NATIONAL TAIWAN NORMAL UNIVERSITY

NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 08: Autumn / Winter 2025

COVER STORY: TAIWAN'S OLDEST MUSIC SCHOOL IS REMIXING TRADITION FOR TOMORROW

FOCUS: FROM TATAMI ROOMS TO FRINGE FESTIVALS, 20 YEARS OF SETTING THE STAGE FOR TAIWAN'S MUSICAL THEATER

President's Message

The relationship between music, education, and cultural preservation is receiving renewed attention across higher education. At NTNU, these connections have long shaped how we teach and work.

This issue opens with a close look at the music program at NTNU. Its evolution reflects global shifts in how music is studied and practiced. Across Asia, Europe, and North America, universities are moving beyond performance instruction to include digital archives, interdisciplinary research, and technological innovation.

NTNU's model combines Western classical training with focused study in areas such as ethnomusicology, composition, performance, and music education. Students specialize in fields like vocal or instrumental performance, conducting, or composition, while also taking part in projects that link cultural preservation with contemporary practice. The program, grounded in tradition and attuned to change, prepares graduates for careers in both the music industry and academia.

Two recent projects reflect this approach. One is the restoration of the 1967 Osterwalder Tapes, combining conservation, fieldwork, and collaboration with Indigenous communities. The other is a partnership with the Evergreen Symphony Orchestra, offering students practical experience under international leadership and in professional rehearsal settings.

This issue also features the Department of Performing Arts in its twentieth year. Since its founding, the program has supported the creation of Taiwan-rooted musical theatre that speaks to local experience while connecting with global forms. Through initiatives like NTNU Fringe and the development of a new English-taught master's program, the department continues to expand its reach. At the same time, it remains grounded in a curriculum that values collaborative production, critical thinking, and artistic agency.

UNESCO estimates that over 70 percent of cultural workers today are employed outside of traditional institutions. NTNU's applied training model, which connects students with communities, public spaces, and international partners, prepares them for that reality.

Internationalization remains a key part of this work. NTNU now has the highest proportion of international students among Taiwan's national universities. With more than 880 EMI courses and a growing number of English-taught degree programs, we aim not only to attract students from around the world, but to support meaningful exchange where Taiwan's voices and values are part of the conversation.

Each of these developments reflects not only progress, but persistence on the part of faculty, staff, and students alike. I thank them for their continued commitment.

Cheng-Chih Wu
President
National Taiwan Normal University

National Taiwan Normal University Newsletter

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Music students infuse NTNU's campus with weekly flash performances in unexpected corners

Research Spotlight

Performing Knowledge

NTNU faculty have recently contributed to research at the intersection of music, technology, and the performing arts.

Predicting Emotions in Music with AI

Cheng-Kai Lu, Department of Electrical Engineering

How do machines learn to "feel" music? A recent study developed a deep learning model that predicts emotional responses to music. Using Emotify, a dataset with 400 music clips labeled with emotions like calmness, joy, nostalgia, and tension, they trained a 1D Convolutional Neural Network (1D-CNN) to recognize patterns in sound. By analyzing audio features known as MFCCs (commonly used in speech and music analysis), the model achieved 93% accuracy across nine emotional categories. The team also expanded the dataset through audio segmentation to improve learning. While the system struggled slightly with underrepresented emotions like "amazement," it showed strong potential for real-world use in music recommendation, emotional tracking, or therapeutic applications. (Lu, C.-K., Lin, Y.-J., & Shen, J.-Y. (2023). "Emotion Prediction in Music Based on Artificial Intelligence Techniques." *IEEE Explore*.)

Computing Once More with Feeling

Yi-Cheng Lin, Computational Thinking and Programming Education Division

This study introduces a novel dataset that connects classical piano performance with the expressive cues encoded in musical notation. While previous datasets have captured variation in musical expression, they often omit direct links to the written score. In contrast, this collection systematically associates performance characteristics with five specific markings: forte, piano, cantabile, leggiero, and con forza. To build the dataset, professional pianists recorded short musical excerpts, each performed with a deliberate emphasis on one expressive instruction in isolation. This method yields a controlled and granular resource for examining how particular markings shape timing, dynamics, and articulation in real-world interpretations. The dataset serves as a foundation for developing computational models that render symbolic scores into musically expressive performances. By aligning annotated score data with detailed performance recordings, this work advances ongoing research in expressive artificial intelligence and opens new avenues for music technology and creative human-AI collaboration. (Hung, T.-C., Tang, J., Armstrong, K., Lin, Y.-C., & Liu, Y.-W. (2024). "EME33: A Dataset of Classical Piano Performances Guided by Expressive Markings." *2024 IEEE International Conference on Big Data (BigData)*, 3174–3180.)

Teaching Machines to Read Music, One Instrument at a Time

Berlin Chen, Department of Computer Science and Information Engineering

Transcribing music by ear is a complex task, especially when multiple instruments are playing at once. This study introduces a model for multi-instrument automatic music transcription (AMT) that addresses this challenge by integrating instance segmentation and self-attention. The proposed system treats musical events as instances to be segmented from a polyphonic audio input, then classifies each event by pitch and instrument type. Drawing on methods from computer vision, this approach enables joint onset-offset detection and labeling, allowing for instrument-specific transcription at the frame level. Unlike earlier AMT models that often rely on convolutional or recurrent neural networks, this method leverages self-attention to capture longer-range dependencies in time. As a result, it offers improved scalability and generalization across complex audio scenes without the need for instrument-specific models. (Wu, Y.-T., Chen, B., & Su, L. (2020). "Multi-Instrument Automatic Music Transcription with Self-Attention-Based Instance Segmentation." *IEEE/ACM Transactions on Audio, Speech, and Language Processing, 28,* 2796–2809.)

Hakka Hymns and the Negotiation of Identity in Postwar Taiwan

Hsin-Wen Hsu, Graduate Institute of Ethnomusicology

This study explores how Hakka-language hymns have served as both religious expressions and cultural negotiations for Hakka Christians in Taiwan. While missionary outreach began in the 1930s, it wasn't until the 1980s that hymn composition in Hakka gained institutional support. Since then, Christians from various denominations have engaged in the composition and compilation of Hakka hymns, with some collaborating to promote the use of local language and musical traditions in worship. These hymns have become tools for negotiating ethnic identity alongside Christian belief, resonating not only in Taiwan but also among Hakka communities in Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia. Through historical analysis and close readings of hymn texts, this research demonstrates how musical and lyrical choices mediate tensions between sacred values and everyday social ethics. In doing so, the study sheds light on how religious practice is shaped by cultural identity and how minority communities adapt global faith traditions to local contexts. (Hsu, Hsin-Wen. "The Making of Hakka Hymns in Postwar Taiwan: Negotiating Identity Conflicts and Contextualizing Christian Practices." *Resounding Taiwan: Musical Reverberations Across a Vibrant Island,* edited by Nancy Guy, Routledge, 2021, pp. 105–123.)

