

MINNESOTA  ORCHESTRA



YOUNG PEOPLE'S CONCERT CURRICULUM:

LUNAR NEW YEAR WITH THE MINNESOTA ORCHESTRA

Learning Asian Cultures Through Music

GRADES 1-6 | BY GAO HONG



About Lunar New Year

When is Lunar New Year Celebrated?

The Lunar New Year doesn't occur on January 1 each year like in western countries. The lunar calendar is based on cycles of the moon, so the dates of lunar new years vary slightly from year to year—between January 21 and February 20 on the Gregorian calendar (the calendar most of the world uses).

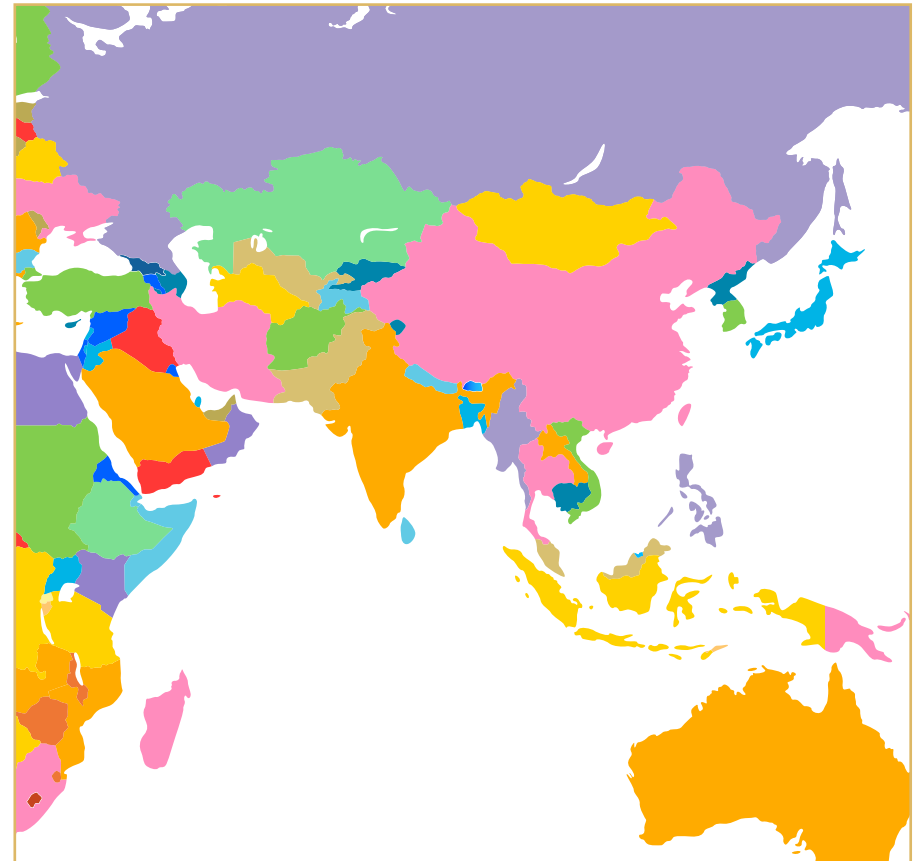
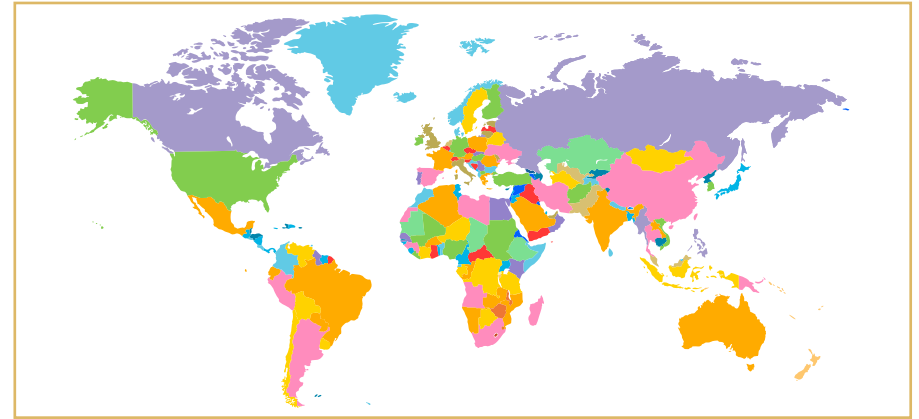
Who Celebrates Lunar New Year?

