Gene Lees Ad Libitum

Jazzletter

PO Box 240, Ojai CA 93024-0240

December 2001 *Vol. 20 No. 12*

You're Gonna Hear from Her: The Adventures of Yue Deng

Move over sun
and give me some sky.
I've got me some wings
I'm eager to try.
I may be unknown,
but wait till I've flown.
You're gonna hear from me.

Music by André Previn, lyric by Dory Langdon

The dawn is filled with dreams,
so many dreams,
which one is mine?
One must be right for me.

Which dream of all the dreams
when there's a dream for ev'ry star?
And there are oh, so many stars!
So many stars!

The wind is filled with songs,
so many songs,
which one is mine?
One must be right for me!

Which song of all the songs,
when there's a song for ev'ry star
and there are oh, so many stars!
So many stars!

Alone, the countless days,
the endless nights
that I have searched
so many eyes, so many hearts,
so many smiles.

Which one to choose?
Which way to go?
How can I tell?
How will I know?
Out of oh, so many stars,
so many stars.

Music by Sergio Mendes, lyric by Alan and Marilyn Bergman

I seem to have an enduring fascination with the unfolding and sequencing of events. Sometimes they occur with a singular stately pace that leaves an illusion of predestination. This person introduced you to that person, who recommended this connection, who suggested that you meet someone else, which led to . . . sometimes a victory, sometimes disaster.

I have pondered how the young lady happened into our lives, and what would have occurred had she not done so. But the existential reality is that what is, is. What happened, happened. And there is no turning back from it. Life is not a tape that you can run backwards and erase, and then re-record, as often as I have wished that it were.

My wife Janet from time to time does volunteer work for the Music Academy of the West, in Montecito, which is a suburb of Santa Barbara. Its brilliant director is David Kuehn, formally of North Texas State University. In the summer it offers eight weeks of master classes for advanced young musicians. The teachers include the likes of Marilyn Horne and Warren Jones. I have watched them in master classes within minutes raise the performance level of singers and pianists who are already at the professional level.

In the late summer of 1999, the Academy presented some of the best of its string players. Janet knew a young lady who had studied there for two summers, and we attended the performance with her. The young lady, whose name I did not yet know, was Chinese. For some reason I felt an immediate rapport with her, and a similarity of sense of humor. The players, both the string players and their accompanists, were mostly from the Orient, excepting a young male cellist from Montreal, and they were almost all female. The nice young Jewish boys with their fiddles who used to grow up to populate our symphony string sections are being supplanted. The young lady, with one of those shy female hand-over-mouth Oriental giggles, confided to me: "They're almost all

Asian. I'm so proud." I did not know that she was better than any of them, but afterwards, in the deference paid her by the others, you could sense that she must be important.

The young lady's name is Yue Deng. She was getting ready to leave to study for her master's degree at Juilliard in New York, but she had no place to live. Friends of ours, an editor named Cliff Hopkinson and his wife, Chris Garrett, managing editor of *Vanity Fair*, invited her to stay with them in their apartment on West End Avenue. She needed some new clothes. One of the comperes at the Academy asked Janet to take her shopping in Santa Barbara. Yue asked if there were some music in the car. Janet said, "Only jazz."

Yue said, "I've never heard jazz." She was twenty.

Janet keeps in the car's tape deck the first volume in the three-CD set of *Dizzy Gillespie in South America*, which Dizzy's business manager, Dave Usher, assembled from tapes made during the tour. The album is fantastic. The band included Charlie Persip, Phil Woods, Benny Golson, and Frank Rehak, among others. It had been on the road for some time, and it was fiercely tight.

Janet played the opening track, *Cool Breeze*. Yue's foot began to tap, and she grew increasingly excited. "Who are these people?" she asked. "How can they play like that? Don't they ever breathe?"

That was eighteen months ago.

Yue is now twenty-two. She was born to working-class parents on November 1, 1979, in a small city south of Beijing. At the age of nine, she was accepted by the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing. At eight she came under the tutelage of a twenty-eight-year-old teacher named Xilin Feng. Why these strange transliterations of Chinese names exist I do not know, but the name is pronounced (more or less) Si-len Fong. She came to the United States about ten years ago and got a degree from NYU. She is now married and teaching in New Haven, Connecticut, and Yue says she is still one of the finest teachers she has ever encountered. During the seven years Yue spent at the conservatory, she was consistently an honor student. In 1992, when she was thirteen, the Chinese government sponsored her to enter the Yehudi Menuhin International Violin Competition in London.

