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SEATTLE—Since 2006 Shen Yun Performing Arts has been dazzling audiences around the world. Joseph Dobbs saw the performance around a decade ago and he was pleased to share that Shen Yun has become even more spectacular. “I saw Shen Yun probably a decade ago, and I have to say it’s only gotten cleaner and more vibrant,” Mr. Dobbs said. Mr. Dobbs is a musician and artist who has his own label. He has toured the United States performing his music. The piece that moved Mr. Dobbs the most was Shen Yun’s erhu solo. “This was the most beautiful show I’ve seen and also the lady who performed the erhu was absolutely incredible. It was a very beautiful show, truly, truly exquisite. I’m glad we came today,” Mr. Dobbs said. The erhu is a two-stringed instrument that is known for its emotive timbre and expressive qualities. “The emotional quality of it made me want to cry. It was so beautiful. It was actually stunning,” Mr. Dobbs said. The erhu is one of many traditional Chinese instruments in Shen Yun’s live orchestra. Many audience members have been impressed with the virtuosity of the erhu soloist. “She just had a way of bringing out emotion in that instrument that I’ve never heard before. It was incredible,” Mr. Dobbs said. Shen Yun is based in New York, and its mission is to revive 5,000 years of Chinese civilization. “I think sharing both traditional and modern when moving forward is very important. I think that our past should be remembered and I think our ancestors should be honored,” Mr. Dobbs said. Shen Yun’s artists are trained in classical Chinese dance, one of the most comprehensive dance systems in the world. “Just the amount of quality and the amount of training you must have gone through to make such an incredible performance. I mean, that’s another level you don’t really see very often. And it truly is something special. Very much appreciated,” Mr. Dobbs said. In terms of expressive qualities, classical Chinese dance is arguably unparalleled. “There was a lot of energy in the show. It was very good. I think the performers did a great job of purveying their love for the craft and the way they move their faces when they’re creating all those different scenes was really something beautiful. They did very well,” Mr. Dobbs said. Mr. Dobbs shared that he would love for his friends to also see Shen Yun. “100 percent. I’m hoping that I’ll get some of them to come with me next time. ... [It will] probably the most vibrant and beautiful show they’ll ever see,” he said. Reporting by Sunny Chen and Maria Han. From The Epoch Times NTD is a media sponsor of Shen Yun Performing Arts, covering audience reactions since 2006. I was fortunate enough to have attended Shen Yun Symphony Orchestra concert at Carnegie Hall in New York, on Oct. 14. On my way back home, the first, and strongest feeling was, I have to “craft” a new term to describe what I just heard, and the new term should be “Shen Yun Music”.Actually the term “Shen Yun Music” has already been used before, at least at the Shen Yun website, so what do I mean by “crafting”?Well, what I really want to express is, in the music, art and academic communities, “Shen Yun Music” should be treated as a special term; and in the music dictionary, music history books, and music courses in school, “Shen Yun Music” should be added in as a new term, a new chapter and a new course, or area of study. Shen Yun Symphony Orchestra performing at Carnegie Hall, New York City, on Oct.14, 2017. Why do I say these? Since I watched Shen Yun Performing Arts for the first time in 2007 in Australia, in the past 11 years, I have been following and watching it, or attending Shen Yun Symphony Orchestra concert for at least dozens of times. Time and again, I wanted to write articles to express how I felt, but human languages always failed me...This time, when I sat in Carnegie Hall again, and melt into the music, trying to catch every note and every moment, I finally realized: Shen Yun Music is just Shen Yun Music. It is not western; it’s not eastern. It’s not classical; it’s not modern either. Then how do we describe it? We have to call it “Shen Yun Music”!For people who have listened to “Shen Yun Music”, they must immediately understand what this phrase means. However, it could be difficult to explain the connotation of “Shen Yun Music” to those who have never enjoyed it. I can only try my best to express a little bit about how I felt when I listened to Shen Yun Music.For me, the most notable nature, or quality of Shen Yun Music is that it blends the two systems of Western and Eastern music so well that the