

Title:

The Guqin - a Chinese Musical Instrument that Helped Defeat an Army

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521

Summary:

The guqin, or seven-stringed zither, is China's oldest stringed instrument, and as legend has it, its sweet sounds once helped defeat an army. Now this ancient instrument experiences a modern-day renaissance. This holiday season, NTDTV's Holiday Wonders (live at the Beacon Theater on Broadway, NYC, Dec. 19-24, 2006) brings a unique opportunity to experience the magic of traditional Chinese culture, using traditional and ancient instruments.

Keywords:

Guqin, Holiday Wonders, Broadway, Beacon Theater, NTDTV, Manhattan, New York, Chinese traditional culture, Holiday Greetings, Divine Beauty, Beautiful dances

Article Body:

The guqin, or seven-stringed zither, is China's oldest stringed instrument, and as legend has it, its sweet sounds once helped defeat an army. Now this ancient instrument experiences a modern-day renaissance. This holiday season, NTDTV's Holiday Wonders (live at the Beacon Theater on Broadway, NYC, Dec. 19-24, 2006) brings a unique opportunity to experience the magic of traditional Chinese culture, using traditional and ancient instruments. The magnificence of the backdrops, the abundant imagination, the marvelous music, the splendor of the costumes, and the actors' great skill--altogether make for outstanding entertainment reflecting China's 5,000 years of civilization and traditional culture--a culture full of myths and legends.

The first guqins were made about 3,000 years ago. They were very simple, with just one or two strings. As aesthetic concepts flowered and playing skills improved, the instrument changed. By the 3rd century the guqin had seven strings, and was very similar to the instrument played today.

Historically, the guqin has been viewed as a symbol of high culture, as well as the instrument most able to express the essence of Chinese music. There is consequently a great deal of symbolism surrounding the guqin.

In ancient China, the guqin was an instrument played mainly by those of noble birth. Among the 3,000 or so guqin tunes that have been handed down, the

majority are works by the then ruling class, expressing their aspirations.

In Chinese history, there is a famous story called the "Empty City Trick" (Kong Cheng Ji) in which the guqin played the key role in defeating an army of thousands. The story of Kong Cheng Ji can be found in the famous 15th century novel Romance of the Three Kingdoms.

During the "Three Kingdoms" period (220-280 AD), the Kingdom of Shu underwent a series of defeats by the Kingdom of Wei. On one occasion the Wei general, Sima Yi, advanced with his armies to the gate of a Shu city, unaware that there were no Shu soldiers within the city to protect it.

On seeing the Wei army advance, rather than capitulating, the Shu military advisor Zhuge Liang went to the gate tower and played a beautiful melody on his guqin.

As he listened, Sima Yi, the general of the invading army, found himself in a quandary. He tried to tell from the nuance of the music whether the city was truly empty, or if Shu soldiers hid within it. Judging by the tranquil tones, he decided this was a trick of Zhuge Liang's to tempt his army into an ambush, and so he ordered a retreat.

The ruse helped the Kingdom of Shu to avoid another defeat and ultimate destruction.

You may wonder what melody Zhuge Liang played. Nobody knows. This will probably forever remain a secret shrouded in the mists of history.

In addition to Holiday Wonders, NTDTV also brings to live the divine beauty of the ancient East with its now-legendary Chinese New Year Spectacular <http://shows.ntdtv.com/> . This year the "Spectacular" is grander than ever, touring 26 mayor cities worldwide with more than 1,000 performers between January and March 2007. The NYC flagship show returns to Radio City Music Hall for seven performances.