

More About CHINESE FOLK RHAPSODY

I spent the 1985-86 academic year teaching English at a university in Harbin, China and collecting as much Chinese music as I could. I later used some of it in my own work.

This is my arrangement of a set of folk dances that is incredibly popular in China. They originated with the Yao people of Guangxi Province in South-Central China, but are commonly heard all through the entire country. Even now, more than three decades later, I am told that this music hasn't lost any of its popularity.

Here is a condensation of a description of the music from the preface to the score:

The vast majority of Chinese folk melodies, including those found in **Chinese Folk Rhapsody**, are based on some kind of pentatonic scale. The pure pentatonic scale, demonstrated by the black keys on a piano, originally corresponded to the five elements: earth, metal, wood, fire, and water. Although the folk themes used in this piece make exclusive use of two pentatonic scales, no attempt has been made to restrict the harmony and accompaniment to those scales. Even there, however, "foreign" notes do not predominate.

The melodic structure is not the only characteristic of this piece which makes it sound Chinese. Several color and texture characteristics common in Chinese instrumental folk music are also used: long upper woodwind trills--especially the piccolo trills on the final chords, prominent use of tuned percussion and tambourine, parallel fourths and cross rhythms, etc. Especially idiomatic is the way some of the themes are passed from section to section.

This dualistic approach to composition, relying on melody on the one hand, and timbre and texture on the other, is characteristic of Chinese music. The Western reliance on harmony as a compositional end in itself is essentially absent in the traditional music of the Far East.