

Rekindling the Torch:

Report on the 29th International Society for Music Education (ISME) World Conference Beijing, China, August 2010

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When the city of Beijing in 2008 invited the world community of music educators to assemble in the Olympic compound for the 2010 World Conference of the International Society for Music Education we were again forcefully reminded that arts competitions had been part and parcel of the program for the Olympic games in antiquity. It seemed to many delegates that choosing the China National Convention Center located right in the heart of the Olympic city as the conference venue two years after the Beijing games was a symbolic act of rekindling the torch and passing it on to the community of devoted music educators, which will in two years, again assemble in the Olympic heartland of Greece.

And so it was that a capacity audience of an estimated 7000 music educators and performers from around the world filled the Plenary Hall of the CNCC on Sunday Aug. 1st for the opening concert honoring the conference motto “Harmony and the World Future”. The organizing hosts took us on a breathtaking musical journey along the Silk Road portrayed by music and dance ensembles from China, Mongolia, Kyrgyzstan and India. Through the impressive performances, not least by the Uyghur Xinjang Muqam Art Group, the King Kong Dancing Team, and the Tongtianhe Folk Art Group of Chengduo County in the Yushu Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Qinghai Province, the message got across that harmony in our world’s future must be built on the respect for cultural diversity. And moreover the music community here in China as in many other countries, leads the way and sets an example for other sectors to follow.

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This was the start of a four day program packed with paper presentations, workshops, demonstrations, symposia and round tables, and not least an impressive array of concerts.

The big strides made by China in the field of music education was demonstrated by the large attendance of music educators from all regions of the Republic, an impressive exposition of music literature and instruments, and not least the high standards of music performances in all genres demonstrated by the Chinese ensembles.

A special concert was devoted to a performance of the court music traditions of the Tang dynasty recognized by the UN Intangible Cultural Heritage Project that was re-constructed and restored in a unique cooperative undertaking with Taiwanese musicologists.

So in this last year of the United Nations Decade for A Culture of Peace, the torch has been re-lighted and will be carried on to the next ISME World Conference in Thessaloniki, 2012 by an international community of engaged and devoted music educators convinced of the power of music to uplift, inspire, and pave the way for a more peaceful future.