

盡得風流 余其偉的粵樂三昧

2004年，余其偉從廣州受聘到香港演藝學院擔任教學工作，亦打開了本地粵樂發展的新一頁。余其偉當時已經是國際樂壇上的粵樂名家，也有不少本地的樂手曾經跑到廣州隨他學習。但始終因路途所限，本地有心學習的樂手很難有機會隨老師長期習藝。特別是粵樂一類的傳統樂種，要學得當中的精粹，需要長時間浸淫。他受聘到香港教學以後，音樂學院的學生與其他一些本地的樂手，才有機會更全面的學習。不像以前只能在有限的時間當中，匆匆隨老師拉奏一、兩首樂曲便算學成。

余其偉擔任香港演藝學院中樂系主任前，曾在學院主持一次教學示範。當時筆者與音樂學院的院長同為觀眾之一。示範結束前，我請余老師示範一下即興演奏粵樂的特點，他便輕鬆地把一段《早天雷》以完全不同的風格演奏了三遍。院長顧品德是來自英國的小提琴家，對粵樂的認識不多，但也馬上給他那種看似隨意但又細膩活潑的演奏打動。

其實余其偉剛到學院的時候，追逐現代胡琴技法是音樂學院學生的主流思想。對粵樂一類的地方樂種，感覺是技術難度不高，按著樂譜演奏便可。幾年下來，大家才認識到要掌握當中的竅門，把看似簡單的樂曲演奏得渾然天成，是一個需要認真觀摩和感受的過程。近年香港有多位年青的演奏家，在他的薰陶下，已經能夠以相當成熟的風格演奏粵樂。而且余老師的教學，並不局限於胡琴學生，其他青年樂手的技藝亦通過他的教學得到提高。另外，不少本地專業樂團的演奏家，雖然來自廣東以外地區，對粵樂本來不太熟悉，亦經常找余老師學習。

說到余其偉的演奏有甚麼特色，為何能夠打動觀眾？其實粵樂本來是一種非常貼近生活，突顯出珠三角地區人們靈活多變性格的音樂。他的演奏既有一般平民的生活氣息，亦有不失高雅的精緻感，可以說是充分展示了粵樂的特色。

要達到這樣的高度，與余其偉不斷追求藝境與意念的創新有密切關係，這一點從他1977年開始跟隨劉天一學習一事便可知一二。劉氏雖然是一代大師，但余其偉追隨他學藝時，其實已經是一位小有名氣的演奏家；找劉天一學習，是要在藝術上追求更高的境界，絕不是抱著找個名師為自己鍍金這種功利思想，他也經常談及這段珍貴的師生情誼。1982年，余其偉在武漢舉行的全國民族器樂獨奏觀摩演出中，憑著演奏《鳥投林》與《思念》兩首樂曲，獲得24位評委一致通過得到首獎，亦突顯了粵樂作為地方樂種的魅力。

其實余其偉曾經說過，他對藝術境界的追求，亦隨著歲月的遷移有過多次轉變。年青時的演奏可能是炫技的成份多一點，近年則傾向更為精煉的音樂表現。他的粵樂演奏，可說是盡得個中三昧。其一是雅俗共賞，深得粵樂能夠在傳統樂種中別樹一格的趣味。其二是不拘一格，演奏華麗而不會流於花巧，簡約而不失精緻。其三是意境深遠，除了在《思念》《琴詩》《粵魂》《珠江之戀》等曲表現高難技巧和高遠境界，往往也於《漢宮秋月》《平湖秋月》《雙聲恨》等小曲中表達了意想不到的哲理情趣。聽過他現場表演的觀眾，相信亦知道他會隨著演奏情緒的變化，隨時為觀眾帶來驚喜，表現了樂曲中意想不到的意境。

盡得風流，深透粵樂三昧，是余其偉粵樂人生的寫照。如果有機會能夠欣賞到他和眾弟子的演奏，實在是觀眾的耳福。

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A Model of Consummate Musicianship Yu Qiwei's Profound Understanding of Cantonese Music

