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# An interview with the newest UNESCO's Goodwill Ambassador Tan Dun

**UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova designated Chinese composer and conductor Tan Dun as a UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador on Friday, 22 March. Maestro Tan Dun talked to UNESCO Web about his nomination, his projects and above all, his reflections on music and water.**

*On March 22<sup>nd</sup>, you were designated a UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador by Director-General, Irina Bokova. You are actually UNESCO's first Chinese Goodwill Ambassador.. What does it mean to you?*

It's a great honor for me and for China. It is also a great recognition of Chinese culture and all Chinese people.

As a UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador, I will continue to promote intercultural dialogue and water preservation.

China is increasingly wealthy and developed. We should do more on the international stage to contribute to global well-being. It is good for the development of the Chinese people and it helps China to play a more important role. I hope that my work will mobilize entrepreneurs, educators, artists, government officials and people from all different sectors to promote intercultural dialogue and cultural heritage and water preservation.

*March 22 is World Water Day. You brought a "Water for Music" concert to UNESCO HQ. Why is water so attractive to you? Why do you want to make music with and for water?*

I have been working with "water" for a very long time. I think human beings are profoundly connected with water. Humans hear the sound of water even before birth. It might be the very first sound one hears in his life. Humans have a close relationship with water. Human health, human culture, human origins and human futures cannot be separated from water. I was born and grew up on the banks of the Liuyang river in Hunan Province. Water has always been music to me; my earliest contact with music was water as a musical instrument. The waves, colors and sounds of water—I feel an intimate connection to all of these. Water is about my belief, my talent and my inspiration. As Li Bai once said in a poem, *Great nature sound is a composer itself* - my understanding is that nature itself, such as water has very beautiful sounds; *it plays without a string* – music can also be played without instruments. For generations, China's literati and

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artists have been attracted by the sounds of water.

Now I am working on projects to promote water culture, to preserve water resources, and to discover and create water music. They are all related to my childhood memories. Since I was a child, I have listened to Hunan local women wash clothes by using a wooden club beating on soaked clothes; or wash vegetables and rice, and bathe along the river. I spent a lot of time with these women in the river. The women of our family took us children to play with water every day. From then on, the sounds of the water have always had a great influence on me, and have claimed a big part of my artistic activities. Water is great fun for me. The sounds of water are very colorful. In my ears, they sound better than the Violin, the Erhu—better than all the instruments.

*You have been actively involved in the preservation of cultural heritage—for example, you made a micro-musical film documenting Hunan's Nüshu (Women's script). How did you come to this project? Any similar projects planned for the future, now as UNESCO's Goodwill ambassador?*

As UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador, I have two tasks: one focuses on intercultural dialogue and preservation of culture heritage, the other on natural resources, especially the preservation of water resources. For me, the preservation of cultural heritage is part of my profession. For example, my recent projects ("map", the Kunqu opera "The Peony Pavilion" in an authentic garden, and also what I am doing now for the documentation of Nüshu) are all about rescuing and transmission of disappearing traditional culture heritage. This valuable heritage was created by our ancestors. If we take them not only as museum objects but also as innovative resources, I think we will be more interested in preserving them. Thus I hope every action of rescue and documentation will develop some new structures, some new paths at the same time. I have been doing this for a long time, and I still haven't had enough.

My upcoming projects will include collaborations with people from New Zealand, China and Australia to help promote the preservation of water, forests and birds. We will make music about birds and classify the birds' sounds, then combine them with Chinese traditional music and the development of future music.

*Your works have not only crossed the boundaries between East and West, but also the boundaries between different disciplines of arts: for example, your "Water Music Hall" in Shanghai. What is the most important factor to make crossing boundaries and exchange possible?*

I feel that I live for the future. But to look for answers about the future necessitates a search for traces of the past. The traces of the past will provide a lot of answers about the future. It's same for the sound, for the color, for the form, for all kinds of art.

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