Many Asian countries celebrate Lunar New Year, which is also known as the Spring Festival: Chinese call it Chunjie 春節; Vietnamese, Tết Nguyên Đán (Hán-Nôm: 節元旦); Korean, Seollal (음력 설날); Tibetan, Losar (ལོ་སྐྱེད་ཀྱི་འཇམ་ལོ་སྐྱེད་), and more.

Activities

- Locate Asia on a world map.
- Locate China, Korea, Vietnam and Tibet on a map of Asia.
- Identify four countries that share borders with China.
- Find out on which dates Lunar New Year did or will occur according to the Gregorian calendar in 2021, 2022 and 2023.

(Answers: February 12, 2021; February 1st, 2022; January 22, 2023)



Spring Festival Overture by Li Huanzhi (李焕之)



Spring Festival Overture is the most famous composition by Chinese composer Li Huanzhi 李焕之 (1919–2000). The music is so beloved that it was among a small number of musical works that were launched into space in 2007 on China's first lunar probe, Chang'e 1 嫦娥一號. This overture is the first and best-known movement of Li's four-part Spring Festival Suite that he composed in 1955 and 1956. It depicts a scene from the Shanbei 陝北 region where revelers celebrate the Lunar New Year (also known as the Spring Festival). The themes were derived from Shanbei 陝北 region's folk music. In the overture we hear sounds reminiscent of fireworks and parades. We also hear a gentler, inner passage that is based on a traditional melody which conveys greetings for the New Year as well as prayers for peace and good fortune.

Listen to the Music

- Can you hear sounds that are meant to sound like fireworks?

It is common for composers to use percussion instruments to imitate sounds of fireworks, thunder, and exciting events.

- Which part of this piece depicts parades?

When people in China celebrate New Year, they go to parades wearing red ribbons and small drums on their waists as they dance to fast rhythms. The composer, Li Huanzhi, uses a northern style of folk song, Da Yang Ge 大秧歌, to portray the excitement of parades. Watch a short segment of a [parade](#).



Arirang Fantasy by Choi Sunghwan



The Korean folk song *Arirang*, an expression of nostalgia in the face of separation, is popular throughout the divided peninsula, serving as an unofficial national anthem. It is heard at this concert in a version written in the 1970s by North Korean composer Choi Sunghwan that was notably performed by the New York Philharmonic on its 2008 tour to North Korea and South Korea. Featuring lush Romantic harmonies and key solo moments for harp and flute, *Arirang Fantasy* opens with the lyrical *Arirang* melody, which is varied freely in the opening section, gradually increasing in speed. After a plaintive digression into minor harmonies, the music returns to a happier major key, grows faster and triumphant, then dials back to a slow, calm close.

Listen to the Music

- Can you identify the music's time signature?

Time signatures consist of two elements: a top number and a bottom number. The top number tells us the number of beats in each measure. The bottom number tells us what note values those beats have. For example, if the bottom number is a 4, it means the beats are quarter notes (four quarter notes in a measure).

There are $\frac{2}{2}$, $\frac{3}{4}$, and $\frac{4}{4}$ time signatures in Korean music.

Because Korean people love to dance, many of their folk songs are in $\frac{3}{4}$ time just as waltz music is in western music.

- What is Folk Music?

Folk songs are about everyday life sung by everyday people. Folk music often reflects the cultural traditions and values of a particular time, period, or place. Folk music is often passed down from generation to generation, and is often learned and taught orally from person to person.