result comes out as a new system: Shen Yun Music. It is “ancient yet innovation, soothing yet powerful”. It is so under control and fair that even at the climax and most exciting moment, what the audience feels is the sudden lighting up of the Buddha’s worlds, instead of the slightest deviation to anywhere else.Oftentimes, I felt that my physical body had disappeared, while my soul and spirit had become one with the music. The feeling was so wonderful, pure, virtuous, bright and moving...I couldn’t help imagining: If human beings could immerse themselves in such pure and wonderful music and moments, there would definitely be no killing, no robbing, no ugly fights, no evil actions in the world whatsoever!There were two pieces that impressed me very much in terms of the uniqueness of Shen Yun Music. One was “Mongolian Bowls”. When the music started, you could see that it was erhu and violins moving. However, what you heard was the sound of matouqin, which immediately took you to the vast grassland of Mongolia. You could even smell the fragrance of the Mongolian milk tea. Erhu master Xiaochun Qi, Lu Sun and Linda Zhen Wang performing at Carnegie Hall, New York City, on Oct.14, 2017. (Larry Dye/The Epoch Times) It was the same with the “Tibetan Drums”. When the music started, you saw western brass trumpets moving. However, what you heard was the special sound of Tibetan radung, which immediately made you feel like standing on top of those sacred Tibetan mountains, and very close to the clear blue sky and pure white clouds of the Tibetan Plateau.Another number that impressed me very much was the “Plum Blossom” sung by soprano Haolan Geng. Soprano Haolan Geng singing “Plum Blossom”at Carnegie Hall, New York City, on Oct.14, 2017. (Larry Dye/The Epoch Times) “Plum Blossom” is a very famous Chinese song in Taiwan. The best-known version was sung by Teresa Teng, a Taiwanese pop singer, who sang this song in a very tender and sweet way.Shen Yun’s soprano Haolan Geng sang it in a totally different way. Accompanied by a full symphony orchestra, Haolan Geng’s magnificent “Plum Blossom” moved me to tears for many times.I remembered once a Shen Yun audience member said that Haolan Geng’s voice was so powerful that it could break glasses. When I first heard her singing in Lincoln Center in 2012, the word “metal” somehow appeared in my mind. It might sound a little bit unreasonable to connect metal with human voice. But the connection just “naturally” came to my mind. I guess it was because I felt that her vocal cords and voice were so strong that they were as indestructible as metal! This time, however, when I listened to her “Plum Blossom”, I no longer thought about “metal”, or anything else, because I was completely carried away. When she majestically sang: “Plum blossom, plum blossom, you cover the earthYou bloom all the better with winter’s chillYou persevere, as we doSymbolizing the majestic spirit of China”What came to my mind were the majestic Chinese history of thousands of years long, the numerous righteous and courageous heroes in those thousands of years who made the history, as well as the Falun Dafa disciples in China, who have been bearing astonishing evil and crimes with their flesh bodies in the past 18 plus years, who have never given in even one inch’s ground amidst the overwhelming landscape of human’s morality and standards, who thus successfully stopped and turned the tide around with their unchangeable and indestructible will as strong as diamond, who are willing to sacrifice their lives for others with grand compassion and forbearance...I also remembered the poem by Mr. Li Hongzhi, founder of Falun Dafa: “In the chaotic world, like pure lotus flowers—plum blossoms, a hundred millionCold winds only accentuate their beautyThe interminable snowfall and rainare the tears of gods,Who look longingly for the plum blossoms’ return”With all these emotions and pictures running through my mind, I cried again and again, and deeply experienced what was contained within “Shen Yun Music”... Shen Yun Symphony Orchestra is given a standing ovation at Carnegie Hall, New York City, on Oct.14, 2017. (Larry Dye/The Epoch Times) Even when the traditional western music numbers, which people are very familiar with, were played by Shen Yun, they sounded greatly different. They were more peaceful, more beautiful, fairer, more disciplined and controlled.And this reminded me of the difference between diamond and graphite. The two substances are both composed of pure carbon, and their chemical formula is also the same “C”. However, while diamond is the hardest natural substance, graphite is