Art Song as Cultural Translation in Early 20th-Century China

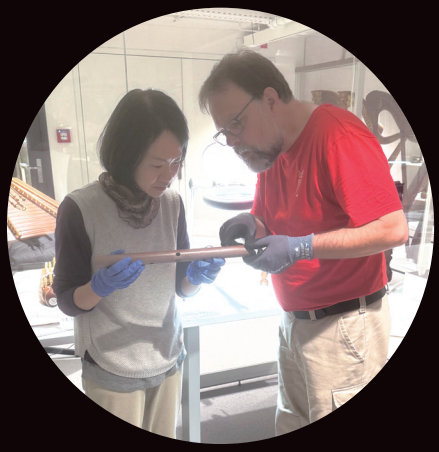
Joys H. Y. Cheung, Graduate Institute of Ethnomusicology

How did early Chinese composers respond to the challenges of adapting Western art song to local aesthetics and linguistic rhythms? A 1931 exchange between two early proponents of Chinese art song reveals how the genre became a site for negotiating musical identity. Zhao Yuanren, a US-educated linguist and composer, and Qing Zhu, a German-educated intellectual and editor of *Yueyi* (Musical Art), the journal of the National Conservatory of Music, published a debate that highlighted contrasting compositional priorities: Zhao emphasized the tonal and rhythmic features of the Chinese language, while Qing focused on musical structure and internal flow. Both viewed art song as a medium for expressing Chinese poetic sentiment, but differed in their approaches.The chapter appears in *The Art Song in East Asia and Australia, 1900 to 1950,* a volume co-edited by Cheung. Featuring 20 essays by scholars from Japan, Korea, China, Taiwan, and Australia, the book explores how art song mediated the tension between cosmopolitan aesthetics and local cultural identities across early 20th-century East Asia.(Cheung, J. H. Y. (2023). "Composition, commentary and collegiality in the translated modernity of early Chinese art song," in A. M. Tokita & J. Cheung (Eds.), *The Art Song in East Asia and Australia, 1900 to 1950* (pp. 146–160). Routledge.)

Staging the Anthropocene: Imagining Taiwan's Future Through Theatre

Wen-Ching Liang, Graduate Institute of Performing Arts

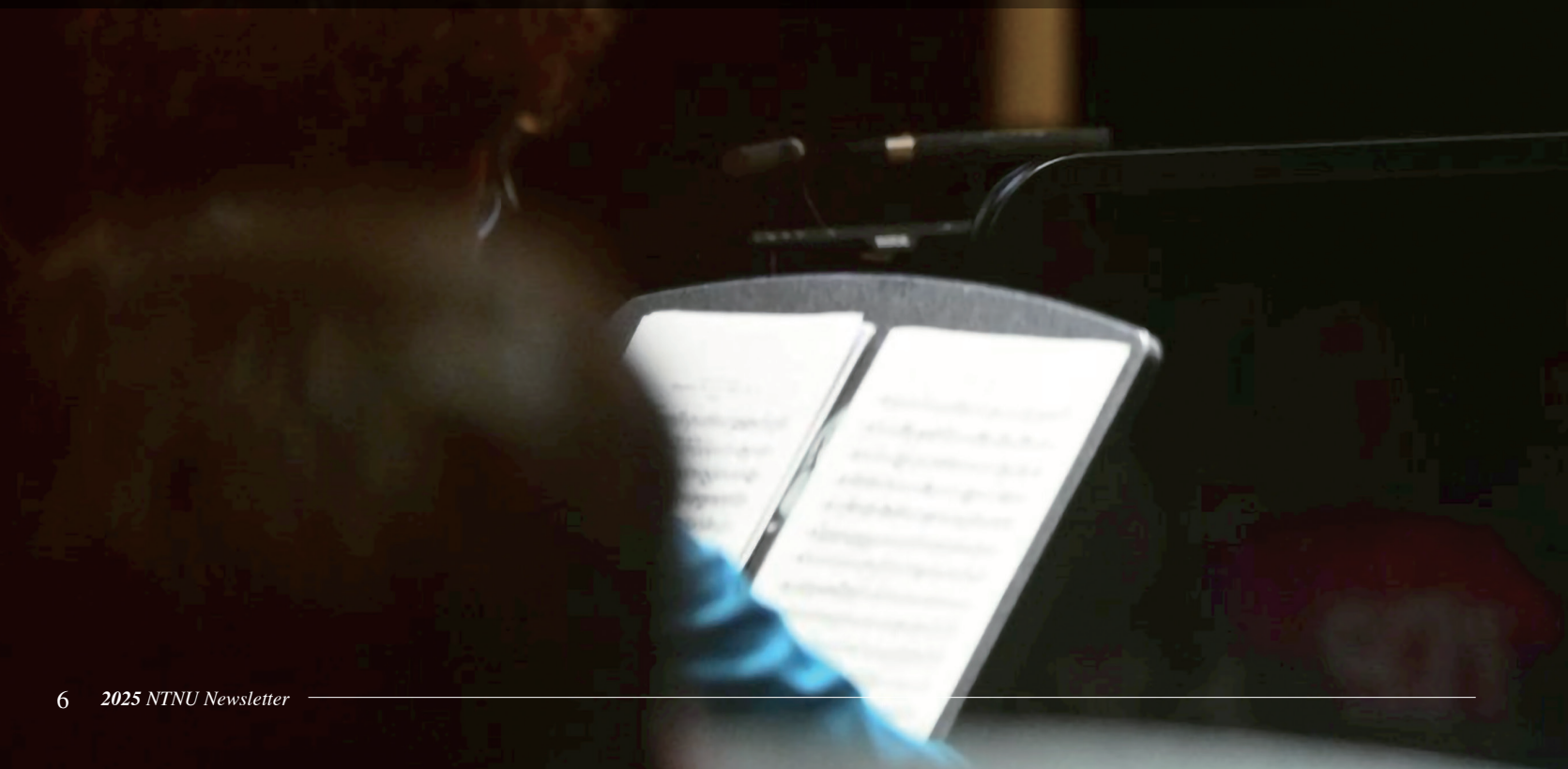
This study examines how contemporary Taiwanese theatre responds to the challenges of the Anthropocene through speculative storytelling and immersive performance. Focusing on *Taipei Notes* (2017), *1984: The Family Life of Three Sisters* (2017), and *What Colour is the Cloud?* (2016), the article explores how artists use fragmented timelines, multilingual dialogue, and striking scenography to reflect on ecological collapse, surveillance, and cultural memory. Rather than relying on realism, these productions imagine dystopian or posthuman futures shaped by resource scarcity and displacement, while also engaging Taiwan's unique geopolitical and environmental contexts. *Taipei Notes*, for instance, reframes global conflict through everyday conversations in a Taipei museum, while *What Colour is the Cloud?* presents a haunting vision of extinction in Hakka-speaking Taiwan.Blending environmental humanities and theatre studies, the article considers how performance can help audiences confront uncertainty and imagine alternative futures in a time of planetary crisis. (Liang, L. W. C. (2021). "Imagining the Future in the Anthropocene on the Taipei Stage: *What Colour is the Cloud?* (2016), *Taipei Notes* (2017), and 1984 (2017)." *Tamkang Review*, 52(1), 3-22.)



