Ode to the Sun《太阳颂》

Mvt. 4: Ode to the Sun《太阳颂》 — Wang Danhong 王丹红 (b. 1981)

PROGRAM NOTES

Traditional Chinese Music 中国传统古曲
Three Variations on Plum Blossom《梅花三弄》

Three Variations on Plum Blossom, also known as Prelude on Plum Blossom, Plum Blossom Melody, and Prelude of the Jade Consort, is one of the most celebrated works in the guqin repertoire. Its history can be traced back to the Eastern Jin dynasty. The piece may originally have been written for the dizi or xiao, although only guqin notation survives today. The earliest extant score appears in the Shenqi Mipu (The Mysterious and Marvelous Tablature) of 1425.

The work evokes the plum blossom, admired in Chinese culture for its purity, fragrance, and ability to bloom in the cold, as a symbol of integrity, resilience, and noble character. The complete work consists of ten sections. Its title, literally "Three Renderings of the Plum Blossom," refers to the principal theme being played three times in harmonics at different positions on the guqin.

According to the Shenqi Mipu, the melody originated in the Eastern Jin dynasty as a flute piece associated with Wang Ziyou and Huan Yi, and was later adapted for the guqin; the original flute version has not survived. Later sources preserve differing accounts of its authorship. The 1609 Boya Xinfa attributes the work to the Tang-dynasty musician Yan Shigu and praises it with the words: "The plum is the purest of flowers, and the qin the purest of sounds. With the purest of sounds, it portrays the purest of things."

Over the centuries, Three Variations on Plum Blossom has appeared in numerous arrangements, including versions for erhu, piano, and other instruments. Since 2004, an arrangement of part of the melody has also been used as theme music by China National Radio's Voice of China.

The earliest surviving recording of the piece was made in the 1940s by the Jinyu Qin Society in an ensemble version for qin, se, and xiao. A qin-and-xiao version was later released by China Record Corporation in 1955. Since then, the work has appeared on numerous recordings and remains one of the best-known pieces in the traditional Chinese instrumental repertoire.

Wang Huiran 王惠然
Dance of the Yi Tribe《彝族舞曲》

Dance of the Yi People is a pipa solo composed by Wang Huiran in 1960. The work draws its musical material from the Yunnan Yi folk traditions Haicai Tune and Cigarette-Box Dance.
With lyrical and graceful melodies contrasted by vigorous, strongly accented rhythms, the piece evokes the enchanting night scenery of a Yi village and the joyful atmosphere of communal dancing. Rich in distinctive ethnic character while also reflecting the spirit of its time, the work has become widely admired by musicians and audiences alike.
It has been arranged for a variety of instruments and ensembles, including guzheng, sanxian, yangqin, ruan, and orchestra. Yin Biao later arranged the work for solo guitar. His performance of the arrangement at the 1987 China International Guitar Festival in Zhuhai received high praise from musicians in China and abroad, and the piece has since become an influential work in the guitar repertoire.

Traditional Chinese Music 中国传统古曲
Jian Dian Hua (The Snipped Indigo Flower)《剪靛花》
Jian Dian Hua, also known by names such as Jian Jian Hua (剪剪花) or Jian Jian Hua (尖尖花), is a traditional Chinese folk tune with roots dating back to the Ming dynasty. The melody was already widely popular by the Wanli period and later appeared in Qing-dynasty collections of popular songs.
Simple, bright, and lively in character, the tune is typically built from four phrases in a pentatonic mode. Expressive interjections such as “ai-yo” and “ai-ai-yo” are often added at the ends of phrases, giving the music a light and animated quality.
Over time, Jian Dian Hua spread widely across China and was absorbed into many regional traditions of narrative song, instrumental music, and opera, where it developed into numerous local variants.

Su Xiao 苏潇
Jin Xiu (Splendid Brocade for Silk-and-Bamboo Chamber Ensemble)《锦绣》
The “string quintet” is a form of Chinese chamber music pioneered in 1964 by Hu Dengtiao, the distinguished composer and ethnomusicologist of the Shanghai Conservatory of Music.
Following Hu’s creative approach to the genre, Su Xiao combines the techniques of traditional Chinese bowed and plucked strings with elements of Western chamber-music writing. Drawing on the Jiangsu folk song Embroidering a Pouch《繡荷包》, the work paints a vivid musical picture of the beauty and richness of Jiangnan and, more broadly, of China.

