

Buried Treasure Found and Restored



Photo: Matt Wrzeszcz

The Reverend Dr. Ching Fen Hsiao (left), Dr. Ai-Lan Wang, and President Torrance

by Heather Rote Faller

The treasure wasn't buried, exactly. The Steinway grand piano was in plain sight in the basement of the Mackay Campus Center for at least a decade, but it languished in obscurity until it was "rediscovered" in 1999, when chapel services were held in the Mackay Campus Center during the restoration of Miller Chapel.

During its years in the basement, the piano fell into disrepair, needing such frequent tunings that Chi Yi Chen, PTS's choral assistant, found it difficult to play.

It is not clear when or how the piano came to PTS, but after investigating, the Seminary's director of music Martin Tel learned that the piano was a vintage Steinway, manufactured at the New York Steinway & Sons factory in 1933.

Chen, a native of Taiwan, knew that her family physician, Dr. Ai-Lan Wang, was concerned about seminary education. "I mentioned to her the situation with the piano, and she said, 'yes, I will do it,'" said Chen. With a generous gift from Wang, the piano was completely restored by A.C. Pianocraft Inc. of New York, and on May 17, PTS held a dedicatory concert for the restored vintage Steinway grand piano in the Gambrell Room of Scheide Hall.

When asked to whom she wanted to dedicate the piano, Wang didn't hesitate. A Taiwanese national, she met Shoki Coe at Taiwan Union Christian Church in New

York in 1973 and became his follower. After his death, she established the Reverend Shoki Coe Memorial Fund, and published some of his writings in *Recollections and Reflections* by Shoki Coe. "Shoki Coe is a very important person in Christianity in Taiwan and around the world, and he is a pioneer of the democratic movement in Taiwan," Wang said. "I wanted people to remember him."

The Reverend Dr. Ching Fen Hsiao, M.Div. 1967, Ph.D. 1986, and former professor and president of Tainan Theological Seminary, gave the memorial tribute to Coe at the concert. Coe (1914–1988) was a church leader, educator, theologian, and conscientious Christian. Born in Taiwan when that country was a colony of Japan, Coe graduated from Tokyo Imperial University of Japan and studied at Westminster Theological College in Cambridge, England. He integrated his understanding of East and West and pioneered "contextual theology," a term he is credited with creating.

Coe served as president of Tainan Theological Seminary in Taiwan. He guided the Presbyterian churches in Taiwan to unite as one church under the same General Assembly, and he was elected its first moderator. With others, Coe launched Formosan Christians for Self-Determination in 1972. "Dr. Ai-Lan Wang was one of the early supporters of this organization," said Hsiao, "which is one of the precursors that led to

the full-blown democratic self-determination movements in Taiwan."

Hsiao described how Coe's name kept changing throughout his life, as Taiwan's political situation changed. Coe's original name, Chiong-hui Bok-su, "bears the name of his birthplace, which became a built-in component of the theological thinking he advocated later in his life.... He enthusiastically used his various names as part of his understanding of contextualization in theology," said Hsiao. Coe continued to "maintain and to search for his unique Christian and Taiwanese identity.... It was this search that led to his contextual theology and passion for his homeland," said Hsiao.

The concert featured music for piano, voice, viola, and erhu, a two-stringed fiddle. The musicians, all natives of Taiwan, were Wei-En Hsu, pianist, Chi Yi Chen, pianist, Andy Lin, violist and erhu fiddler, and Peter Lee, countertenor and tenor. Members of Wang's family also performed, including her sister, Huey-Lan Wang Chen, soprano, her nephew, Roy Chen, pianist, and her brother, Hua-Tong Wang (Mynor King), who sang and played original compositions on the harmonica.

In thanking Wang for her gift to the Seminary community, President Iain Torrance said, "One thing that excites me about Presbyterians in America is that they are a singing people...your generous and perceptive gift allows Martin Tel and our

Photo: Matt Wrzeszcz



The musicians and Dr. Ai-Lan Wang are honored with applause.

musicians to provide inspirational leadership for worship.”

The evening was a celebration of music and faith, and the role of both in bringing people together. While glancing through Coe’s collected writings before the event, Torrance learned that Coe had met James I. McCord, who would become PTS’s fourth president. He also learned that Coe visited Princeton Seminary in the 1950s and was received by then-president John A. Mackay. Mackay introduced Coe to T.F. Torrance, President Torrance’s father, who was a visiting scholar at PTS at the time.

Of these meetings, Coe writes in his memoirs, “For some reason or other [T.F.] Torrance and McCord coopted me into their circle. Torrance told me that his parents had been missionaries in China and that he himself had been born there.... On hearing of my deep appreciation of the rapid availability in English of Barth’s *Church Dogmatics* (thanks to the energetic editorship of Torrance and G.W. Bromily), he told me why and how he first began to be interested

Photo: Matt Wrzeszcz



The restored piano in Scheide Hall

in Karl Barth and asked me in turn how I had done so. It was a friendly and informal chat over a cup of tea, but somehow it stuck in my memory.”

After reading this passage of the book aloud to those gathered in Scheide Hall, Iain Torrance spoke for all: “How extraordinary that we should be here together today.”