In October, 1995, she toured the Orient with the China Youth Symphony Orchestra. She performed the Saint Saens violin concerto with the China National Movie Production Orchestra. In 1996, when she was sixteen, she was awarded a full scholarship to Oberlin College. In February, 1997, she was selected to perform in the Oberlin Honors Recital. In March she won the Judges' Prize in the Johansen International Competition in Washington D.C. In December 1998, she was the soloist in the Bruch G-minor violin concerto with the Chinese American Music Society in Maryland. (I have seen a videotape of her performance. It is amazing.) During her years at Oberlin, she played in the Canton and Akron symphony orchestras. She was elected to the Theta Chapter of the national music honor society Pi Kappa Lambda and was graduated with honors from Oberlin in May, 2000.

For two summers, 1998 and 1999, she attended the Music Academy of the West, studying under Zvi Zeitlin. In December, 1999, she played in two concerts at Carnegie Hall with the New York String Seminar orchestra.

She was awarded the H. and E. Kivekas Scholarship to study for her Master's degree at the Juilliard School of Music under the noted teachers Dorothy Delay, who trained Itzhak Perlman and Pincus Zuckerman, and Hyo Kang, who taught Gil Shaham and Sara Chang. Then she was awarded three other scholarships for the year 2001-2002. She played with the Juilliard symphony orchestra in Alice Tully Hall, Avery Fischer Hall, Merkin Hall, and the Juilliard Theater.

And she has had master classes with Yehudi Menuhin, Yfrah Neaman, and Isaac Stern.

Janet knew none of this when they spent the day together, shopping and listening to Dizzy and the band. Yue needed a little job of some kind to earn walking-around money while she was at Juilliard. When Janet came home and told me this, I began to think of whom I knew in New York. I have been away a long time, and my connections at record and publishing companies are not what they were. Aha! ASCAP! The lyricists Alan and Marilyn Bergman are good friends of mine. And Marilyn is president of ASCAP. I called her and asked if she might be able to get the kid a job. Marilyn said, "I may be able to do better than that. I might be able to get her a grant. Can you get me a tape?"

This was in August of 2000. I called Roger Kellaway (he lives about a mile from me) and asked if he'd make a tape with her. He said, "Sure. In fact, I've got something she might want to play."

He had been music director a few years ago in a Carnegie Hall tribute to Stephane Grappelli, for which he had written an arrangement for piano and violin on Django Reinhardt's *Nuages*. It was performed by the concert violinist Nadia Salerno-Sonenberg. It contains an extended violin solo designed to sound improvised but written in the last detail. Roger said he could make a tape of this with her, if she could learn it, the coming Friday. He brought me the music, and on Tuesday Janet gave it to Yue in Santa Barbara. On Thursday evening, she brought Yue to our house for the night. Yue said she knew the piece. *What!* In two days? I was to discover that she has an awesome musical memory. She had played the Tchaikovsky Violin Concert at the age of ten, and can still

play it from memory. She also, as I learned, has astonishingly perfect time and eerie intonation. Her ears are such that I think she can hear a whispered conversation from about a hundred yards. And she almost never practices, illustrating a principle enunciated to me by the late Robert Offergeld: those musicians who build a big technique early do not, in later life, have to work hard to maintain it. Glenn Gould, Harry James, and André Previn come immediately to mind. All that was yet to be discovered about her. All I could see at the moment was a very pretty Chinese girl who weighed all of ninety-six pounds, and I had yet to hear her play.

On Friday morning, Janet said, "Don't you think you should be practicing?"

She said, "No. Just one thing." She pointed to the music. "What does this word mean, *swing?*"

Janet said, "What you heard in the car."

"I see."

At two o'clock that afternoon, Janet drove her to Roger's house. I said, "Tell Roger to call me when they're finished and I'll come and pick her up."

At four o'clock, the telephone rang. It was Roger. I said, "Do you want me to pick her up now?"

"No!" he said emphatically. "I'll bring her. I want to watch your face when you hear this."

