

EASY HARMONY

Musicians from China and the UK relish the chance to share a stage — and an Olympic moment, **Mu Qian** finds in London.

When the torch of the Olympic Games passes from Beijing to London, a musical bond between the two cities is also celebrated.

The Beijing Symphony Orchestra and London Philharmonic Orchestra's joint concert received standing ovation in the Royal Festival Hall of London on Sunday, after a magnificent performance of Beethoven's *Symphony No. 9*.

The London Philharmonic Choir and vocalists from China and UK — Ning Liang, Rebecca Evans, Andrew Kennedy and Matthew Rose — joined the performance, which concluded Beijing Culture Week in London.

In contrast with the Beethoven symphony were two Chinese works in the first half: Tang Jianping's *Sacred Fire 2008 — Concerto for Percussion and Orchestra*, dedicated to the Beijing Olympic Games, and Guo Wenjing's *Overture 'Lotus'*, dedicated to the London Olympic Games.

"In numerous Chinese poems, songs and essays, the lotus is a symbol of friendship, as well as a messenger," Guo writes in the program note. "This overture is a message of best wishes to the London 2012 Olympic Games from the Beijing Symphony Orchestra and myself, and it is for this reason that I have named my piece of music after the sacred, auspicious lotus."

The work opens with one violinist playing solo and then more violinists joining in one by one, symbolizing the petals of lotus flower as it opens. It also features different musical scales, including those from China and Southeast Asia.

"I love the fact that *Lotus* is not a purely traditional Chinese piece but is written in modern style with a Chinese flavor. It's a beautiful marriage between Western and Eastern music," says Pieter Schoeman, concertmaster of London Philharmonic Orchestra. "The percussion concerto is also very impressive. I think it's a wonderful first half."

Sacred Fire 2008 featured Chinese percussionist Li Biao, who premiered the work with the Beijing Symphony Orchestra in 2008.

"Of course the two orchestras have their own different styles of playing, but the more we rehearse, the more homogenous we feel," Schoeman says.

"That's what music is all about, playing with other people and being flexible and adapting."

London Philharmonic Orchestra was one of the first Western orchestras to visit China, making its first of many China tours in 1973.

The two orchestras are also linked because the Beijing Symphony



Musicians from Beijing Symphony Orchestra rehearse with primary school students of London.

PHOTOS BY MU QIAN / CHINA DAILY



Under the baton of Tan Lihua, Beijing Symphony Orchestra and London Philharmonic Orchestra perform together a gala concert in London in celebration of the 2012 Olympic Games.

Orchestra recorded the Games anthems and national anthems for the 2008 Olympic Games, and the London Philharmonic Orchestra did

the same job for the 2012 Olympic Games.

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PRINCIPAL CONDUCTOR OF BEIJING SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Chinese works through rehearsing and playing with us, and we also get to know more about their style of performance," says Tan Lihua, music director and principal conductor of Beijing Symphony Orchestra.

This London concert is one of

the Beijing Symphony Orchestra's efforts to become a more international orchestra. This year the orchestra has invited a cast of the world's top-notch musicians to collaborate, including maestros Christoph Eschenbach and Daniel Barenboim, and soloists Herbie Hancock and Lang Lang.

The orchestra will tour Germany and Turkey this year as well as the UK.

Tan says the joint concert is also good for London Philharmonic Orchestra because it attracts audiences with a new program and lineup.

Since 2007, Beijing Symphony Orchestra has released six CDs under the EMI label, with half Chinese works and half Western works. This year the orchestra will record two new CDs with EMI, featuring Guo's *Overture 'Lotus'* and Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*.

Education programs are also an important part of the orchestra's

work, and it has regular rehearsal sessions with primary and middle school orchestras in Beijing.

In London, the orchestra also had a concert at the Stockwell Park High School with the Holst Orchestra, formed by 60 local primary students. Together they performed *Farandole* from Georges Bizet's *L'Arlesienne Suite No. 2* and Vangelis's *Chariots of Fire*.

William Freitas, a 12-year-old student who plays cello in the Holst Orchestra, says the Chinese performers are "strong musicians, and it looks like they have put in a lot of heart and soul when they play".

"It was an unforgettable day for both us and the children," Tan says of the school program. "Some of the children have shown great musical talents. But whether or not they become professional musicians, music brings joy to their lives."

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The art of showing the Olympic spirit

By XIN DINGDING

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While athletes from around the world are competing in the ongoing London 2012 Olympics, more than 100 Chinese artists are attending a cultural Olympiad in London.

They are among more than 500 artists from 73 countries, whose artworks are displayed at the *Creative Cities Collection Fine Arts Exhibition London in 2012*, which runs at London's Barbican Arts Center from Aug 2-7.

Coordinated and supported by China's Ministry of Culture, the *Creative Cities Collection* is initiated to purchase and exhibit visual arts in the great cities of the world. Its first exhibition was held during the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games, when 800 artworks from 15 countries were displayed.

A reason behind this is that Pierre de Coubertin, founder of the modern Olympics, believed the Olympics should be a marriage of sports and art, China's ambassador to Britain Liu Xiaomin said at the opening gala on Aug 1.

This year's exhibition week focuses on the Olympic host cities of London and Beijing.

Displayed artworks are all related to the Games, the Olympic spirit and the two cities, said the event organizers, which include the China International Culture Association and the China Society for the Promotion of Cultural and Art Development.

"Both Beijing and London respectively have a long history and splendid culture, and are making great efforts to develop culture and create innovative cities," Liu said.

"This event symbolizes the warmest greeting message from Chinese artists and people to London and the Olympic Games. I have no doubt that arts will be a bridge connecting Beijing and London, and that the Olympic spirit will inspire continuous progress in China-UK relations."

Among the works are 60 focused on diversity that were purchased from celebrated and emerging artists based in London, the organizers said.

Because these artists live or work in the UK but were born, educated or have worked overseas, they're able to



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draw on a wide range of experiences, styles, techniques and artistic traditions — from Hebrew calligraphy to Polish embroidery — said the event's partner the Global Cities Foundation.

Global Cities also explained the exhibition provided an opportunity for cultural exchange.

China Calligraphers Association vice-chairman Yan Gongda, whose 16-meter-long scroll presents Pierre de Coubertin's *Ode to Sport* through calligraphy, said the event is a good

opportunity for Chinese artists to "go around the world".

"Since China's opening-up in the 1980s, it has been making efforts to let the world know about its culture," Yan said.

"Although it's hard for Western viewers to understand the abstract beauty of Chinese calligraphy at the moment, we try to make it understandable and grasp this opportunity to showcase this most ancient form of Chinese arts," he said.

Claus Larsen, an artist born in Denmark and living in Italy, said he is glad his work is shown at the exhibition.

"Cultural exchange is very important. It opens up many things because we don't know so much about China, and that also goes the other way around," he said.

He also said that linking the arts with the Olympics is a good idea because the Olympics gather people from around the world, which will generate publicity and visibility for the arts, he said.

The collection will go on long-term display in Beijing after the London exhibition ends.



MATT DUNHAM / ASSOCIATED PRESS

A woman walks past a painting by an unknown artist from about 1604, entitled "The Somerset House Peace Conference" during the press view of the "Shakespeare: staging the world" exhibition at the British Museum in London on Wednesday. The exhibition, which is being held as part of the London 2012 cultural Olympiad, provides a unique insight into the emerging role of London as a world city 400 years ago, seen through the innovative perspective of Shakespeare's plays. It runs from July 19 to Nov 25.