

Mei Han 韩 Randy Raine-Reusch

New Directions for Asian Instruments

“Mei Han and Randy Raine-Reusch redefine the zheng, and challenge the world of Chinese music in general. Together they have invented new tunings, developed virtuosic techniques, expanded old structures and created radical new forms of expression on this ancient instrument. These two innovators boldly step from the past to the future, constructing exciting new forms of expression for this new Millennium.” China Daily, Beijing

Mei Han and Randy Raine-Reusch have created a radical new repertoire, combining five thousand years of Chinese musical traditions with those of New Music, World Music, and Jazz. These rich innovations result from the collision of two cultures: Chinese virtuoso Mei Han's deep roots in traditional music and the modern innovations of Canadian multi-instrumentalist Randy Raine-Reusch. Mei Han is a rare blend of virtuoso performer and scholar, whose career spans five continents. Her performances range from traditional Chinese to orchestra and chamber works to jazz and free improv. Her recordings with prominent international artists are heard around the world. Randy Raine-Reusch is a composer, international concert-artist, and multi-instrumentalist with a collection of over seven hundred world instruments. Specializing in New Music for world instruments, he has worked with some of the world's most prominent artists in numerous genres, including: Pauline Oliveros, Aerosmith, Yes, The Cranberries, Robert Dick, Barry Guy, and Sainkho Namtchylak.



Performing powerfully evocative landmark compositions for the Chinese zheng, a 21 string long zither, Mei and Randy's performances often feature a host of other rare and unique instruments to the contemporary stage. These include the soulfully philosophical Japanese ichigenkin (1 string zither), the deeply esoteric Japanese sho (bamboo mouth organ), the triumphant Thai Khaen (bamboo mouth organ), the plaintive Chinese bawu (free reed pipe), the hauntingly beautiful hulusi (free reed pipe) and the radiant dizi (transverse flute). Han Mei and Randy Raine-Reusch are transporting the zheng and other Asian traditional instruments well beyond the borders of Asia, from culturally specific instruments to serious instruments for the international stage.



Recent performances include: Hanoi – Vietnam, Tanz and Folkfest Rudolstadt - Germany, Womadelaide - Australia, National Ethnology Museum - Osaka, the Vancouver International Jazz Festival - Canada, the Rainforest World Music Festival - Malaysia, WOMAD - Singapore, CHIME Conference on Asian Music - Prague, and the Awesome Africa Festival - Durban. Mei and Randy have lectured at prominent universities and music conservatories worldwide, and have been Artists-in-Residence at University of Michigan Ann Arbor, Hendrix College, Arkansas, and others.

With concerts ranging from traditional folk songs to modern sonic soundscapes, Han's sensual melodic style compliments and contrasts with the vigorous improvisations of Raine-Reusch. Their dynamic performances continuously invigorate, fascinate and amaze.

Mei and Randy's CD "Distant Wind", reached #1 on the Canadian College World Music charts, was nominated for a Juno - "Best World", and for the West Coast Music Awards - "Best Global", "Best Instrumental". The CD is available on Za Discs, or through www.ASZA.com.



New Directions in Asian Music from the 1st to the 21st Century

HMR3 Productions Box 1119 Stn A Vancouver BC Canada V6C 2T1 T 604.255.2506 asza@asza.com, www.asza.com

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Highlights

UPCOMING

2007

Ottawa Chamber Music Festival
German tour

PREVIOUS

2006

Eastern US Canada tour
US West Coast
Tour to China and Korea including the Nanjing Jazz Festival
Westcoast US Tour

2004

Tanz and Folkfest, Rudolstadt, Germany
British Columbia tour
Hendrix College, Arkansas , Artists in Residence

2002

Vancouver International Jazz Festival, Canada, (*with Frank Gratkowski, Germany*)
Asian Heritage Month, Vancouver
Further East Further West, Vancouver, Canada
Juno Awards (*nomination for Distant Wind - Best Global*)
West Coast Music Awards (*nomination for Distant Wind - Best World, Best Instrumental*)

2000

Vancouver Sacred Music Festival, Canada

2005

Concert in Hanoi - Vietnam
Eastern US tour
Artist in Residence, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

2003

China, Japan, Australia, and Singapore tour (*WOMADE-LAIDE, Australia, National Ethnology Museum, Osaka, Japan*)
Quebec, Ontario and Nova Scotia tour (*SunFest and Atlantic Jazz Festival*)
Eastern US and Canadian tour (*Wesleyan and Kent State Universities*)
New Works Calgary

