

Chinese Music Makes Mass More Popular in Taiwan

By FATHER IVAR McGRATH, S.S.C. (NC News Service)

Taiwan, Taiwan — Is it a temple service or a performance of Chinese opera?

It is neither. It's a Mass in the cathedral here with the words of the Chinese liturgy sung to uniquely Chinese melodies and accompanied by traditional Chinese musical instruments. The people love it.

"For the first time in history the ancient music of China is heard during the Mass," said Father Thomas Ly, cathedral music director. "The traditional instruments of our country, a part of our cultural heritage, stir the sensibilities of our people, and they experience a new appreciation of the sacred mysteries."

Chinese music was originally sacred and it is still heard in Taoist and Buddhist temples, but it is only since the Second Vatican Council opened new vistas for the Church that it has been considered possible to adapt the traditional melodies for the Mass.

Hearing their own music at the Mass has been a deeply moving experience for the Christians here and many priests think this may prove a major breakthrough in evangelization.

"After 200 or 300 years of modern-missionary endeavor in China, less than 1 per cent of the population is Catholic," Father Ly said. "The Church in China has always suffered from being labeled 'foreign.'"

Priests point out that the Latin, the music and the vestments of the Mass, and the prevalent church architecture have been un-Chinese. It is these non-essentials that the Chinese priests and enlightened foreign missionaries want to change.

Bishop Paul Cheng of Taiwan encouraged Father Ly to experiment with typical Chinese melodies for the Mass and community singing in church. Father Ly, who studied sacred music and liturgy at the famous Abbaye de Saint Andre, near Bruges, Belgium, and at the Ecole Saint Gregoire at Tournai, Belgium, started 10 months ago to train his choir in traditional Chinese musical forms and to gather a group of people, Catholic and non-Catholic, who played the various Chinese instruments.

The ancient Chinese musical scale is pentatonic, that is, it has five tones instead of the eight in the traditional Western scales. In practice, no more than 14 sounds are found in any Chinese composition. Harmony in the Western sense is not possible with an untempered scale nor without semitones. By harmony the Chinese mean that the timbre of the different instruments playing the same tune is agreeable to the ear.

"Chinese music is more like Byzantine music, it is Oriental and more melancholy, less varied than the Western," Father Ly said. "In our church music we return to the spirit of the ancient music with purely Chinese melodies."

Father Ly's orchestra consists of 25 members, including six non-Catholics, one of whom is the guardian of the Concular temple. The guardian's post is

hereditary; his father and grandfather were guardians before him.

There are two Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul in the orchestra, one of whom is Sister Sheila Sullivan of Chicago, Ill. Sister Sheila plays the pi-pa, a lute about 42 inches long with a pear-shaped body, and a neck about eight inches long. It has 12 frets and six strings.

Some of the young priests

and Sisters arriving in Taiwan want to introduce the guitar to introduce guitar Masses where the instrument is not known as we know it," Sister Sheila said. "The guitar in Taiwan is associated with bars, modern style 'garile' restaurants, and a small, long-haired young set, aping the West."

Sister Emma M.I. of Anhui plays the yang-tsun, or dulcimer, a flat box about two feet long and one foot wide, covered

with sets of wire crossed by two bridges and played with two bamboo sticks.

"I think the people like the new liturgy very much," Sister Emma said. "They are very excited with their own music and their own language and the Mass has become more meaningful."

Father Ly directs the tempo with rhythmic beats on the ying-ku, or barrel-shaped drum resting horizontally on a frame.

His position is somewhat equivalent to that of the conductor of a Western orchestra, but his beat is part of the melody. Hanging on the drum frame are a ching, or brass bowl, about 10 inches in diameter, and a nu-yu, or rounded piece of wood, partly hollow — and these he strikes at appropriate times.

Father Ly feels that eventually a school of Chinese sacred music must be established in Taiwan.

Colombian Bishops Open Institute

Bogota, Colombia — (NC) — The Colombian bishops have opened (April 15) the Institute of Applied Social Doctrine (IDES) here to draft development studies and plans.

