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Lee Liheng (left) is the brains behind the Shanghai Expo's City Square Art Festival.

## Interactive arts fest worth the wait

By LI XINZHU  
CHINA DAILY

The Shanghai Expo's City Square Art Festival features over 20 pieces of street theater and gives visitors a way of "releasing the pressure caused by all the long queues," said Lee Liheng, the festival's director.

"As thousands of visitors rush into the Expo Garden everyday, why wouldn't we create a certain form of art performance to stimulate them to interact with us?" he said.

Artists from around the world bring their most creative and humorous performances to eight public squares inside the Expo site each day to keep guests entertained as they wait to access their favorite pavilions.

Lee said that he pays special attention to finding the most suitable venue for each show.

"Street art enhances the interaction between artists and visitors, so it's important to find the right environment and the right people to carry out our work."

Lee gave the examples of his belly dancers, who invite people up on stage with them, and "skin artist" Liu Xiaodong. Liu has become a hit among Expo visitors by painting oil patterns on their bare skin.

Huang Zhongyuan, 21, said he was too shy to approach Liu at first, but eventually plucked up the courage to request he paint his leg.

"You think they won't like it, but in the end most people will surprise you," said Lee, who was born in Taiwan. He describes himself as a stage director devoted to promoting a new art form.

"We have to create a new form, style and content in order to win a place in the world, otherwise our work will always be judged by the existing rules made by others," he said.

"I always insist on maintaining the quality of my work," Lee said. "Quality first, then innovation."

## China's 'Piano Princess' hits just the right note

Wang Yujia teams up again with Milan orchestra to scale new musical heights, **Yu Ran** reports.

**W**ang Yujia, the 23-year-old pianist who local media have dubbed China's "Piano Princess", gave a concert at the Expo Center with Milan's Scala Philharmonic Orchestra earlier this month.

Wang said her second collaboration with the Italian orchestra was a last-minute affair that gave them barely enough time to rehearse.

"I confirmed the performance with them at the last minute and we had one quick rehearsal on the day of the concert," she said. "I was nervous but also excited to play in my homeland."

Huang, who was born in Beijing, began playing at the age of six. Her first public performances took place in China, Australia and Germany. She then went on to study at the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing.

When Wang turned twelve, she went to Canada to join an exchange program for two years with the Morningside Music Bridge at Calgary's Mount Royal College.

"I studied English for the first year, which was hard. However I enjoyed the tough times because I went there alone, and I was happy and free at that age without my parents around," she said.

In 2002, when Wang was 15, she won the Aspen Music Festival's concerto competition. One year later she moved to Philadelphia to study with American classical pianist Gary Graffman at the Curtis Institute of Music.

"I was so lucky to have Gary, who tutored (leading Chinese pianist) Lang Lang, as my teacher," she said. "I learned so many concertos at Curtis and made a lot of progress there."

Wang signed a contract with Deutsche Grammophon, a German recording label for classical music, when she was 16, during her second year at Curtis. This gave her the opportunity to play with leading artists from around the world.

Her debut with the National Arts Center Orchestra, led by Pinchas Zukerman, in 2005 was positively appraised by the Canadian press, who reported that "a star is born".

Since then Wang has performed with many of the world's most prestigious orchestras, and worked with esteemed conductors such as Italy's Claudio Abbado, Switzerland's Charles Dutoit and American Robert Spano.

"When you see them on the cover of the CD, they are like gods, but when I work with them, I realize they are just normal people," said Wang. "They are nice, because they really listen to what I do, especially Dutoit, who tried patiently to adjust to my style."

Wang, who has given recitals in major cities throughout North America and in other countries, is a dedicated performer of chamber music. She makes regular appearances at the Aspen Festival, the Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival and the Gilmore Festival.

Wang has about 100 concerts scheduled each year through 2013 and tries to release one album every year.



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Chinese pianist Wang Yujia gives a concert at the Expo Center earlier this month.

"My third album will be out next year, and I have to play in festivals across Europe and the United States," she said.

Wang's mother, a former ballerina, used to take her to rehearsals when she was young, which she said triggered her love of symphonic music.

"There is a difference between being in love with music, and playing for a better future. If you're interested in it, then emerge yourself in the instrument or the music. If you're not, then do something else," she said.

Next up is a gig in Amsterdam with Holland's Royal Concertgebouw, Europe's leading orchestra.

Wang said she will return to China in March to cooperate with the Shanghai Symphony.

"They have a group of really promising artists my age, and I really enjoyed playing with them last time when they toured New York," she said.