

PRESS KIT

Lucy Zhao – Pipa

Solo | Orchestra | Contemporary Music | Collaboration | Comprovisation

Instrument	Pipa (Chinese necked lute)
Profile	Soloist; collaboration with orchestra; classical tradition & present; contemporary music; improvisation/comprovisation
Education	China Conservatory of Music, Beijing
Based in	Berlin, Germany (in Europe since 2015)
Languages	German / English / Chinese
Contact	lucy.zhao.pipa@outlook.com +49 (0)174 4514 075

This press kit includes a short and long biography, program formats, selected press quotes, repertoire highlights, and essential information for presenters and the press.

Short Biography

Lucy Zhao is a virtuoso of the Chinese pipa whose music crosses boundaries between centuries-old tradition and the present day. Her career began at the early age with a performance at the Opening Ceremony of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games; since then, she has become a sought-after soloist performing at international concert halls. Trained at the China Conservatory of Music in Beijing, she has lived in Europe since 2015, combining traditional virtuosity with the sound worlds of contemporary music and free improvisation. Her distinctive artistic approach creates a compelling space between cultures—shaped with precision, energy, and emotional depth.

Long Biography

Lucy Zhao's music transcends sonic borders. As a soloist on the pipa – the Chinese necked lute – she leads audiences on emotional journeys in which the instrument's centuries-old heritage meets the pulsing breath of the present: a sound world between memory and departure.

Her artistic path has been shaped by early mastery and a deliberate expansion of her practice. Trained as a pipa virtuoso in Beijing, she appeared as early as 2008 as a member of a pipa orchestra at the Opening Ceremony of the Olympic Games. At the China Conservatory of Music in Beijing, she intensified her studies and gained initial international experience, before moving to Europe in 2015 and developing her artistic language in new contexts.

Today, Lucy Zhao is an internationally sought-after soloist, appearing in venues such as the Konzerthaus Berlin, the Haus für Mozart in Salzburg, and the ZKM Karlsruhe. Critics describe the special allure of her playing: the hall becomes “completely silent,” the effect is “breathtaking”; her expression has been praised as a “mixture of tender lyricism and explosive rhythm.”

Her repertoire spans the classical solo tradition of the pipa as well as contemporary works (including by Tan Dun). In symphonic settings, she has established herself as a soloist (e.g., with the Niederrheinische Sinfoniker and the Vienna Hofburg Orchestra). She also explores new sound worlds through free improvisation (e.g. with the Ensemble Śabdāgatitāra and in the trio BirkeJanekZhao). This interplay of tradition, the present, and experimentation has also led her to cross-traditional projects – among others with the Orchester der Kulturen, the Lautten Compagny Berlin, and with Sandeep Bhagwati and Peter Wiegold (The Third Orchestra).

At the heart of her work is a deeply personal yet universal impulse: a living dialogue between rooted tradition and bold modernity – new, focused, and compelling in every performance.

Programs & Formats (Available for Booking)

The following formats are available as concerts/programs. Duration, instrumentation, and repertoire can be tailored to the occasion and venue upon request.

1) Solo – Classical Pipa Repertoire

- Duration: 45 / 60 / 75 minutes (acoustic; amplification optional)
- Context: concert halls, chamber music series, festivals, curated museum settings
- Repertoire: classical solo pieces, narrative works, virtuosic character pieces

2) Orchestra – Pipa as Solo Instrument

- Format: soloist with (chamber) orchestra; concertos/solo parts
- Examples: Pipa Concerto No. 2 (Zhao Jiping); additional works/arrangements depending on the program

- Suitable for: themed seasons, New Year programs, cross-cultural projects, contemporary orchestral formats

3) Pipa in the Present – Contemporary Music

- Duration: 45–75 minutes (depending on the program)
- Format: solo or with chamber/ensemble instrumentation
- Repertoire: contemporary solo pieces and chamber music; works by composers including TAN Dun, Ying WANG; selected premieres (by arrangement)

4) Collaboration & Comprovisation

- Duration: 45–75 minutes
- Format: duo / trio / ensemble (project-based)
- Focus: structured improvisation, comprovisation, cross-traditional dialogues; interdisciplinary options possible

Moderation / Audience Engagement

Upon request, Lucy Zhao offers moderated concerts and introduces the pipa in an elegant, accessible way. In concise spoken remarks, she shares insights into the instrument’s history, repertoire, and playing techniques, opening listening paths that bring audiences closer to the music. Moderation can frame individual pieces or be delivered as a brief introduction at the beginning – always concert-focused, unobtrusive, and sensitive to the atmosphere.