Activities

- Do you know a folk song?
- Have you heard any other styles of music by Korean artists?

Korea is a vibrant environment for contemporary music, and produces a wide array of styles. Their music, though often electronic pop, hip-hop and/or R&B in essence, is generally grouped under a genre called K-Pop. BTS is currently one of the most popular K-Pop groups.

Learning About Korean Music: Korean Traditional Musical Instruments



String Instruments

Traditional Korean string instruments are made of paulownia wood and some other materials. They are categorized by playing techniques used to produce the sounds, such as plucking, pulling, or hitting. Here are a few examples:

[Gayageum >>](#)

The gayageum makes sounds when the strings are plucked or strummed. The soundboard, which is made of paulownia wood, has twelve movable bridges that support twisted silk strings. Different types of gayageum are used for specific styles of music. Pungnyu gayageum are used in literati music, sanjo gayageum for folk music, and the modified gayageum for modern music. Gayageum come in various sizes with differing numbers of strings, and are built using different materials.

[Haegeum >>](#)

The haegeum has a rodlike neck, a hollow wooden sound box, and two silk strings. It is held vertically on the performer's knee.

[Ajaeng >>](#)

The ajaeng is a bass zither that has seven or eight strings made of twisted silk, and is played by means of a bow made of forsythia wood or horsehair. The larger one has seven strings, called a daeajaeng, and is used for court orchestral music, while the smaller soajaeng has eight strings and is used for folk music or solo performances.

Activity

- Can you identify any other string instruments that are similar to one of these Korean instruments?

Learning About Korean Music: Korean Traditional Musical Instruments



Wind Instruments

Most Korean wind instruments are made of bamboo. They are classified differently based on the musicians' posture and the direction the instruments are facing when played. Some are vertical instruments, while others are transverse flutes.

[Piri >>](#)

The piri is a Korean double-reed instrument made of bamboo. Sound is made when air is blown into the bamboo cylinder pipe through the thin bamboo reed.

[Daegeum >>](#)

The daegeum is a long bamboo transverse flute used in traditional, folk and contemporary Korean music. It has a membrane that produces a unique buzzing sound.

[Saenghwang >>](#)

The is a free-reed mouth organ with an air chamber made of dried gourd.

Activity

- Can you identify any wind instruments that are similar to one of these Korean wind instruments?

Learning About Korean Music: Korean Traditional Musical Instruments



Percussion

Korean percussion instruments are made of metal, animal skin, wood, bamboo, and stone. They are divided into two categories—pitched and unpitched.

[Janggu >>](#)

The janggu is an hourglass-shaped drum with a wooden body and two heads made of animal skin. The janggu is used in court or classical music where it is played with one stick and one hand. Two sticks are used for folk music and janggu dance music, and each head produces a different pitch and timbre.

[Jwago](#)

The jwago is a drum hung on a wooden frame. The musician always plays it while sitting on the floor. It is used in ensembles to cue the first beat or to intensify the sound of the janggu.

[Pyeonjong](#)

The pyeonjong consists of sixteen bronze bells hung on a wooden frame, and it is played with a stick made of cow horn. Each bell has a different pitch. The thicker the bell, the higher the pitch.



Activity

- Can you identify any percussion instruments that are similar to one of these Korean percussion instruments?

The Butterfly Lovers Violin Concerto by Chen Gang/He Zhanhao



The Butterfly Lovers Violin Concerto is a rarity among well-known orchestral concertos in that it is credited jointly to two composers—Chen Gang (b. 1935) and He Zhanhao (b. 1933). They collaborated on its composition in 1959 while they were both students at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music. Cast in one long movement and subdivided into seven sections, the concerto is a musical representation of the Chinese legend of the Butterfly Lovers. The solo violin represents the protagonist Zhu Yingtai, and the cello part portrays her lover, Liang Shanbo. Chen was responsible for the majority of the concerto's scoring, while He's primary contribution was the work's well-known opening theme.

