

Tian Jiixin plays from the heart

By **Chen Nan**
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Compared with Chinese concert pianist Lang Lang, whose musical foundation was influenced by his parents, who wanted him to be a musician, Tian Jiixin has a different story. Her parents did not want her to follow in their footsteps.

"We know the hardship of learning music, and we've spent our whole lives in this area," says Tian's mother, Wang Yuying, 55, a retired soprano from Opera Troupe of the General Political Department of People's Liberation Army. "We didn't want our daughter to go through it."

Tian's father, Tian Di, who is a composer and conductor from the same troupe, agrees. "It's very natural for our daughter to learn piano but we didn't want her to become a professional pianist. Playing piano as a hobby is good enough."

Despite her parents' reservations, Tian Jiixin was set on becoming a professional pianist.

At 25, she performed the *Yellow River Concerto* with the Forte Symphony Orchestra in January 2012, during the Spring Festival at the National Center for the Performing Arts in Beijing. In February 2012, she performed at the John C. Borden Auditorium with the Manhattan School of Music Symphony under the baton of Philippe Entremont.

The New York Times described her as "full of passion and energetic commitment". She won acclaim for her solo performance of Mozart's *Piano Concerto No 20 in D minor K 466* at the Rising Artists Evening event organized by the New York Concert Artists & Associates at Carnegie Hall in New York on June 2, 2012. On July 6, 2012, she held her first solo concert in China at Beijing Concert Hall.

"I never felt it was a torture and was never bored playing piano, even when I had to practice constantly at a very young age," says the Beijing native.

In fact, Tian describes playing piano as her greatest childhood joy. She started learning the musical instrument at 3 years old under pianist Huang Peiyang at the Central Conservatory of Music and famed Chinese piano instructor Zhou Guangren.

Tian says she was destined to play piano. Growing up in a family of musicians, her ears are sensitive to music.

"I like imagining pictures and stories with each piano piece. For example, when the rhythm is fast, I think of a jumping deer or blinking stars. When the music is slow, I picture dancing aquatic plants," she says.

Because of her straightforward and confident personality, Tian never experienced stage fright, even during her debut performance at Beijing Concert Hall when she was only 5 years old.

"I always feel excited the night before a performance. But when I'm onstage, I feel relaxed," she says.

Unlike many Chinese prodigies who study music academically and systematically at music conservatories in China from as young as 6 years old, Tian went to middle school and high school like most other children.

"We didn't choose music conservatories, which put more emphasis on music than other courses like science, math and literature. We wanted our daughter to get a comprehensive education like most children in China," says Tian's mother.

Tian practiced on the piano for four hours daily after school. To her, that was considered a break from homework.

At 18, she entered Shenyang Conservatory of Music and studied under Wei Danwen, who, Tian says, ushered her into a different musical world.

"Wei changed my attitude toward piano playing," Tian says. "Previously, I was taught to focus on technique — the faster I played, the better. But Wei taught me to listen to myself and to feel the emotion running between each note. He also told me that I had to express my emotions through the music."

It was her first time away from home and during the first year, it was challenging. She had to learn to be independent and strong by immersing herself in music, practicing piano for some eight hours daily.

One of Tian's all time favorites is Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata*. She says initially, her teacher was worried that she would not be able to play the piece well because of her happy personality.

But, Tian says when she played the piece, she placed herself in the composer's shoes and surprised her teacher.

"A beam of moonlight shed on the lake — cold, lonely and even scary. As the music proceeds, I picture the water in the lake moving with the rhythm," Tian explains.

Upon graduation, Tian furthered her studies at the United States' Manhattan School of Music, under the tutelage of Jeffrey Cohen, a professor whom Tian describes as "a father and a friend".

Unlike the traditional musical education Tian received, the professor motivated her to create and deal with new music pieces on her own.

Tian has since won awards for her performances in the United States, including the 2011 Dora Zaslavsky Kuch Concerto Competition, and the First Young Artist Competition in Long Island. She was also selected to perform with the New York Concert Artists Orchestra through their Rising Artists Concerto Presentation in 2011. Her achievements attracted the attention of several record companies.

In May 2012, she received her master's degree in classical performance from the Manhattan School of Music.

