

**Jin Xiang:** There are two parts. As to classical music itself, it is technically rigorous, it falls in the order of the hierarchy of the universe. It gives people discipline and harmony, in the technical aspects. On the other side, is the spirit; the feeling of classical music uplifts the people, so they would go to a higher phase of reality. I want to emphasize that it was not just classical music [that brought people out of the Cultural Revolution]. It depended also on the government, what the government would do to improve people's lives. But in certain aspects, to a certain degree, classical music does contribute to uplift people and to educate the people in China.

**Billington:** Who do you think were the most important leaders who supported you and supported classical music?

**Jin Xiang:** First I'd like to make it clear that I don't quite agree that only classical music, in the sense of *western* classical music, is the only solution that can uplift the people in China. I don't emphasize this just because I happen to work in the music field. In Chinese musical life, there is both western classical music and Chinese classical music and contemporary style, like some light music as well. These can all uplift people. So I would not exaggerate the function of western classical music, as the only solution to the problem. Classical music represents a period of history. I am not the sort of person to emphasize only classical music—I think that is a difference between you and me.

**Billington:** Do you consider your opera to be western-style classical music?

**Jin Xiang:** I don't think so. Does your definition of western classical music include romanticism and impressionism?

**Billington:** They are sometimes called "classical," but they are not what is properly known as classical in their nature, and I have strong disagreements with them, which go beyond the question of music per se, embracing the areas of culture, politics, art, and science, where I think the same division exists. The collapse of our civilization is due to the romantic, impressionist influence, and the loss of the classical love of truth and beauty.

**Jin Xiang:** Do you believe that the degeneration of contemporary civilization relates to the romantic period of music, including Debussy and so forth?

**Billington:** Yes.

**Jin Xiang:** What is the relation?

**Billington:** Perhaps it is better to go back a bit. The classical period, with perhaps Beethoven as the highest expression, was committed to the idea that art, both music and the physical arts, was a medium through which to express the creative ideas of the mind, in a way which would be intelligible to the viewer or the listener. The audience would be brought to

use the creative powers of his own mind in hearing or seeing such an artistic work, and would therefore be uplifted to a higher order of truth and beauty. They found beauty to be located in the process of solving a problem in a piece of music, which was the same mental process as that required for the solving of a problem in the physical sciences, or economics, or any scientific field—that the same process of creative mentation was involved.

Beginning with the romantics, you begin to see a breakdown in the commitment to scientific discovery, and art became transformed into romanticism and impressionism, which was the expression of the *feelings* of the composer, which in turn were meant to evoke a *feeling* in the listener, but not necessarily to provoke a mental crisis or a mental problem which had to be solved. This is very clear in the case of Wagner. It is not an accident—it is lawful—that Wagner was a fascist, and a racist. If I may take the liberty, I found that the best parts of your opera came when you were trying to express a higher emotion—love or duty. But when you were trying to create an impression of insanity, you used techniques that were basically unintelligible. It definitely

## The tragedy of the Cultural Revolution

*Violinist Isaac Stern spent three weeks in China in the summer of 1979 as the guest of the Chinese government, accompanied by his family and pianist David Golub. That was the year of the Democracy Wall movement in China, the first breath of hope since the hell of the Cultural Revolution.*

*The following is an excerpt from the 84-minute videotape on the trip, "From Mao to Mozart: Isaac Stern in China" (©Hopewell Foundation, 1980). The videotape features Stern's master classes with students of all ages from Beijing and Shanghai conservatories, and a rehearsal with the Beijing Philharmonic Orchestra.*

*The following passage captures a particularly poignant moment during a discussion among Stern, Golub, and officials of the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, in which the deputy director of the Conservatory, Tan Shuzhen, relates his personal tragedy during the Cultural Revolution.*

**Stern:** You have an extraordinary power in China available to you in your young people. But both Mr. Golub and I have reached the same conclusion, all the way through, from everything we've heard, that the young people—8, 9, 10, 11—remarkable. But 17, 18, 19, 20,

does create a feeling, a mood in the audience, and your reviewers liked that part very much!

