

Musicians that Think Different:

Memetjan Metqasim

Text Andre Waters



musicians, there is always a surprise awaiting. Through conversation, I gather insights from such performers, some of whom I would like to share with you. Let's talk about one.

Just one minute's walking from the Xiaoshibe Hutong bridge over Houhai at its narrowest point is the Reggae Roots bar, a small, low key acoustic club.

Chinese and foreigners alike enjoy spending time there to hear live music. I have visited the club several times and returned home enthralled.

In recent years, the nightly lineup contains mostly musicians from western

China. They perform

a unique blend of reggae, folk music and modern renditions of the traditional music representative of western China, extensions of ancient *moqam* music. But what particularly caught my attention were the thrilling vocal styles that Memetjan Metqasim has mastered. These vocal styles originate from the Aksu, Kashgar, Hotan and Yilimoqam traditions. During set breaks I got to know more and more about his background as well as his determination.

Metqasim was born into a household of school teachers in a small town at the southern

reaches of the Taklimakan desert in western China. He discovered music at a young age and through it transformed into an extremely reflective, polite, kind-hearted and hardworking musician, happy to experiment with musicians outside his tradition. He is part of *Zulu Band* and *Living Mythologies*, two Beijing based ensembles that explore the frontiers of modern traditional folk music. He tours extensively in China appearing frequently in T.V. performances.

I was most surprised by his simple and vivid views about the future of music: "We don't need a particular style or performance approach, we simply need more real music," he said. "I became serious about developing Uyghur music two years ago after a trip deep into the Kunlun Mountains to the high altitude village of Pulu in Yuxian county. Ironically, it was there, far from everything, that I discovered what should be regarded as 'international Uyghur music': Pulu villagers are self-subsistent, very generous to visitors and money is of little importance. Their music embodies this mentality, and this is the mentality that represents international music. I want to expose these songs in many cultures and contexts and integrate them with various styles. Only through this process can our traditional music achieve real development in this century."

You won't regret a night at Reggae Roots. Be sure to request Metqasim's performance of *Gulsaydihan* or *Tamaku*, just a few of the musical treasures he brought back from Pulu.

What may surprise you is that some performers residing in Beijing are from far away corners of China and may have travelled just as far or farther than you to pursue their musical dreams in the capital. After exploring the universe surrounding such folk ethnic musicians for 10 years, I know predictions don't work. I focus on how they integrate their traditional music with modernity. When I go to see performances given by different ethnic folk

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