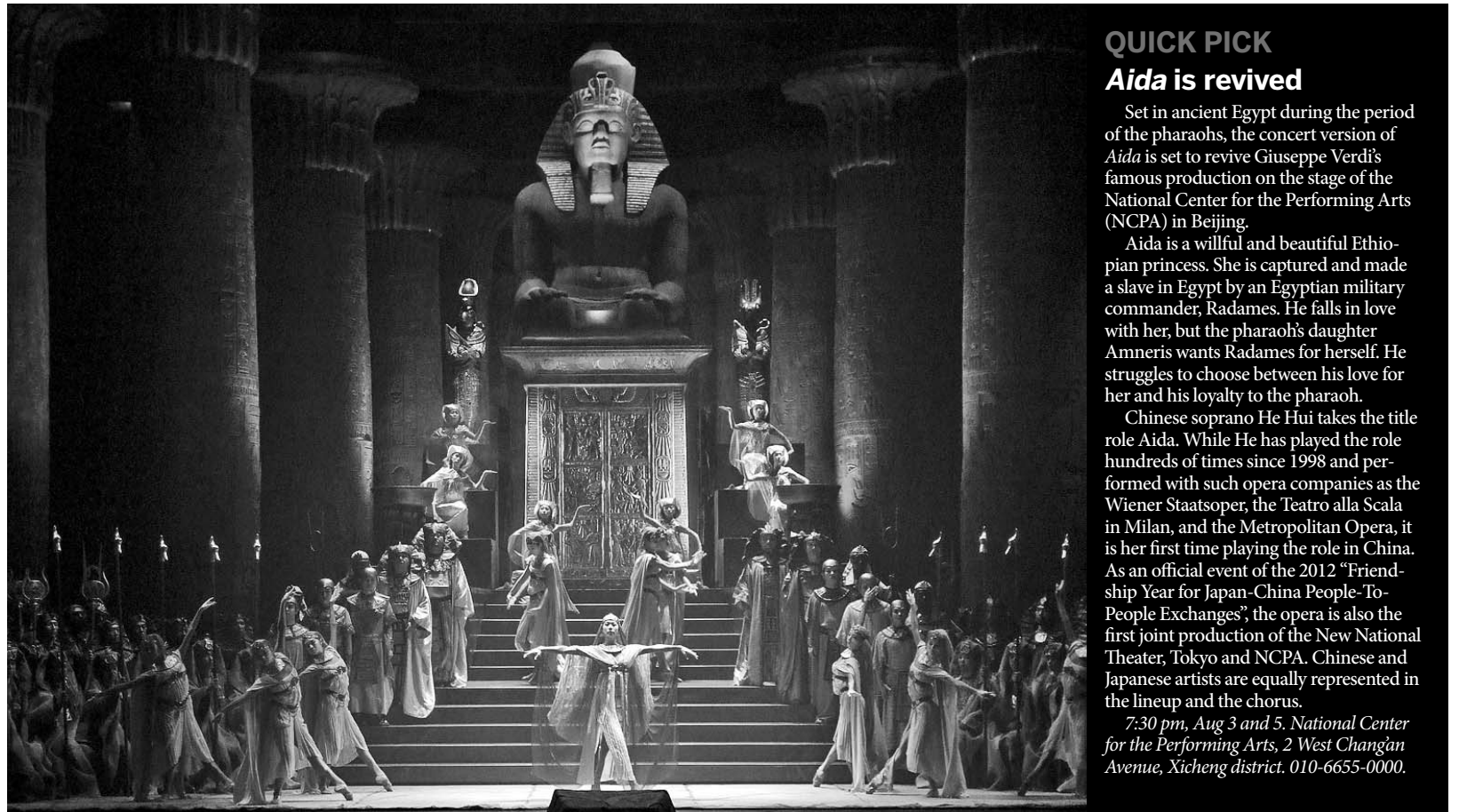
But Tian says she wants to slow down and deepen her piano studies in the US for one more year. She also plans to cooperate with some young Chinese musicians who mix classical music with jazz and traditional Chinese music.

"I feel that the future of classical music depends on developments in China in the next 20 years, so I am not in a hurry," she says. "I never really thought about my future plans because it interrupts the nobility of the music. I'll do my best and let it be."



ZOU HONG / CHINA DAILY

Tian Jiixin is recognized as one of the most promising classical musicians from China, in the West.



QUICK PICK

Aida is revived

Set in ancient Egypt during the period of the pharaohs, the concert version of *Aida* is set to revive Giuseppe Verdi's famous production on the stage of the National Center for the Performing Arts (NCPA) in Beijing.

Aida is a willful and beautiful Ethiopian princess. She is captured and made a slave in Egypt by an Egyptian military commander, Radames. He falls in love with her, but the pharaoh's daughter Amneris wants Radames for herself. He struggles to choose between his love for her and his loyalty to the pharaoh.

