

A M A D E U S . . .

Several RCM students had the trip of a lifetime in December as the **Amadeus Orchestra** whisked them off on a 16 day tour of China after an invitation by the Chinese government - a journey that would ultimately clock up 1.4 million miles. The tour was, in part, to celebrate the 250th anniversary of Mozart. Philip Mackenzie, Conductor of the Orchestra shares some of his thoughts on a unique cultural experience below.

"We received a rapturous reception wherever we went. Banners the size of my house proclaimed in English and Chinese 'Welcome to the London Mozart Symphony Orchestra' or 'Welcome to the Mouzart Philharmon (sic) Symphony Orchestra' and once, 'Welcome to the London Mozart Players'. Let's hope they're not reading this ...

Halls of up to 4000 seats were routinely full and broadly divided into two types: the 'sophisticated Shanghai types' who listened to the music and turned their mobiles off and the more rural types who answered their phones and held conversations!

The programme consisted of some Mozart, lots of Strauss Waltzes and Polkas, Chinese orchestral music (think *The King and I*) and Elgar's *Enigma Variations* - a selection that reflected both the Chinese taste and our own. The Elgar consistently went down well and in Hangzhou we were the first orchestra to perform in a brand new concert hall which was stunning. All quality materials, good acoustics, superb back stage facilities, enthusiastic audience, and, outside on a new plaza, giant screens broadcasting a DVD of the Amadeus Orchestra in full swing at the Sheldonian Theatre in Oxford.

The highlight for everyone was the two days spent in Hohhot, the capital of Inner Mongolia. We arrived at 1am and were met by a line of beautiful girls in national costume who handed out silk scarves and swigs of some lethal local spirit. They whisked us off to a five star hotel where we were greeted by more of the same plus a band of local musicians and singers. I used to think that



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Western Classical music was the best sort of music but then I heard Mongolian singing. Stunning. Electrifying. Heart melting. Invigorating. Totally absorbing.

The next day we were treated to a lunch of extraordinary proportions. All seventy of us, plus about thirty members of the local Communist Party were given identical brightly coloured waistcoats and led into the dining hall. After speeches (mine was written for me by officials) and toasts, a whole roast sheep was carried in. To my amazement I was beckoned towards it and asked to cut a deep cross in the top of its head and straight through the brain. This done, we proceeded with twelve courses of mouth watering food, a surprisingly good red wine and more of the local fire water. Throughout the meal we were treated to singing, dancing and acrobatics from all the different Mongolian tribes.

On the morning we were due to leave Shanghai, we were all aboard our two coaches when we noticed that we weren't moving. On glancing out of the coach window I noticed a collection of about four men in agitated discussion with our driver. They had also positioned a petite girl about four feet high in front of the coaches so that we couldn't 'escape'. It turned out that they were the local promoters who had 'bought' the concert, and the programme we had performed the night before was four minutes shorter than the contract stated. So they were seeking to 'save face' by causing a little commotion, and perhaps knocking a few Yuan off the price.



We finished the tour in Beijing with a couple of days for sight seeing, taking in the Forbidden City and the Great Wall - a relaxing way to finish a tiring and unforgettable tour."

The Amadeus Orchestra was formed in 1990 by former RCM student Philip Mackenzie as a training ground for music students and young professionals - a place to get extra orchestral experience out of term time. Past and present RCM students on the tour included Lucy Baker, Ben Griffiths, Angus Meryon, Philip Mackenzie, Polly Beaven, Helen Tudor, Rosie Cow, Michael O'Donnell, Victoria Sayles, Alice Kent, Emma Smith, Julia Crowell, Robin Crinson, Hannah Evans, Robin Smith, Rhys Smith, Nathan Gash, Sarah Wortley and Elana Eisen.
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