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Classical homecoming

The Global Chinese Orchestra sees overseas musicians return to the motherland to perform with local talent

By CHEN NAN

chennan@chinadaily.com.cn

When the Global Chinese Orchestra performed at the National Center for the Performing Arts in Beijing on Sept 27, audiences enjoyed a varied program.

It included *Scheherazade* by Russian composer Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, the fourth movement of Beethoven's *Symphony No 9 in D Minor* and *Racing Horses*, an original Chinese piece for the *erhu* (a traditional two-stringed bowed instrument) by Chinese composer Huang Haihui.

For musicians of the Global Chinese Orchestra, which also performed at the Wei Lai Theater of the China Soong Ching Ling Foundation on Sept 28 and Tsinghua University on Sept 29, the concerts in the capital were an opportunity to play together, with many returning from overseas to perform.

Half of the musicians of the Global Chinese Orchestra are Chinese living abroad and are members of Western symphony orchestras. The other half have studied and worked abroad for years, but have since returned to live in China and are members of Chinese orchestras.

"Every September, the overseas musicians return to their home country to perform as the Global Chinese Orchestra with the musicians based here. It's more like a reunion party," said conductor Lyu Jia, president and artistic director of the orchestra.

"We choose repertoires that combine original Chinese works with Western classical pieces."

Initiated by the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the State Council, the Global Chinese Orchestra has performed each year in China since its founding in September 2015.

Lyu said the annual concerts have different themes, with this year's events focusing on the Silk Road.

Last year, which marked the 400th anniversary of the death of the English playwright William Shakespeare and Chinese Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) playwright Tang Xianzu, the orchestra played such pieces as Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet* and *Wan Fu*, an aria from the original Chinese opera, *The Peony Pavilion*, composed by Chinese musician Ye Xiaogang with the libretto by Tang.

For Lyu, 53, the idea of gathering overseas Chinese musicians in an orchestra was a longtime wish.



Lyu Jia takes the baton of the Global Chinese Orchestra to perform at the annual Beijing concerts that gather overseas Chinese and returned musicians who have studied and worked abroad for years. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

The conductor from Shanghai studied at the University of Arts in Berlin in 1988 after graduating from the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing. He won the Golden Prize and Favorite Conductor Award in the Antonio Pedrotti International Conducting Competition, in Trento, Italy, in 1988.

In 1991, he was appointed chief conductor of the Italian opera house, Teatro Lirico Giuseppe Verdi, making him not only the opera house's first chief conductor from Asia, but also its youngest.

Lyu worked and lived abroad for years, conducting 2,000 concerts and operas in Europe and the United States, before returning to China and serving as chief conductor of the Beijing-based National Center for the Performing Arts Orchestra in 2011.

"During the past three decades, more Chinese musicians have studied at music schools abroad and played in Western orchestras. They've been recognized by Western audiences," said Lyu.

He also noted that classical music is a universal language that connects

China with the rest of the world. He hopes that the orchestra can tour overseas besides giving its annual performances in China.

Ma Junyi, the concertmaster and orchestra director of the Opera Australia Orchestra, has been playing with the Global Chinese Orchestra since its inception. This year, he is the principal violinist.

"It's like playing in an NBA All-Star Game. It's fun, and we enjoy playing together," said Ma, who was born in Shanghai and moved to Australia in 1990.

Lin Wei, daughter of the late renowned violinist and music educator Lin Yaoji, joined the Global Chinese Orchestra in 2016. From Guangzhou, in South China's Guangdong province, Lin started learning violin with her father at age 7. She plays with the Iceland Symphony Orchestra, which she joined in 1988.

"The musicians have absorbed different cultures, and they turn their chemistry into expressive music. The opportunity of performing together is rare," said Lin. "We are proud."