

# APPALASIA



APPALASIA was formed in 2009 by Mimi Jong, Jeff Berman, and Sue Powers in Pittsburgh, PA. Together they have created an evocative and ambitious performance language for dulcimer, erhu, banjo, and vocals that combines the influence of their folk-roots with original composition and inspired improvisation.

The individual members of Appalasia each have extensive histories of collaboration, performing,

and recording with artists including Andy Statman, Tony Trischka, Pasang Dolma, Alash, Susan Mckeown, Karen Han, Robert Een, Min Xiao Fen, Samir Chatterjee, Linda Thompson, Osei Koranke, Devilish Merry, Arthur Russell and Huang Xiang, to name just a few.

Visit AppalAsia at [www.appalasia.com](http://www.appalasia.com) for links to audio and video clips as well as more information and photos.

# A P P A L A S I A

## **JEFF BERMAN**, dulcimer

Jeff is a multi-instrumentalist, improvising artist, and composer whose work reflects his global musical vision. A native of New York City now living in Pittsburgh, his genre-extending concept on mountain dulcimer, vibraphone, and percussion, has allowed him to collaborate, across stylistic boundaries, with a diverse group of artists from across the planet. Josef Woodward has described his music as "a worldly folk-jazz", the Los Angeles Times wrote "Berman bends a chord or strums his Appalachian dulcimer... to stunning effect." *Jazziz* has written "...hypnotic vibes work... Berman not only plays vibes, he sounds like he created the instrument," and Bill Milkowski has called Jeff's writing "...hauntingly beautiful..."

Jeff has performed internationally both as a solo artist and as a member of various ensembles. Some of the artists he has performed, recorded, and toured with include Andy Statman, Tony Trischka, Robert Egan, Susan McKeown, Lindsey Horner, Osei Kwanke, Paul Bley, Linda Thompson, and choreographers Yin Mei, and Gia Cacalano to name just a few. He has three recordings on the Palmetto Records label featuring his own compositions, and his music has been used for performance, dance, theatre, and film—including the Academy Award nominated documentary *In Our Water*.

Jeff is rostered with the Pennsylvania State Council on the Arts as a Teaching Artist and has conducted residencies and professional development sessions in the Western Pennsylvania region. These experiences have ranged from creating world rhythm ensembles with Elementary School students, Aesthetic Education workshops with Middle School students, lecture/demonstrations on cross-cultural collaboration with college students, and workshops in improvisation for arts educators.

## **MIMI JONG**, erhu

Mimi has a diverse musical background acquired from being born and raised in Indonesia, educated in Germany, and immigrating to the United States. Since age eleven, she has been performing erhu, an ancient, Chinese, two-string, bowed instrument.

By moving beyond tradition and embracing the erhu's versatility, Mimi has performed with jazz, folk and classical musicians, conducted educational workshops, and performed at music festivals.

With the mission of nurturing cross-cultural connections through art, Mimi has co-founded multiple projects. Partnering with artists from China, Mimi was able to introduce traditional Chinese dance and music to schools in the region. Along with AppalAsia, she was a featured presenter and performer at the Festival of Woman Composers conference at IUP. She was a returning faculty member of Huntington County Art Council's Folk College as well. With the group "Silk Sound," Mimi collaborated with various jazz musicians and tabla master Samir Chatterjee to develop a new voice from ancient and contemporary Asian melodies. Demonstrating her open mind and musical flexibility, Mimi collaborated with Persian santur master Dr. Dariush Saghafi and tombak master Mahmoud Tehrani, creating hauntingly beautiful music that transcends cultures and genres. Bringing erhu to modern movement, Mimi's cross-disciplinary involvements include collaboration with Mary Miller Dance Company, and artist Jennifer Myers theatrical productions, creating ground-breaking, cinematic performances.

Mimi was a recipient of 2014 "Master Artists and Tradition Bearers Award" from Rivers of Steel National Heritage Area. In addition, she serves as the music program director for "Silk Screen Arts and Cultural Organization" and the board president and founding member of "HarmoniZing," where her contributions include recruiting renowned artists for local concerts and residencies, and providing a platform to encourage diversity in Pittsburgh's music scene.

