



Zhang Fan

Dean of the Beijing Midi Music School

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Azchael of rockinchina.com and Zhang Fan of Midi School.

Azchael: Hello Mr. Zhang Fan. As a Dean of the Beijing Midi Music School, what are you responsible for?

Zhang Fan: I'm the Dean of the music school. You can say, that I'm something like an owner of the school. An equivalent English expression could also be President of the school.



Since the set up of the Midi school my responsibilities included administration, school development, the search for new teachers and new teaching materials and translation of respective material from English to Chinese.

Since 1993 Midi has grown and we've got a lot of new staff, so I have time for other things, such as our plans to set up a record company and record studio in the future, our plan to set up a publishing company and our plan to establish a live house for rock concerts every weekend with good PA and lighting.

Azchael: Where from China are your students coming from?

Zhang Fan: Basically from all over mainland China. We also have students from Hongkong and Taiwan.

Azchael: Do you have any foreign or western students or teachers?

Zhang Fan: We're going to get two German guitar students next semester. At the moment they're still taking part in a Chinese course, but they're going to join the school soon.

Our teaching staffs come 70% from Beijing and 30% from outside Beijing (including foreign countries). We had teachers from Italy, the USA and Australia and we're holding foreign expert workshops from two to five weeks every year. Our longest one was ten weeks in total.



Azrael: Can you please tell me something about the history of Midi? What was the development?

Zhang Fan: In the beginning, 1993, we only one hundred thousand RMB to buy some equipment. We only had one classroom with 40 square metres and one office room with 6 square metres. In our first year we had 80 students and until 1997 we only hold 3 month courses.

From 1997 onwards we're holding two year diploma courses. In total we moved 5 times since 1993 and we arrived on our new school campus in 2001 with a total of ten thousand square metres, a own dorm building and a separate classroom building.

In the beginning we had no support from government and had a lot of financial problems. At the end of every semester we had nothing left on the bank and invested everything back into the school, so that the school could make progress.

Azrael: And what was your relation to the Tree Village? I've read in Jereon Groenewegen's master thesis about Shu Cun.

Zhang Fan: The Tree Village started from 1998, basically because of our change in 1997 to offer two year courses lots and lots of students from all over China arrived in Beijing to study at the school.

And after their graduation they still wanted to be close to the school. That time we'd been at Shandi and a village nearby was called Tree Village. The students moved there and kept close to the school to get a chance to meet other students and foreign teachers.

At some time nearly 100 to 200 bands were living in Tree Village, but now there are only trees, no more Tree Village. As Midi school moved in 2001 to it's present campus Tree Village changed and now there are just trees.



Azchael: In all the years, what was the best thing, the most remarkable thing that happened?

Zhang Fan: I would say the best thing is that via our education a lot of rock and jazz musicians could be trained and that way new blood and new energy was given to Chinese Rock'n'Roll.

You see, at Midi Festival half of the bands consist purely of Midi school graduates and 80% of all musicians are or had been our students. We want to keep the Midi festival changing and that's the reason that for this years festival 80% of the bands are completely new and only 20% have played at the festival before.

A lot of people have complained that we've changed too much, but there are also a lot of people who are supporting our plan and who see it as a good chance to open the stage for new bands.



Azchael: How many people are actually involved in organizing the Midi festival?

Zhang Fan: About 20 people are starting to make arrangements half a year before the festival is scheduled.

During the venue about 300 volunteers and about 100 technicians and 100 security people are helping. So in total about 500.

Azchael: This year's festival features more than ten foreign bands. What can you tell me about this?

Zhang Fan: In total we'd received more than twenty applications, via mail, demo records and even with videos. Out of twenty we've chosen 12 bands from countries such as the US, France, Norway, Spain and many more.

Some of them knew about Midi school, some contacts were arranged via embassies and

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cultural organizations and some like the UK Liverpool band The Wombats were arranged via art colleges.

Some of them pay everything by themselves, some of them received support money from their government and for some we're trying to help them.

Azrael: You already had foreign bands playing in recent years' festivals. In 2003 there had been a Japanese band called BRAHMAN playing and if I remember correctly, there had been shouting and throwing of things on stage. Now in 2006 there is another Japanese band, the Yokohama Association. Do you think there is going to be another "event" as in 2003?

