

China Tour may 1998



Report tour through China by the Yuri Honing Trio. Written by Tony Overwater. 28th of April until 5 th of May 1998.

5.30 am 28th of April 1998 local Chinese time

To be honest, I'm sitting here with mixed feelings. I've never been to China, and never gave it any thought; not the people of china, not it's music, not it's communism, nor the human rights. Now I'm in the plane for about ten hours, one hour before landing in Beijing, I start to wonder whether I will like it or not.

When we, the Yuri Honing trio, were invited by the Dutch Embassy to perform I was excited, of course. The main goal of the trio seems to be to find as many exotic tours as we can and this was a perfect opportunity to expand our already extensive list of odd places to play jazz in. We even considered a trans Siberian tour once but were unable to raise enough money to set it up. Dutch filmmaker Brigitte Hillenius would film the journey. Funny enough she is also the person who introduced us to Robert van Kan who works at the Dutch embassy in Beijing and invited us to come over. My first Chinese impression was the Chinese Embassy in The Hague. Expecting some kind of impressive building I walked into a sort of classroom with neon lighting, some old beat up couches and chairs forming the waiting area and a glass wall at the other end of the room dividing the employees from the visitors. The first line I had to get into was the line for getting the application form. It was hard to make out a definite queue of people but I just cued up at the end of the group of people scattered around the glass windows. Five minutes later some Chinese people came in and stepped in front of me claiming their spot in the queue, I guess I wasn't tailing the man in front of me enough. The whole atmosphere reminded me more of the kitchen of a Chinese restaurant than of the restaurant itself with it's 'traditional Chinese' decor. I wonder what the country itself will bring.

3 am Thursday 30th April 1998



Shanghai is great, but everybody tells me Shanghai is not China, so I can't tell you how China really is yet. All I noticed so far is that people behave more like ants here. Everybody seems to be going to some place important and make their way regardless of other people around, fearlessly risking their lives in traffic, as if their lives or those of the others around is as replaceable as a battery.

Even stranger is the life of ambassadors, consuls, general consuls, advisors and other more or less relevant people contributing their lives to the representation of the country they accidentally were born in,.. our employers at this moment. We played on the Holland Food promotion

night in the Tompson Hotel in Shanghai. I guess most foreigners here don't do anything else but go to these kind of parties of yet another country trying to convince the Chinese market that the Chinese would love

their goods. What a life! I'm happy that the thing that we (yuri, Joost and I) are selling is the things we really love most; our music. Although playing for the fashion show of Frans Molenaar (famous Dutch couturier) doesn't seem to be the most logical step. Still we have learned a lot tonight. Not only about how to play for Chinese mannequins so thin as a rake that most of the clothes they were wearing threatened to fall off their skinny bodies halfway the catwalk but also about business and no business and dedication and loyalty. I'm happy we met Frans and his crew. Soulmates are a rare thing to find in any profession or art.

Friday May 1st day of Labour Shanghai

I must say I'm happy to leave Shanghai. I feel trapped here on an island of diplomats, and consuls, eating mediocre Dutch food by renowned Dutch chefs de cuisine with an attitude. Why is it that we always have to promote Holland with tulips and pancakes as if we still wear wooden shoes and actually live in windmills. Now I would like to see China. This is supposed to be the people's republic of China. I want to meet the people's people!

Yesterday was Queen's day in Holland. The Dutch colony in Shanghai tried to celebrate it. It was the most boring queen's day I had so far. In Holland queen's day means partytime. I would be walking around with my little son Kaili on my neck enjoying the music, the games, the people... Boy, I miss him!

Saturday the 2nd of May, Beijing. Part one.



Yesterday we arrived in Beijing. Here we start the touristic part of our journey. We visited the Lamaistic temple in town. Lots of incense, lots of tourists and some beautiful statues. The little exposition in one of the buildings of this complex wants to make us believe that Tibet was 'peacefully liberated' by the Chinese people's army... sure! At night we go eating with our friendly host and china-specialist Robert van Kan. We end up discussing the western influence on Asia, I was disgusted by the fact that all the Chinese personnel and the Chinese models were given Anglo Saxon names to make them easier to address for the western guests. It's particularly the mindless adaptation of western or American ideas that

upsets me. Not only here in China but also in Europe for example. To make a copy of the format of David Lettermans' talkshow is understandable but why on earth do they put a Manhattan Skyline in the background of the German version. That night we saw a good example of how to adapt western music with Chinese roots, Beijing's most well known protest singer gave an officially unannounced concert in the CD club. Chinese stacatto rap with music influenced by both Chinese and western music. A rare bread. Beautiful.

Saturday, 2nd of may 1998. Part two.

Finally! A real concert! Today we played in a club somewhere in Beijing. Unannounced of course because it's very difficult to get official permission to do a concert. The Ministry of Culture (and censor) needs an application 10 months before with all the information available. cd's video's, biographies, setlists and if there is a singer also a printout of all the lyrics. So most concerts here are unofficial. The place was packed, word spreads around regardless of censor. It was great to play for this crowd. The protest singer of the day before was there and we had a nice conversation with him. Later we were introduced to a Tibetan pop singer who just arrived in Beijing. This is what music is about. Unifying worlds with the universal language called music.

Monday 4th of may 1998.

Yesterday we played the last concert in tour in China. The bar, called the Keep in Touch, is one of the new underground bars in China. No official license for live music but there is music about three times a week. 'Gedogen' we call that in Dutch, doing something that's not officially allowed but government looks the other way knowing that it would happen anyway. A bit like the coffee shops in Holland selling marijuana. Anyway, it's great to walk in a club in China and see two pictures of Dutch masterdrummer Han Bennink on the wall. The band that played before us was a typical new style jazz group from china. guitar, piano, drums and bassguitar each musician supplied with a copy the well known and sometimes despised Realbook. The popular tunes seem to be Autumn Leaves, Chameleon, If I should loose you, and all the other hits from the real book. We played a nice set but were slightly surprised when the owner of the club (a Chinese Koto player) told us that he recorded the whole thing on DAT and that he would like to release it on CD. Copyrights are not a popular subject in China let alone royalties but he seems to be a nice and honest guy and we might profit from the exposure and maybe one day sell our own CD's over there.

Tuesday 5th of may somewhere above Siberia

Holland is celebrating it's liberation day (from the Nazis in WW II that is) and we couldn't suppress a feeling of liberation ourselves when we finally cleared customs at the Beijing Airport this morning to catch our flight to Holland. We spent two hours waiting in cues surrounded by zillions of people all trying to get through the same custom controls. In a city of 16 million people enjoying an increasing mobility 6 custom desks isn't particularly a luxury neither would a functioning air conditioning have been.



Yesterday we visited China's great wall and the Temple of heaven. I must say that especially the temple impressed me deeply. For the first time I felt something of the atmosphere that I imagined to find in China based on the impressions I had reading about Taoism and practising Tai Chi Chuan for several years. The park and buildings surrounding the Temple of Heaven are all in perfect balance combining splendid simplicity with rich ornamentation. For a brief moment I felt the beauty and richness that China surely possesses but for some reason hides it's true spirit from us. As if it is embarrassed by it's own beautiful culture and tries to hook up with the economical rat race of the west.