The Butterfly Lovers Violin Concerto is scored for solo violin and a standard-sized Western orchestra. It utilizes a variety of traditional Chinese techniques and styles to create a sound world suitable for its story. Among them are the use of a pentatonic scale—based on five pitches rather than the seven pitches of a major or minor scale. A variety of melodies from Chinese folk songs and from a well-known Chinese opera version of the Butterfly Lovers story are also used. In the concerto we follow Zhu and Liang as they meet in childhood, attend school and fall in love. The tale turns tragic as Zhu is betrothed to another man. Liang becomes ill and dies, and Zhu throws herself into Liang's grave. In the very end, the lovers are transformed into butterflies.

The Butterfly Lovers received its first performance in 1959 in celebration of the 10th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China. It was little-known until the late 1970s, but has since become one of China's most famous contributions to standard orchestral repertoire. It is now heard often in concert halls around the world. It is also often used in figure skating routines, most notably serving as background music for Chen Lu's free skate performance at the 1998 Winter Olympics in Nagano, Japan, where Chen Lu became the first Chinese athlete to win a medal in figure skating.

Listen to the Music

- Can you identify the happy music when Zhu and Liang are together? Can you identify the dark and scary music when they are separated?

Chinese music almost always tells a story. There are many pieces where you can follow the storyline while listening to the music. It could be a story of an ancient battle (Mulan), or a more light-hearted story like *Mother-in-Law Arguing with Daughter-in-Law*.

- What makes Chinese melodies so beautiful?

Chinese folk songs are mostly based on five-tone pentatonic scales. A pentatonic scale on the piano can easily be found by playing only on the black keys. Chinese music is based on the sounds of different dialects of the language. Melody is the most important element of the music. Many people describe Chinese music as sounding like intertwining butterflies.



In the Dark Night for Jing Hu and Orchestra by Wu Hua



For *In the Dark Night* 夜深沉 by Chinese composer Wu Hua (1943-2020), the Minnesota Orchestra welcomes jing hu master, Mr. Zhengang Xie, and yue qin master, Ms. Mei Hu, a husband-and-wife team who are the parents of the Orchestra's Principal Bassoonist, Fei Xie. Wu's composition, heard here in an orchestration by Ma Jun and Han Guang, has its origins in a famous melody from the Peking Opera and showcases the jing hu—a two-stringed bowed instrument—and the yue qin—a four-stringed lute with a distinctive round, hollow wooden body. These performances come two years after the passing of Wu, who conducted China's National Song and Dance Troupe. Wu composed or arranged over 4,000 works and was a highly-regarded scholar and practitioner of conducting, composition, and musical instruments.

In the Dark Night comes from a suite by Wu that describes the ill-fated story of Xiang Yu, a rebel leader during the fall of the Qin Dynasty (221-206 B.C.), and his concubine, Yuji. The music begins with a low-pitched flute solo and continues with a Chinese drum passage, over which the orchestra crescendos and stops, leading to the entrance of the jing hu. The featured instrument plays continuously in free-flowing melodies for the rest of the piece, through varying textures, tempos and time signatures until the final measures, marked *fff*, with trills and tremolos abounding.

Listen to the Music

- Listen to the musical textures.

Texture is the way harmonies, melodies, rhythms, and timbres are combined. Four common texture types are:

monophonic, solo voice

polyphonic, two or more voices with independent melodies

homophonic, multiple voices supporting a main voice (think of a choir singing)

heterophonic, multiple voices performing the same melody at the same time with slight variations

- Listen the jinghu's high-pitched sounds. Can you notice any physical differences between the jinghu and the violin? How do these differences affect the sound? What is similar and what is different?

Hint: the jinghu's soundbox is made of snake skin

Activities

- Can you identify one of the Chinese instruments that is similar to a Korean instrument?
- Do you know how old Chinese music history is?
(Chinese music is about 5000 years old)
- Which instrument do you like the most? Why?
- If you picked one instrument to play, which one would it be?