Luk Wai Chun 陸尉俊
Autumn Yearning on the Steppe《草原秋思》
Autumn Yearning on the Steppe is the second movement of a string quintet - “Queen Wang Zhaojun" commissioned by Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra and composed by Luk Wai Chun.
This composition is inspired by the historical story of palace maid Wang Zhaojun, who was bestowed on Huhanye Chanyu of the Xionghu by the Emperor Yuan of Han in Han Dynasty. It is also influenced by the solo pipa piece "Song of the Frontier." The music is inspired by the traditional pipa solo work “Song of the Frontier”. It has been adapted into a dectet for dizi, soprano sheng, pipa, konghou, two guzhengs, violin, morin khuur, cello and percussion.
Autumn Yearning on the Steppe expresses Zhaojun's feelings after living on the steppe over the frontier with Huhanye and her desire to return to the Han, and at the same time affirms the marriage of Zhaojun in enhancing the friendly and trustworthy relationship between Han and Xionghu. The yangqin section in the middle section depicts the composer's fantasy of Wang Zhaojun praying to the stars on the grasslands and expressing her longing to return to the Han Dynasty. In this version, the dizi and morin khuur melody incorporates the characteristics of a Mongolian long song, while the guzheng and konghou imitate the sound of a horse's trot on the grasslands. The dizi and violin also simulate horse neighing.

Jiang Ying 姜莹
arr. Xinyan Li 李昕艳
The Silk Road《丝绸之路》
Composer Jiang Ying’s Chinese orchestral work Silk Road makes vivid use of the expressive qualities of traditional Chinese instruments, especially the crisp, articulated sonorities of plucked strings that spread and evolved along the historic Silk Road. The work also incorporates rhythmic elements drawn from flamenco, tango, and tap dance.

Structurally, the music gradually accumulates energy: the pulse tightens, the sonority grows denser, and the momentum steadily builds toward a powerful climax. The effect is like processions converging from all directions, transforming life, passion, and dreams into a sweeping musical vision of the Silk Road.
Created from the composer's youthful imagination, Silk Road has become a representative work of contemporary Chinese orchestral music. It received First Prize in the 18th National Music Works Competition under the Wenhua Awards, as well as the Gold Award in the "New Interpretation Cup" Young Composers' Chinese Orchestral Works Competition.

Astor Piazzolla
arr. Xinyan Li 李昕艳
Oblivion · Libertango《遗忘 · 自由探戈》
Piazzolla spent the early 1970s in an experimental chamber music ensemble called "Conjunto Electronico." He objected to the eventual classification of his Argentinian/European collective as a jazz-rock band. He described the music of Conjunto Electronico as "…my music, it had more to do with tango than with rock." Most things did. Piazzolla revolutionized the Tango form during his interesting and varied career and became one of the foremost proponents of the Tango Nuevo movement of the late 1950s. Before this could happen, however, Piazzolla would need to be convinced that he was meant for it. His love of Bach, Bartok and Stravinsky and his period of study with Nadia Boulanger in Paris spoke to his desire for distance from his beginnings as a bandoneon virtuoso. He was in search of a new path as a purely classical composer but Boulanger, after hearing him play one of his tangos, steered him back to his real calling when she told him: "Astor, your classical pieces are well written, but the true Piazzolla is here, never leave it behind." Oblivion, from 1982, remains one of Piazolla's most popular tangos. Part of this fame is owed to Oblivion's inclusion into the soundtrack of the 1984 film Henry IV, the Mad King. It evokes a sense of melancholy that writer Tim Sestrick once called a "whispered sorrow". The earlier Libertango (loosely "Liberty Tango") of 1974 embodies the break from the old traditions and the creation of the new tango school (mentioned above) that defined the rest of Piazzolla's composing life. Libertango has been recorded hundreds of times in various instrumental guises and has been incorporated into numerous advertisements and, like Oblivion, even a few movie soundtracks. (by Jeff Counts from Utah Symphony | Utah Opera)

Wang Danhong 王丹红
Ode to the Sun《太阳颂》
Mvt. 4: Ode to the Sun《太阳颂》
The Chinese orchestral suite Ode to the Sun draws on folk-music traditions of the Bayu region in southwestern China. Its four movements (Treading the River, Carrying Through the Mountains, Longing, and Ode to the Sun) create a vivid musical portrait of the landscapes and people of Sichuan and Chongqing. Rich in regional character, emotional depth, and sweeping energy, the work celebrates the resilience, vitality, and spirit of working people.
The fourth movement, Ode to the Sun, incorporates the familiar melody of the eastern Chongqing folk song The Sun Comes Out, Bringing Joy《太陽出來喜洋洋》, written by musician Jin Gu. Simple in form and bright in character, the song expresses the mountain people's love of work and of life in their homeland, and has become widely known both in China and abroad.