2001

Awesome Africa Festival, Durban, South Africa
ETV South Africa, National TV broadcast
Seattle Art Museum, USA

1999

WOMAD, Singapore
Rainforest World Music Festival, Sarawak (Borneo), Malaysia
Chime Conference of Chinese Music - Prague, Czech Republic
Vancouver International Jazz Festival, Canada
Vancouver Sacred Music Festival, Canada



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PRESS

Han and Raine-Reusch have redefined the zheng, and challenged the world of traditional Chinese music in general. Together they have invented new tunings, developed new fingering techniques, expanded old structures and created radical new forms of expression on this ancient instrument. They have created a new repertoire, attempting to combine the Chinese musical traditions with those of world music and jazz. ... They have stepped from the past to the future, trying to construct exciting new forms of expression for the new millennium.
China Daily, Beijing

Together, their playing is nothing short of extraordinary, whether casually experimenting with dissonance or improving upon the ethereal, characteristically Eastern timbre of their instruments....Mei Han and Randy Raine-Reusch remind us that the best conditions for improvisation begin first with the soul and then with intuition.
Alan Jones, One Final Note.com

The highlight of the festival was hearing the extraordinary performance by Randy Raine-Reusch and Mei Han. What they played and how they played completely transcended, for me, the concerns of the normative. Between them, the music became an alchemy of transformation. In Chinese terms (since the instruments that they played were primarily Chinese), it was the most perfect melding of the energies of Dragon and Phoenix. In their realization of those energies and with its attendant impact on me, I was moved to a rapture that had me joyfully weeping throughout the entire performance. It is one of the performances in my life that I shall never forget. Even now, the memory of it brings tears to my eyes.
David Mott, 2003 Atlantic Jazz Festival

Mei Han is a Chinese virtuoso and scholar while Vancouver-based Raine-Reusch is a multi-instrumentalist and collector of world instruments who has worked with a wide range of artists. The two of them have combined their knowledge and technical ability to come up with a new direction for Chinese zheng music, the zheng being the parent instrument of the Asian long zither family. Han and Raine-Reusch return to the essence of the music while bringing in new elements that don't compromise the music's integrity. The result is an original and quite remarkable set of compositions that find the common ground between the old and the new.
Paul-Emile Comeau, Global Rhythm, Aug 2002

A highly accessible and attractive album of zheng duets. Their mission is to rescue the zheng from the highly hysterical sentimentality that pervades much Chinese music, and then gently propel it down paths, such as improvising over riffs, that a Western mind might naturally explore. Skillful and forceful playing.
Clive Bell, The Wire, Dec. 2001

Two outstanding zheng players: Raine-Reusch's more vigorous improvisation-based approach complimenting zheng virtuoso Han's more sensual and melodic command of the ancient instrument. A series of spatial and temporal realities ranging from the delicate "Forest Rain" to the harsher "Black Zheng" creating a dissonant modern soundscape.
The Georgia Straight, Vancouver, Canada

Distant Wind contains sounds intriguingly different from what the Western ear may be accustomed to.
Jazzreview.com

Stunning and energetic performances, from Han Mei's unique technique on the zheng to Raine-Reusch's fascinating array of Asian instruments.
The Star, Singapore

Forget moonlit evenings of poetic musings, think folk-funk Canadian - Chinese style. Glissando passages splashed out in spurts instead of the usual lazy rollout. The team of guzheng experts, Mei Han and Randy Raine-Reusch, seemed to be trying to outdo each other with near violent pluckings.
The Straits Times, Singapore



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Distant Wind

PRESS

Distant Wind is the effort of Vancouver instrumentalists Mei Han and Randy Raine-Reusch to establish a hard link between modern jazz improvisation and Chinese music thousands of years old. In their approach using traditional Chinese techniques they have succeeded in adding new, brilliant color to improvisational music. Han has almost single-handedly brought the Zheng, a 25-string zither, into more contemporary light, with over thirty years of experience with the instrument behind her. Her partner, Raine-Reusch, is an internationally renowned musician, having performed with a wide range of stylists, from Mats Gustafsson to Aerosmith. Together, their playing is nothing short of extraordinary, whether casually experimenting with dissonance or improving upon the ethereal, characteristically Eastern timbre of their instruments.