In 2004, Yu Qiwei moved from Guangzhou to teach at The Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts (HKAPA), and this opened a new page in the development of Cantonese music in Hong Kong. Yu was already a leading figure in worldwide Cantonese music scene, and many musicians in Hong Kong would travel to Guangzhou to seek his guidance. However, the distance involved meant that it was difficult for interested local musicians to train with him for long periods of time. This is especially a problem because the essence of a traditional music genre such as Cantonese music is something that can only be learned through extended immersion. It was only after Yu moved to Hong Kong that students from the HKAPA's School of Music and other local musicians have access to more comprehensive learning experience. No longer do they have to rush through one or two pieces with the teacher within the limited time available and call it a day.

Yu gave a demonstration session at the HKAPA before he became its Head of Chinese Music. I was in the audience along with Benedict Cruft, Dean of School of Music. At the end of the demonstration, I invited Yu to show us the characteristics of improvisation in Cantonese music, and he effortlessly played a passage of *Thunder in a Drought* in three completely different styles. Cruft, himself a violinist from the United Kingdom, had little knowledge of Cantonese music, but he was immediately moved by Yu's seemingly casual yet exquisite and lively performance.

In fact, when Yu first arrived at the Academy, the mainstream thinking among students at the School of Music was to pursue modern *huqin* techniques. Regional music genres such as Cantonese music was considered less technically challenging, something that can be easily played by following the score. It was only after a few years that they realised mastering the *huqin* and playing a seemingly simple piece of music like it's second nature was a process that required serious observation and experience. Under Yu's tutelage, a number of young Hong Kong musicians have been able to demonstrate a mature level of music playing when performing Cantonese music in recent years. Yu's teaching is not limited to students of the *huqin*, other young musicians have also improved their skills through his teaching. In addition, many musicians playing for professional orchestras in Hong Kong who hail from outside Guangdong and are unfamiliar with Cantonese music would often go to Yu for lessons.

So what is special about Yu Qiwei's music and why does it move the audience? As a matter of fact, Cantonese music is distinguished by its profound humanism, and showcases the adaptability of the people in the Pearl River Delta region. Yu's music captures the essence of everyday life while keeping its refined touch. Such a seemingly paradoxical feature brings to the fore the uniqueness of Cantonese music. Yet to be able to attain such a high level of musicianship is closely linked to Yu's continuous pursuit of artistic and conceptual innovation. This is evident from his

training with Liu Tianyi back in 1977. Liu was a legendary figure at that time, but Yu was already a minor celebrity when he came under Liu's tutelage. He had come to Liu to pursue a higher level of artistry – it was not a bid to polish his credentials for fame and fortune. In 1982, 24 judges unanimously recognised Yu Qiwei as champion for his performance of *Birds Returning to the Woods* and *In My Thoughts* at the National Competition of Folk Instrumental Music in Wuhan, attesting to the appeal of Cantonese music as a regional music genre.

In fact, Yu has said that his appetite for artistry has changed many times over the years. In his youth, it might have been more about showing off his virtuosity, but in recent years it is more about refining one's musical expression in pursuit of a higher level. The best way to describe his music is that he has fully grasped the essence of Cantonese music. First, his music suits both refined and popular tastes, and he shows a deep understanding of what makes Cantonese music unique among traditional music genres. Secondly, he has an eclectic repertoire, and his playing can flamboyant without being flowery, simple and yet delicate. Thirdly, his music is philosophically profound; not only does he demonstrate technical virtuosity and transport listeners to a higher realm with pieces such as *In My Thoughts*, *A Poem on Strings*, *Guangdong Spirit*, *For the Love of the Pearl River*, his performances of tunes such as *Autumn Moon in the Han Palace*, *Autumn Moon over a Placid Lake* and *Lovers' Sorrow* are also rich in philosophical curiosity. Those who have heard him live would know that he adapts to the changing moods of the performance and brings plenty of surprises and unexpected artistic expressions to the concert stage.

Yu Qiwei's musical career can be summarised by an elegant refinement and a profound understanding of the essence of Cantonese music. It is a real treat for the audience's ears to be able to listen to a concert featuring both him and his protégés.

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