Roger gained a great deal of experience in writing for classical string players when he had the Roger Kellaway Cello Quartet with the great cellist Edgar Lustgarten. Ed loved jazz, but couldn't improvise. Roger wrote all his solos. Ed could give them a natural jazz phrasing, although he was often scared, since everyone was improvising around him

Roger arrived with Yue soon after four o'clock. They had discovered that they had the same birth date, November 1. He walked to my stereo system and put on the cassette. The opening of the piece is written strictly classically, with trills and very high notes. Then the Django Reinhardt melody starts. Janet burst into tears and I started to laugh. When Johnny Mandel heard it later, he said, "She knows how to put the grease on the notes." It was exquisite jazz phrasing, nuanced and passionate. After the head, the piece went into a long seemingly improvised jazz solo. I grew more astounded by the passing moment, and Roger just laughed. The piece ran something over eight minutes, and when it had finished I was in some sort of shock. I had *never* heard anything like this. Roger had marked every subtlety of phrasing and dynamics on the score, but the point was that she *got* it.

Roger sat her down and gravely wagged a finger in her face. He said, "Listen to me. *Nobody* can do what you can do." And I added a confirming opinion.

As it happened, Roger was presenting a young trio from Poland at the Jazz Bakery in Los Angeles the following Monday and Tuesday nights. He looked at me and I looked at him and all that passed between us was, maybe, a flick of the eyes. It said, "Let's put her on."

I called the Bergmans and told them that, while I had a tape, they could hear Yue in person on Monday night at the Bakery. They came, and I sat next to them, to watch their faces. Marilyn's jaw dropped. I mean that: it's not a metaphor; and at the end, she exclaimed, "She's a star!" And she said that she and Alan would be back the next night, with friends. Indeed they were and the place was crowded. Among them were the film directors Mark Rydell and Sydney Pollack, who were as blown away as we had been. The audience was on its feet, whistling and yelling through the applause. Mark Rydell told me, "This is one of the defining musical events of my life." And he is not only an actor and a great film director, he is an ex-jazz musician who studied at the Chicago Musical College and Juilliard. Yue and Roger had to play the piece again: there was nothing else prepared. The applause was undiminished. Someone approached her and offered her a gig on the score of a movie, but she had to turn it down since she was leaving next week for New York.

Roger decided to do a CD with her, and soon after she went to Juilliard, he flew to New York and did a new track on *Nuages*. Having discovered how effortlessly she can play double stops, sixths and even tenths, that would defeat many a violinist, he made them more challenging. And they recorded one of his own pieces, which he had arranged for her: *California Rainy Day.* These were done at the Nola Penthouse Studio with Jim Czak the recording engineer. When Roger got back to Ojai, he gave me a CD of the two tracks and began writing other pieces (one of which, at my request, is Ellington's *In a Sentimental Mood*) for their pending CD.

Meanwhile, Janet and I and Alan and Marilyn Bergman extended financial help, and so did the executives of ASCAP. The school year ended. Janet and I had to go back east to pick up a station wagon, and I intended to drive back to California. She had moved into the Juilliard dormitory for the second semester. I picked Yue up in front of the dormitory. I took her to meet Marion Evans. He was as gassed by her playing on the CD as every other composer, and immediately said, "Has Pat heard this?" meaning Patrick Williams. I said, "No." Marion said, "Well, he'd better."

We drove to Savannah, Georgia, where I had some research to do on my biography of Johnny Mercer. We stayed at the home of Nancy and Steve Gerard, who have a beautiful house on one of those tidewater channels through the ubiquitous marshes. Nancy is Johnny's niece, and she has a prodigious knowledge of music. She was astonished at Yue, and captivated by her too.

Next I was scheduled to do a concert and lecture at

Louisiana State University with pianist Willis Delony, who is associate professor and director of its jazz ensemble, and a sextet that included Bill Grimes. Bill is a composer and arranger, one of the protegees of the late Rayburn Wright at Eastman. He is professor of music and director of graduate studies for the School of Music. He is also a formidable bassist. I sent the charts on ahead, and they were ready for me. The concert went beautifully. I had sent Willis a tape of *Nuages* along with Roger's score. Willis wanted to do a presentation to one of his classes of this and a classical piece. When we arrived, he and Yue chose the first movement of the Brahms G-major violin-piano sonata. They quickly rehearsed it and played it, with *Nuages*. He said later, "It was absolutely gorgeous in her hands." Bill Grimes offered her an all-expenses four-year doctoral program, should she want it.