The record, speckled with transcendent, beautiful music, serves as a primer for those of us unfamiliar with Asian stringed instruments - they brought a small arsenal of obscure devices to the recording. The bulk of the compositions are written, sometimes using only one or two modes, and interlaced with poetic improvisations, single stringed runs and hypnotic tremolo patterns embellished by brushes and mallets, among other tools. The title track, a zheng duet, speaks for itself with Raine-Reusch imaginatively soloing over Han's minimalist, carefully structured melody. Where "Distant Wind" is attractive for its lucidity, "Nokoto" is the intermingling of various approaches, from Chinese voicings to traditional Western jazz improvisation. Laurence Mollerup provides a thick tonal center on acoustic bass for several of the tracks, allowing more freedom for the instrumentalists. Many of the tunes are built from a spiritual platform, calling to philosophical mysticism or tangible elements of nature, as with Raine-Reusch's mimicry of crows with the guanzi, a reeded bamboo instrument. Whatever the approach, Distant Wind is a linear program of captivating music that succeeds on its own. Mei Han and Randy Raine-Reusch remind us that the best conditions for improvisation begin first with the soul and then with intuition.

Alan Jones, One Final Note.com



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PRESS

Musical Duo Strike the Right Chord with Zheng

China Daily, Beijing, Feb 28th 2003

"The Concerto for Zheng and Orchestra" ("When Cranes Fly Home") in the second half of the Sunday concert at the Poly Theatre by the China Philharmonic Orchestra will present an innovative experience of zheng, the traditional Chinese plucked instrument with 21 or 25 strings.

With four movements, the concerto conducted by John Sharpley of the United States is cyclic and bustling with complex texture. There are fundamental, and generally submerged, musical materials that permeate through the work. The orchestra and the zheng's tuning are delicately intertwined. Sharpley scored the 25-minute concerto for the Canadian-Chinese zheng player Han Mei, soloist at the concert.

The concerto's origin came about a few years ago, when Sharpley first met Han and her husband Randy Raine-Reusch at a music festival in Sarawak, Malaysia. "I was deeply inspired by the couple's extraordinary music-making," said Sharpley. Recognized internationally, a virtuoso on the zheng, Han presents music deeply rooted in over 2,000 years of Chinese culture mixed with ground breaking contemporary styles. After learning ballet and violin briefly in her younger years, Han turned to the zheng when she was 10. "Before my first zheng teacher, renowned zheng master Gao Zicheng showed me the instrument, I had never seen it. But after listening to him play the piece 'Lofty Mountains and Flowing Rivers,' I was fascinated by the sound and immediately asked Gao to teach me," she recalled.

That began Han's exploration of the zheng, which spanned more than 20 years in China. She studied with a number of famous zheng masters including Gao and Zhang Yan. From the age of 16, she began playing as a featured soloist with her performances broadcast on national radio in China. "Though my technique was improving quickly during those years, I gradually sensed I was lacking a deeper understanding of the music," she said. "I couldn't shake this feeling of emptiness and asked myself if I would just play these several zheng pieces for the rest of my life." So she enrolled in a master's degree of Ethnomusicology at the Chinese Academy of Arts in 1993. Her dedication took her to some 28 remote ethnic nationalities in Southwest China to collect folk songs.

In 1996, Han went to Canada for an ethnic music programme in the School of Music at the University of British Columbia. She worked as a teaching assistant while performing Chinese music to Westerners. "In Vancouver, I gradually found it a home for various people, languages and cultures. I could hear a fusion of music types and I realized how shallow my knowledge about music was," she said. What is most meaningful to her music and

life is that in Vancouver, she met Randy Raine-Reusch, Randy, the composer and multi-instrumentalist, who became her husband in 2001. An improvisational based composer, Raine-Reusch, 50, shows great interest in extending the boundaries of music. He has created distinct new performance styles on a number of instruments including Chinese zheng, Japanese ichigenkin (one-string zither) and the Thai khaen (16-reed bamboo mouth organ). Raine-Reusch has also been heralded as a "dexterous multi-instrumentalist" due to his ability to play about 50 of his collected 600 world instruments.

The co-operation and romance blossomed one day in 1998. After hearing that Raine-Reusch was good at playing zheng, Han called him out of curiosity. At first, he politely rejected her. Han later learned that Raine-Reusch had been eager to co-operate with some Chinese zheng players but was always met with a negative response. The players he asked could not fathom his musical style and preferred to only play "Lofty Mountains and Flowing Rivers" or "Three Variations on the Theme of Plum Blossoms." But Han was determined. Raine-Reusch finally invited Han to his home, where he played a CD of his jazz for her. He had never expected that the Chinese woman would take to the music, "but she immediately understood and enjoyed it," said Raine-Reusch. Then he asked her to play the zheng. "Don't use your mind and forget the melody, just play with your feelings," he inspired her and she played for more than 15 minutes. The amazing result was "I felt the wall which had stood in front of me suddenly crumble," she described the sensation, "I inhaled the fresh air and saw a bright broad world which I had never seen before." They appreciated each other's talents.

