Tsinghua student band gives first concert in US

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By Linda Deng in Seattle |   
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Tuesday afternoon on the main stage of Meany Hall at the University of Washington, 62 young musicians from the Tsinghua University Symphonic Band (THUMB) treated the audience to a performance at the 30th Annual University of the Washington Pacific Northwest Band Festival.  
Robert Sommer Jr was in the audience and said that he didn't expect a band of students primarily in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) could play so well.  
"I am actually typing here on my phone, updating my Facebook by saying how impressive their performance was," he said.  
THUMB, founded in 1916, is one of the oldest wind bans in China and has about 200 members. Most THUMBers had no instrumental experience before joining the band. In 2008, they became the first non-professional symphonic band to be invited to play in the China National Theatre.  
This visit to Seattle is the band's first trip abroad in its over 100-year history.  
Timothy Salzman, professor of music and director of concert bands at the University of Washington, helped make the trip a reality.  
Salzman has been a conductor, adjudicator or arranger for bands throughout the United States and many countries, including Canada, England, South Korea, Indonesia, Thailand, Russia, Singapore, the Philippines, Japan and China.  
In recent years, he has traveled frequently to Beijing where he served as visiting professor at the Beijing Conservatory, conducted the People's Liberation Army Band in concert and gave master classes for numerous wind bands, including a concert appearance with the Beijing Wind Orchestra.  
Salzman has visited Tsinghua University four times since 2013. As a visiting scholar, he brought his band to Tsinghua for an arts exchange, worked with THUMB for the annual New Year Concert on campus in 2016 and 2017 and invited THUMB to come to the US.  
"Every time I hear the band, it gets better and better," he said. "They are very bright students. When I taught them, the only thing they want is 'What's next? Show me the next good thing.' It is not usual for students who start to learn instruments at 18 years old to develop the skills so quickly.  
"So you're going to find out what is possible for people who are so bright, so motivated, and love music so deeply," Salzman told the audience before the performance.  
After the band played Dance of Yao People by Liu Tieshan and Mao Yuan, Salzmann conducted the band in The Stars and Stripes Forever by John Philip Sousa, bringing the concert to a rousing climax.  
Liu Wei, a graduate student in energy and power engineering from Hunan province, joined THUMB six years ago when he entered Tsinghua. He was excited about his first performance and the learning experience in the US.  
"We learned a lot through the master classes and communication with young musicians in the US who are more professional. Being immersed in art during this trip, I am fulfilled and extremely happy," he said.  
Salzman believes in the universal power of music and is driven to connect people across the world through music.  
"There is so much unrest in the world today. So many people are angry with each other. I think when you do this kind of thing, we see that we are all the same and we all want the same things," Salzman said.

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