BARD CHINESE ENSEMBLE

Jindong Cai, conductor
Zuo Zheng, assistant conductor

Dizi/ Xiao
Minghui Mia Wu

Flute
Cici Pulizzi

Soprano Sheng
Yi Zhang

Soprano Suona
Mason Hasket

Pipa
Xiaoyan Zoey Luo
Xintian Liu
Wenjun Jessy Lu
Kendall Griffith
Shuhan Chirstine Zhang

Guzheng
Jiaxin Yang
Xiaoya Ni

Percussion
Yining Zhu
Danni Chen
Surina Pan
Zhaoxuan Song

Konghou
Kexilin Ke
Jiayi Sun

Erhu
Lewanna Le

Violin
Greta Hong
Xiaomeng Ma
Yuchen Zhao

Viola
Enoch Ng

Cello
Dari Batsaikhan

Bass
Nuzomi Sugimoto

Jindong Cai is director of the US-China Music Institute, professor of music and arts at Bard College, and associate conductor of The Orchestra Now (TŌN). Previously, he was a professor of performance at Stanford University. Born in Beijing, Cai received his early musical training in China, where he learned to play violin and piano. He came to the United States for his graduate studies at the New England Conservatory and the College-Conservatory of Music in Cincinnati. Cai started his conducting career with the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, and has worked with orchestras throughout North America and Asia. He is a three-time recipient of the ASCAP Award for Adventurous Programming for Contemporary Music.

Over his 35-year career in the United States, Cai has established himself as an active and dynamic conductor, scholar of Western classical music in China, and leading advocate of music from across Asia. At Bard, Cai founded the annual China Now Music Festival, which has become a major platform in the West for new works by some of the most important Chinese composers of our time.

With his wife, Sheila Melvin, Cai has coauthored many articles on the performing arts in China, as well as two books, Rhapsody in Red: How Western Classical Music Became Chinese and Beethoven in China: How the Great Composer Became an Icon in the People's Republic.

ABOUT THE BARD CHINESE ENSEMBLE

The Bard Chinese Ensemble is one of the key components of the Chinese instrument major at the Bard Conservatory, offering numerous public performance opportunities for students of Chinese instruments. Students of Western instruments are also encouraged to participate, as well as non-majors with interest in Chinese music. The Ensemble performs at least two major concerts on campus every semester to showcase the varied styles of both modern and traditional Chinese instrumental music.

ABOUT THE US-CHINA MUSIC INSTITUTE

The US-China Music Institute was founded in 2017 by conductor Jindong Cai and Robert Mar- tin, founding director of the Bard College Conservatory of Music, with the mission to promote the study, performance, and appreciation of music from contemporary China and to support musical exchange between the United States and China. In partnership with the prestigious Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing, the Institute has embarked on

several groundbreaking projects including the first degree-granting programs in Chinese instrument performance in a U.S. conservatory, the annual China Now Music Festival focusing on music from contemporary China, annual scholarly conferences, and public Chinese music education programs. barduschinamusic.org

Jindong Cai, Director
Hsiao-Fang Lin, Director of Music Programming
Beitong Liu, Graduate Program Coordinator and Festival Artist Liaison
Wenrui Shi, Recruitment Coordinator and Festival Artist Liaison
Weiber Consulting: Wei Zhou and Yu Cao, PR and Marketing

COMING UP…

Bard Chinese Ensemble Winter Concert
3pm, December 6, 2026 in László Z. Bitó '60 Conservatory Building

Sound of Spring: Chinese New Year Concert with The Orchestra Now
3pm, Saturday, February 13, 2027 at the Fisher Center
3pm, Sunday, February 14, 2027 at Jazz at Lincoln Center

Stay tuned! BARDUSCHINAMUSIC.ORG/EVENTS

US-CHINA MUSIC INSTITUTE
Bard College Conservatory of Music
巴德美中音乐研习院