



The ancient Forbidden City

This year's Olympics host city will be very much in the international spotlight. Tom Pattinson highlights its musical hotspots

Modern Beijing creates so much of its own music, from the cacophonous riot of the eerie creaks of cranes and the monotonous bang of hammers to the crack of sparking metal. The car horns of the 1,500 new cars that hit the roads daily hum and screech their way across gridlocked streets and there's the shuffle and scuffle of thousands of shoppers clip-clopping in their high heels across the polished floors of new mega shopping malls. Beijing is a modern metropolis that has undergone more gentrification and building than any other city in modern history.

Chinese music first emerged over 2,500 years ago and whilst ebbing and flowing in popularity depending on the whims of the ruling emperors, its

fundamentals have changed little over time. During the communist revolution however, music was regarded as bourgeois and counter-revolutionary and all but banned. But the last three decades has seen the country once again finding its musical voice.

To the south of Tiananmen Square around the old quarter of Qianmen, lie a number of small Peking opera theatres such as Huguang Huiguan and the Liyuan Theatre. At weekends the ancient gardens in the parks surrounding the Temple of Heaven are home to small groups of spontaneous performers who arrive at the crack of dawn to perform renditions of Peking opera, folk classics and revolutionary songs.

Folk music – vastly different from Peking opera – is more often performed at family occasions including weddings and funerals. Many types of folk

music are still popular in the capital and everything from Mongolian throat singing to Xinjiang folk guitar music can often be heard in many of the bars around the Houhai Lake.

Whilst the prevalence of Western rock has diluted many traditional Chinese elements, good Chinese pop-rock, often accompanied by traditional instruments, can still be heard most weekends at the main live music clubs. China is currently a pioneer when it comes to live electronic sounds. Often heard in the small club 2 Kolegas, live computer-based music is played live through old Gameboys and other modified electronic equipment. It certainly makes for an interesting, albeit amateur, new wave of electronic music that Beijing can claim as its own.

GOING TRAVELLING?

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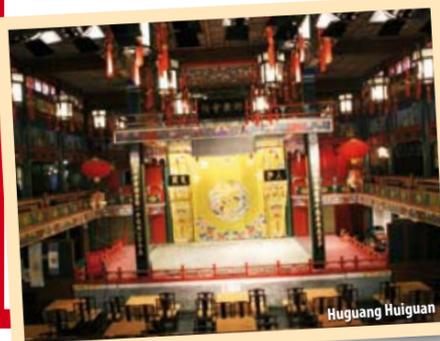
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PEKING OPERA Huguang Huiguan

This small opera house that holds just a couple of hundred people, was built during the Republic of China era (1911-1949) and is rumoured to be haunted. Today it also doubles up as a Peking opera museum, but every evening classical Peking opera highlights shows are performed.

Hufangqiao, Shizhilukou, Shinajiao, Xuanwu district, +86 10 6351 8284



Huguang Huiguan

Liyuan Theatre

Inside the Qianmen Hotel, this mid-size theatre is often packed with tourists getting a taste of Peking opera. The most professional of all the highlights shows, you can even arrive early to see the performers get made up.

Qianmen Hotel, 175 Yongan Lu, Xuanwu district, +86 10 8315 7297

Imperial Granary

Located inside the ancient Imperial Granary, this tiny venue is one for academics of traditional music. Sporadic shows of classical Western music, traditional Chinese folk and modern jazz are performed. Attached to the building is probably Beijing's finest music shop for DVDs, CDs, books and magazines about traditional music.

Inside Nanxincang, Dongsì Shitiao

south-west of Dongsì Shitiao Bridge, Chaoyang district, +86 10 6409 6499

Forbidden City Concert Hall

Just to the west of the Forbidden City, situated within its garden, is a wonderful concert hall. Nowadays it mainly hosts foreign classical chamber orchestras but with a capacity of nearly 2,000 (albeit uncomfortable) seats, it is one of the city's finest.

Inside Zhongshan Park, Xi Changanjie, Dongcheng district, +86 10 6559 8285, www.fcchbj.com

Poly Theatre

This modern theatre is among the city's largest and shows everything from stage productions to traditional performances from Japan and Korea, as well as China. First Floor, Poly Plaza, 14 Dongzhimen Nan Dajie, Dongcheng district, +86 10 6501 1854, www.en.polytheatre.com

VENUES

2 Kolegas

This tiny venue holds no more than a couple of dozen people but the garden outside means that summer gigs sprawl into the open air. Electronic music from bit-pop artists like iLoop and experimental mood musicians FM3 are likely to be crammed onto the tiny stage surrounded in smoke.

