In the name of culture

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By Zhang Kun in Shanghai |   
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The Shanghai Chinese Orchestra will begin a tour of Europe, performing eight concerts in Britain, France, Belgium and Germany from Feb 6 to 23.  
According to Luo Xiaoci, director of the Shanghai Chinese Orchestra, the 70-piece orchestra will hold a concert titled New Oriental at some of the most acclaimed concert halls in the world and it will be the first time traditional Chinese music is performed at the Paris Philharmonic Hall and the Elbphilharmonie in Hamburg.  
The objective of the concert, Luo said, is to share with the world the rich history, aesthetics and philosophical ideas of Chinese culture through folk music.  
"We will present our long history, as well as its diversity, tolerance and innovation. I believe the openness, elegance and confidence reflected in our performance will win the recognition of audiences from different cultural backgrounds," she said.  
The formation of a musical group featuring traditional Chinese instruments only took place in Shanghai in the 1920s when a band was formed under the banner of Datong Music Society. The Shanghai Chinese Orchestra, which was later founded in 1952, was the first of its kind in the new China. Luo said that the orchestra has since been a pioneer in the modernization of traditional music.  
It was Peng Xiuwen (1931-1996) who designed the layout of the Chinese music orchestra. Even today, the structure he created is still widely adopted by Chinese orchestras all over the world, such as those in Singapore and Malaysia. It was also Peng who started the reform of traditional Chinese instruments in order to expand the range and enhance the sound quality.  
The New Oriental concert production was created for the opening of the 18th China Shanghai International Arts Festival in 2016 and has been well-received and widely toured in China. In June 2017, the concert made its overseas premiere in Piraeus, Greece, in celebration of the 45th anniversary of Sino-Greece diplomatic relations. During this concert, audience will get to hear tunes from an ancient flute made of a bone that dates back 8,000 years. Compositions by contemporary Chinese musicians Zhao Jiping, Tan Dun and Liu Changyuan will also be performed.  
"We have constantly explored the new possibilities of Chinese music," Luo said.  
"We know there were big orchestras comprising 100 people 1,000 years ago, but we know nothing about how they were structured and performed. As such, we have to create new forms and acoustic presentations of Chinese music relevant to this age we are in."  
In order to do so, Luo has hired Western musicians to compose musical works for the orchestra. Last year, the orchestra premiered a new production   
According to Luo, Chinese music is very much linear and emphasizes the flow of the melody. She added that Jost, being a European musician, "has the natural endowment for the harmony and balance in music" and helped the orchestra achieve "a graceful elegance that is rare and precious in traditional Chinese music performance".

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