Dr. Huang Ruo was born on Hainan Island off the southern coast of China in 1976. His father was also a composer, and he began learning both the piano and music composition when he was only six years old. Dr. Ruo studied both traditional Chinese music and Western music at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music. He then moved to the United States, studying music at both the Oberlin Conservatory in Ohio and the Juilliard School in New York City. He currently lives in New York City where he teaches at the Mannes School of Music.

Dr. Ruo’s compositions combine traditional Chinese folk music with Western influences like classical and even rock and jazz music. His compositions include orchestral music, choral music, opera, film music and multimedia works.

ABOUT THE REALLY COOL COMPOSITION

“The Girl from Da Ban City” is one movement or section of his Folk Songs for Orchestra, a four-movement work. “The Girl from Da Ban City” is a love song from the city of Turpan in the Xinjiang region of Northwestern China. The song is often heard sung in either Uyghur (pronounced “Wee-grr”) or Mandarin.

Dr. Ruo says, “(‘The Girl from Da Ban City’) is also known as the ‘Carriage Driver’s Song.’ It is from the Xinjiang province and is sung by carriage drivers in Turpan. The lively music shows the enthusiastic and colorful characteristics of Uyghur folk song, reflecting its people’s heartfelt admiration for Xinjiang, the ‘hometown of songs and dances.’”

Turpan is located in the Xinjiang province of northwestern China. Turpan is famous for its carriages pulled by donkeys. They are used not only to carry goods but also serve as taxis.

Teaching Idea

Vocabulary
Da Ban, Daban or Dabancheng: A district in Wulumuqi, the capital of the Xinjiang region of Northwestern China.
Pinyin: A representation of Chinese using the Western (Roman) alphabet. It is often used to teach Mandarin Chinese.
Folk song: A song originating among the people of a country or area. It is often passed down to others by singing it rather than writing it down.

Activity
1. Play “The Girl from Da Ban City” in the following YouTube clip. The acting in the video helps tell the story of the song: https://youtu.be/qxxULyqjJso

2. Ask students to identify where the music is from. Point out China on the map and, if possible, identify the Xinjiang region of Northwestern China.
3. Distribute the attached sheet music. Tell students this is a very popular Chinese folk song. It tells the story of a carriage driver who falls in love with a woman. It can be performed with traditional Chinese instruments or Western instruments like guitar. Play both videos:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WpTl6sVZT1c
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RhJofLMlikJ (vocals start at approximately 1:00)

**NOTE:** Like many folk songs that are passed down through singing, there are often variations in both melody and text in different performances of the song!

4. Read students the text of the song. The text is included in Mandarin, English, Chinese Pinyin (Romanized) and a phonetic representation.

达坂城的石路硬又平
English: Dabancheng’s stone streets, hard and flat.
Chinese Pinyin: Daban Cheng de shi lu ying you ping
Phonetic representation: *Daban Chung duh shii-ler yeeing you ping*

西瓜呀大又甜
English: Watermelons big and sweet!
Chinese Pinyin: Xigua ya da you tian
Phonetic representation: *See-gwa ya, da you tian*

那里住的姑娘辫子长啊
English: A girl from there has long braided hair
Chinese Pinyin: Na li zhu de gu niang bian zi chang ah
Phonetic representation: *Na-lee drew-duh goo-nyang bian-dzuh chang ah*

两个眼睛真漂亮
English: And a pair of beautiful eyes!
Chinese Pinyin: Liang ge yanjing zhen piao liang
Phonetic representation: *Lyang-guh yan-jing djen piao-lyang*

你要是嫁人 不要嫁给别人 一定要嫁给我
English: If you intend to marry, please marry me!
Chinese Pinyin: Ni yao shi jia ren, bu yao jia gei bie ren, yi ding yao jia gei wo
Phonetic representation: *Nee yao-shiir jia-ren, boo-yao jia-gay beeh-ren, yee-ting yao jia-gay wuuh.*

带着你的嫁妆 带着你的伴娘 赶着那马车来
English: Bring along your dowry, accompanied by your bridesmaids, catch a horse carriage.
Chinese Pinyin: Dai zhe ni de jia zhuang, dai zhe ni de meimeii, gan zhe ma che lai
Phonetic representation: *Dye-juh nee-de jia-drong, dye-juh nee-de may-may, gan-juh ma-churh lye*

5. Have students listen to another version of the song. This is sung by Dr. Ruo. Play the following video:

6. Tell students that Dr. Ruo wrote a version of the song that’s played by an orchestra. Ask if they can hear the song!
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4PY2rHxmF9U (Original folk song begins at 0:35)
The Girl from Da Ban City

Uyghur Folk Song

Moderately slow

Pinyin: Da-ban Cheng de shi lu ying you ping
Phonetic: Da ban Chung duh shiir loo ying you ping
English: Da-ban-Cheng's stone streets, hard and flat.

Xi - gua ya da you tian
See - gow ya da you tian
Watermelons big and sweet!

Na - li zhu de gu niang bian zi chang ah
Na-lee drew duh goo nyang bian dzuh chang ah
A girl from there has long braided hair

Liang ge yan jing zhen piao liang
Liang ge yan jing djen piao liang
And a pair of beautiful eyes!
If you intend to marry,
please marry me!
Bring along your dowry, accompanied by your bridesmaids.

catch a horse carriage.