

AROUND TOWN

FRIDAY, APRIL 17, 2009

PAGE 13

Musical encounters

of a non-traditional kind

The Taipei Traditional Arts Festival continues with two concerts this weekend. Tomorrow's show features an unusual pairing of a French saxophone quartet and a traditional Chinese orchestra, while Sunday's features music from the Silk Road

BY DAVID CHEN
STAFF REPORTER

Saxophones, *suona* (嗩吶) and music from the Silk Road — audiences will hear these sounds converse and blend in collaborative performances tomorrow and Sunday that are part of the 2009 Taipei Traditional Arts Festival (2009 臺北市傳統藝術季).

The festival, which started in February and runs until June, includes over 20 performances by the Taipei Chinese Orchestra (臺北市立國樂團).

The main theme of the festival is to push the boundaries of Chinese music; the program features collaborations with artists from outside the orchestra's traditional realm. Guests range from a contemporary theater group to an Indian master of the sarod, a type of lute.

Tomorrow's show, part of the festival's Silk Road Series, features French saxophone quartet Diastema, whose members are conservatory teachers and composers that have been playing chamber music since 1986.

The quartet, which arrived earlier this week for rehearsals, will perform six songs with the orchestra, including a piece written especially for Diastema by the orchestra's director and composer, Chung Yiu-kwong (鍾耀光).

Amy Chang (張佳韻), who conducts the 48-piece orchestra tomorrow, said the concert will be full of the "unexpected."

She says one highlight of the show will be a cultural exchange of sorts. Before performing Wang Gaolin's (王高林) *Drinking Song* (喜酒歌), the musicians will begin with an onstage toast: the French musicians will drink red wine and the Chinese musicians will drink Kaoliang and demonstrate a Chinese drinking game.

The onstage theatrics will be followed by a musical "dialogue" between the saxophones and the orchestra's *suona*, trumpet-like instruments common in traditional Chinese music.

Suonas and saxophones will be the prominent voices of the evening, with concertos arranged for each instrument.

But the introduction of new sounds to the Chinese music context is what will likely keep audiences engaged. The show's title, *The French Touch*, refers to the saxophone, a French invention.

"In a way it does fit and in a way it doesn't fit," said Chang. But that is what is novel and fun about the performance, the conductor said.

Fun is also one part of Diastema's approach to performance. The group enlivens its onstage presence by moving around and not using music stands, according to Diastema's tenor saxophonist Damien Royannaif.

And while purists might scoff at the mixing of Western and Chinese instruments, Diastema is accustomed to taking on the unconventional.

When the group formed, very few saxophone groups played chamber music, said Royannaif, so the members set out to transcribe string quartet music for the alto, tenor, soprano and baritone saxophones.

The group earned renown and praise for its refreshing interpretations of chamber music, and continues to expand the saxophone's repertoire by arranging and performing both classical and modern music. Its recent projects include an album of music from the Spanish-speaking world, including the songs of tango composer Astor Piazzolla.

"It's quite interesting, the saxophone, because it's a modern instrument [having been invented] in 1846," said Royannaif. "Therefore, we have the feeling [that] everything is possible for us."

But beyond the technical aspects, the group says it simply enjoys the opportunity to work with the Taipei Chinese Orchestra. "What is great is to share different music with different cultures," said Royannaif.

Taking to the stage on Sunday are Shao Ensemble (韶現代樂團) and Aashti Ensemble (汎絲路樂團), both Taipei-based groups composed of musicians from Taiwan, Macedonia, Japan and France.

Members perform on a wide variety of instruments ranging from the saxophone and violin to the sitar and tabla, as well as traditional Chinese instruments like the *erhu* (二胡) and *guzheng* (古筝).

Under the concert's Silk Road theme, the groups will perform traditional music from Turkey, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Iran, Xinjiang and India.



Top: Aashti Ensemble plays music from the Silk Road on Sunday.

Left: Conductor Amy Chang presides over tomorrow's performance at Zhongshan Hall.

Below: Diastema, a quartet of saxophonists that play chamber music, appear tomorrow with the Taipei Chinese Orchestra at Zhongshan Hall.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF TAIPEI CHINESE ORCHESTRA

PERFORMANCE NOTES:

WHAT: Two concerts as part of the Taipei Traditional Arts Festival (2009 臺北市傳統藝術季). The Taipei Chinese Orchestra with French saxophone quartet Diastema; Shao Ensemble (韶現代樂團) and Aashti Ensemble (汎絲路樂團)

WHEN: Tomorrow at 7:30pm and Sunday at 7:30pm

WHERE: Zhongshan Hall (台北市中山堂), 98 Yenping S Rd, Taipei City (台北市延平南路98號). Tonight's show is in the Zhongzheng Auditorium (中正廳); tomorrow's show is in the Guangfu Auditorium (光復廳)

ON THE NET: www.tcomusic.tw. A PDF file of the entire program of the Taipei Traditional Arts Festival from www.tco.taipei.gov.tw/cgi-bin/SM_theme?page=457fb0bd

TICKETS: Tickets are NT\$200 to NT\$1,000 for tomorrow's show and NT\$300 for Sunday's, available at the door, through NTCH ticketing or online at www.artsticket.com.tw