We made our way back to California on I 10. It was white-knuckle driving under the threat of big-rig trucks constantly exceeding the speed limit and I will never do it again. We got home in June. Yue immersed herself in my CD collection, and soon was very knowing about the records of Dizzy Gillespie (she is a fanatic about Dizzy), Art Tatum, Gil Evans, Bill Evans, Paul Desmond, Oscar Peterson, and I know not who all else, because she would take the CDs to her room and listen on headphones. I answered her countless questions about jazz history, and the structure of western languages. Her English improved rapidly. I told Roger, "I don't know how intelligent she actually is, and until she has mastered English, I don't know how anyone could measure it. But I suspect she's off the scale."

One day I opened my laptop on the dining room table. It made a little rising beep, and I mumbled aloud, "A fourth." As I said, she can hear even a whisper. She said, "E A." I told Roger later, "Did you know she has absolute pitch?"

Roger said, "No, but why are we surprised?"

While we were in Savannah, I introduced her to Bob Alberti, who lives in Hilton Head Island, a short distance away. Bob was a highly respected composer in film and television in Los Angeles, and if you don't know his name, that may well be because he did a lot of ghost writing for "composers" and "arrangers" with far less talent but far greater skills at the politics of the business. A few years ago, he decided to get "out of the business" and moved to Hilton Head, planning only to play piano, which he does superbly. He soon found himself busier than ever, playing duo and trio gigs with Ben Tucker, who now lives in Savannah, and going on the road with Steve and Edie as their musical director. I sent Bob a tape of the tracks Yue had done with Roger. He sent me a note: "I got the cassette today, and I'm blown away by her talent. The true intonation is something rarely heard even with the much heralded Joshua Bell. My congratulations to Roger for his concept in the tunes. Her talent is as great as her personal appeal, and I wish only the best of everything for her future. Thanks again for allowing us to meet her."

I sent a tape to Bob Farnon in England. He faxed me a note saying, "She is surely from heaven. I am overwhelmed." (Actually, the term he used was "gob-smacked" but we don't know what it means on this side of the pond.)

She is insanely funny, both intentionally and unintentionally. I have never known anyone who is as easy to crack up, and when she cracks up she is liable to roll off a sofa and fold up in a quaking foetal ball of laughter, rather the way Paul Weston used to. She uses all the language she picked up from fellow students at Oberlin and Juilliard, including some I tell her she can use in our presence, but not in front of strangers. And when certain slang comes out in the Chinese accent, it almost puts *me* on the floor. Her ears never stop working. She was sitting at a table writing, and I was listening to some orchestral CD. Without looking up and without even a smile, she said, "That oboe player sucks." It was something she heard deep in the texture of the piece. It killed me.

She played me a tape of classical material, mostly recorded at Oberlin when she was seventeen. It included difficult material by Ysaye, Paganini, and others, and one movement of the Sibelius Violin Concerto, all played with consummate mastery. The *gigue* section of a Bach *partita* particularly enthralled me, for she has something Glenn Gould had: uncanny and swinging time. It is no coincidence that she loves Bach and Glenn Gould.

She played us a DVD, drawn form Chinese television, of performances she had done at the ages of ten and fourteen. Her certainty, accuracy, and authority even at the age of ten were incredible. It's so odd to see: that little wisp of a girl with total concentration and a deadly serious mien play an instrument of which she is already a master.

At first she was reluctant to talk about her accomplishments; she is profoundly self-effacing after the Oriental manner. But eventually I got her going.

"I started learning violin in 1985, when I was six," she told me. This was at Hebei School of the Arts. "During that time, everybody in my generation began to learn classical music. Classical musicians are treated like royalty in China. In China it is not expensive to take music lessons, but in Korea you have to be rich. It's really expensive in Korea and Japan. In China it's cheap. My first violin was four dollars.

"Both my parents are music lovers. My dad plays Chinese instruments and he used to be a standup comedian. My mom loves to sing. She taught me to sing when I was two. I would sing in front of lots of people and conduct the beats at the same time. I would stand on the table and sing Chinese pop songs. I could sing for two hours. She also taught me Chinese

poems.