Chinese soprano He Hui takes the title role *Aida*. While He has played the role hundreds of times since 1998 and performed with such opera companies as the Wiener Staatsoper, the Teatro alla Scala in Milan, and the Metropolitan Opera, it is her first time playing the role in China. As an official event of the 2012 "Friendship Year for Japan-China People-to-People Exchanges", the opera is also the first joint production of the New National Theater, Tokyo and NCPA. Chinese and Japanese artists are equally represented in the lineup and the chorus.

7:30 pm, Aug 3 and 5. National Center for the Performing Arts, 2 West Chang'an Avenue, Xicheng district. 010-6655-0000.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

artbeat ... finger on the pulse

ART Bookplates reinvented

Have you noticed the small print or decorative label pasted on the inside front cover of a book when you flip through it? A 15th century, European invention, bookplates are now recognized as not only indications of the owner of a book, but also specimens of a bygone era for decorative fashion.

Six talented Guangzhou-based printmaking artists have created bookplates for Guangdong Museum of Art's collection of historical books on Chinese art's development and the museum has put on an exhibition of their works since June 7. These young artists have included their understandings of the books in the bookplates so that visitors can take a glance at China's art history, while appreciating the beauty of the printmaking art.

9 am-5 pm, until Aug 7 (closed on Mondays). Library for Liberal Arts Collections, Guangdong Museum of Art, 38 Yanyu Lu, Ersha Island, Yuexiu district, Guangzhou. 020-8735-1468.

Material metamorphosis

Multi-media pioneer Wang Mai's exhibition, *Wang Mai: Dire Straits*, shows the artist's interest in the usage of materials.

Wang, 40, has transformed the soaring nave of Ullens Center for Contemporary Art (UCCA) into a spectacular landscape that is part waterway and part forest. His work is an analysis of both a disappearing past and an uncertain future.

The walls of the nave are papered in blue foil wrappers from Zhongnanhai cigarette boxes (a Beijing cigarette brand); its floors are covered in pieces of corrugated blue metal cut directly from the roof of Wang's own nearby studio. Wang's creation is also inspired by the Hezhe people — a nomadic ethnic group from his native Heilongjiang province. The ethnic group is famous for crafting clothes from fish skin.

The artist will give a talk on his works on July 28 at UCCA Auditorium, in Chinese with English translation.

Until Aug 30. UCCA, 4 Juxianqiao Lu, Chaoyang district, Beijing. 010-5780-0251.

Jilin scenery

Young artist Song Bin from Jilin province is holding a solo show at Wu Dongkui Art Museum in Beijing.

Sponsored by Red Capital Group, Art Celebrity Magazine and the museum, the exhibition presents some 30 ink paintings Song has created over the year. Highlights are his ink representation of Wuhua Mountain and wintry cityscapes in his home province, as well as his vivid depiction of wild geese and swans.

10 am-5 pm, until July 31. Wu Dongkui Art Museum, 1 Donghuashi Dajie, Dongcheng district, Beijing. 010-5100-5500.

Guilin in paper

Since the 1980s, the breathtaking scenery in Guilin in Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region has been an inspiration for landscape artists. Many of the works of artists during that period have been on display at the Guilin Museum.

Now, residents of Guangdong can appreciate the collections at Guangdong Museum of Art until Aug 1. The exhibits fall into four categories including traditional Chinese painting, oil painting, watercolor and print — an interesting experience to see artists depict the beauty of Guilin in diverse styles.

9 am-5 pm, until Aug 1 (closed on Mondays). Hall 6, 8 and 9, Guangdong Museum of Art, 38 Yanyu Lu, Ersha Island, Yuexiu district, Guangzhou. 020-8735-1468.

Creative sculpture

Some artists tend to spend days on refining a sculpture, while Pan He, a Chinese sculptor, is able to quickly mold and cut the clay into a vivid portrait of a person.

Guangdong Museum of Art is displaying 37 Pan's creations, which he completed in 2006 while he was ill. Pan made the sculptures for families and friends who visited him at the hospital.

The sculptor captured the features of people from 28 professions including a policeman, worker, doctor, nurse and dancer.

Many of the pieces are on exhibit for the first time. From the sculptures, visitors will get to share Pan's passion for art and life.



Left: Wang Mai: *Dire Straits*, an exhibition of the multi-media pioneer's work in Beijing. Above: Guangdong Museum of Art displays 37 works by artist Pan He.



Members of the Lyon Children's Choir return to China for a performance at the Forbidden City Concert Hall.

9 am-5 pm, until Aug 1 (closed on Mondays). Hall 7, Guangdong Museum of Art, 38 Yanyu Lu, Ersha Island, Yuexiu District, Guangzhou, Guangdong. 020-8735-1468.