**Jin Xiang:** I do not understand what is the difference between getting the feeling and mood of pain over to the audience, but that the idea didn't get across.

**Billington:** My wife and I both, after the opera, wished that you had used the same methods of composition which you used in the expression of love and duty, when you attempted to express the battle in the mind of a man going insane, instead of the [howling noises].

**Jin Xiang:** Now I understand. But one question I want to ask, what's your opinion of Puccini? Is he classic or romantic?

**Billington:** Puccini was able to write so as to bring out the voice, so many of his operas have passages which allow a beautiful voice to come forward, but he is romantic. He is looking only for musical effect.

**Jin Xiang:** I agree with some of your points of view, to look to music to educate and uplift people. But on the other side,

what I believe, is that sometimes those composers like Puccini and Wagner just cannot be classified as classicist or romanticist. It is not extremely necessary to do so. Because I believe that even in one single composer, there exist both characteristics of classic and romantic. Just as you and I agree on the method I used for love and duty, but not on the other part, as you commented that I take measurements from both sides. So I personally think that it is not that necessary to differentiate them. But your opinion is reasonably good.

Let's go back to the question about the influence of classical music in China. Well, classic music is a gem from the treasure of human culture. It is supported by many people in China. For instance, the Central Orchestra of China performed only classical music in the early days, although they also play some modern music nowadays. The conductor of the orchestra, Mr. Li Delung, loves and advocates classical music strongly. The government basically criticizes rock and roll, but not Stravinsky or modern classical music.

**Billington:** Since Tiananmen Square, there has been much more repression of intellectual movements. Has this also

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21—something happens to them. What happened in between?

**Official:** Well, originally, you know, the graduates of the conservatory were all taken from the graduates of the primary and middle schools attached to the conservatory. For instance, Ms. Tan-yuen, she was a graduate of the primary school of this conservatory before, but when she reached the age of 18 or 19, there came to be the Cultural Revolution, and these activities, these teachings were stopped. You could see that many of the young people of 18 or 19 years old, they have gone through this period and during that period, nothing was taught and it was quite difficult for them to continue their studies, so the level—

**Stern:** They couldn't even play.

**Official:** To play was a crime. Even to listen to a record of classical music was actually a crime. . . .

**Tan Shu-zhen:** The Cultural Revolution started during the spring of 1966. All of a sudden in May, the storm broke out. I taught Beethoven, Mozart, western music. I taught people to make violins. Those are the instruments belonging to the imperialists, belonging to the foreign devils, belonging to the westerners. It was like a bad dream, like a nightmare.

I was confined to a small room—that's not a room, it's a closet in the basement of the library, just under the stairs. A small closet without window, without light, without ventilation, and there is a septic tank under the

floor and a big pipe. The refuse comes from the toilets through that pipe into the septic tank, and smells very badly. I had to stay there for 14 months. And because of lack of oxygen, lack of air, my legs were swollen.

I think the chief reason they did that to all the old professors and teachers is just to get rid of us because they want to get power, to get control of the conservatory, to get control of the music.

But during that period, I was not allowed to come out. I had to stay in the dark room all the time. Somebody would send me something to eat, I was allowed to come out for a few minutes every day to get a little water, to go to the toilet. And once, when my daughter came from Beijing she wanted to see me, and the Red Guard told me, "Your daughter wants to see you, but I will allow you only five minutes to talk with her." And with his presence.

So, it was in the evening, she led me to a corner of the wall and I saw my daughter in the dark, with my granddaughter of seven years. When I saw my granddaughter, my granddaughter called me grandfather. I couldn't restrain my tears, because I was treated as a criminal, sometimes we were treated as animals.

Ten of our teachers died by suicide, because they couldn't stand the humiliation and torture, especially the torture of the mind and the humiliation. Of course we were beaten, we were kicked and beaten in many ways, but, I think, that's all right compared with the humiliation. We were treated as criminals because we taught them western music.