Archives, Algorithms, and Arpeggios

Founded in 1946, the Department of Music at NTNU is the oldest music department in Taiwan and one of its most influential. For nearly eight decades, it has shaped the music education of generations, its story closely intertwined with the island's broader cultural development. In its early years, the department shared space with Taiwan's first Provincial Symphony Orchestra, which rehearsed on campus, placing many of the island's top musicians just down the hall from young students.

Today, the department is part of the NTNU College of Music, which also includes the Graduate Institute of Ethnomusicology, the Graduate Institute of Performing Arts, and the Digital Archive Center for Music. This broader academic structure reflects a vision that reaches beyond the concert stage and into research, education, technology, and cultural preservation. As Taiwan negotiates its cultural presence on the global stage, NTNU's program is actively redefining what it means to be a musician: rooted in tradition, yet responsive to an evolving world.



Professor and former Dean Chia-Hong Drapal Liao conducts Thailand's PGVIM Youth Orchestra, joined by five NTNU musicians at a bilateral exchange concert in April 2024.

The Chang Yung-Fa Foundation and Evergreen Symphony Orchestra collaborate with NTNU's Department of Music to expand rural music education, offer student performance opportunities, and host masterclasses with conductor Jaap van Zweden.

Grounded in History, Oriented Toward the Future

While the department continues to offer a strong foundation in Western classical training, its current orientation is distinctly forward-looking. "Gone are the days when music students could focus exclusively on rehearsal and performance," said Dean Hsiao-Fen Chen. "Today's musicians must understand the digital ecosystems that shape how music is produced, distributed, and consumed. From streaming platforms and sound editing to AI and music management, students also need to engage in interdisciplinary collaborations, whether with visual artists, writers, or filmmakers, to remain relevant in an evolving cultural landscape."

Director of Ethnomusicology Professor Chun-Zen Huang leads efforts in sound restoration and archival preservation.

Being part of a comprehensive university is a major advantage. The music program collaborates with a range of disciplines, from music education and gerontology to the visual arts and digital media. "The strength of the NTNU music program is that it is within a comprehensive university," said Chen. That has made it easier to innovate while staying grounded in tradition. Recent partnerships have led to immersive exhibitions with the NTNU Museum, projects in music therapy, and applied research in senior music activities.

"The department also maintains active ties with institutions like C-Lab, Dequn Gallery, and the National Culture and Arts Foundation," said Music Department Chair Ling-Yi Ou Yang. "Our students explore sound art and improvisation while gaining digital fluency through courses in Max/MSP/Jitter interaction, 3D sound design, modular synthesis, and spatial acoustics."

Students at all levels benefit from this multidimensional environment. In addition to undergraduate and graduate degrees in performance, composition, conducting, musicology, and music education, the College of Music also offers the Music-Assisted Guidance and Special Education Credit Program and the Master's Degree Program in Interdisciplinary Studies in Music and Technology. These programs allow students to explore career paths in creative industries and multimedia production alongside traditional performance-based study.

One recent collaboration further underscores the emphasis on professional readiness. In early 2025, NTNU signed a three-way memorandum of understanding with the Evergreen Symphony Orchestra and its resident conductor, Jaap van Zweden. The partnership offers orchestral internships, masterclasses, and live performance experience. Van Zweden conducted his first-ever Taiwan masterclass with the NTNU Symphony Orchestra and led a rigorous audition process that selected twelve students for Evergreen's professional training program. The initiative gives students a direct view of orchestral life while also supporting community outreach efforts to bring music education to underserved regions.

A Global Orientation with Local Commitments

The College of Music at NTNU is among the university's most internationally engaged academic units. It maintains active partnerships with leading institutions including Stanford University, Seoul National University, the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna, and Deutsches

NTNU's music program combines classical training with digital technology and ethnomusicology to prepare students for a global stage.

Museum. According Ou Yang, the music department currently offers more than 32 EMI courses across bachelor's, master's, and doctoral levels, taught by 8 faculty members experienced in English-medium instruction. "Our goal is to provide a learning environment that balances academic rigor with global accessibility," she said, adding that teaching assistants also support international students in EMI courses to navigate coursework and enhance interaction.

Recent collaborations reflect the College of Music's commitment to both innovation and heritage. This past spring, NTNU partnered with Stanford's Center for Computer Research in Music and Acoustics (CCRMA) for a modular synthesis workshop and a 3D soundscape lecture-concert led by CCRMA Director Chris Chafe and system design expert Fernando López-Lezcano. That partnership culminated in a summer workshop at CCRMA for students from NTNU's music and computer science departments.

Through the Fulbright Foundation, the Graduate Institute of Ethnomusicology also welcomed Audiovisual Archivist Dave Walker from the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, who led a hands-on workshop in audio preservation and conservation, offering students access to global best practices in sound archiving.

