

# Notes on the Program

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## **Spring Festival Overture**

### **LI Huanzhi**

Vibrant, brilliant orchestral sound suffuses the *Spring Festival Overture* from its energetic opening. A spirit of dance propels the cheerful principal theme; to ears accustomed to the European symphonic tradition, this opening section will greatly resemble folk-infused pieces by Dvořák in both mood and effect. A central expanse of keening lyricism provides gracious, even nostalgic contrast in the middle of this short piece. At the end, the tempo picks up again for a return to an abbreviated version of the “A section,” now heard as a brief coda powerfully supported by percussion.

The *Spring Festival Overture* has been performed in many arrangements for various groupings of Chinese instruments, Western instruments, or combinations of the two, either in chamber ensembles or full orchestra. It is widely regarded as a traditional piece, although it was actually composed in 1955–56

by Li Huanzhi (1919–2000). A major force in music of the People’s Republic of China, Li was associated with the Central Conservatory of Music, the Central Ensemble of Songs and Dances, and the China Central Chinese Orchestra. Beginning in 1985 he served as the chairman of the Chinese Musicians’ Association.

While the music in this overture relates specifically to the Spring Festival as it is celebrated in the Shanbei region of Shaanxi Province in northwest China, the piece has become immensely popular throughout China, and even beyond – since in 2007 it was one of 30 musical selections sent into outer space aboard *Chang’e No. 1*, China’s first lunar-probe satellite, which beamed this music back to Earth from a distance of some 236,000 miles.

**Instrumentation:** two flutes and piccolo, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, triangle, cymbals, Chinese cymbals, Chinese bass drum, and strings.

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## **Spring Festival**



The Spring Festival, as the New Year celebration is known inside China, takes place over 15 days. A thorough house cleaning sweeps away bad spirits of the passing year, and red and gold decorations, wishing good fortune, are hung. The color red – symbolizing joy, virtue, and sincerity – infuses the celebration, including on envelopes containing money that are given to wish the recipient prosperity. Family gatherings feature foods rich with symbolism: whole fish represent togetherness and abundance; uncut noodles, longevity; dumplings (said to resemble traditional currency), good fortune; and bags of tangerines or oranges, good luck.

– The Editors