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Ottawa Edition

ENTERTAINMENT

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SOPRANO: Artist Sarah Brightman performs on stage.
RALF JUERGENS/GETTY IMAGES

Artist Profile: Sarah Brightman

By KREMENA KRUMOVA
Epoch Times Staff

Singer, songwriter, actress, and dancer Sarah Brightman is the only person to have held number one spots on the Billboard classical and dance charts simultaneously. With over 26 million albums sold worldwide, 150 gold and platinum awards in 34 countries, she remains a unique force in the performing arts world.

Currently Ms. Brightman is on tour in support of her two album releases this year. In January she released her first album in five years, "Symphony" which includes collaborations with Andrea Bocelli and Paul Stanley from Kiss. Then just last month the Soprano released

a Christmas themed album entitled "A Winter Symphony," which features renditions of "Ave Maria," "Silent Night," and "Amazing Grace."

The tour passed through the U.S. Northeast in late November, and is currently passing through Canada and the U.S. Midwest before concluding in late December in the U.S. Western region.

Ms. Brightman is the former wife of famous playwright and composer Andrew Lloyd Webber. She performed in his two smash Broadway and West End musicals "Cats" and "The Phantom of the Opera," and has also collaborated on projects with opera star Jose Carreras and German producer Frank Petersson of Enigma fame.

The two-stringed erhu mesmerizes audiences

Rediscovering China's Divine Performing Arts

China scholars agree that one of the great tragedies of modern Chinese history was the violent and chaotic decade known as the Great Cultural Revolution, during which many of the classical arts were suppressed. One of the most enduring losses from this period was the resulting disconnect of the Chinese people from their traditional culture.

New York based Divine Performing Arts (DPA), however, is striving to revive these nearly lost Chinese traditions, ushering in a renaissance of China's ancient legacy in performing arts.

The Epoch Times is a proud sponsor of DPA and will be providing information about Chinese traditional arts as well as covering DPA's 2009 World Tour.

By ROSEMARIE FRUEHAUF
Epoch Times Staff

A small woman with a tiny bowed instrument enralls an entire audience, holding thousands breathless as they listen with undivided attention—this would be the work of DPA erhu soloist Ms. Qi Xiaochun. She has been introducing the tiny, simple-looking instrument to people who had never seen or heard the "Chinese fiddle" before.

"When she was playing it, the music made you feel something. You weren't just listening to it, you were feeling something ... it was amazing," described Toronto history student Victor Byenkyta at last year's DPA performance.

This unique instrument can be traced back 1,000 years to China's Tang dynasty, often considered the peak of China's 5,000-year culture.

The erhu's name is composed of two Chinese characters: er, which means two, resembles the two strings of the instrument, hu, indicates that it belongs to the family of Huqin instruments. Huqin literally means "barbarian instrument," demonstrating that it was originally foreign to the Han Chinese.

The erhu's unique, soul-stirring sound is created through its curious shape and the unique materials used in its construction. The bow is made of horsehair, and python skin is used for the cover of the resonator box.

The erhu is constructed of a long stick that serves as the neck and a small sound box, which is either hexagonal, octagonal, or more seldom round in shape. The two strings are fixed on the tuning pegs and stretch over a very small wooden bridge placed on the snake skin cover of the sound box, which gives it the characteristic, melancholic sound.

Unlike Western string instruments, which have only small sound openings, the resonator box on the erhu is open on the back side. Both instrument and bow are 32 inches long from top to bottom and made of either sandalwood or ebony. For very fine erhus that are handcrafted today, instrument makers also use wood similar to that of antique furniture.

The specialty of its construction requires that the bow always be in contact with the strings. The horsehair of the bow then moves between the two strings as the player fingers both strings at the same time.

The erhu's tonal range is about three octaves, depending on the technical skills of the player. It is tuned in D4 and A4, the same pitch as the middle strings of the Western violin, though some compositions require a special tuning.

