Folksongs for Orchestra

II. Love Song from Kan Ding

III. The girl from the Da Ban City

By Huang Ruo

Click here to see the BSO perform this piece.

About the Composer and Piece

Now a U.S. citizen, Huang Ruo was born in 1976 on Hainan, an island in the South China Sea. He studied music with his father, Huang Ying-Sen, an important film composer, and became interested not only in Chinese music but also Western classical, jazz, and rock. He studied in the U.S. at Oberlin College and the Juilliard School and settled in New York City. Huang Ruo’s music ranges from avant-garde classical to Chinese folk styles, and he has also been a rock and folk song singer. He brings all of his stylistic variety to bear in his orchestral arrangements of the Chinese folk songs “Love Song from Kan Ding” and “The girl from the Da Ban City.” The first is slow and lyrical. Huang says the lyrics are from the point of view of a man singing to his older sweetheart but that they’re destined not to be together. Kan Ding is in Sichuan Province near Tibet. Da Ban City, or Dabancheng, is in Xinjiang Province in northwestern China, a “cowboy” region. The song is rollicking and energetic, like a rider crossing the rolling plains.

Vocabulary

avant-garde classical: Avant-garde classical as a music style honors classical traditions while encouraging experimentation and new ideas.

folk: Folk music is traditional music that historically was passed on orally. It is often based on simple melodies and is associated with specific geographic regions.

lyrical: having an artistically beautiful or expressive quality
Activities

Compare and Contrast

These two songs from Ruo’s Folksongs for Orchestra tell two different love stories. In the description above, you learned that “Love Song from Kan Ding” is slow and lyrical and tells the tale of two people in love who cannot be together. “The girl from Da Ban City” is a song about a carriage driver who has fallen in love with a beautiful woman. This piece is rollicking and energetic. Take time to listen to both pieces so that you can compare and contrast them. What do you notice about the tempo and dynamics? How would you describe the main themes of each piece? How does Ruo use music to tell these two different tales of love and how does each piece make you feel as a listener?

Composition

What parts of “The Girl from Da Ban City” sound like cowboy music? Can you describe what the composer does to get that effect?

Folk Music

All cultures have their own folk music. Can you find other examples?

Love Song

Write your own love song. It can be for anyone or anything that you love – family, pets, friends, food - sky’s the limit!