so soft that it is used in pencils and as a solid lubricant.My point here is: There is a Way, or a Law in the universe. Only beings or things that follow the Way, and discipline themselves according to the Way, can last long, and emit pure and different energy that accords with the Way.And that are exactly the feelings Shen Yun Music gives to me. I could feel that everything with Shen Yun Music, from the music composition, music arrangement, the understanding of music, the coordination and cooperation between different parts, different instruments, different musicians, as well as the coordination and cooperation between the conductor and the entire orchestra... were in sync with the Way, with the Law of the universe. After three encore pieces, the audience giving a standing ovation at Carnegie Hall, New York City, on Oct.14, 2017. Further more, I believe the following introduction in Shen Yun program book reveals a very important aspect as well: “Shen Yun’s performers draw their spiritual inspiration from the meditation discipline and self-improvement practice called Falun Dafa. Also known as Falun Gong, it is rooted in China’s ancient spiritual traditions, and its practitioners strive to live by the principles of truthfulness, compassion and tolerance. The performers you are seeing today incorporate study and meditation into their rigorous daily training. You can see the result in the genuine joy with which they perform.”Yes, at the end of the day, musical instruments are controlled and played by musicians; and that’s what makes Shen Yun performers so distinctly different. Because of their own cultivation and assimilation to the Law of the universe, what they carry within, what they emit, what they can display and depict on the stage, are all very different. That’s why people can feel the different energy. Therefore, that is also why I do believe that the music and art community, as well as the music critics should follow closely what Shen Yun is doing in order to catch up with what it has already created and brought to the world. Shen Yun Performing Arts is a classical Chinese dance company based in New York. With a mission to revive 5,000 years of Chinese culture, it has eight companies that tour around the world. “Shen Yun” translates roughly as “beauty of divine beings dancing.” Each year, the dancers—the women in flowing silks and the men in bold colors—wow audiences with seemingly impossible grace and physicality. Many viewers have said that they thought they were indeed watching divine beings on stage. But what do divine beings dance to? The music penned by Shen Yun’s composers and played by Shen Yun’s orchestras. The orchestra is the first and only ensemble in the world that permanently combines ancient Chinese instruments with a classical Western orchestra. Many composers have tried to combine the two musical traditions in a single piece, but none do it quite as naturally as Shen Yun’s composers. After the global success of Shen Yun Performing Arts, demand was high to hear more of the music. In response, the company pulled musicians from each of its touring groups to create a 100-piece symphony orchestra. In 2012, Shen Yun Symphony Orchestra made its debut at Carnegie Hall, and has since graced the stage of concert halls worldwide. The symphony is frequently met with standing ovations, and often even gives encores. At Shen Yun’s classical Chinese dance performances, audiences frequently peek into the orchestra pit during intermission to try to glimpse which instruments produced the fascinating sounds they heard. But at a Shen Yun Symphony Orchestra performance, the orchestra is on full display, and concertgoers can see the ancient erhu or pipa play a melody they’ve never heard before, soon to be picked up by the Western strings and brass. Classical music lovers may think they have heard it all, but the world of classical music has just opened up new boundaries with the Shen Yun Symphony Orchestra. Shen Yun compositions integrate the strengths of Eastern and Western instruments, creating a sound like no other. One of the hallmarks of the Shen Yun Symphony Orchestra’s original pieces is how it layers distinctly Eastern melodies over a base of Western strings, percussion, woodwinds, and brass. They provide the backdrop against which ancient Chinese instruments—like the soulful erhu, delicate pipa, and resonant percussion—can truly sing. Can a trombone sound like a dung-chen, a Tibetan long horn? Can a violin sound Chinese? In Shen Yun pieces, they can—and it opens up a whole new world as to what traditional instruments can sound like. It is truly a performance like