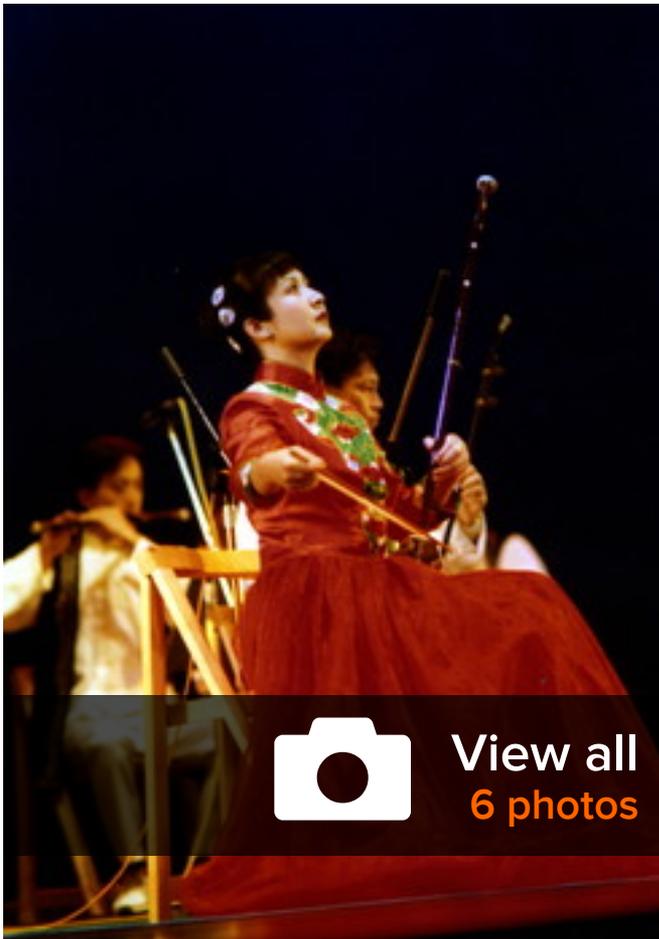


Erhu, Jazz and Six Healing Sounds

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The **Erhu** is a musical instrument with two strings, no fingerboard or fret, and a soundboard covered by snakeskin. That is why the timbre is unique. The Erhu's structure is so simple yet it can produce incredibly a wide range of sounds. The Erlu is regarded as Chinese violin for its popularity and importance in traditional Chinese music. Musician **Yang Ying** comments that the Erhu sometimes even sounds like a human voice.



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Yang Ying performed Erhu with the Ensemble in Singapore.

Yang Ying



Yang Ying

Yang Ying learned how to play the Erhu from her father. She was taught in a very strict and traditional way - playing each single note at a time until she expressed it to his satisfaction. Though that early training was exceptionally hard, Yang Ying says that she understands now how much love and self-sacrifice her father had to train her playing The Erhu. She did not disappoint him and became the soloist at the prestigious [Central Song and Dance Ensemble in China](#) and played for dignitaries and foreign state heads. She also travelled abroad with the Ensemble for cultural exchange programs as a lead musician.

Foreign friends introduced her to [jazz](#) and rock in the mid 1980s. From that first encounter, she dreamt of composing a fusion of rock, classical, and jazz with the diverse styles of Chinese music. In 1990, she formed the first all-female rock band [Cobra](#) in China (click the Cobra link and you can watch it play). Friends and family thought she was crazy to sacrifice her status with the National Song and Dance Ensemble. She wasn't sure if the group would be allowed to play publicly. The group also had a hard time obtaining rock music instruments and she played a bass guitar that was a gift from a foreign friend. But nothing could stop her. They sang Western as well as Chinese songs in a rock style. They toured in various cities in China as well as hosted the largest rock concert in Beijing then. This pioneering effort lasted about three years. They were successful and gained international recognition. But Yang Ying did not want to copy western music styles, but to create music that fused Chinese and Western music. With the differences on the musical direction that *Cobra* should follow, the band dissolved.