"The College of Music has always seen its strongest competition come from overseas," said Dean Hsiao-Fen Chen. "Many of our applicants also receive offers from top international institutions." Yet international engagement, she emphasized, is not about emulating global trends. "We aim for what I call a 'glocal' approach of connecting globally while remaining rooted in Taiwan's multicultural musical identity."

That philosophy underpins ongoing faculty research, including a project in collaboration with the Deutsches Museum that explores early twentieth-century Sinophone musical heritage through rare Chinese instruments from the Datong Music Society.

Ethnomusicology professor Yu-Hsiu Lu echoed this dual focus. "As a young musician, I studied the Western canon. But when I left Taiwan to study in the West, I realized that we need to know who we are, and what our music brings to the table."

While the Western repertoire remains foundational, NTNU encourages students to write original compositions and reinterpret local traditions, especially when performing internationally. "There are still relatively few Taiwanese compositions and arrangements presented on global stages," said Chen. "It's important that students learn to

Music Department Chair Ling-Yi Ou Yang discusses the department's expanding EMI programs, new international collaborations, and how music education is adapting to a changing cultural landscape.

create works that resonate broadly, rather than being purely experimental."

Reclaiming History: The Archive as Living Practice

NTNU is home to one of Taiwan's most significant music archives, particularly in ethnomusicology, field recordings, and Indigenous musical traditions. Through the Graduate Institute of Ethnomusicology and the Digital Archive Center for Music, the university has developed a comprehensive repository that supports preservation, research, and public engagement.

Among its most notable holdings are the "Osterwalder Tapes," a set of 56 reel-to-reel recordings made in 1967 by NTNU professors Wei-liang Shih and Tsang-Houei Hsu, with support from Swiss-German priest Alois Osterwalder. Long presumed lost, the tapes were rediscovered in Germany and returned to Taiwan in 2013.

Department Director Professor Chun-Zen Huang, an expert in sound restoration, was connected with Osterwalder in 2013. Before agreeing to release the tapes, Osterwalder requested a detailed conservation plan. After securing approval, Huang traveled to Germany and brought the collection back to NTNU. Recognizing the vulnerability of the analog media in Taiwan's humid climate, he and his team trained at the Phonogrammarchiv of the Austrian Academy of Sciences to ensure proper handling and digitization.

The original tapes are now stored in climate-controlled facilities at the National Archives, with digital versions accessible to researchers by request.

But preservation is only the beginning. "Our purpose is not only to preserve, but to present," said Huang. Each year, graduate students select one cultural group from the

As part of NTNU's partnership with Stanford and Taiwan Sound Lab, Fernando López-Lezcano leads a modular synthesis workshop and 3D concert at C-Lab.

Kaying Kainga Qalavangan (far right) on stage before a concert launching a CD of historical Bunun recordings, based on fieldwork with Pei-Jie Yang.

collection as the basis for their thesis. Under the guidance of Professor Yu-Hsiu Lu, students verify and document the recordings through fieldwork, community consultation, and ethnographic research. Lu also helps secure funding for these projects and oversees the production of annotated CDs, which are available upon request to anyone with an interest in the recordings.

Dean Hsiao-Fen Chen emphasizes a "glocal" approach to connect Taiwan's musical traditions with global perspectives.

The most recent project focused on the Bunun people. Graduate students Pei-Jie Yang, who completed her degree in May 2025, and Kaying Kainga Qalavangan spent over four years working with Bunun communities in the central mountains to confirm names, lyrics, and cultural context. Yang described the experience as both emotionally and physically demanding. "Some of these communities are quite remote, and the communities are wary of yet another group of outsiders," she said.

For Qalavangan, whose heritage is Bunun, the challenges were more personal. "The elders assumed I would intuitively understand or know about the culture of my ancestry," she explained. "But I'm a couple of generations removed. I relied on my mother's childhood memories, and the support of a young Bunun local to gain access and understanding."

Their work culminated in a public concert that began with the original 1967 recordings, followed by reinterpretations from tribal elders and new compositions by NTU System students. Under the mentorship of Assistant Professor Ling-Hsuan Huang, these pieces blended Indigenous soundscapes with digital technologies and instrumentation, demonstrating how archival material can inspire creative renewal and cultural dialogue.

A Culture of Engagement

NTNU's music students are involved not only in performance and scholarship but also in community engagement. For decades, the department has brought orchestral demonstrations to rural schools, hosted interactive music sessions for Indigenous children, and performed across campuses and communities. Lunchtime concerts at Wenhui Hall, flash performances in public spaces, and annual concerts at NTNU's historic auditorium are all part of the rhythm of life on campus.

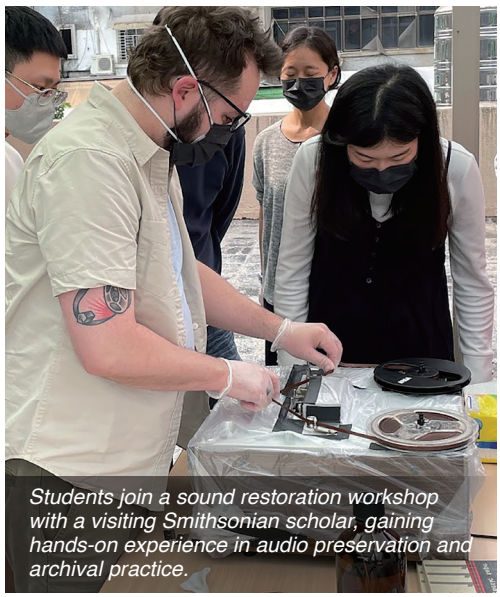
One recent initiative, "Shaw-chiao 2.0," reintroduced a ceremonial horn traditionally used in temple processions. The project included instrument redesign, new commissions, and community workshops, helping reconnect younger audiences with older traditions in a contemporary context.