no other, and one that no music lover should have missed. While Shen Yun’s original compositions are new, with more than a dozen newly composed original works performed for the season’s all-new program, they are inspired by a 5,000-year-old musical tradition consisting of regional styles not only popular among China’s ethnic majority but also from the many ethnic groups in and around China. There’s also court music that changed dramatically with the dynasties. For instance, Creation – performed in 2012 concert tour – is based on an ancient legend that tells of heavenly beings bringing humanity its culture. The melodies are modeled loosely after court music (yayue) from the Tang dynasty (618-907), which is considered the zenith of China’s cultural history. The majestic brass section resonated throughout the hall, and the percussion set an air of mystery with its Chinese drums. Violins descended into a tremolo, suggesting that something magical was about to arrive. Another example is Khata for the Gods. This song opens with a duet for the clarinet and oboe, and whisks listeners to the vast blue sky of the Himalayas. The wind instruments emitted new sounds to convey the unique feeling of Tibetan tunes, while the trombone used an exotic sliding slur to do a stunning imitation of the Tibetan long horn. Throughout the ages, Chinese have kept documents chronicling the development of music—instruments, tones, even melodies. Conductor Kuo Keng-Wei explained that many erroneously believe that Chinese music uses only a pentatonic scale, while in reality records exist of a 12-note scale in use as early as (c.2600 B.C. It is possible, therefore, that the West’s 12-note scale may have originated from China. Find out more at: References: Shen Yun is home to an impressive number of accomplished musicians. They hail from five continents, joined together by a wish to share the glory of the Western symphonic tradition and China’s cultural heritage with the world. All members of the Symphony Orchestra are also members of Shen Yun Performing Arts who accompany Shen Yun’s dance performances during its touring season. “Dancing for the Divine” is an enchanting musical piece by the Shen Yun Symphony Orchestra, composed by Jing Xian and conducted by maestro Milen Nachev. With a profound respect for the spiritual beliefs and the rich cultural identity of the Tibetan community, this work ventures into exploring life’s themes in this vibrant region. Through their dynamic performance, the orchestra channels a potent and uplifting energy, ensuring that each member of the audience is imbued with renewed vigor and passion for their everyday pursuits. In the opening strains of this piece, the tubas and trombones recreate the solemnity of a summons. They simulate the deep call of a ceremonial horn, echoing through the vast expanse of the Himalayas, reaching out to the sky. This call is answered by the trumpets and woodwinds, whose response reflects the hierarchical structure and profound respect inherent in monastic traditions. It also symbolizes collective veneration and solemnity, which is integral to such a sacred ceremony. Beneath this grandiose dialogue, the rumbling of drums adds an even more powerful layer, providing a stable, grounding backdrop over which the trumpets smoothly glide. Its presence enriches the texture of the musical tapestry, lending a majestic aura to this moment. At ((0:25)), the violins enter, their notes running along the scale with a fluidity that feels like a step ladder, lifting the musical tone. Following this is the return of the trumpets with a louder and more regal call, elevating the ceremony to a grander scale. The trombones, too, carry a sense of dignity, stating a noble mission and purpose. Here, we can see that beyond demonstrating music’s capacity to evoke majestic spaces and the solemnity of formal rituals, this passage also highlights the power of music in fostering cohesion and unity within a group, especially in ceremonial contexts like this. As this piece progresses to ((0:34)), another run of violins takes center stage, continuing in duple meter to the ending chord and making a transition to the new musical scenery with the downbeat at ((0:40)). Here, the orchestra masterfully encapsulates the spirit of traditional Tibetan melodies, where each note is brimming with vitality, bursting with a fast tempo and steady rhythm. This also makes the audience think about the personality and enduring lifestyle of the Tibetan people. Despite the rugged and challenging living conditions of the Himalayas, the music reflects how Tibetans maintain an unyielding optimism, fueled