

## SHANGHAI

SOUNDING OUT  
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## Host city of this year's World Expo, Shanghai is mainly known as a hub of commerce and finance but the Chinese city also has a plethora of musical offerings, as Tessa Thornley discovers

China is not known for being a multicultural country. It's a place with so much going on within its own borders that it has rarely needed to look elsewhere for inspiration. The many ethnic groups and seeping influences from across the borders in the north, south and west, have given the country a rich musical heritage and source of artistic stimulus.

Hence, in Shanghai, you may not find the broadest variety of sounds from around the world, but the city won't disappoint if you want to tune in to a combination of Chinese folk from the north-eastern region of Dongbei mixed with jazz or Mongolian drinking songs and rock.

Shanghai also has its fair share of classically trained musicians and singers who are proficient in Peking and Kunqu opera, and expert at the *erhu* (violin), *pipa* (lute) or *zhongruan* (plucked string

instrument) thanks to the local Conservatory of Music and the Shanghai Peking Opera House and school. You can hear them perform at venues across the city, but things get really interesting when these ancient skills are combined with rock, jazz or electronica.

Last year, under the guise of the World Expo (which runs for six months until October 2010), Shanghai launched a world music festival and invited artists from across the globe and the four corners of China to jam together. Sa Dingding, who is fast becoming a mainstream mega-star, took to the stage with Deep Forest and Liu Suola, who creates contemporary sounds from traditional Chinese instruments, lit up the stage at the event.

On the back of its success, the organisers are promising an even stronger line-up in 2011 at a new venue, the Himalayas Center, currently under construction.

In the meantime, most local bands and artists can be found in the independently run, live music venues in the Yangpu University district in the north-east of Shanghai or around Dingxi Road where a host of dive bars, recording studios and rehearsal spaces have created an underground music hub.

World music purists should also make the pilgrimage to the city's Moganshan arts zone in the north, a warren of galleries and studios that is home to Bandu, a café-cum bar and music shop devoted to Chinese ethnic and new age sounds. The owner runs a music label and is a zhongruan master who hosts a regular music salon for more intimate and experimental live sessions. A dedicated core of independent bar owners run one-off nights devoted to African drumming or Spanish guitar, ensuring that the city's increasingly eclectic music crowd can also get their world music fix.



One of the many buzzing and bustling streets of the cosmopolitan and culturally rich city



Old meets new in China's most modern metropolis



The many seeping influences from across the borders have given China a rich musical heritage

### TRADITIONAL MUSIC & OPERA

#### Shanghai Oriental Art Center

An impressive venue designed by French architect Paul Andreu to resemble a five-petal flower. It is constructed from glass, wood and steel, and is a huge space for classical music performances (both Western and Asian) and popular solo artists' concerts. Each of the petals mark a separate space: entrance hall, performance hall,

concert hall, exhibition hall and opera hall.

425 Dingxiang Lu, near Century Boulevard, [www.shoac.cn](http://www.shoac.cn)

#### Yifu Theatre

Established in 1925, Yifu Theatre or Tianchan Peking Opera Centre, features a host of traditional operas including Beijing Opera. Shows change every month and it seats almost 1,000.

701 Fuzhou Road, near People's Square, [www.tianchan.com](http://www.tianchan.com)

#### IS THE RHYTHM CALLING YOU?

Check out [www.songlines.co.uk/musictravel](http://www.songlines.co.uk/musictravel) to seek out the trip that will tickle your musical tastebuds

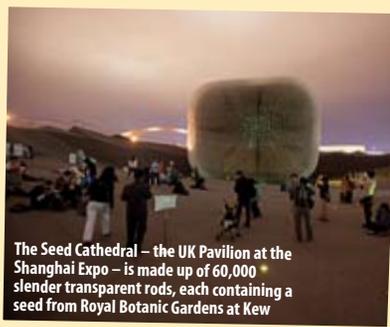




Lao Qiang Ensemble perform traditional puppet show music from Shaanxi Province at the Shanghai World Music Festival



Pumi Jew's harp player (Pumi is a minority group of southern China)



The Seed Cathedral – the UK Pavilion at the Shanghai Expo – is made up of 60,000 slender transparent rods, each containing a seed from Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew

## FESTIVALS

### The Shanghai World Music Festival

This nascent event may still be relatively small but it's a big coup for Shanghai's world music scene. In 2009, 11 artists from around the world and inside China, including Sa Dingding, *tabla* master Zakir Hussain, Synchro Sound System's Max Reinhardt and Rita Ray, plus Netsayi, the Zimbabwean singer, took to the stage. Next year's gathering is expected to be even bigger, although it's too early to confirm who will play.