Since their meeting, Han and Raine-Reusch have redefined the zheng, and challenged the world of traditional Chinese music in general. Together they have invented new tunings, developed new fingering techniques, expanded old structures and created radical new forms of expression on this ancient instrument. They have created a new repertoire, attempting to combine the Chinese musical traditions with those of world music and jazz.

Their first CD of zheng "Distant Wind" reached the top of the charts on the Canadian College Radio Charts, and was nominated for a Juno Award (Canadian Grammy) and two West Coast Music Awards. They also often performed improvisational works with other artists at major international jazz festivals and concerts.

They have stepped from the past to the future, trying to construct exciting new forms of expression for the new millennium.

by Chen Jie

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Bold Marriage Makes for a Strong Wind

Distant Wind, the first CD from zheng virtuosos Mei Han and Randy Raine-Reusch, is an album that could easily be misinterpreted. Given that it features a Chinese musician with 35 years' experience on her chosen instrument (a kind of long zither related to the Japanese koto and the European harp)

OFF BEAT
ALEXANDER VARTY

and a Canadian whose collection of musical devices from around the globe has taken on near-legendary status, it's tempting to slot it into the all-encompassing "world music" bracket. On the other hand, given the talk of Zen and Tao in the liner notes, and song titles such as "Forest Rain" and "Clouds", the equally amorphous void of the "New Age" category beckons.

In truth, however, this recording is neither, as its final track, "Black Zheng", makes plain. Utterly unlike what has come before it, yet clearly the culmination of the same creative process, this tune presents a nightmarish counterpoint to Han and Raine-Reusch's otherwise benign moods. Over a bed of droning bowed zhengs, so deep and ominous that they conjure up a Tibetan temple full of chanting monks, Raine-Reusch's *hun*, or Korean ocarina, outlines a ghostly tune; later, Han comes in with plucked notes rich in what I can only describe as a kind of desolate beauty. Her bent notes carry some of the pathos of the country blues, but the atonal melody they create has more in common with contemporary chamber music—a comparison intensified towards the end of the piece, as the bowing increases in fervour before disintegrating into a mist of shimmering harmonics that echo in the mind long after the track is over.

"We were a little bit concerned about putting that piece on this album, and that's why it's at the end," Raine-Reusch confesses, on the line from the East Vancouver

home he shares with Han. "We feel that the album is a progression up to that point, and we're wanting to take the listener to that point, so that they can accept this piece if they've not encountered this kind of music before."

"We have had people say 'Well, I like everything except that piece,' or 'That piece really scares me,'" he adds. "And it's funny that they use the term *scares*, because I think the piece challenges you to listen more and go inside a little bit more, so I think that, therapeutically, it would be good for them."

Nonetheless, this is not music for massage therapy. Nor is it the kind of denatured exotica commonly marketed as "world beat". This is strong stuff, and it forces a reappraisal of the album as a whole: what we have here is not so much cross-cultural fusion (though it is that, too) as a collection of first-rate compositions that just happen to be played on instruments unfamiliar to most North American ears. And, in turn, *Distant Wind* might also lead to a reappraisal—both here and in the conservatories of Beijing and Shanghai—of the Chinese music that is one of its major components.

In conversation with the scholarly Han, an internationally respected authority on the zheng and Chinese music in general, I raise the point that much Chinese music sounds almost Baroque in its stiff formality. Generally, it seems, elaborate melodic ornamentation takes precedence over emotional expression—but that's not the case on *Distant Wind*, and Han is quick to explain why.

"I'd guess that what you've heard of Chinese music is not the real, traditional Chinese music," she contends. "It's a contemporary reinterpretation of traditional music. But a thousand years ago, Chinese music didn't sound like that. We did have improvisation, we did have free structures, and most of all we did have soul in our music. But it's been lost in the 20th century, and right now the conservatory-trained musicians in China do not know that at all, at all. So I really hope that this CD, from any point of view, good or bad, gives them a shock."

The Georgia Straight,
August 23-30, 2001

Han adds that one of her next projects might be a CD of traditional music for zheng, but interpreted in a looser, more improvisational way. And she credits Raine-Reusch, whom she recently married, with pointing her in that direction.