Learning About Chinese Traditional Instruments: Plucked Strings (弹拨乐)



[Pipa >>](#)



[Yangqin >>](#)



[Guqin >>](#)



[Ruan >>](#)



[Yueqin >>](#)



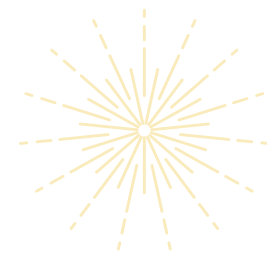
[Liuguqin >>](#)



[Zheng >>](#)



[Sanxian >>](#)



Learning About Chinese Traditional Instruments: Bowed Strings (弦乐)



[Jinghu >>](#)



[Erhu >>](#)



[Banhu >>](#)



[Gaoju >>](#)



[Zhonghu >>](#)



Learning About Chinese Traditional Instruments: Wind (吹管乐)



[Dizi >>](#)



[Suona >>](#)



[Hulusi >>](#)



[Sheng >>](#)



[Xiao >>](#)



[Xun >>](#)

Learning About Chinese Traditional Instruments: Percussion (打击乐)



Chinese use percussion instruments in celebrations and joyful ceremonies such as weddings and harvest festivals. Percussion instruments have also been used in war and military conflicts, and in solemn commemorations.

Drum(s)

Gong(s)

Bells

Cymbals

Wooden Fish

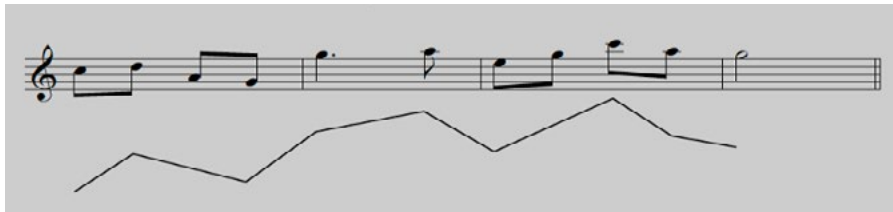
How Do Geography and Language Affect Music?

Geography, Dialects and Lifestyles in Chinese Music

Chinese melodies are strongly influenced by dialects; dialects in turn are influenced by geography, and peoples' personalities, cultures, and lifestyles.

Northern Music Style: In northern China, you may find many mountains and open fields. When people talk, their voices are loud and bright due to the hardships of their lives and their open personalities. Loud voices and shouting are also necessary for communicating in the mountains and open fields. That's why most northern-style instruments are high-pitched, such as the *Banhu* (a bowed string instrument with a coconut resonator), *Jinghu* (a bowed fiddle used in Peking Opera), *Suona* (an oboe-like wind instrument) and others. Like the tonal inflections of northern dialects, the melodies contain large skips from note to note. If you were to draw the melodies, you would clearly see the shapes of mountains. Northern music is always exciting and dramatic, describing the happiness and hardships of the lives of people.

Melodic lines in northern music resemble the shapes of mountains:



Southern Music Style: In southern China, there are many beautiful rivers and dense populations. People need to lower their voices, and their dialects have more syllables and tones making their speech smoother. Like these dialects, southern-style instruments are much quieter. The melodic twists and turns occur within a small range and resemble casual conversation. Here you won't find the large melodic skips of northern melodies. If you were to draw southern melodies graphically, the lines would resemble the meandering rivers. Due to the beautiful landscapes, unique cultures and exquisite lifestyles of the southern people, the music resembles Chinese landscape paintings and is full of pleasant, flowing elegance and beauty.

Melodic lines in southern music resemble the shapes of rivers:



Activities

- Learn the differences between northern and southern Chinese music.
- Learn how the differences are influenced by geography and the personalities of the people.

Ethnic Groups in China

The People's Republic of China (PRC) has 1.4 billion people.

China officially recognizes 55 ethnic minority groups within China in addition to the Han majority.