Reimagining Musical Education

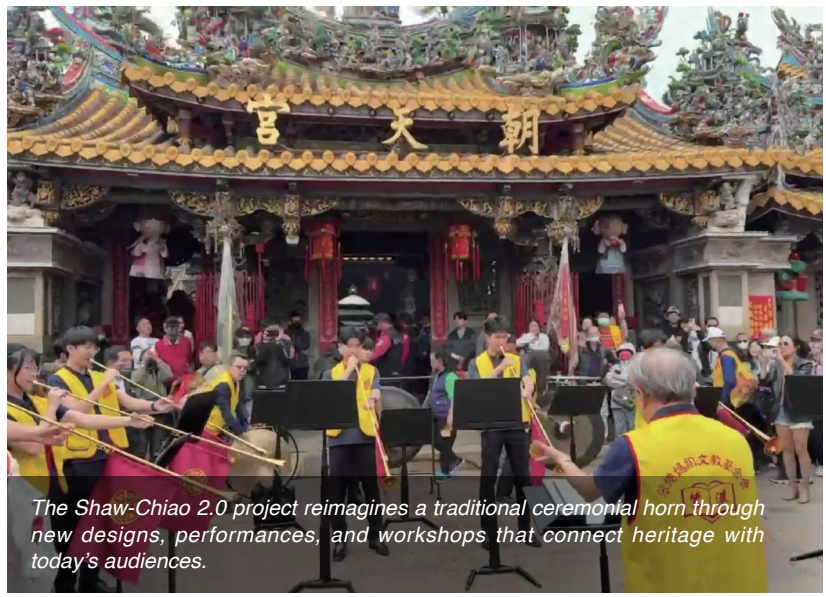
What NTNU offers is more than a place to study music. It is a space where music is interrogated, contextualized, and put into conversation with technology, society, and culture. Students are expected to master their instruments, but also to think critically about what their practice contributes to the world around them.

"It's not enough to just be technically excellent," said Chen. "You must know how to communicate, how to collaborate, and how to create meaning across cultures and across disciplines."

In that spirit, the NTNU College of Music continues to reimagine the role of music education for the future. Its students leave not only as performers and composers, but as educators, curators, researchers, and creative practitioners—shaping what music means, and what it can become.



Students join a sound restoration workshop with a visiting Smithsonian scholar, gaining hands-on experience in audio preservation and archival practice.



The Shaw-Chiao 2.0 project reimagines a traditional ceremonial horn through new designs, performances, and workshops that connect heritage with today's audiences.

Distinguished Alumna

Notes on Unwritten Canons Q&A

(Photo by Lynne DeLade)

Dr. Nancy Yunhwa Rao

Profile in Brief

Dr. Rao is one of the most influential music scholars of her generation. Her work spans American modernism, transpacific musical histories, and the sonic lives of early Chinese American communities. A Distinguished Professor of Music at Rutgers University, she is the author of Chinatown Opera Theater in North America *(2017) and* Inside Chinese Theater *(2025). She is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, was appointed to the Rutgers University Board of Governors in 2025, and will deliver the keynote at the International Musicological Society's East Asian Regional Association conference in September.*

How did your time at NTNU shape your academic and artistic path?

As a music major concentrating on vocal performance, I was exposed to the European canon as well as contemporary Chinese compositions through Professor Liu Sai-Yun. She challenged me to ask how music shapes memory, identity, and society. We stayed in contact into the 1990s. She was commissioning new works and doing pioneering research in contemporary Chinese music; I was fortunate to be part of that effort.

Much of your work has focused on recovering lost or overlooked histories. What led you to study Chinese opera in North America?

When I began researching *Chinatown Opera Theater in North America*, there were very few traditional sources. At the time, standard archives held almost nothing on the music of early Chinese immigrant communities. It would be easy to assume that a missing archive meant the history itself didn't exist. But I knew it had. I started building my own by piecing together torn lyric sheets, immigration records, early recordings, and newspaper clippings. Holding a fragment of handwritten lyrics, I felt like I was touching the past itself.

Your latest book, Inside Chinese Theater, was just published in 2025. What does this project explore?

The book traces the history of Chinese opera theater in 19th-century California and how it became part of everyday life, not just in San Francisco, but in mining and railroad towns across the West. These performances were deeply embedded in the social, political, and economic lives of Chinese American communities. I also look closely at elements like costumes, singing, staging, and storytelling to show how theater shaped how Chinese immigrants saw themselves and how they were seen by others.

As editor of American Music and a contributor to the upcoming volume commemorating 250 years of U.S. theater, how do you think about inclusion in your work?

At *American Music*, I've worked to broaden the field by highlighting underrepresented musical traditions, from Caribbean music to Indigenous performance and Asian American jazz. Being invited to contribute to a volume marking the 250th anniversary of American independence felt significant. Chinese American musical history was once undocumented; now it's part of a national reflection. That inclusion is important. American music isn't one story; it's many. And we need to listen to all of them.

On a recent trip to Taiwan, you attended 25 performances in 30 days. What stood out to you during that time?

I was struck by how traditional forms are being reimagined. From *potehi* puppetry, *koa-a-hi*, and Peking opera to new experimental works like *The Queen with No Name*, artists were creating something fresh while preserving the essence of their traditions. That hybridity is so interesting to me. It's something I've been thinking about a lot recently, and it may shape the direction of my future work.

What advice would you give to young scholars in the field of music?

Don't shy away from unconventional paths. I started by working within established frameworks, but the most meaningful work I've done has come from asking different kinds of questions. I want to validate new approaches my students bring to the field and to future scholars.

On With the Show

NTNU Performing Arts at 20

On a humid summer evening in June 2025, a small audience gathered at the Liang Shih-Chiu Residence behind the NTNU Library. Performers moved through the tatami rooms and courtyards of the restored Japanese-era home, transforming the space into an intimate stage for *Grandma's Clothes*. Meanwhile, on the 10th floor of Union Building I at NTNU's Heping II campus, student crews adjusted lights and cued sound in the Zhi Yin Black Box Theater for the Thrilling Improv Troupe's (TIT) show.

This was the first NTNU Fringe Festival—an event that felt both improvised and intentional, stitched together with resourcefulness and care. The performances were original, the production student-led. While the festival marked the department's 20th anniversary, its tone was not nostalgic but exploratory. It asked what performance can become when artists build it themselves, piece by piece.

"Begin the Beguine"

When NTNU launched its Performing Arts Department in 2005, Taiwan had little infrastructure for developing original musical theatre. "There was talent," said Professor I-Fang Wu, director of the Performing Arts Department and a former principal dancer with Cloud Gate Dance Theatre. "But we needed to build a Sinophone repertoire from the ground up: from writing to training to production."

Musical theatre is not new to Taiwan's performing arts landscape. Forms like *gezaixi*, folk opera, and *potehi* (glove puppetry) are still performed and appreciated, but they rarely reflect contemporary Taiwanese life, whether its people, events, or aesthetics.