"In China, if you are a performer you only perform, you don't compose," she says. "And I was a traditionally trained musician, which meant I didn't improvise until I met Randy. That's one of the things that urged me to meet him, because I wanted to learn something new. I'd heard him, and he had done something on this instrument, like improvise and retune the scales, so I called him and asked if he was interested in working with me."

"So Mei came over, and I gave her like a 10-minute idea of what I was up to, and sat her down at a retuned zheng," Raine-Reusch adds. "After 10 or 15 minutes, she was playing the thing like you would not believe. And then after she'd played it for half an hour, she looked up at me and she said, 'I feel free!'"

"That's right," Han concurs. "And after I learned improvisation, on-stage right now I feel much more relaxed. I don't have to worry about playing everything exactly the same every time. But I have to say that although I'm a quick learner, this is still not in my blood. It will take a long time for me to get a really natural sense of this."

She's being modest. As *Distant Wind* attests, Han's already comfortable in musical situations that are a long way removed from what she learned at the Chinese Music Research Institute in Beijing. And on his part, Raine-Reusch credits his partner with both validating his work on an instrument that is not a traditional part of his culture, and helping smooth out some of the rough edges of his technique. The two play a joint concert at the Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Classical Chinese Garden this Friday (August 24), and it should be a rare opportunity to see a true marriage of musical minds at work. ■

The Vancouver Courier, Sunday, August 19, 2001

Unlikely couple makes beautiful music

ACCORDING TO CHINESE ASTROLOGY, it's a bad idea for a person born in the year of the dragon to get together with someone born in the year of the dog. That's certainly the cautionary message about dragons and dogs in a book called *Secrets of Chinese Astrology*. "A relationship between these two volcanoes waiting to explode is full of risk," says the book. "Any romance will be rough sailing indeed."

Vancouver-based musician Randy Raine-Reusch has a copy of the book, but he hasn't followed its advice. In fact, Raine-Reusch (a dragon) married fellow instrumentalist Mei Han (a dog) in June. Contrary to astrological assertions, the players are blissfully in love. They're also ideal musical partners. Han and Raine-Reusch both contribute distinct approaches to music that harmonize well together. As well, they share an adventurous spirit that challenges each other to explore new techniques and achieve a profound depth of feeling.

The aptly titled "Dragon Dogs," a song on the couple's extraordinary *Distant Wind* CD, exemplifies the rapport between the musicians. The track features both on zheng, the multi-stringed zither that's been an important instrument in Chinese music for centuries. After establishing the tune's beguiling melody, Han improvises with thoughtful assurance. Then both players empathically trade solos back and forth in the same way that jazz musicians have a call-and-response dialogue. Raine-Reusch provides the final improvisation, a wild romp on his zheng's strings. The performers, solidly anchored by Laurence Mollerup on acoustic bass, ultimately convey their individual character, make a

chris wong

in sync

contemporary statement and still retain the essence of traditional Chinese music.

Expect to hear all of that, and more, when Han and Raine-Reusch perform Aug. 24 (7:30 p.m.) at the Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Classical Chinese Garden. The concert celebrates the release of *Distant Wind*, which reflects their years of music-making, but had its beginnings in a fateful phone call.

About three years ago Han called Raine-Reusch after she heard he had an innovative style on the zheng. When they met, Han wanted to hear Raine-Reusch play the instrument. As she recalls, "He asked, 'Are you sure you want me to play?'" The question was understandable given the different paths they've taken to becoming premier musicians in Vancouver's world music community.

In her native China, Han studied zheng with a top teacher and became a major voice on the instrument. She also established herself as a scholar. The 40-year-old wrote the zheng entry in the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. Han, who moved from Beijing to Vancouver in 1996, is a member of the Orchid Ensemble.

As for Raine-Reusch, calling him a "multi-instrumentalist" is an understatement. The 48-year-old owns a collection of more than 600 instruments from around the world, including many he can play at a high level. Raine-Reusch

has an international career that's taken him to jungles and towns of northern Borneo, where he recorded traditional music, and Vancouver recording studios, where he played sessions with Aerosmith, Yes and the Cranberries. Raine-Reusch also leads Asza.