"I started violin with the Suzuki method, but my teacher thought I didn't need to follow the method. I stopped just before I won the competition when I was eight — the National Violin Performance Competition. I got into the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing, one of the best professional music schools, when I was nine. I was there until I was sixteen. It was very, very competitive, with very good players. And I had very strict teachers. My teacher gave me a huge amount of repertoire. I gave my first recital when I was ten. I played the Paganini *Concerto Number One* and the Paganini *Caprice Number 17* and the Wienawski *Polonaise in D major.*" She soon was giving solo recitals in Shanghai, Beijing, and Tanjing.

She confided in me at another point that her life in these years was often painful. She aroused such jealousy — and I am not surprised — among other students that she would often find someone had cut her violin strings or the hairs on her bow. That she persisted is indicative of an important, but hidden, characteristic: an indomitable, steely will.

"When I was fourteen the government sponsored me to go to London for the Menuhin violin competition. My family couldn't afford the air fare. But I didn't win it. They picked six finalists, and I was the seventh one. The president of the jury came up to me and said it was a pity that I didn't win it.

"One of my friends took a tape to Mr. Taras Gabora who was teaching violin at Oberlin. He is a Canadian, of Hungarian ancestry. He went to the Vienna Academy of Music. He also taught at the St. Louis Conservatory and now he teaches at the University of British Columbia. He really liked my tape and he phoned me from Oberlin. I sent him a videotape of my playing from a national competition. He told me I was able to get a full scholarship and I came to the United States in 1996, when I was sixteen. I studied at Oberlin for four years and got my bachelor's."

One day last summer, Marilyn Bergman called to invite us to join her and Alan at a dinner for the Mancini Institute Orchestra, to be held outdoors at the Paramount Picture studio in Hollywood. I thought it would be good for Yue to go: she might meet people who could be helpful to her. This proved prescient. At the table with us, besides Alan and Marilyn, were David Raksin and Benny Carter and his wife. David and Benny were immediately fascinated by her, and the opposite: she fell in love with Benny without even knowing who he was. She said he reminded her of Buddha. Benny loved that when, later, I told him about it.

The Mancini Institute Orchestra had been conducted by Jack Elliott, but Jack had become gravely ill, and Patrick Williams became a hasty substitute conductor for this concert. Jack, in fact, had died only the night before. I introduced Yue to Pat, told him quickly about her, and said I would send him a tape. It was a lovely evening, with a lot of old friends, and the next day, I sent tapes of her performances with Roger to Dave Raksin, Benny Carter, and Pat. Benny was amazed by her. And meantime, I played her a bunch of Benny Carter records. She was enthralled. "Is that where Phil Woods comes from?" she said, again astounding me with her ears. "In part, yes," I said. (Yes, Phil too has now heard her.)

The summer passed all too quickly. She was listening to J.J. Johnson, Bill Watrous, Miles Davis (the way he plays flat really bothers her), Tommy Dorsey, Red Mitchell, Frank Sinatra, Ella Fitzgerald, Sarah Vaughan, Johnny Mandel, Phil Woods, Paul Desmond, Dave Brubeck, Gil Evans, Shirley Horne. (She is the world's most fanatic Shirley Horne fan.)

Oscar Peterson was to appear at the Hollywood Bowl. John Clayton, who directs its summer jazz program, asked me to do a seminar on Oscar just before the concert. We took Yue, who had by now been listening to him for weeks, and she was thrilled, perhaps most of all when we took her backstage and she had her picture taken with him.

After hearing her tape, Pat Williams called, and talked to her at length. So did Johnny Mandel. Everyone who had encountered her was trying to help her. She came to America without a penny. When we were driving to Savannah, we stopped to see our friend Sara Frooman in Raleigh, North Carolina. Sara gave her a magnificent gown in which to perform. It is worth a few thousand dollars. It's a bright gold yellow. Yue said, "That was the color of royalty in China, and nobody else was allowed to wear it." Janet has given her clothes. So has Nancy Gerard. Howie Richmond, who published a lot of songs by Johnny Mercer and Alec Wilder, and a number of my own, bought her a round-trip plane ticket to New York, so that she could return to California at Christmas. She was coming out of her shell. Janet told her to stop covering her mouth when she laughed: women don't have to do that here. She has the loudest screaming laugh I've ever heard. Janet had Yue's magnificent rich hair styled.

The Christmas holidays arrived. Juilliard by now had a jazz program and the jazz students became her friends. Roger told her he was writing her an arrangement on Billy Strayhorn's *Lush Life*. I can only imagine how her jazz friends laughed when she told them she was going to play *Lust Life*. They played Coltrane's version for her.