by their profound belief in divine protection. This faith has cultivated a community marked by strength, resilience, and a joyous carefreeness. They work hard and fully engage in spiritual activities, including singing and dancing in praise of the gods and offering the Khata scarf, imbued with deep spiritual significance. The Khata, a sacred symbol of respect, gratitude, and divine blessings, is traditionally offered to high-ranking monks and superiors. The white scarf, in particular, holds a place of honor, denoting the highest level of respect and solemnity. And in “Encore: Dancing for the Divine,” the offering of the white Khata through dance is a significant moment. This dance is depicted in the symphony through a fast tempo and the rhythmic vibrancy of the composition, mirroring the fast, lively step dance. The music reflects the physicality and energy of the dance, embodying the joy and reverence of the Khata offering. And in the distance, you hear the sharp sounds blending with woodwinds, reminiscent of the wild and free neighing of horses – a vital element of life in Tibet and emblematic of the region’s strong spirit. Furthermore, the sound of the tambourine simulates the clanging of metal and gemstone jewelry, such as earrings, necklaces, belts, and bracelets – accessories typical in inhabitants’ costumes, especially during significant ceremonies. The clashing of this jewelry, in sync with the dancers’ graceful movements, brings to life a scene of vibrant celebration. And at ((1:03)), you’ll hear more of the distant sound of horses’ hooves simulated by woodblocks. You will see, in this piece, the orchestra employs a multitude of tremolo techniques on the strings, particularly the violins, which is a prominent feature throughout the performance. These tremolos bring to life the undulating landscape of Tibet and the ceaseless energy of its people. But it’s not just the violins that are showcased in their virtuosity. Other instruments, including the clarinets and woodwinds at ((1:15)) and the brass at ((1:33)), perform with equal agility and precision. Their quick glides over the notes create a rich tapestry of sound that captures the liberal, free, and cheerful spirit of the Tibetan people. This part of the symphony is a celebration of life itself, filled with passion, energy, and dynamism. By ((1:50)), the composition returns to the tonic key, reaffirming the primary theme in a strong manner. As we can see, the entire musical structure is characterized by a fast, rigid tempo with little room for rest or relaxation. The directly returns to the main theme, without any preparatory slowdown or buildup, is a deliberate decision that propels both the listener and the music to a climax without hesitation. This is a bold representation of the Tibetan community’s spirit, whose life, though filled with challenges, is also replete with joy, living fully in the embrace of profound faith and unwavering zest. As we approach ((2:00)), the music at this juncture, instead of drawing to a close, employs a deceptive cadence, a technique that creates an expectation of resolution but then leads unexpectedly to a different chord. The continuation of the piece beyond this deceptive cadence towards the actual climax and conclusion after a passionate and majestic performance. The piece, in its entirety, is imbued with enthusiasm and spirit. The melody and the musicians transmit a powerful energy that is both positive and uplifting. As a listener, one cannot help but be moved by this surge of energy, which seems to convey the indomitable spirit of a nation characterized by vitality and admirable perseverance. The music becomes a medium to share the story of the Tibetan people with the world, capturing everything from the elegance of their traditional culture and unique way of life to their spiritual beliefs. If you seek a more visual experience of this theme, the “Dancing for the Gods” performance by the Shen Yun Performing Arts offers a splendid opportunity. Here, music is not only for listening but also for seeing and feeling. Every dancer’s movement and expression bring the music to life, opening up a multi-sensory experience that immerses the audience in the spiritual and cultural essence of Tibet. The fusion of Shen Yun’s original choreography and the symphonic orchestra ensures a deeper and more comprehensive understanding for you. For those interested in exploring more of Shen Yun’s musical creations, their compositions, including this remarkable piece, are available for streaming through Shen Yun Creations (Shen Yun Zuo Pin).

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