Each of the minority groups has its own distinct culture and customs. The Xizang Province (Tibet) and Xinjiang Province have more minority people than Han people. The Uygur people mainly live in the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region in northwestern China. They practice Islam, and have their own music, dance, and customs. Yunnan Province has 21 minority groups, including Yi, Miao (Hmong), Yao, Dai, Bai, etc. They are versatile people who have many achievements in music. They practice Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, Taoism, Polytheism, and other religions.

Activities

After learning about Chinese music styles:

- Can you tell me if the music for *In the Dark Night* for Jing Hu and Orchestra is from northern or southern China?
- What piano keys can you use to easily compose a Chinese style melody? (use only the black keys as this will produce a pentatonic scale)
- Based on the Peking Opera Face Painting, can you draw a face mask to describe your emotions?

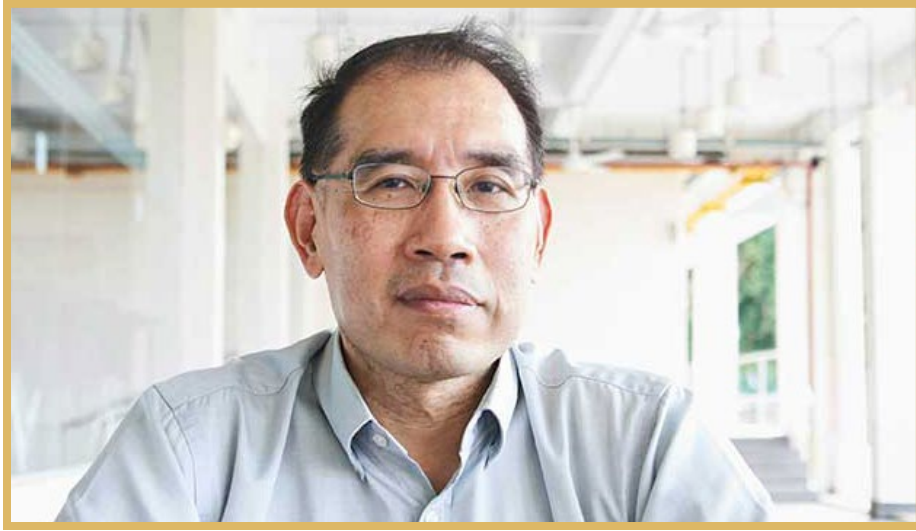
Peking Opera Facial Makeup: The Art of Face Painting

In many genres (such as Peking opera and Cantonese opera), a singer's role requires heavy face painting. This is known as Hualian 花脸 ("Painted face").

Peking Opera is an extraordinary cultural treasure of China. It is full of energy, skill, and musical tradition. The key to appreciating Peking Opera lies in understanding the patterns of the opera's facial makeup—representing noble and brave characters like Zhang Fei and Guan Yu from the Three Kingdoms, fictitious figures like Monkey King from *Journey to the West*, shady figures like Cao Cao from the Three Kingdoms, and so on.



Sketches of Singapore by Kelly Tang



Contemporary Singaporean composer Kelly Tang (b. 1961) wrote the colorful *Sketches of Singapore* in 2008 on a commission from the Singapore Symphony Orchestra. His catalog includes more than 60 compositions in genres ranging from classical and jazz to symphonic and popular music. His music is performed regularly by leading orchestras and bands around the world, and by many student groups. The score for *Sketches of Singapore* bears the following program note:

"*Sketches of Singapore* utilizes the broad musical palette of the symphony orchestra to unlock expressive possibilities lying latent within four popular Singaporean melodies. The simple elegance of these tunes provides the ideal foundation upon which to weave elaborate textural layers, lively rhythmic elaborations, colorful tonal shading and flavorful harmonic tapestries. The development and transformation of fragments derived from these tunes generates fresh dramatic dimensions that unfold upon a symphonic canvas... The work begins with the triumphant energy of *Stand Up for Singapore*. Next, the folk tune *Rasa Sayang* is presented in the comic style of a scherzo. Cast in a passionate yet elegant orchestral glow, the deep Romantic essence of the third tune, *Where I Belong*, is fully unveiled. In the grand finale, the venerable *Di Tanjong Katong* is symphonically expanded to radiate all of its innate glory."