In 1996, Yang Ying immigrated to the U.S. In America she has met and learned from many great musicians. She met the Grammy award winning saxophonist [Charles Neville](#) in New Orleans, who gave Yang Ying her first "live" instruction in Jazz theory. According to Yang Ying, she learns something from

almost everyone whom she plays with. Many of the best musicians are not famous or well known, at least not outside of musical or Jazz circles. She has focused mainly on studying Western and composing music. She performed occasionally, but formed a band in 2008 and started touring and playing her own music using The Erhu as a lead instrument for Jazz. Clicking the [link](#) here, you can see Yang Ying and her band performed in 2008 [Planet Arlington World Music Festival](#). Recently, she did an interview with BBC/PRI for "The World" radio show. She invited [Alex Blake](#), a great Jazz bassist originally from South Africa and now based in NY, to improvise with her for the live music part. Yang Ying said that "Every time I play with a great musician, I gain energy, and I learn. Live performance is the best part of music."

The Six Healing Sounds is one of the oldest documented, and continues to be one of the most common forms of [Qigong](#) exercise in China. It generates a feeling of relaxed, harmonic "vibrational" energy. It is reported to cure a wide range of chronic illnesses. It is practiced all over China and Yang Ying learned it when she was 12-years old from a Traditional Chinese Medicine doctor. From her own experience, the practice helps to reduce stress, balance the emotions, improve vitality, and clear the mind, all of which improve quality of life and outlook and interactions with others. It also promotes good sleep (a common problem for many musicians, composers, and artists), and improves skin complexion and is a beauty aid for women. She married, and became pregnant relatively late in life. She believes that the Six Healing Sounds practice helped her to get pregnant.

The Chinese character for music is the major part of the character for medicine. So there is no surprise that Yang Ying is an expert on the Six Healing Sounds. According to her, to gain the most benefits from Six Healing Sounds practice, one must understand the fundamental theories and practices of Qigong. For this reason, she included sections on fundamental Qigong posture and breathing in her newly released [Six Healing Sounds](#) instructional video. Yang Ying made a unique contribution to Six Healing Sounds by creating a music program - with musically timed intervals and [meditation](#) music - to help people to learn, and deepen the meditative experience, of Six Healing Sounds practice. Also, by vocalizing the sounds with the music, the practitioner is actively participating in the music.

For years, Yang Ying has practiced sitting and standing meditation, and some traditional dynamic or moving Qigong exercises. She created a meditation CD [Elixir: Music for Moving and Still Meditation](#), of which she was trying to musically express her experiences - the journey into quietness, the peacefulness, the joy - experienced in meditation. This music CD has been used by many Tai Chi instructors - including her brother Tai Chi master [Yang Yang](#) - for Tai Chi classes.

This Fall [Yang Ying and the Ping Pong Jazz Band](#) are invited to perform at Beijing Ninegates Jazz Festival in Beijing, China with [USArtist](#) International Touring grant, supported by Mid-Atlantic Arts Foundation in partnership with the National Endowment for the Arts and Andrew Mellon Foundation. They are playing Yang Ying's own compositions of Chinese and Western fusion music, as well as jazz classics, arranged for The Erhu as a lead instrument. Jazz is still relatively unknown in most of China.

She is hoping with the familiarity of the Erhu, more Chinese can learn to appreciate Jazz.

To learn more about Yang Ying, you can visit PRI's The World Show of [Yang Ying's Jazzy Take on Chinese Folk Music](#).

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SUGGESTED LINKS

- **Dr. Yang's Evidence-Based Tai Chi Workshop at Omega**
- **An adorable book: Six Healing Sounds by Lisa Spillane**
- **The Secrets of Qigong Masters & its first anniversary**



Violet Li

Tai Chi Examiner