Some of what comes out of her is only the funnier because it isn't meant to be. She said that the Juilliard string orchestra needed a viola player for an upcoming concert. Could she play the chair? She told me, without a trace of irony or arrogance, that it took her twenty minutes to get the hang of the instrument.

For all the scope of her talent and the perfection of her playing, we are all still amazed that a young Chinese girl, trained only (and trained strictly) in classical violin, could so quickly get a jazz feeling when so few string players have ever done so. (Of the jazz violinists she has heard thus far, the one she likes most is Eddie South.) I've asked her about it several times. At one point she said:

"I loved it the moment I heard that Dizzy Gillespie record in the car. I just didn't know people can play trumpet, brass instruments, as free, as spontaneous, as inventive, as Dizzy Gillespie. The whole group of musicians, not only him. And I fell in love with it. Instantly."

"And how was it," I asked her, "that first afternoon when you played with Roger? Because you'd never before played with an improvising musician . . . . "

She said, "It was very comfortable. Actually, when I first got the music, I didn't spend much time learning it, practicing, because I didn't know what was going on with the music. I felt that I should use a different kind of vibrato. But I couldn't figure it out *until* I played it with him. Nobody ever told me it should be different. I guess it just came out of me."

"And your phrasing?"

"I think I just wanted to play it beautifully. I didn't know the background of the piece. I didn't know its history. I didn't even know the meaning of the title. I found out later that *Nuages* means clouds in French. I guess it just came out of me naturally.

"I just wanted to play it to touch people's souls, to make them cry. Before I played *Nuages*, I played very technically, not musically. I didn't put *myself* into my playing until I played *Nuages*. It brought out my deep feeling, the connection with music. I know I can use my breathing, and everything, in music. It was magic, it was a miracle. That changed my classical playing too. The way you phrase things."

"But that's exactly the point," I said, "the phrasing."

She said, "Before I played *In a Sentimental Mood*, I didn't know the lyrics or the original theme. I just played it the way I felt it. And then I started using different fingerings, different vibrato, different bowing. A different sound. Very different from classical. If I played straight what Roger wrote on the music, it wouldn't sound like jazz at all. You have to make it sing. You have different fingering and different bowing. That's one problem with classical players. If they try to play jazz, they play it in the classical way, which is very straightforward. Stubborn. And sometimes in jazz you have to play still, and then the vibrato later."

"It's called terminal vibrato," I said. "You play straight tone as you go into the note and then you start the vibrato. How did you do that?"

"Nobody told me. I just felt it has to be played that way. I think you're just born with it. It's in your genes."

"Maybe," I said, "but how come more classical players haven't been able to do it? There have been a few guys in New York, above all David Nadien, who is one of the finest, who could do good section work with jazz players. One person I've seen who could do it well was the cellist Edgar Lustgarten. Ed had a great love of jazz. He listened to it a lot. He couldn't improvise, but if it was written for him, he could play it. Beautifully."

"I don't think," she said, "that jazz composers realize that you need to write different bowings for violin. When you see two eighth notes . . . actually, there was a term in Bach's time, *inégale*. That means if you see two eighth notes, you play them unequally. That came from Baroque times. Uneven. Classical musicians don't know that. I have seen some jazz arrangements, and they're just eighth notes. You just have to indicate how short you want it to be."

When she was graduated from Oberlin, Taras Gabora wrote a letter for her. He said, "In my opinion, she is one of the most important young violin talents in the world today. She is a master of the technique of the violin, performing many of the most difficult works for this instrument. She is also musically mature far beyond her years. I expect her to make an important international career." And that was more than two years ago; he hasn't heard what she is doing now.

I hesitate to step beyond what he said. But my father was a violinist, and he encouraged me to become one. I failed at that, as I have failed at many things, but I *know* a lot about that instrument. When we were talking about violinists — she doesn't like Isaac Stern, and neither do I — she asked for my own preferences. I said, "My favorite violinist was someone you may never have heard of, Nathan Milstein." I thought she was too young to know his work. Mistake.