CONCERT

Budding vocalists

Six years ago, Lyon Children's Choir (La Cigale de Lyon) from France won a standing ovation for its widely acclaimed performances across China. The choir is in China again and will perform at the Forbidden City Concert Hall in Beijing on July 29.

It will wow the audience with songs such as *Kite* and *On the Way* from Oscar winning movie *The Choir Boys*. The talented children are also set to sing Michael Jackson's iconic song *Heal the World* and French Chanson *Brussels and Music Box*.

The Lyon Children's Choir was founded in 1947 by Professor Christian Wagner and its members belong to choirs in Lyon, France's third largest city. It has won top honors in international choral competitions in Tours, Debrecen and Lausanne.

2 pm and 7:30 pm, July 29. Forbidden City Concert Hall, inside Zhongshan Park, west of Tiananmen Square, Beijing. 010-6559-8285, 6559-8306.

Voices from Oxford

The Christ Church Cathedral Choir of Oxford University, one of the oldest and most prestigious choirs in the world, will tour China in August, covering Beijing, Guangzhou in Guangdong province and Shenzhen.

The choir was formed almost 500 years ago, at the cathedral, filmed as Hogwarts in *Harry Potter*. It comprises 12 men and 16 boys.

Audience will be treated to a singing journey starting from *Pastime with Good Company* composed by Henry VIII, king of England 500 years ago, to Broadway musical selections and pop soundtracks in movies *Harry Potter* series and *Alice in Wonderland*. After launching the chorus festival at the

National Center for the Performing Arts in Beijing on Aug 2, the choir will stage performances at Xinghai Concert Hall in Guangzhou on Aug 4 and at Shenzhen Concert Hall on Aug 5.

7:30 pm, Aug 2. Concert Hall, National Center for the Performing Arts, 2 West Chang'an Avenue, Xicheng district, Beijing. 010-6655-0000.

Plan B tours China

Plan B has been an important force on Australia's rock bar scene since the early 1980s. Its first album, *Second Time Around*, was promoted strongly by the press, which led to several tours in many cities in Australia.

The band has recorded three albums and in early 2010 and 2011, it carried out two successful tours in Vietnam and Cambodia.

9 pm-11:30 pm, July 31. Yuyintang, 851 Kaixuan Road, Changning district, Shanghai. 021-5237-8662.

Youth and music

The 100 members of the Asian Youth Orchestra (AYO) are among the finest pre-professional musicians with members from China, Japan, Korea, the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. Chosen through highly competitive auditions held throughout the region, they get together for six weeks each summer, initially for a three-week Summer Festival and Rehearsal Camp in Hong Kong, then for a three-week international concert tour with celebrated conductors and solo artists.

7:30 pm, Aug 15. Concert Hall, 425 Dingxiang road, Pudong district, Shanghai. 021-6854-1234.

Italian recital

Born in Naples, Italy, Mariangela Vacatello is an internationally acclaimed concert pianist, who has won many prizes and awards, such as the 2009 Top of the World

International Piano Competition.

She made her debut when she was 14, performing Liszt's *First Piano Concerto* with the Pomeriggi Musicali Orchestra in Milan. Since then, she has appeared as a soloist at the most prestigious venues and festivals worldwide, such as the Berlin Konzerthaus and Wigmore Hall in London.

7:45 pm, July 27. Performance Hall, 425 Dingxiang road, Pudong district, Shanghai. 021-6854-1234.

FESTIVAL

Singing in the breeze

Sea breezes, local cuisine, beer and music — the best way to spend a summer night. To enjoy all that, head down to the annual White Dolphin Music Festival for a three-day party at Guanyinshan Beach in Xiamen, Fujian province from July 27-29.

Besides rock bands like last year's festival, the audience will be able to enjoy music of other genres, including dynamic hip-hop, emotional ballads and sweet pop. Popular singers who are based in Taiwan including Stanley Huang, Penny Tai and Ding Dang will also be attending.

5 pm, Aug 27-29. Guanyinshan Fantasy Beach Resort, Xiamen, Fujian. Take Bus 5, 58, 127 and exit at Guanyinshan Station. 0592-2067-678.

Dalian arts festival

The third Dalian Summer International Arts Festival will be launched on July 27 in Dalian, Liaoning province.

Themed "Sound of Yida", the organizers have lined-up a wide spectrum of performances such as Peking Opera, cross talks, musical drama presented by artists from China and other countries, including Belgium, Croatia, England, and Japan. The festival will run until Aug 12.

Dalian People's Culture Club, 8 Zhongshan Square, Zhongshan district, Dalian. 0411-8263-3797, 8280-5859.

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