

Reviving a sound from the past

The accordion is gaining popularity again after decades in obscurity, and Chinese students are even winning awards abroad. **Chen Nan reports.**

When Cao Xiaoping started learning the accordion at the age of 5 in 1970, the instrument was very popular in China.

"You can play everything on it, pop songs, folk tunes and chords, and the instrument is portable," says Cao, 52.

Cao's uncle and father were amateur accordion players, who played the instrument at home.

However, in the past decades, other Western instruments, such as the piano, the violin and the cello, have dominated the classical music scene. The accordion has a small following among music learners in China.

So, when the Central Conservatory of Music launched its accordion major in 2004, Cao was invited to take the position as the first director of the accordion department at the school.

"I took the job because I wish to revive the instrument," says Cao, who taught at the Hochschule fuer Musik, Theater und Medien Hannover (Hanover University of Music, Drama and Media) in Germany from 2001 to 2003.

Cao graduated from the Tianjin Conservatory of Music in 1988 and later obtained his PhD from the Hanover University of Music, Drama and Media in 2001.

In May, four of his students stood out among 78 competitors from 22 countries and dominated the 54th Klingenthal International Accordion Competition, which was held



Accordion player Mao Junhao, 20, a junior student at the Central Conservatory of Music, performs concertos with an orchestra at the 54th Klingenthal International Accordion Competition held over May 15-21 in Germany.

from May 15 to 21 in Germany.

"It's the first time in this competition that four first prizes were awarded to students from one country, let alone from the same school," says Cao.

"Ever since the accordion performance major was launched in 2004, we have sent students to the Klingenthal International Accordion Competition. Some of them had won prizes previously, but this year is a milestone for us. It's like a dream come true for me."

The competition, an annual event, attracts accordion players from all over the world. It is open to soloists as well as duos and bands.

One of the winners is Mao Junhao, 20, who is in his third year at the Central Conservatory of Music.

His repertoire at the competition comprised Danish conductor and composer Ole Schmidt's *Toccata No 1*, Italian composer Domenico Scarlatti's *Sonata in f minor* and Russian composer Eferm Podgait's *Chamber No 1 for Bayan and Chamber Orchestra*.

The winners in each category also performed at the Berliner Philharmonie after the competition. They recorded an album, in which Mao performed Finnish composer



Mao with his professor Cao Xiaoping (right) after winning the first place in May in Germany. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Paavo Korpijaakko's third movement of *Sonata No 1, Ultra*.

"I was the second to perform in the final round, and after my performance, I returned to my room which is near the competition venue. About three hours later, I was told that I had won," says Mao, who bagged the first prize at the contest in 2013. In May, he won the first prize again in the competition.

"I was excited about the

prize but I also felt the pressure. The next time when I compete or perform, the audience expectation will be high."

Mao, who was born and raised in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, started learning the accordion at the age of 6 after a relative gave him the instrument.

The young man, who learned the instrument faster than his peers, says he never felt bored practicing.

He enrolled to study at the

middle school affiliated to the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing in 2010 under Cao.

Mao is also majoring in composing. Besides classical music, he is also interested in electronic music.

In 2012, he released his debut album, *Song for Seasons*, which comprises his accordion works. His own composition, called *Children Suite: Song for Seasons*, was also included in the album.

Meanwhile, Mao will pursue his master's degree at the Central Conservatory of Music after obtaining his bachelor's degree. In November, he will do two recitals in Serbia, and in early 2018, he will do one in the Czech Republic.

Cao says that the Klingenthal event's significance among accordion players is like that of the International Frederick Chopin Piano Competition among pianists, which takes place in Poland's capital, Warsaw, every year.

"With their awards, these young musicians will have more opportunities to perform abroad. Their success will encourage more young Chinese to learn about the accordion," says Cao.

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Fudan offers more choices to undergraduates

By **CAO CHEN** in Shanghai
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From this academic year, Fudan University in Shanghai is offering more choices for undergraduate students.

The Upgrade Plan 2020 for Undergraduate Education offers a fusion of courses.

For instance, the 2+X education system in the plan offers undergraduates an opportunity to widen their basic general knowledge in the first two years.

In the third year, students can have more options, or even change their major subjects according to their interest and ability.