She said, "I *love* him!" And she brought from the room that is now hers at our house a stack of CDs of his great performances, and we spent some time listening to him. One of my idols revisited. Such taste, such restraint, such control of the passion, such utter and unfaltering musicality. And, too, I told her, I was nuts about David Oistrakh. So is she. She had to learn a violin concerto for Juilliard. She chose the Shotakovitch A-minor concerto."That concerto is some mountain to climb," Roger said. "When Shostakovitch first showed it to Oistrakh, Oistrakh said something like, 'It would take a man with four arms to play,' and Shostakovitch said, 'I'll wait.'" Oistrakh did of course perform it. Yue knocked it off in what seems like nothing flat. Roger said, "It has a long cadenza in the fourth movement, very difficult and all forte. You'd know that she'd choose something like that."

And so, keeping in mind that anyone who makes an absolute statement is a fool, I will herewith put on the pointed

cap. By a process of a sort of esthetic triangulation, comparing her to Milstein, thinking of *all* the major violinists I have listened to in my life, taking into account what Bob Alberti and Marion Evans and Roger Kellaway and Pat Williams and Johnny Mandel — all highly experienced composers for strings — have seen in her, I cautiously approach what seems to be an inexorable conclusion. No; the conclusion approaches me. It is inescapable. I think that she may already be, at twenty-two, our greatest living violinist.

She is an old soul when it comes to music, someone who seems to have been here a thousand years. In all other ways, she is a little girl. So tunneled has her life been, so utterly disciplined and restricted to music, that she seems to me at times like a kid just entering high school. Looking over pictures of clothes in magazines and cars (she can name every car on the highway, particularly the fancy ones) and asking naive questions about Life and how to use makeup, or watching her skip joyously across a room, she strikes me as being about eleven. She is the welcomed invader of all our lives, and now that she is back at Juilliard, her stuffed animals sit on her bed looking a little forlorn. .

Pat Williams called her to ask when she will be finished at Juilliard. She gets her master's in May. He has been appointed artistic director of the Mancini Institute Orchestra. He said he would like to present her as feature soloist in the first of next summer's concerts. He wanted her to play *Nuages*. Then he called Roger and asked if Roger would expand the arrangement for full orchestra. Roger is working on it. She will thus make an auspicious west coast debut on the evening of July 27 in Royce Hall on the campus of UCLA.

Who among us with any sense of exploratory curiosity hasn't wondered whether we do or do not have free will? The belief that we do not underlies the thinking of Islam. The belief that we do underlies democracy and the idea of moral responsibility. The contradiction lies not in the answers but in the question itself. Unless there are some remarkable medical breakthroughs, and soon, few among us will be here a hundred years from now. And a hundred years from now, someone is going to be able to go to a library (and in the computer age, libraries will become limitless; they are already computerizing the genealogical tables in Salt Lake City) and look up the date of your death or mine. Since the date of your death is fixed as of a hundred years from now, it is inescapably fixed as of now. The Muslims have it wrong. So do we. For there is no answer to that question — the question is implicitly erroneous, a trick of our limited intelligence. I think of what Gertrude Stein is purported to have said on her death bed. She said, "What is the answer?" and closed her eyes. She opened them again and said, "No, what is the question?" A rose is a rose is a rose is not as shallow as it sounds.

It has long been my intuitive perception that time does not exist. There is no time, there is only event, birth and cell growth and decay and death, the birth and death of stars, and the expansion of the universe. We can never directly know anything, we can only use what are quaintly referred to as the five senses to measure vibration, those frequencies we define as sight and sound and the molecular motion that a hand touched to a flame interprets as heat. We're just measuring temperatures, light and sound frequencies. Even the olfactory sense measures frequencies. This underlies my conviction that the usual definition of music as comprising melody, harmony, and rhythm, is wrong. There is only rhythm, and if you double the beats of a single tone you get its octave, and if you play two or more tones together the interference of the wave forms gives the foundation of what we call harmony. If one (crudely) thinks of time as utterly still water, and of our selves as being towed through it by some divine invisible cord, the sensation on the body is the illusion we call time. But we move; the water doesn't. A catalogue of perceived and interpreted frequencies is all we "know", and all we can ever know. We are ever on the outside looking in.

Our most advanced science deals only with frequencies, and when we reach the limits of our own direct perceptions, we achieve indirect perception through the use of instruments, from those astronomers use to detect novae and black holes and the red shift all the way down into — indeed, especially into — subatomic particles. We cannot see these things, and the events through which they progress, but our instruments and calculations tell us they are there and doing things.