## **SUSAN POWERS**, banjo, vocal

Sue has been playing banjo and singing since high school. She grew up outside of Pittsburgh in a family with deep roots in the Western Pennsylvania musical landscape. Both parents were sacred singers, and her grandfather and great grandfather were fiddle players in the Appalachian "old time" tradition, who performed for local square dances. She is a founding member of the group Devilish Merry where she pioneered the use of the 5 string banjo in celtic music. The group has released three recordings featuring her playing, singing and song writing. She has adapted her unique 'claw hammer' style to blues, rock and pop music, and is acknowledged as a songwriter whose personal imagery evokes the Pennsylvania landscape. The *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* has written "...the primary element that makes Devilish Merry unusual is the prominent banjo by Ms. Powers... her polyrhythmic...clawhammer style [explores] inside the rhythm... an Afro-blues style applied to Celtic music..." The *Pittsburgh City Paper* has written, "(her songs)... convey a sense of drama... her approach to the banjo - a bluesy variation on claw hammer plucking - makes her an original."

Her music has been used for modern and traditional dance, performance, theater, and film, including the Smithsonian exhibit "Lewis and Clark: Clash of Empires", Roger Sayers documentary about "outsider" folk-artist Howard Finster, and the stage play "Sago Mine Disaster."

Sue has extended her educational outreach to "Beyond Appalachia" - a workshop and residency/performance experience that highlights the influence of Appalachian music, from it's roots in the British Isles and Africa, to it's branches in Country, Bluegrass, Blues, Jazz, and Rock music. She conducts lectures and demonstrations in schools and universities on the aesthetics of cross-cultural collaboration and creativity, and was a featured presenter and performer at the last Festival of Woman's Composers conference at Indiana University Pennsylvania.

# A P P A L A S I A

"AppalAsia is one of the most innovative and musically exciting groups I have ever heard. The unusual combination of instruments creates such a joyous feeling and combines sophisticated composition with brilliant playing in a way that makes it all seem effortless. Those of us who sat and listened were all literally spell bound. Hearing the banjo played in new ways and the use of the traditional Chinese violin played with stunning virtuosity with Jeff Berman's dulcimer was just what the world needs to hear. This wasn't cross-over or fusion. This was great music making that needs no label."

— David Amram / NERFA 2015

"...I find it immensely enjoyable... music can be very evocative... this is somehow evocative of a place and/or time that doesn't really exist... something mythical or existing in imaginative literature..."

— Bob Studebaker, WDUQ

"AppalAsia's second album (CARGO) continues to seamlessly blend the Western strains of Jeff Berman's dulcimer and Susan Powers' banjo with Mimi Jong's erhu and zhonghu (Chinese bowed instruments) to create something that reaches beyond the concept of genre hybrids. The trio, aided by bassist Jeff Grubbs, has a knack for taking folk-like melodies and expanding them with unique textures, shifting time signatures and arresting vocals. "Green Island," a Mandarin Chinese song, starts slow and traditional, then shifts into a Western groove without losing the song's hypnotic quality. Jong's bowing gives "Up and Down the River" a rustic quality that fits the haunting Appalachian side of the trio. These melodies stick with you long after the songs finish."

— Mike Shanley / Pittsburgh City Paper

"This trio create, perform, and record music that is very unique and beautiful with its evocative eloquence and multitude of sound images... Those of you familiar with the music of West Canadian groups Asza, Orchid Ensemble

and Silk Road Music will find themselves in familiar territory because their approach is relatively similar to that of AppalAsia in terms of instrumentation and overall sound though it seems that AppalAsia goes further in its melodic search and does not hesitate to give free rein to improvisation and emotional expression... Susan Powers singing often evokes that of the wonderful Gillian Welch..."

— Dan Behrman / Le Magazine Son et Image

"AppalAsia performed a rich and hauntingly beautiful set of songs..."

— The Titusville Herald

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"...glad to give some airtime to new music which doesn't sound like everything else!"

— Tom Bingham, "General Eclectic", WCVF-FM, SUNY Fredonia

"AppalAsia is one of those experiments that happen when musicians from different back-grounds decide to try something different. It would be unfair to call it Chinese, or Appalachian, it was a hybrid of the two, done in the tradition of jazz."

— Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra (PSO) Blog

"It is very much the spiritual third element, that which combines sounds or styles, that is the ever-present and core inspiration that makes this new musical form work for this band... I could experience this aspect in each detail of their playing."

— Gerald Van Waes, Radio Central Antwerp, Belgium