In 2002, Taiwan's Council for Cultural Affairs convened a working group to assess the future of Taiwanese musical theatre. The group concluded that meaningful development required academic infrastructure to support original work grounded in Taiwan's languages and creative practices. In response, NTNU established a graduate institute three years later with a clear mission: to cultivate artists capable of creating original performance rooted in Taiwan's cultural context and connected to global discourse.

"Bare Necessities"

In 2014, nearly a decade after its founding, the department introduced an undergraduate program with a project-based curriculum. Students enter through Taiwan's general university entrance exam rather than by audition, so many arrive with little formal theatre training.

"Some students come in with very little formal training but they are full of passion," said Wu. "In the first year, the teachers bring them up to speed, from basic breathing techniques to developing the skills they need to match their potential."

From the start, students devise short original works. By their third year, they stage 50-minute productions. Final-year capstones involve writing, casting, budgeting, marketing, and producing a full-length musical at a professional venue. They rotate through every major role from actor, stage manager, producer, to designer, crew, and marketing, and gain a comprehensive understanding of collaborative production.

"Seniors start scouting first-year talent the moment school begins," Wu said with a laugh.

The curriculum integrates theory with practice. Students study dramatic literature, performance studies, and theatre history alongside rehearsals. From Shakespeare to Deleuze and Guattari, and contemporary Sinophone thinkers, they develop critical frameworks to analyze their work and engage across disciplines.

Dancers from NTNU's Performing Arts program perform **Requiem for Beauty Dance Theater,** ***inspired by Gao Xingjian's poetic and visual works.***

NTNU Performing Arts presents Of Mountains and Seas *at the National Theater in Taiwan—a rock musical adaptation of Nobel Laureate Gao Xingjian's work blending mythology with music, staging, and contemporary performance.*

"Tradition!"

Though the program enrolls only about 30 undergraduates annually, it sustains a wide-ranging curriculum. Its faculty includes working directors, choreographers, producers, and researchers active across Taiwan and abroad. Areas of expertise span musical theatre, devised performance, theatre history, arts marketing, and digital media. Many hold advanced degrees from institutions in the United States, United Kingdom, France, and Japan, bringing diverse global perspectives into the classroom.

In May 2025, two 20th-anniversary performances honored program founder Professor Emane Wu. A vocal recital curated by Professor Yen-I Lee reunited alumni on stage, while *Rondo of Love and Time*, an original musical with artistic direction by Professor Chi-Ming Liang, founder of Taiwan's Godot Theater Company, reflected on the department's early years.

Nobel Laureate Gao Xingjian has served as Chair Professor since 2011. His interdisciplinary writings on literature, aesthetics, and theatre form part of the curriculum and have inspired student work. In recent years, the department has staged adaptations of *Mountains and Seas* and *Requiem for Beauty*, performed at national venues including the National Theater in Taipei and the National Taichung Theater, where *Of Mountains and Seas* opened the opera house's inaugural season.

"The Room Where It Happens"

Being part of a comprehensive university allows for meaningful cross-disciplinary collaboration. The department frequently partners with NTNU's programs in design, music, computer science, and education.

One standout project was *Rice Dragon 360*, an immersive performance presented at Taipei's Nuit Blanche festival in November 2024. Inspired by a Hakka ritual honoring the Earth Dragon God, the work invited audiences into a 360-degree projection space where they guided a digital dragon using motion-sensing technology. A live performer, dynamic soundscapes, and interactive visuals blended folklore with digital innovation.

The production brought together students and faculty from the Performing Arts, Design, and Music Departments, and was supported by the Ministry of Education's Forward-Looking Display Technology Plan. It exemplifies the

"Students rotate through every major role: actor, stage manager, producer, designer, crew, and marketing... Gaining a comprehensive understanding of collaborative production."

Professor I-Fang Wu discusses how NTNU's Performing Arts program adapts to limited performance spaces, emphasizing creativity and flexibility as part of students' training.

Launched in May 2025, the NTNU Fringe Festival showcases student-led performances across campus, blending original works with hands-on production experience.

Alumni and students perform Rondo of Love and Time *, an original musical.*

Students with Professors James Chi-ming Liang and Kang-Kuo Ho promote their Adelaide Fringe production in a Radio Adelaide interview.

department's vision of performance as a space where tradition and technology meet.

Space on NTNU's central Taipei campus presents creative constraints. Without a large auditorium, students adapt productions to venues like the Art Museum, heritage buildings, and the black box theatre.

"Working with what we have, and finding creative solutions, is part of the training," Wu said, noting that these limitations often prompt inventive staging choices and pedagogical flexibility.

"A Whole New World"

As part of its 20th anniversary celebrations, the department hosted Taiwan's first international academic conference on musical theatre in April 2025, with Professor Elizabeth Wollman of Baruch College as keynote speaker. Scholars from Taiwan, Japan, Australia, Hong Kong, and the United States presented research on adaptation, multilingual performance, musical comics, and more. A roundtable brought together producers, policymakers, and educators.

Since 2009, Professors Chi-Ming Liang and Kang-Kuo Ho have led student-created productions to fringe festivals in Edinburgh, Off Avignon, and Adelaide. These trips immerse students not only in performance but in the full scope of international touring: booking venues, generating publicity, and reaching unfamiliar audiences. In 2025, students also pitched their shows to international producers at a market conference during the Adelaide Fringe.

"I Know Where I've Been"

Even as the department expands globally, it remains committed to Taiwan's local cultural ecosystem. The NTNU Fringe Festival, inaugurated in June 2025, embodied this mission. Modeled on international fringe events, the festival took place across campus venues and featured work by students, alumni, and guest artists. Students handled technical production, scheduling, and backstage operations, gaining hands-on experience under real-world conditions.

Extending the department's presence well beyond campus, many graduates now work in major performing arts institutions across Taiwan, often returning to collaborate through teaching, mentorship, or co-production.

In 2026, NTNU will launch an English-taught master's program in Performing Arts Industry and Marketing. Focused on international touring, cultural policy, and arts management across the Sinophone world, the program marks the department's next step: not only sending students out, but bringing the world in.

Students perform traditional opera at NTNU's annual graduation show in the historic Assembly Hall, highlighting Taiwan's musical theater traditions.

International students gather at NTNU's annual Christmas event, one of the many cultural engagement programs supporting a global student community.