I believe, but I am not sure, that it was Sir James Jeans who said, "The universe is not only stranger than you think, it is stranger than you *can* think."

And now one of the strangest thoughts of all confronts us. Newtonian physics of course still operates at the mundane level, and indeed you ignore his principles at your own risk. But Newton's laws cannot function in a universe of Einstein's relativity, or beyond that, Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, which prompted Einstein's uncomfortable retort that God does not dice with the universe, wherein he fell into the pitfall of anthropomorphism. There is no one there to do the dicing. Event is everything, and the idea that a watch found on a beach proves that "someone" made it is risibly simplistic. If quantum mechanics weren't so, your cellular phones, computers, and CD players, among other things, wouldn't work.

In recent times, we have been presented one of the most disconcerting conceptions of all, first by Hugh Everett who in a 1957 Princeton doctoral thesis proposed the "many worlds" interpretation of quantum mechanics. It has been extended by

David Deutsch, currently of Oxford University, to the point where even physicists want to laugh, some I daresay do, and others are deeply discomfitted by his thinking, but you cannot dismiss Deutsch. At forty-eight, he is one of the world's leading theoretical physicists. In his early thirties, he established the basis for a new discipline called quantum computation. On the basis of this, researchers around the world are working to develop a new computer of unimaginable power.

It is known in modern physics that a subatomic particle can, in contradiction to all seeming logic, occupy two and indeed many places at the same time. Deutsch says that this is not an illusion of our perceptions. He says that if a photon or electron *appears* to occupy more than one place at the same time, it does. (For a fascinating exploration of Deutsch's thinking, see Tim Folger's article on the subject in the September 2001 issue of *Discover* magazine. You can order it at 800 829-9132.) Most physicists seem content to leave it at that, concluding, albeit uneasily, that it is true only in the small world of quantum particles. But Deutsch argues for the consistency of science. Some astronomers support his view that we live not in a universe but in a multiverse. Deutsch says, "I'm not sure why physicists should be more ready to believed in planets in distant galaxies than in Everett's other worlds. Of course the number of parallel universes is really huge. I like to say that some physicists are comfortable with little huge numbers but not with big huge numbers."

Deutsch's reasoning is at odds with the usual interpretation of Heisenberg, which is that when some quantum phenomenon is observed, it is altered, "collapses," as if it were running away from the untidy intrusion of your thought. The act of measurement supposedly alters what is measured — an hypothesis that has always made me uncomfortable.

In Deutsch's thinking, all the things that could have happened to you, to me, and to the universe did in fact happen. Each of us took not one road but *all* the roads. There is (though Yue had never heard of it) a Chinese perception of reality called fan-shaped destiny. Reality is like the ribs of a fan. When you choose to go down one of them, it immediately divides into more ribs, and you keep on choosing one at each juncture. In Deutsch's universe — pardon me, multiverse — all that could have happened *did* happen. But we can see only what is in this one road we took, not what is happening on the infinite number of other roads we are traveling.

All of this rises up before me when I consider the life of Yue Deng. What if she had not encountered her superb teacher Xilin Feng when she was eight? Would she have abandoned the violin by now? Or would she simply never have become good enough to get to Oberlin and then Juilliard? What if Janet had not taken her shopping that day? What if Janet had not had *Dizzy Gillespie in South America* in the tape deck?

And this one is really eerie. What would have happened to her had I known that a tape of Bach and Ysaye she made at Oberlin when she was seventeen already existed? Would I have sent Marilyn that tape, rather than asking Roger to make a tape with her? Would she be on her way to searching for a job in the diminishing number of symphony orchestras? Would Benny Carter and all the others never have heard her, or heard of her? Would we never have discovered her strange affinity for jazz? And where does it come from? Some parallel universe with which she is somehow in touch? Would there be no such thing as the Royce Hall concert for her in July?

Don't take my word for her abilities. Ask Marion Evans, Pat Williams, Benny Carter, Johnny Mandel, Roger Kellaway, and anyone else with ears who has heard her. I can't believe that I have known her, as I write this, only eighteen months, and that in so short a "time" she has altered our lives as much as we have altered hers. No one can know what's going to happen to her as she follows her fan-shaped destiny. But on *this* rib of the fan, in this of the many universes, I foresee nothing less than a dazzling career for her.

And there are oh so many stars.