



Joanna Lee: I'm Joanna Lee. I'm a musicologist who has done fieldwork in China.

You're listening to an excerpt from the Concerto for Cello, Video and Orchestra by Tan Dun. This piece is also called "The Map." This work combines field recordings that Tan Dun made in rural Hunan, a province in China that he grew up in, and it included minority music, folk music, singing as well as instrumental music. Tan Dun juxtaposed video footage of these performance practices and combined them with live orchestra and cello.

Tan Dun: When I was a student, I was fascinated by the dreams of Bartok and Stravinsky. Bartok always collected all those fantastic music from farmers and peasants and made such beautiful repertoire in our history.

Joanna Lee: That was the voice of Tan Dun, the composer of this work.

Tan Dun: Bartok always wanted to take the pieces he wrote, play back for those farmers. When I was a student, I always think this is fascinating, this is almost like magical.

You had inspirations from someone who has no idea what you're doing. Then a few years later when you finish this work, you bring back to them.

Joanna Lee: Tan Dun went home for inspiration, in the place where he grew up with his grandmother in the 1970s. There he looked for minority music, especially practices and traditions that he felt was endangered.

Tan Dun: I was horsing around in my hometown, trying to find some old memories. I went back to the countryside to collect folk songs and I meet an ancient stone music player. He can play a single stone with all kinds of melodies, magical and ancient.

I want to study music with him and he said, no problem. But after many, many years I wasn't able to go back. It's almost twenty years later I went back. He died, I find. Also this kind of way to play music has vanished.

Joanna Lee: The old stone man was dead, but Tan Dun felt that his music somehow was still around. So he searched. What he did was he went and did a lot of field recording of many musicians. What he felt was, if he could find that music that inspired him, then in many ways he's creating a map in which he could find or rediscover the music of the stone man.

You're listening to the inaudible minority women doing something that is very, very special to their singing tradition. It's called tongue singing. They rapidly move their tongues. What Tan Dun did was he recorded it on video as part of his fieldwork and then he added a live orchestral segment to go with the video as it plays. So when you go to a performance, you see a huge screen above the orchestra with these beautiful girls doing tongue singing, and then below it is the orchestra playing live. They play together in the sense that there is the video music as well as live music.

With changing times, all sorts of musical traditions change. So when an anthropologist goes into the field and makes recordings, he actually is collecting data of a type of music of a certain time. In that way, it's frozen in time. What Tan Dun has done is he's done the field recordings but then incorporated them into his own musical creations. Therefore he now mixes old and new and also lets various segments of time coexist at the same time.

You're listening to a flying song of the inaudible minority people. The flying song is normally sung between two people across mountains. So the vocal production, the voice, the sound of it, has to really carry long distances. The flying song is actually one of the most poignant movements of "The Map." It is where time seems to be frozen because on video you have a woman singing, and then the video would freeze and then on stage the cellist would play a solo and they enter into a dialogue.

Out of this dialogue there really is an amazing connection that builds between the musicians – and we're talking about the musicians in the orchestra, the cello soloist, as well as those who are captured on video.

Tan Dun tells the story of one of his cellists who met the woman who actually had been on the video.

Tan Dun: It's shocking to witness my soloist meet the real girl. Before when they meet her, she thought she already know her many, many years because she practiced every day. It's become Mozart, every day is practice, practice, and suddenly she was in Shanghai. So when Wendy see her, I remember it's like, "Oh, oh, that's her!" Because it's like somebody you meet in a dream.

Joanna Lee: When Tan Dun wrote "The Map," it was not just to fulfill an orchestral commission. He wanted to bring the music also back to the people, the people who actually gave him the inspiration. In October 2003 he did exactly that.

Tan Dun: Afterwards I took the composition and the whole symphony orchestra, went back to this village. So they built a stage on the river. That night 30,000 indigenous people showed up, came for their first concert in their lives.

Joanna Lee: There's all this great music that is currently practiced by lots and lots of people around the world. It would be really, really valuable if somebody goes out there, collects them and then brings the really good music to the rest of the world.

The value of a project like this is not only did Tan Dun create a new breakthrough work, but the minority peoples who participated and who were recorded by him realized suddenly that what they did was really valuable and loved and appreciated by many, many more people in the West than they had ever imagined.