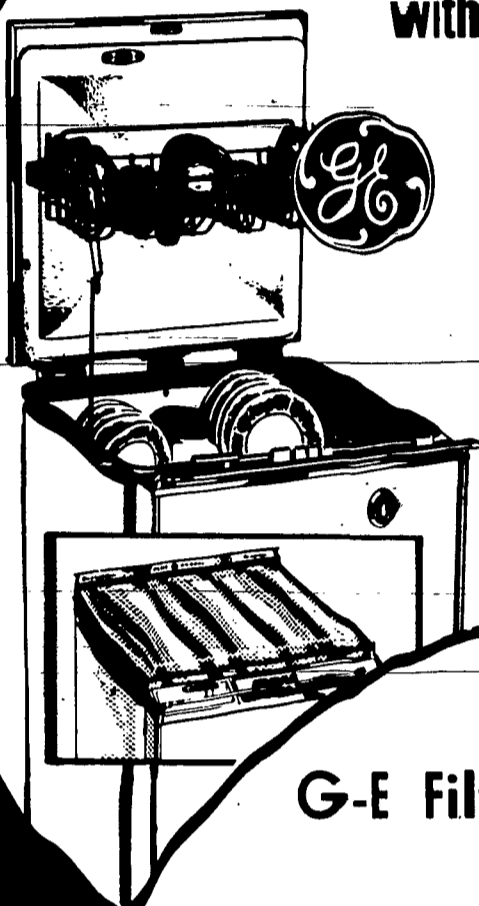
"We are trying to give a Christian foundation to development in Latin America, and at the same time to use a strictly scientific approach in order to promote and guide more efficient action by Catholics," the bishops' statement said.

Baptist Speaker Cites 'Protestant Deformation'

Houston — (RNS) — Southern Baptist pastors were warned here of a theological "Protestant Deformation" by a speaker who called for return to a Biblical, Christ-centered theology. Dr. Clark H. Pinnock, professor at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, told the Pastors' Conference that "we stand in great danger of losing the Gospel altogether."

which began with a deep comprehension of the Gospel of grace," he claimed "have largely surrendered their convictions and as a result lost their momentum. The Roman Catholic Church added tradition to Scripture, and modern Protestantism has given up both." "Our only hope is for a return to Biblical standards and to profound Scriptural preaching."

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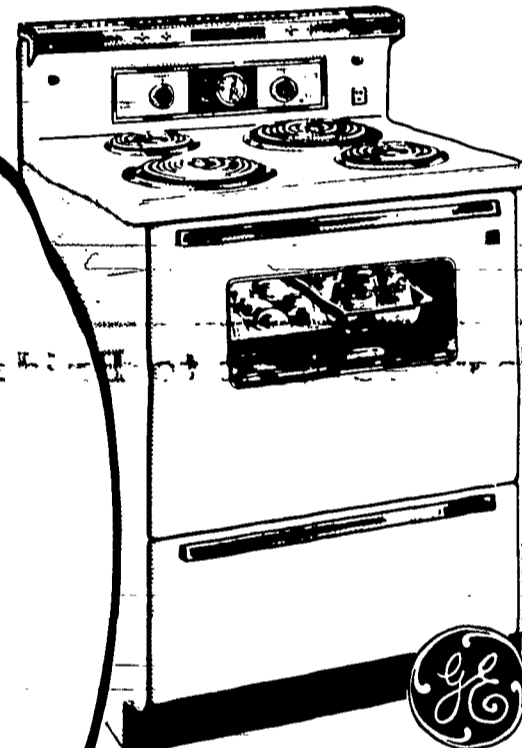


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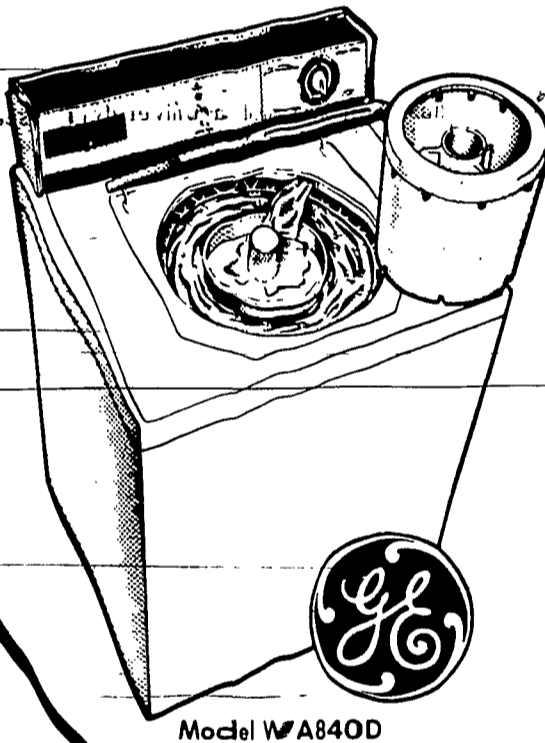


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