- Languages: German / English / Chinese
- Formats: short introductions; moderated programs; family/outreach concerts

Video (Selection)

- “The Conqueror Doffs His Armor” (Solo traditional) – https://youtu.be/M_xJxvEQXbE
- “Spring Silkworm” (Solo contemporary) – <https://youtu.be/WiaZ9gVo-zA>
- “Wild Geese Descending over the Sands” (Solo traditional) – <https://youtu.be/rg1PyAEZP4Q>

These three videos present the pipa as a solo instrument in its full range—from lyrical refinement to virtuosic, rhythmically percussive energy.

About the Pipa

The pipa is a plucked Chinese necked lute with a history of more than 1,500 years. Its sound ranges from delicate, vocal lyricism to luminous, percussive energy—often within a single musical breath. Characteristic is its flat, pear-shaped body, often crafted from hardwoods. Today, the pipa typically has four steel strings, commonly tuned a–e–d–A, and 24 to 30 frets—a construction that enables an exceptionally wide spectrum of tone colors and expression. The instrument’s name refers to two fundamental stroke directions: “Pi” (琵) and “Pa” (琶) denote strokes in opposite directions. It is played mostly with natural or artificial fingernails, allowing dynamics, articulation, and tone to be shaped with great precision—from shimmering arpeggios to crisp, percussive accents. This technical versatility makes the pipa a highly expressive solo instrument and a compelling partner in chamber and orchestral dialogue.

Selected Repertoire

Examples — depending on program and context:

Solo / Traditional and Contemporary (Selection)

- Ambush from All Sides
- The Conqueror Doffs his Armor
- Wild Geese Descending over the Sands
- Lady Zhaojun Goes Beyond the Frontier
- Dance of the Yi People (WANG Huiran)
- Spring Silkworm (LIU Dehai)

Concerto / Orchestra (Selection)

- ZHAO Jiping: Pipa Concerto No. 2
- Moonlight on Spring River (arr. WU Zuqiang)

Contemporary / Chamber Music (Selection)

- TAN Dun: Ghost Opera for String Quartet and Pipa
- LIU Yuan: Ensemble for Pipa and Seven Cellos
- JIA Daqun: The Prospect of Colored Desert
- Ying WANG: KUAFU for Pipa, Accordion and Vocalist

Improvisation / Comprovisation Formats

- Ensemble Šabdagatitāra
- The Third Orchestra
- Ensemble Extrakte Berlin
- Trio BirkeJanekZhao

Cross-Cultural Collaboration

- Lautten Compagney Berlin
- Orchester der Kulturen
- Vortex Ensemble

Press Quotes (Selection)

- “The hall fell completely silent ... Breathtaking.” — Politiken (Denmark)
- “What Lucy Zhao drew from her beloved instrument was simply magnificent.” – donaukurier (Ingolstadt)
- “The applause for Lucy Zhao was thunderous and lengthy.” – Rheinische Post (Krefeld)
- “Thanks to her wide range of playing techniques, Lucy Zhao can ... convey complex emotions and dramatic battle scenes in music.” – Westdeutsche Zeitung (Krefeld)

Selected Appearances

- Konzerthaus Berlin
- ZKM Karlsruhe
- Haus für Mozart Salzburg
- Humboldt Forum (Berlin)
- ARTE Concert
- Berliner Festspiele
- Aga Khan Museum (Toronto)
- Opening Ceremony of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games

Press Photos

High-resolution press photos (300 dpi) as well as additional images for program booklets and social media can be provided upon request by email.

Technical Rider

Solo / Chamber Music (acoustic)

- No amplification required
- 1 armless chair (stable), 1 music stand (if needed)

Concerto / Orchestra (with amplification)

- 1 bass amplifier
- 1 stand microphone incl. stand

Experimental Music

- Pipa with pickup (suitable for experimental music only)
- Bass amp (may be supplied by artist or by venue)

Booking / Contact

For inquiries, please include the suggested date, location, desired format (solo / orchestra / contemporary / collaboration), planned duration, budget range, and – if applicable – technical requirements.

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