NTNU Connects the World

Connecting International Students with Learning, Work, and Community

NTNU expanded its commitment to international students in the 2024–2025 academic year through a diverse set of programs focused on academics, professional growth, cultural engagement, and institutional collaboration. International degree students now make up 12.05 percent of the university's total enrollment, the highest among Taiwan's national universities. This milestone reflects more than growth in numbers, it is a testament to NTNU's continued effort to create a supportive, inclusive environment for students from around the world.

Broadening Academic Access with EMI and Bilingual Education

Through the Bilingual Benchmark University initiative, NTNU has significantly increased its English-Medium Instruction (EMI) offerings, now totaling more than 880 courses. Fully English-taught degree programs are also available in areas such as education, business administration, global studies, international human resource development, athletic performance, and physics.

NTNU's fully English-taught degree programs have drawn students from countries including India, Myanmar, Vietnam, Indonesia, Canada, France, Egypt, and Colombia. To further support international students in these programs, NTNU offers a variety of language services. These include a Mandarin tutoring program jointly managed by the Office of International Affairs, the Office of Academic Affairs, and the General Education Committee, as well as one-on-one Chinese tutoring provided by the International Youth Service Team. The Mandarin Training Center, now in its 70th year, also offers supplementary courses and cultural experiences for students seeking more formal instruction.

As a member of the NTU System, alongside National Taiwan University and National Taiwan University of Science and Technology, NTNU gives students access to a broader academic and social community. Through this partnership, international students can register for courses across campuses, access shared resources, and participate in system-wide events. This year's collaborative efforts included joint cultural festivals, campus tours, and workshops that strengthened connections among the three universities.

Cultural Engagement Beyond the Classroom

Outside the classroom, NTNU encourages international students to take part in cultural experiences that build meaningful connections with local communities. This spring, the "Let's Flip! Changing Places, Sharing Cultures" program

NTNU President Cheng-Chih Wu speaks with exchange students from Purdue University and UT Austin during the International Cultural Festival.

Students from Norway, the U.S., Japan, and beyond explore Myanmar's culture through a hands-on cooking workshop organized by the Myanmar Students' Association.

brought 64 international students into 34 NTNU classes as guest presenters. More than 600 local students took part in lively sessions that included open discussions, interactive games, and themed workshops on education systems and cultural traditions.

Students also traveled to different parts of Taiwan. In Dulan, Taitung, they learned about Indigenous heritage through community visits and storytelling workshops. In Pinglin, they worked alongside tea farmers and visited eco-friendly tea producers. In May, trips to Taiwan Blue Magpie Tea and Arovia Studio introduced students to circular design through a creative project using sediment from local reservoirs to make scent diffusers.

Cristina, a Romanian graduate student from the Department of Taiwanese Culture, Languages, and Literature, said the experience made her realize that sustainability was not just paying lip-service to buzzwords. "These are concrete practices that engage our senses of smell, taste, and touch that the companies have transformed into business innovations."

On campus, students participated in a variety of cultural activities. These included a textile dyeing workshop exploring Taiwan's artisan heritage, a winter tangyuan flash mob to mark the Dongzhi Winter Solstice Festival, and seasonal events such as a Mid-Autumn Moonlight Tea Party and a brush-making and calligraphy class. Students also engaged in hands-on heritage activities focused on Qingming Festival customs, a ghost festival scavenger hunt, and presentations on Peinan Indigenous arts and traditional Taiwanese snacks.

A Global Gathering: International Cultural Festival

One of the most anticipated events of the year was the International Cultural Festival, where students from NTNU's partner institutions, including Purdue University and the University of Texas at Austin, joined NTNU students in sharing their cultures. Representatives from 16 countries created booths featuring traditional foods, crafts, and clothing, turning the campus into a vibrant cultural exchange hub.

This year's theme, "Forest Symphony," represented the university as a diverse and interconnected environment. During the opening ceremony, NTNU President Cheng-Chih Wu welcomed diplomats and cultural officials from 12 countries, including Belgium, Mexico, Hungary, the United Kingdom, and the Czech Republic, affirming the university's international standing.

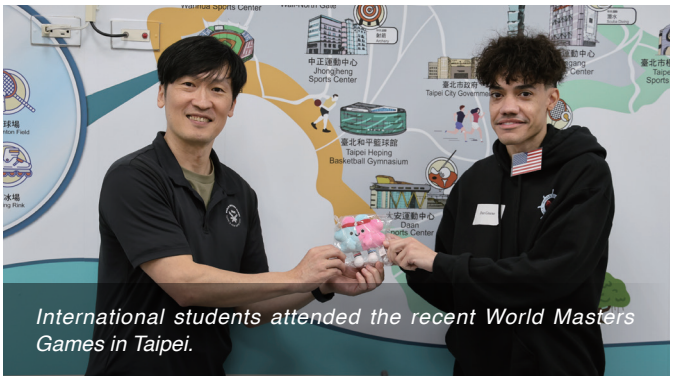
"This festival is more than a celebration," President Wu said. "It's a chance to see the world through others' eyes, to share meals and stories, and to grow in understanding."

Visiting dignitaries echoed this sentiment. Cédric Schampers of the Belgian Office in Taipei spoke on the importance of curiosity and connection. Susan Milner of the British Council praised NTNU's role in global education. In a symbolic gesture of exchange, Martin Torres Gutierrez Rubio from the Mexican Trade Office wore an NTNU tie, following President Wu's earlier appearance in a UT Austin tie.

Student performances gave the event a personal touch. The Vietnamese Student Association performed a dance inspired by the folk song "Au Lac," and the Indonesian

Two students, from Saint Lucia and the UK, create their own custom-dyed fabrics, exploring Taiwan's traditional textile crafts through a hands-on experience organized by the OIA.

The International Cultural Festival featured booths and performances by students from 16 countries, sharing traditions through tea, music, and food.



International students attended the recent World Masters Games in Taipei.

President Cheng-Chih Wu and VP for International Affairs Yi-De Liu join students on stage at the International Cultural Festival.

Student Association presented *Voices of the Archipelago*, a musical piece blending instruments from across the islands.

Food played a central role as well, with dishes such as Burmese fish noodle soup and Mongolian dumplings sparking conversations and shared experiences.

"NTNU is the world, and the world is NTNU," said student emcees Yu-Ting Ma and Njål Armin Kaland Homeyer. "This campus welcomes everyone who wants to grow, learn, and connect."