The college aims to help undergraduate students, so they can take the more challenging honors courses, which feature cutting-edge research and need more effort.

Honors students who achieve high grades will be given certificates, scholarships and prizes.

According to the plan, by 2020, all schools at Fudan University are to offer honors programs, though it is on trial only in few schools at present.

"The plan offers more choices to students. We are changing from teaching-oriented to learning-oriented education," says Jiao Yang, the Party chief of Fudan University.

Fudan University began working on education reform in 2015, but the plan was officially introduced in this academic year.

Speaking about the plan, Xu Ningsheng, the president of Fudan University, says: "Universities that offer excellent undergraduate courses will be regarded as top institutions."

Liu Weitao, a professor from the School of Physics at the university who teaches the honors courses, says she is amazed by the undergraduates' performance.

"I teach freshmen the basics of electromagnetism. But students in the honors class discuss quantum mechanics and even general relativity."

“The plan offers more choices to students. We are changing from teaching-oriented to learning-oriented education.”

Jiao Yang, Party chief of Fudan University

"Students (in the honors courses) learn not only for academic credits, but also out of interest. They regard the honors courses as a way to broaden their horizon. Some even think that the classes are not long enough," she says.

Hu Qiong, a sophomore majoring in physics, says that she has developed research skills with the honors course.

For instance, for her report on energy transformation, she bought a drinking bird online, a perpetual motion device, and explored its velocity under different environmental conditions.

"That report received compliments from my lecturer, which made me feel proud. I expect to do further scientific research on the subject," says Hu.

Hu hopes that lecturers raise more research-worthy questions in the class for discussion.

"Instead of reading existing literature on a problem which has already been solved, I am more than willing to deal with new issues that need independent thinking. It is really critical in science," she adds.

However, Liu says that interactivity in class is not enough.

"Not all students like to express their opinion or ask questions, which means I need to try other teaching methods to motivate students to interact," she says.

Taiwan companies offer internships in Dongguan

By **LI WENFANG**

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Fifteen Taiwan companies in Dongguan, Guangdong province, are offering 128 internship positions to students from eight Taiwan universities to allow them to gain knowledge of business operations.

The students will spend nine months starting September at the companies in the program jointly organized by Dongguan University of Technology, the Humen branch of the Taiwan Businessmen Association Dongguan and eight Taiwan universities, including the Tai-

wan University of Science and Technology, and the Taipei University of Technology.

The program is much longer than previous internships in Dongguan offered to Taiwan students by other organizations, which mostly covered two months in the summer vacation, says Chen Wei, the dean of the Guangdong-Taiwan College of Industrial Science and Technology, of the Dongguan University of Technology.

It will allow the students to gain more knowledge of the mainland and get accustomed to the local environment, he says.

Hu Chien-min, the secretary-general of the Taiwan Business-

27,173 companies
in Guangdong province are Taiwan-invested as of March.

men Association Dongguan's Humen branch, sees significant demand from Taiwan students for the internship, adding that the internship program may have to be extended next year.

The Taiwan companies also need "fresh blood" who are accustomed to Taiwan-style management, he says.

The members of the Humen branch comprise more than 260 companies, and they are engaged in manufacturing of garments, machinery, electronics and cables.

Taiwan companies in Dongguan numbered 3,447 at the end of last year, according to the city's commerce bureau.

Meanwhile, the number of Taiwan companies in Guangdong stood at 27,173 as of March, and involved \$63.46 billion in investment from Taiwan.

Trade between Guangdong and Taiwan accounted for about one-third of all cross-Straits trade, according to the provincial Taiwan affairs office.

Students in the internship program in Dongguan will be paid a monthly salary of 5,000 yuan (\$735), with free food and accommodation, for positions at companies mainly producing electronics and home appliances, says Hu.

The academic credits gained from the internship in Dongguan will be recognized by their universities and the Taiwan education authorities, says Chen.

The Dongguan University of Technology will tutor Taiwan students taking the internship as its Guangdong-Taiwan College of Industrial Science and Technology has about a dozen teachers from Taiwan.



Fudan University releases its Upgrade Plan 2020 for Undergraduate Education in June to offer a colorful fusion of courses for students. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

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