Unlike Western string instruments, the erhu has no fingerboard. Musicians who play the erhu press their fingertips on the strings with-

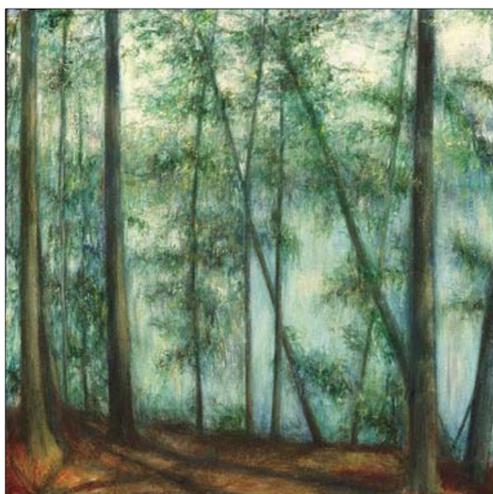
out making contact with the neck. This produces the magical, weightless quality of the sound. Because of the way the instrument is played, the erhu's tone might bring to mind a voice of endless breath.

In the 20th century, the erhu's silk strings were gradually changed to metal strings. This made its very soft sound stronger in volume and enabled the instrument, which required a quiet environment, to catch up with the times—modern music listeners are no longer accustomed to the subtleties of silken strings. Due to the change of string material, the erhu became powerful enough to succeed as a solo instrument in a modern concert hall.

Las Vegas photographer and

publisher Lindsay Hebbard summarized her experience in listening to a master player's erhu performance at last year's DPA performance in Las Vegas. "My favorite instrument in the world is the erhu," she said. "It looks like a child's toy, but it has the most amazing sound and the greatest tonality in the world."

To learn more about Chinese culture and find ticket information for the nearest Divine Performing Arts show near you, please visit www.divineperformingarts.org.



Lakeside Screen #1 - oil and wax on canvas. BARBARA GAMBLE

Exhibit Offers Insight into Nature's Being

By KATHLEEN KEZAR
Epoch Times Ottawa Staff

OTTAWA—Art lovers, naturalists, or anyone who is looking for an oasis of calm in the midst of a busy pre-holiday season would do well to visit Ottawa's Canadian Museum of Nature and see the spacious new art gallery.

In it you will discover a stunning exhibition called "Natural Affinities" which features the work of both Ottawa artist Barbara Gamble and amateur naturalist Catharine Parr Traill, who came to Upper Canada in the 1830s.

Parr Traill collected plant specimens and pressed them into scrapbooks. These scrapbooks, exhibited alongside Gamble's art, invite many comparisons, as the title "Natural Affinities" suggests.

When an artist sits for long hours observing nature, the natural world offers a reward—an insight into its being. On the surface we see atmospheric scenes of woodlands and lakes; but spend a few moments longer and you will quiet right down and see the heart in the paintings, the feeling of being in that place, and a sense of gratitude for what is given freely to anyone in that forest or fen.

This is work that can be experienced directly. No one needs an audio guide or an art expert to understand and appreciate Gamble's art. But if you do have a question, a museum guard is the person to talk to. After all, other than the artist or an owner of one of these works, who spends more time with the paintings? The guards are there day after day so they get to know the works on a deeper

level.

Standing in front of a painting called "Red Oak" one of the guards said: "When you look at that tree you want to sit right under it and relax. You smell the oxygen and feel the breeze and talk to the tree...and let the tree talk to you."

He was referring to the large painting that invites you into the exhibition. It is of an oak tree, not life size, but in that space it almost seems so.

The rest of the paintings vary in size and format, big, small, monumental, vertical, horizontal. They are sensual and are composed of sensual materials: oil, beeswax, canvas, and steel. Yes, steel can be sensual as Gamble uses it.

There is a sad saying among artists that "we paint what we destroy." This is pertinent here, because whereas Parr

Traill simply walked out of her door and observed what surrounded her in the 1800s, for Gamble it was different. Her subjects were not so close at hand; some were on public land such as the Ottawa Arboretum, but for others she had to get special permission to go to an undisclosed protected area to observe the plants that Parr Traill had been able to find so readily in her day.

A catalogue is available that includes many images from the exhibition and an essay by museum curator Petra Halkes. The exhibition continues until January 4th, 2009.

The Canadian Museum of Nature is at 240 McLeod Street (at Metcalf). There is limited parking on site, and street parking nearby. Entrance fee is \$5.

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