The International Cultural Festival is organized by student volunteers from the International Youth Service Team, under the Office of International Affairs, who play a key role in welcoming and integrating international students into NTNU life. Comprised of 40 to 50 local students, the team supports a range of events including welcome parties, campus tours, and seasonal celebrations like Halloween or Christmas events. They also provide one-on-one Chinese tutoring, helping students navigate both language learning and daily life in Taiwan with greater confidence. Through these efforts, the team helps ensure that international students feel supported, connected, and at home in the NTNU community.

Preparing Students for the Workplace

NTNU also focused on career development through its Stay in Taiwan initiative, working with the Ministry of Labor and the National Immigration Agency to organize workshops on employment opportunities, job-hunting strategies, and immigration policies. These sessions were offered in both English and Mandarin to ensure accessibility.

Students visited local companies, including a trip to Dajia Biotech, where they toured facilities and received résumé consultations from staff. NTNU also collaborated with companies such as Delta Electronics, RealTek, LeadTek, Turing Drive and FamilyMart to introduce students to sectors including smart manufacturing, AI, and retail.

The year's signature career event was the "Shaping Tomorrow: The Dual Transformation Job Fair," hosted by the Office of International Affairs. More than 150 students from over 30 countries met with recruiters from 12 companies for interviews, consultations, and networking.Employers included Unity Sustainability Services, Veda International Group, Blue Orcas Cargo Express, Lion Travel, iKala Interactive Media, Plus Pay, and LOTES Co. Ltd.

"NTNU students bring cultural awareness and adaptability—traits that are hard to teach but essential in today's workforce," said Steven Cheng-Chang Tsai, CEO of Unity Sustainability Services.

Vice President for International Affairs Yi-De Liu noted the importance of building these bridges between education and employment:"These programs help students see what's possible in Taiwan's job market, while also helping companies recognize the value of international talent."

Looking Ahead

NTNU's strategy for international engagement rests on clear goals: creating access, supporting success, and maintaining continuity. By connecting academic study with cultural experiences and career development, the university is building an environment where international students can truly thrive.

"We're not just trying to attract students," Liu said. "We want to make sure they succeed—in their studies, their careers, and their lives."

As the university moves forward, that mission remains at the heart of its work: supporting a new generation of global learners in building futures here in Taiwan.

Each year, 40–50 local students volunteer for the International Youth Service Team to support cultural events, campus tours, and tutoring that help international students feel at home.

International students connect with recruiters from 12 companies at NTNU's "Shaping Tomorrow" job fair, part of the university's Stay in Taiwan career initiative.

Trailblazers

Two Maestros, One Mission

Sigmund Thorp and Mei-Ann Chen

NTNU's orchestral training program has recently welcomed Sigmund Thorp and Mei-Ann Chen as Visiting Professors in the Department of Music. Both are internationally recognized conductors who bring extensive professional experience to the education of young musicians. Though their backgrounds differ, they share a commitment to performance-based teaching grounded in musical clarity, leadership, and collaboration.

Sigmund Thorp: Structure, Gesture, and Reflective Practice

A professor at the Norwegian Academy of Music and former Artistic Director of the Norwegian Academy Sinfonietta, Thorp has conducted more than 350 contemporary works. He is a recipient of the Biel International Conducting Competition award and the Royal College of Music's Tagore Gold Medal. His work emphasizes precision, clarity, and interpretive depth.

Since joining NTNU in 2021, Thorp has taught undergraduate and graduate students with a focus on conducting gesture, ensemble communication, and score interpretation. His method, *The Anatomy of Conducting*, reflects over three decades of pedagogical development and draws on the theories of Dr. Walter Hügler.

He has led several major concerts with the NTNU Symphony Orchestra, including the 2025 Spring Concert at the National Concert Hall (NCH) in Taipei. The program featured works by George Butterworth, Chiung-Yu Chen, Vaughan Williams, and Mussorgsky.

The NTNU Symphony Orchestra performs regularly at the NCH, Taiwan's leading venue for classical music and the primary stage for orchestras such as the Vienna Philharmonic, Bavarian Radio Symphony, and Staatskapelle Dresden. NTNU is the only university in Taiwan with a recurring presence at the hall, where each concert requires a formal proposal and approval from the venue's artistic committee, providing students with rare access to a professional-level performance environment.

"Teaching at NTNU has been a deeply rewarding experience and among the most meaningful years of my career," Thorp said. "It has been a privilege to work with such dedicated musicians, to teach, to interpret, and to make music together."

Mei-Ann Chen: Collaboration, Mentorship, and Cultural Engagement

Mei-Ann Chen, Music Director of the Chicago Sinfonietta and Chief Conductor of Austria's Styriarte Festival Orchestra, joined NTNU in autumn 2024. The first Asian female conductor to lead a professional orchestra in Austria, she has conducted over 150 orchestras worldwide, including the Orchestre National de France, BBC Symphony Orchestra, and Taiwan Philharmonic. In 2005, she became the only woman to win First Prize at the Malko International Conducting Competition and was later named one of *Musical America's* Top 30 Influencers in classical music.

Her appointment also holds personal significance: her father is an NTNU alumnus.

In her first semester, Chen conducted the 2024 Autumn Concert at the NCH, featuring Strauss Jr.'s *Die Fledermaus* Overture, Rachmaninoff's *Piano Concerto No. 3* with NTNU professor and pianist Chun-Chieh Yen, and Brahms's *Symphony No. 4.*

Alongside rehearsals, Chen led graduate seminars, provided individual coaching, and gave student conductors hands-on opportunities with the orchestra. "As a conductor, my job is to help musicians realize their potential," she said. "Even in a limited rehearsal period, I try to create an environment where ideas and sound can develop."

Chen said she was also struck by the culture of the department. "What impressed me most about NTNU students is their motivation. Some came to rehearsals even when they weren't earning credit. Students volunteered to tidy the rehearsal space, and some even brought me throat lozenges before I began. There's a real sense of commitment and care."

Drawing on experience from both European and American orchestras, Chen introduces students to a range of rehearsal and leadership practices.

Two Approaches, One Academic Objective

Thorp and Chen offer NTNU students complementary perspectives on the art of conducting. Thorp emphasizes structure and technique informed by analytical insight. Chen focuses on interpretive leadership shaped by international collaboration. Both stress communication, rehearsal strategy, and musical understanding.

By engaging faculty active in the global music world, NTNU provides students with training grounded in current professional practice. These appointments reflect the university's commitment to high-level orchestral education and its continued development as an international center for music performance and study.

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