So while Han dedicated herself to just the zheng, Raine-Reusch developed singular technique on many instruments. As it turned out, Han liked his fresh sound on the zheng. She was even open to appreciating Raine-Reusch's freely improvised zheng playing on *Gudira*, an album he recorded with Barry Guy and Robert Dick. Raine-Reusch taught improvisation to Han, who was a quick learner, and they began composing repertoire. The pair performed their compositions at events such as the WOMAD festival in Singapore, the Rainforest World Music Festival in Sarawak, Malaysia and the Vancouver International Jazz Festival. Tony Reif, who runs the Songlines label, encouraged the two players to document their music on a recording.

They ended up creating a collection of songs that radically departs from your average zheng music, which emphasizes sweet sounds in westernized arrangements. *Distant Wind* is the first ever recording of tunes for two zhengs and zheng with other Asian instruments like the Japanese ichigenkin (one-string zither). While the album primarily consists of melodically accessible material, it also incorporates unique tunings, techniques and harmonic structures. But you don't need to be an ethnomusicologist to enjoy *Distant Wind*. The album simply has deep soul.

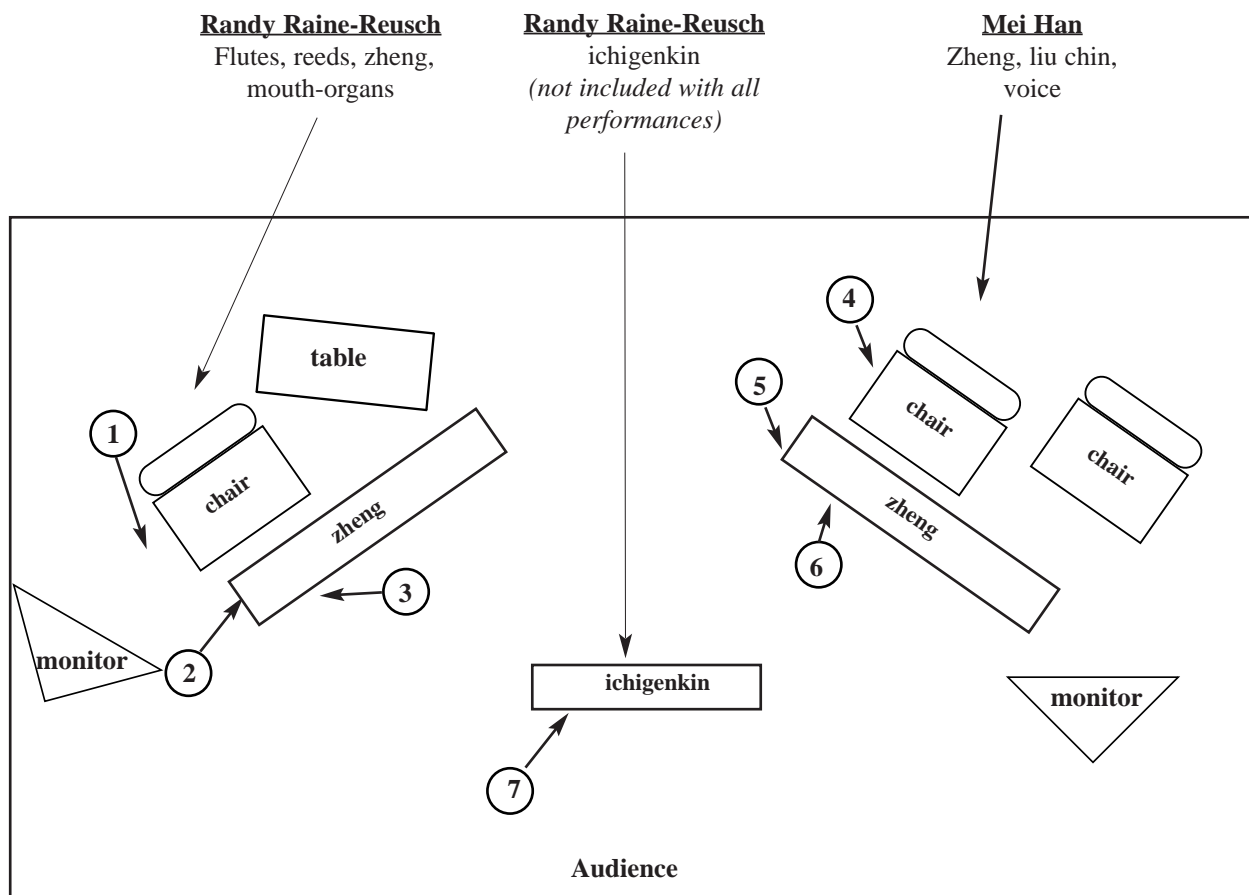


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Stage Plot



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