

Une Conversation Musicale:
Concert at Reid Hall on
Friday June 24, 2005

Geneviève Oger

An invited audience came together at Columbia University's Reid Hall in Paris on June 24th to hear a fundraising concert by Fiona Siang Yun Sze CC'03. She is a pianist and harpist born in Singapore in 1980, who has played for luminaries including Britain's Queen Elizabeth, Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping, Japan's emperor Hirohito and Bill Clinton. A former child prodigy, Sze made her debut at the age of nine, and has since performed around the world.

Sze began the concert on the zither, or the Chinese harp, known as "Guzheng" in Chinese. It's one of China's oldest instruments and can be traced back to 237 BC. Sze performed compositions by Wang Changyuan, such as *Zhan Tai Feng* and as well as one of her own; *The mystic gorges* or *xia gu yi cai*, a piece she wrote for former French President François Mitterrand at the age of 11, with Qiang Xu.

Sze then switched to piano, accompanying singer Sylvie Feltesse for some pieces by Franz Schubert. The evening also included a piano and cello duo, with Carla Bennett on cello.

Performing in Reid Hall's "*grande salle*" (big room in French) has special significance for Sze. She spent some growing-up years in France and had studied French literature at Reid Hall during her junior year at Columbia. "It's like Columbia imported from New York," Sze said. "I'm very happy I can be back and do something for Reid Hall for the evening."

The money raised will go towards upgrading Reid Hall's library facilities. At present, the library offers wifi access, but the 10,000 books in the collection are still only accessible by card catalogue. Danielle Haase-Dubosc, the Executive Director of Reid Hall, would like to fully digitize the catalogue and design a website to help

students access the digital catalogue of other libraries. “We’d like to create a web page so that students could access, not only our library but also French and international libraries more easily,” Haase-Dubosc said.

The project is part of a broader multiyear renovation plan for Reid Hall. The 18th century building dates back to before the French revolution. Modern additions have enlarged the facility, creating an interior courtyard and private garden. Reid Hall has been run by Columbia University since 1964. In the past four years Columbia has refurbished Reid Hall’s security system in case of fire and has made the first floor of the facility wheelchair accessible. Classrooms have all been equipped with digital video equipment and the large skylight in the “*grande salle*” has been given a curtain to allow video and slide projections during daylight hours. Future projects include the renovation of the building’s interior façade and improving wheelchair access on the gravel in the courtyard. “Things are looking better and better, but we are doing everything in keeping with the building’s inherent charm,” Haase-Dubosc said.

A former news broadcaster and art gallery curator, Sze is presently in residency as a pianist at the *Ecole Normale de la Musique* under the direction of Marie-Antoinette Pictet and Tadic Dusan. She is also pursuing a PhD in French and Comparative Literature, specializing in Samuel Beckett.

Geneviève Oger attended the journalism school at Columbia following undergraduate studies in Canada. She currently works as a freelance radio and print journalist in Paris. She is also a board member of the Columbia Club of France.