

# Zither performer plays heartstrings

Musical maverick adds modern flair to traditional instrumentation with upcoming album.

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Beijing's premiere *guzheng* (zither) musician Ji Wei will release her new and timely album *Spring* soon. Her passion for, and commitment to, music — and to bringing ancient Chinese sounds to a modern international audience — continues to make her one of the world's most sought-after *guzheng* players.

"The *guzheng* has an amazing sound that you can't find in Western instruments," Ji said.

"But this doesn't mean it is destined to be performed only in Chinese solos. To get a modern sound, you have to change your technique," she explained. "I have trained myself to play at new speeds and create new sounds," that can be performed on the international stage.

Ji recently worked with Swedish performer Anders Miolin, pairing the Eastern *guzheng* with the Western 13-string guitar. The resulting music spans two cultures and brings new emotions to the surface. She has worked with many international orchestras and ensembles over the years.

"Most people really enjoy the instrument and are interested in my music," she said.

Ji's proudest moment was the successful performance as a concerto soloist with a large orchestra support-

ing her. The difficulty of blending the sound of an instrument that is about 3,000 years old with those of modern instruments can be overcome beautifully, and the resulting music is timeless.

"People don't think the *guzheng* can be balanced in an orchestra, but it is my responsibility to encourage composers to write new pieces for my instrument and to show that it can be expressive and balanced in a big orchestra."

And she has done just that. Her performances include an Argentinean tango piece aired for the Global Chinese Grand New Year Concert 2011. Making the *guzheng* accessible to a wider audience is part of Ji's mission as an artist and performer.

Ji's upcoming album took more than a year to record, compile and compose. It has something for everyone, including classical Chinese music, Renaissance pieces and a few modern adaptations.

While she has been busy with performances, international travel and recording her latest album, Ji also teaches at the Central Conservatory of Music.

"It is the best music school in China," she said.

With more than 15 regular one-on-one tutoring sessions, Ji is paving the way for the resurgence of the *guzheng*. "Beijing has many talented musicians, and the best music programs in China," Ji said, adding that the city inspired the album *Spring*.

Ji got her start at age 4, when her parents decided she should train as a gymnast. The classes were full, so they instead took her to a music academy, where the instructors were instantly struck by how classical and traditional the child acted and appeared. They admitted her and suggested she study the *guzheng*.

The instrument was difficult to find at that time. "My mother made a *guzheng* out of paper and drew strings on it so I could learn the scales and notes," she recalled. I played it for half a year before we finally bought a real one."

Ji performs monthly, mostly at the National Center for the Performing Arts or internationally.

## ALBUM INFO

*Spring* will be available at music stores across the country and at [www.jiwei.org](http://www.jiwei.org).



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