Zhang Fan: It's a shame about 2003 and that a small group of young people disturb such an event. In the music circles we're all against this happening.

We've also taken preparation, such as an interview with the band that is recorded on video and will be displayed before their performance to let everybody know that this event and this band is about music.

I'm quite confident that this year it will be better and such a thing is not going to happen.

Furthermore the Yokohama Association is a fusion band and we think it is more easy for them to communicate the spirit of music. They make... gentlemen music. In contrast with the BRAHMAN band, which was a rock band, there is not going to be so much energy in the music. And I think they are going to be accepted.

We also make preparations on several websites and informed everybody beforehand. Also, the band is going to play at the beginning of the first day and so many people are waiting for this rock festival since half a year. They are so eager to hear rock music that their spirit is calmed and they will welcome the band.

This year will certainly be good!



Photo by Greenwall (Cai Ming) of Chengdu, Midi 2004

Azrael: How come that you're going to have 5 stages this year?

Zhang Fan: Last year we already had two stages and our experience was very good.

This year, the Ao Tu Culture company, a company with a lot of experience in hosting music and lighting events, called us and wanted to do a Dancing stage. They are going to be putting together several DJs at the "Yen Dance stage".

Then we also have a stage organized by www.guitarchina.com, China's biggest guitar website. They asked us and they're going to invite a lot of solo musicians and their bands.

For all stages we're providing lighting and equipment. Everything else, controlling of the stage, schedule, invitation of musicians and producers is responsibility of the stage hosts.

For the Apres Midi stage we wanted to do an event for people who have no chance to come to Midi during day time and for those who live in downtown and who want to see the foreign bands. Therefore the Apres Midi Stage is at the 2nd Ring Road in the Tango bar and it starts every day after 9 o'clock in the evening.

In total we have 5 stages now and if everything goes well, who knows, maybe next year we have 7 stages.

Azrael: What do you think of Chinese underground music now?

Zhang Fan: Well, since Midi started its 2 year course program in 1997, about 10 years ago, more and more people come and more and more bands form and play all around Beijing in bars.

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And now, three years after the first Midi festival out of our school campus (2003), Beijing bands move more and more into the focus of people.

Now we even receive certain government support. They see that Midi is not dangerous and that is a cultural thing. Just today I'd been a BJ TV station and they made a 5 minute report about the festival. Think of it ten years back, impossible.

TV is a good medium and I think Chinese rock is going more and more into TV, newspapers and websites. Chinese Rock will go up!

Last year, all big music websites reported about Midi and now even SINA is going to launch an advertisement on their first page with a link to us!

And you can see in recent years that also other cities host their own festivals. It's like letting Chinese people know, that they can go outside, enjoy the music and have a new lifestyle.

I think in 5 years, rock'n'roll is going to be like pop and everywhere, even in radio. Especially after government experienced that rock is not bad and not dangerous. At last year's festival there had been no single accident and even the policemen were surprised about the politeness of the people.

The Chinese rock underground scene will definitely rise up!

Azchael: Now, may I ask a personal question? What is your favourite band? Which one you like best?

Zhang Fan: Oh, that's a good question! It's difficult to say to only pick one band, because different bands have different style. Hmm...

Azchael: Then, which bands you like most?

Zhang Fan: A few names: Yaksa, Cui Jian, Subs, Nuclear Fusion-G, and the blues band Sand... there are lots of bands, Soundtoy, Muma, XTX and Brainfailure to name a few.

Azchael: What do you think, where's the Midi school in ten years?

Zhang Fan: You know, the Midi school is our all basement. All our developments are based on the Midi school. What we're trying to do now is to get more cooperation with outside colleges and to have more foreign expert teachers.

We also are in contact with educational bureau of Beijing regarding our music studies diploma, which I'm certain is going to have recognized our diploma as a national diploma within the next ten years. At the moment they have no idea about modern music and we're letting them know about.

So far we used to send them our application every year, but they didn't care about it. With our



Midi festival growing bigger and bigger I think Midi school is also getting better recognized, so that we're be able to received the admission.

And for sure, we're going to have more students!

Azrael: Thanks a lot for the interview and your time, rock on!!!

Zhang Fan: No problem, Goodbye!