

media release



JUNE 2005

THE HUA FAMILY SHAWM BAND



Shawm band musicians are the gypsies of China, and the Hua family band are among the most exhilarating. Led by master musicians Hua Yinshan (shawm) and his older brother Hua Jinshan (drum), they are busy performing for funerals and calendrical ceremonies. In 2002 the band scored a big hit at Yo Yo Ma's Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Washington where "their music sent American audiences wild" (Songlines 2004).

The ear-splitting sound of shawms (*suona*, with a flared bell and pirouette, the small reed enclosed in the mouth) and percussion has become an ubiquitous accompaniment to village ceremonial since around the 16th century. The music makes an extreme contrast to the refined world of *erhu*, *pipa* and *qin*, but it is at least as old, of great beauty and complexity, with a corpus of lengthy and through-composed early melody veiled by a gutsy blues-like improvisatory feel. The Hua band is one of few still playing the ancient repertory.

By way of an entertaining contrast to the classic suites, the band plays a repertory derived from local opera melodies. In this the band is often augmented by the *sheng* (mouth organ), *mei* (flute), and *huhu* (fiddle). Tricks are performed playing trumpets with a whistle in the mouth, a curved trumpet, and on the shawm, dismantling and reassembling it, or by playing it through the nostrils, or in pairs. On demand the band may even play their pop music repertory; show old Hua Jinshan a drum-kit and he'll go wild!

Notes to the Editor:

FRI 10 JUNE 8pm	DORSET Portesham Village Hall, nr Weymouth www.artsreach.co.uk	Box Office 01305 871 780
SAT 11 JUNE 7.30pm	LONDON – LITTLE CHILLI FESTIVAL LSO St Luke's www.lso.co.uk/lsoatlukes	Box Office 020 7638 8891
SUN 12 JUNE 3pm	OXFORD Cowley Road Carnival	Box Office 01865 488 369

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