Spring 2011, [www.worldmusicshanghai.com](http://www.worldmusicshanghai.com)

### JZ Jazz Festival

Held every year, this event is Shanghai's largest outdoor festival and draws major international musicians from Gilles Peterson to Dee Dee Bridgewater as well as leading Chinese jazz, blues and swing musicians. The three-day event usually attracts big crowds. In the past the focus has been on jazz, but in recent years the organisers have slowly been building a solid line-up of rock and electronica. This year there are also plans to include a world music stage.

October/November 2010, [www.jzclub.cn](http://www.jzclub.cn)

### Shanghai World Expo

Although this is not strictly a music event, if you make it to Shanghai before October, you are likely to catch several big international artists or groups who have flown over to perform at one of the hundreds of pavilions. The Royal Drummers of Burundi and the Narasirato pan pipers from the Solomon Islands are just two of the acts you can catch. It's worth noting that many of Shanghai's small, independent music venues have fallen foul of tighter security during the Expo and been shut down. Although most have since reopened, the event hasn't been much of a boost to the city's home-grown music scene.

Until October 2010, [www.en.expo2010](http://www.en.expo2010)

## MUSIC SHOPS

### Shanghai No 1 National Musical Instruments Factory Shop

The factory has been crafting traditional Chinese instruments including the *guzheng* (a plucked half-tube zither), *erhu* and the *pipa* since 1958. Most shoppers opt for the *guzheng* because it's quicker to pick up.

114 Nanjing East Road.

### JinLing Street

Dotted along this Shanghai street near People's Square are at least 30 shops selling a wide range of instruments – from *erhu* and electric guitars to pianos and drums. The owners are usually pretty laid-back and students and potential customers are invited to try before they buy.

Jinling Dong Lu, near Guangxi Nan Lu.

## VENUES

### MAO Livehouse

Fast becoming one of the city's coolest live music venues for the bigger gigs. It's where Mongolian outfit Hanggai like to play when in town. Local, national and international acts are on every weekend and most nights of the week.

570, Huaihai Xi Lu, near Hongqiao Lu, [www.maolive-sh.com](http://www.maolive-sh.com)

### Bandu Music

This café, bar and world music salon is run by Liu Xing, a *zhongruan* player who has released several New Age albums. It's located inside the Moganshan art zone and has a bohemian feel. You can buy a wide selection of Chinese CDs and then stick around for a lecture or live performance.

1/F, Building 11, 50 Moganshan Lu, Putuo, near Changhua Lu, [www.bandumusic.com](http://www.bandumusic.com)

### Two Cities Gallery

A gallery and performance space that is a little more chic than your average live music spot. It hosts regular jazz nights where American pianist and local vocalist, Jasmine Chen, has in the past showcased traditional Chinese folk songs with original jazz interpretations and jazz standards. Look out for the 'twocities in tune' events.

50, Moganshan Lu, Building 0, 2nd Floor, [www.twocitiesgallery.com](http://www.twocitiesgallery.com)

### Mural

One of just a handful of venues that has a firm focus on international music from salsa to hip-hop, reggae and African drumming. The local West African drumming circle, Jammala, are among the artists who play here.

B/F, 697 Yongjia Lu, near Hengshan Lu, [www.muralbar.com](http://www.muralbar.com)

### YuYinTang

One of the city's oldest underground live music venues with a heavy slant towards local rock bands. It has a packed roster of gigs every weekend and several week-day events too. The small stage, standing-room only dance floor and cheap beer add to the underground feel. Shanghai's newest ethnic Uighur band, Weghur – who fuse Xinjiang rhythms from China's far western province and rock – play here.

Yanan Xi Lu, near Kaixuan Lu, [www.yuyintang.org](http://www.yuyintang.org)



Beijing-based punk band Rustic playing at Shanghai's uber cool venue, the MAO Livehouse

## PARKS

### Zhongshan Park

China's parks are the perfect place to witness locals' impromptu singalongs. Some of the biggest (and loudest) groups gather in this park on Sunday mornings, often with loudspeakers and microphones, to sing folk and stirring revolutionary songs. It's Chinese music at its rawest and most raucous. The local Jammala drum circle also sometimes play here.

780, Changning Lu, near Dingxi Lu.