21 Liangmaqiao Lu, Chaoyang district, +86 136 9118 0119, www.2kolegas.com

13 Club

Tucked away off the main road in the university area, 13 is the hangout for Beijing punks and ska rockers on weekends, but home of folk rock on Sundays and alternative acoustic music on weeknights.

161 Lanqiying Lu, Haidian district, +86 10 6088 7715

D-22

Expect to hear the next big thing in Beijing rock in this small underground venue in the heart of the university district. The bar with a stage holds only 150 people so gets packed at weekends by those in the know.

13 Chengfu Lu, Haidian district, +86 10 6265 3177, www.d22beijing.com

Mao Livehouse

Mao has more of a live venue feel than any other in Beijing. Not just a bar with a stage, it has a capacity of over 500 people. Expect international acts, top tier local bands and a mishmash of rock, punk and indie.

111 Gulou Dong Dajie, Dongcheng district, +86 10 640 25080 1459, www.maolive.com

Yan Club

This gallery-venue has played host to some of the city's most infamous and celebrated rave nights. It's actually a gallery in the trendy art district of 798 during the day and only hosts events on occasion.

2 Jiuxianqiao Lu, Dashanzi, Chaoyang district, +86 10 84573506, www.yanclub.com

Yugong Yishan

Situated in the former home of Duan Qirui – the prime minister of China during the warlord period – this large club holds up to 400 people on a good night. Cheap drinks, loud music and a varied line-up of artists make this the most popular live music venue in the city.

West courtyard former site of Duan Qirui government, 3-2 Zhangzi Zhong Lu, Ping'an Dadao, Dongcheng district, +86 10 6404 2711



Trendy place-to-be Yugong Yishan

PARKS

Temple of Heaven Park

Built in 1420 when the Ming Dynasty came to power, the Temple of Heaven is one of the major tourist attractions. Every morning hundreds of older people come to practise *tai chi* and fan dancing; they also come to perform spontaneous shows of Peking opera.

Tiantan Gongyuan, Yongdingmen

Donjie (for the South Gate), Chongwen district.

Temple of Sun Park

This park sits right in the centre of the city. The tranquil lakes and overgrown trees make it a shady spot to sit and listen to some traditional folk music performed by locals.

Ritan Park, 6 Ritan Bei Lu, Chaoyang district

LISTINGS

A comprehensive range of Chinese titles can be found in the Imperial Granary shop. But for English language titles, try listings magazines including *That's Beijing* (www.thatsbj.com) and *Time Out Beijing* (www.timeout.com/beijing).

FESTIVALS

Beijing Music Festival

The country's largest classical music festival sadly doesn't include as much traditional Chinese music as it should, but instead favours visiting Western classical musicians. However there is always a small programme of traditional music for avid fans. Every October/November. www.bmf.org.cn/en

Beijing Pop Festival

Held in early September in Chaoyang Park, the Beijing Pop Festival is the closest China gets to Reading Festival with an international rock line-up and over 10,000 music fans per day. This two-day

event has seen international acts such as Nine Inch Nails, Public Enemy, Supergrass and Placebo, as well as dozens of local rock acts. www.beijingpopfestival.com

Midi Festival

Held in May, this four-day festival showcases the best of Chinese rock, pop and hip-hop artists. www.midifestival.com

Modern Sky Festival

Organised by China's largest independent record label, this new three-day October festival that started in 2007 is likely to become one of the biggest in the capital. www.modernsky.com

RECORD & INSTRUMENT SHOPS

Junjie Qinhang

Set back off the main road, this place has scores of *erhus* (two-stringed fiddles) lining the walls. Chinese *diza* (flutes) range in price from 100-180 Renminbi (RMB) and *guzheng* (zithers) average around 1,200RMB.

56 Nanxinhua Dajie, Xuanwu district, +86 10 6302 7986, www.bjhuicui.com



A beautifully ornate guzheng (zither)

Yangshi Yueqi

North-west of the Forbidden City and the Houhai Lakes are a series of shops that sell almost every classical instrument imaginable. A friendly, accessible place stocking most instruments including traditional drums and cymbals.

122 Xinjiekou Nandajie, Xicheng district, +86 10 6615 8552, www.bjjsyq.com

FAB

The largest and most comprehensive music shop in the capital, FAB sells everything from modern rock to classical music and traditional folk. All original CDs (no fakes) are prices around 50RMB.

Oriental Plaza, 1 Dong Changan Jie, Dongcheng district, +86 10 8518 8905

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