

Finding *Life* & *Freedom* through music

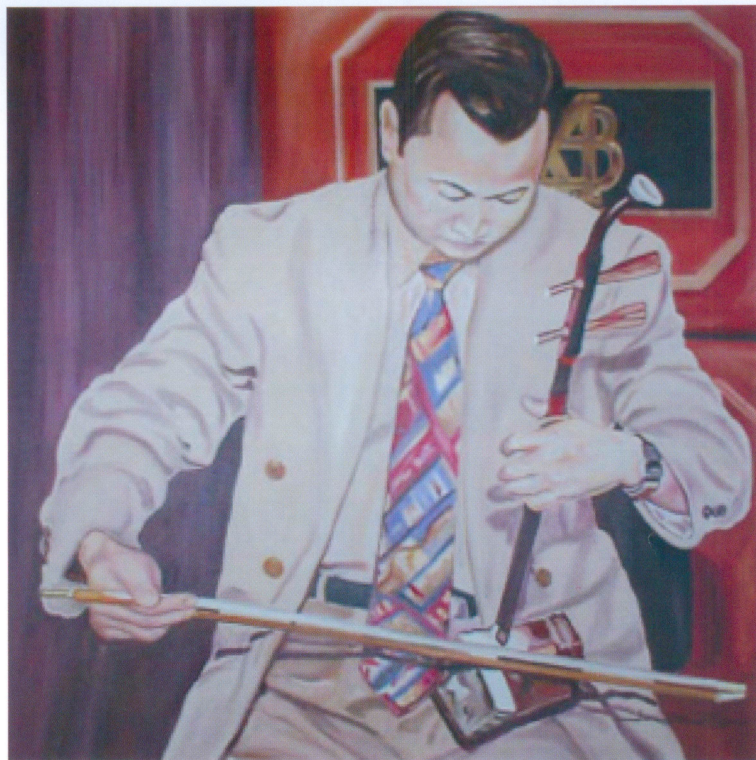
Dr. Ming Wang, Wang Vision Institute

Especially dear to the heart of Nashville ophthalmologist and Director of the Wang Vision Institute, Dr. Ming Wang, is an instrument of five thousand years antiquity. Dr. Wang has been playing the er-hu, an ancient Chinese musical instrument, for over thirty years. The dedication and self-discipline he learned through playing music saw him through many years of struggle and study to make him who he is today.

As a teenager in China during the mid 1970s, Dr. Wang's formal education came to an abrupt halt. During a time of "cultural revolution," the government informed him, along with millions of other Chinese youth, that the pursuit of knowledge would come at a great cost. A policy was put in place to remove the educated from the cities. To continue on in school would mean deportation to a remote province for re-education. This would also mean Dr. Wang would never earn more than fifty cents a day for the rest of his life, ensuring him a life of poverty.

Painfully, Dr. Wang dropped out of school after graduating from junior high. He was given two options by the government--either work a basic level job like paper wrapping for eighty cents a day, or develop a special talent or skill. In desperation, Dr. Wang's parents sought out a career in music for their young son. He chose to play the er-hu, and quickly found it was not only a joy to learn, but also a means for survival. The er-hu is a two-stringed ancient Chinese musical instrument, consisting of a pole with two strings along its side with a sound box at the bottom. The sound box typically is covered with snake's skin. The bow is made of horsetail and sits between the two strings. The player places the instrument on his/her lap, holding the pole vertically and moves the bow horizontally to produce a gentle, soulful, smooth sound. For Dr. Wang, the sound invoked the emotion of joy, love and passion for life.

In music, he found solace and devoted himself to playing. Regardless of the obstacles, he spent fifteen hours a day practicing the er-hu, knowing this was his one chance to escape a life condemned to depression. Longing for a chance to return to school, he poured out his frustration into his music. Learning hundreds of traditional Chinese songs, he studied the lives of composers and their ancient stories of the struggle to survive. During this time, Dr. Wang met a young teenager named Tian Ma, meaning a "lonely horse in the sky". Like Dr. Wang, Tian Ma was all too familiar with hardship, having lost his father to execution by the government. Sharing their dream of freedom and better lives, Dr.



Wang and Tian Ma composed over fifty songs together. "A Prisoner's Song" is still performed by Wang to this day.

The hard work and dedication paid off. Arriving in America in 1982 with a Chinese/English dictionary and \$50 in his pocket, Wang knew no one in this vast, new country. He received this note from his childhood friend: "Ming, I know that you started a new life in the United States, and with much difficulty and from nothing, but just remember the struggling years that we had been through together, with music as our only friend and soulmate. You will make it my friend, and I am confident that you will always have beside you and accompanying you, your music and your er-hu."

Today, Dr. Wang is one of the few LASIK surgeons in the world who holds a doctorate degree in laser physics. He graduated magna cum laude from Harvard Medical School and earned a doctorate degree in laser physics from MIT. His patients come from all over the U.S. and the world to see him. Some have been diagnosed as irreversibly blind due to injuries. With his U.S.-patented invention and eye reconstructive surgeries, Dr. Wang has been able to restore their vision, enabling them to see again. *You can contact Dr. Ming Wang at Wang Vision Institute at 615.321.8881, or drwang@wangvisioninstitute.com or www.wangvisioninstitute.com*