Learning About Singapore

Singapore is both a country and a city. Singapore has four official languages: English, Malay, Chinese and Tamil. Singapore is a multi-ethnic country that brings together people of different races from all over the world. In addition to the four main races of Chinese, Malays, Indians and Eurasians, there are other ethnic minorities. It is known as the "World Ethnographic Exhibition Hall."

Listen to the Music

- How many folk songs do you hear in this piece?
(There are four popular folk songs)
- Are these folk songs from the same style of music?
(All are in different styles)
- What do you imagine when you hear this music?

Give the students the freedom of imagination and encourage them to express what they imagined. There are no right or wrong answers.



Circle of Unity by Trinh Cong Son/arr. Jaakko Kuusisto



This concert features Finnish composer Jaakko Kuusisto's new arrangement of *Circle of Unity* by Vietnamese composer, performer and artist Trinh Cong Son (1939-2001). In the conductor's score, Kuusisto (b. 1974) notes that his arrangement is based on the version by Vietnamese musician Hô Quang Hiêu. Kuusisto's arrangement is energetic and fast-paced, with special effects including muted brass, strings sliding from one pitch to the next, shouting from the musicians, and the direction for a percussionist to imitate the sound of a high-frequency EDM-style snare.

Son, one of the great figures in 20th-century Vietnamese music and art, wrote more than 500 songs and poems, many relating to love and the hope for a peaceful Vietnam. *Circle of Unity* dates to 1968, in the midst of the Vietnam War, with lyrics outlining the dream of national reconciliation between North and South Vietnam. In April 1975, as the war was coming to an end, Son accepted an invitation to perform *Circle of Unity* on a radio broadcast from Saigon, urging all Vietnamese people to join hands and unite. Although he sometimes ran afoul of the government—at one point he was sent to a labor camp for retraining—Son continued to attain popularity with postwar songs about reconciliation. Upon his death in 2001, large crowds turned out for his funeral and a spontaneous concert of his music.

Listen to the Music

- Listen to the trumpet, horns and trombones and what they use to quiet their sound while playing.
Mutes placed in the bells of brass instruments make the sounds softer.
- Listen to the techniques the violin, viola, cello and bass use to create unique sound effects.
The string instruments are sliding from one pitch to the next. This technique is called glissando.
- Listen as the musicians shout to imitate sounds percussion instruments might create.



Vietnamese Traditional Musical Instruments



Most of the traditional Vietnamese musical instruments are string, wind, and percussion instruments. They are made of natural materials like wood, bamboo, stones, ivory and animal skins.

Vietnamese Wind Instruments:

Sao Truc (a simple flute made from the very bottom of a bamboo tree with a single mouth piece and 10 fingering holes)

Ken Bau (a double-reed wind instrument used in traditional Vietnamese music similar in construction to the Chinese souna and the Korean taepyeongso)

Vietnamese String Instruments:

Dan Nhi (Vietnamese Two-string Fiddle)

Dan Ty Ba (Four-string Guitar)

Vietnamese Percussion Musical Instruments:

Dan Da (Lithophone played by ethnic minority groups in Vietnam's Central Highlands)

Dan Tranh is a traditional Vietnamese 16-string zither

Dan Bau is a Vietnamese one-stringed instrument also known as a gourd zither.

Activities

- Identify the differences between the traditional Vietnamese zither, [Dan Tranh](#), and the Chinese [Zheng](#).
- Use a traditional five-tone pentatonic scale to compose a melody that sounds like it is from Asia.
- After learning about Asian music from different countries, what do you like the most about the music?
- Can you find the right animals for the year you were born?
In the lunar calendar there are different animals that represent each of 12 years in the cycle. Here are the [12 animals for each year](#).



