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Dusted Features

Dusted's Mason Jones checks out the out sounds of Beijing's White.

Destined: White

White - "Music for Gu Zheng"

It's safe to say that China's independent music scene isn't within the average music buyer's usual horizons, even for those of you reading Dusted. Within China, however, Beijing boasts perhaps the country's strongest scene, with many talented musicians – a number of whom have moved there from elsewhere in China or even from outside the country; for example, [a New Yorker named Michael Pettis opened D-22 last year](#), which has quickly become a focus of the scene due to their willingness to let musicians do whatever they want.

Coming out of the self-styled "No Beijing" movement, the plainly-named White are one of the bands to watch, and seem set during 2007 to find their place finally outside their home country. Founder and guitarist/noisemaker Shou Wang and drummer/noisemaker Shenggy (aka Shen Jing) are headed to Berlin in May, under the patronage of Blixa Bargeld, to record at the Einsturzende Neubauten studio. There's no doubt that the duo's powerful music, plus the boost that such a high-profile supporter should bring, will bring White to the attention of listeners worldwide. But certainly, theirs is no pop music, and harkens back to Neubauten's early rust-caked explorations, with a similar mixture of cold artifice and warm organic spirit.

Shou Wang founded White a couple of years ago, while still continuing his band

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Carsick Cars: White originally began as an open project to allow him to work with different musicians and in a wide variety of styles, and that spirit is still active: in May, a seven-person lineup performed a piece Shou wrote for Beijing's Midi Festival. In late 2005, however, Shou met Shenggy, and the two hit it off so well that White is now primarily a duo. Shenggy was coming off nearly eight years of playing with the girl group Hang on the Box, and in 2006, she says, "quit the old band to start a totally new musical life."

Both have been heavily influenced by avant-garde musicians, and that inspiration has driven them toward White's experimentation as an outlet from their more rockist bands. Amazingly, just last year White were privileged to perform with a number of high-profile artists, including Glenn Branca, Alvin Curran and Elliott Sharp. As far as inspirations go, while the band list Branca, Throbbing Gristle, and Einsturzende Neubauten, Shou says: "We listen to a lot of different things and we don't really think of any special style. I think maybe I am much more influenced by New York in the 1970s and 1980s, and Shen Jing by New York and also Germany in the 1970s, but both of us like a lot of different things. We just try to steal everything we like and try to make something interesting out of it." Shenggy adds, "All of those bands opened our ears, and afterwards we found our own style and sound. We still will keep creating our own sound; human creation will never stop. However, those musicians, their spirit all made me get tough, and will influence me forever in my life."

In many ways, names like Steve Reich, La Monte Young and Alvin Curran are even more prominent influences in White's work than TG and Neubauten. Squiggling electronic lines snake through rhythmic synth hissing before decaying into glacial tones that are no less hypnotic. Importantly, White also take care to note the influence of Chinese classical music, in particular the gu zheng. An instrument in the zither family, related to the Japanese koto, the gu zheng typically has between 15-30 strings. One of the few White "bootleg" recordings available is from a gu zheng recital.

Another recording is of the duo's first show, with 35 minutes of cascading sound textures, trance-inducing percussion, sparsely chiming metal, and, toward the end, metronomic drumming and pulsing guitar noise. While raw, it's not hard to hear what attracted Bargeld to the band. Shenggy admits, "When he discovered us, I don't think we were that great a band already. But Blixa saw our potential...[and] will lead us to achieve what we can and push our potential, really exert it all." That potential can be heard in the chilling scrapes and primitive rhythms of "Train Song," which builds a propulsion worthy of its name from a very skeletal framework of guitar and percussion. The result is like a shotgun marriage of La Monte Young eternal music and SPK's industrial clangor.

Asked the obvious question about the band's name, they both feel the same way about its relative anonymity. Shou chose it because he "wanted something very clean that didn't have a lot of meaning, because we wanted the band to be open to doing anything." And Shenggy agrees: "I love the name, because 'White' can't show people what you sound like."

The duo obviously enjoy the "anything goes" philosophy of White, which is clear even from the band's MySpace profile, which lists instrumentation from guitar, organ, and drums to Theremin, toys, tape manipulation and analog pedals. And their coming together was an accident of timing and happenstance, as both had

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fallen under similar avant-garde influences. Shenggy recalls, "Actually, at the beginning, we never thought to form a band. We hadn't known each other really long. One time we met at a gig, did some talking, and we found that we both have many favorite musics. So we made a plan to find time to do some improvising, just for fun. In January 2006 we were asked to play at a Beijing experimental gig that happens every week, named Shui Lu KwanYin, and we did a really good job that night."

Shou Wang notes, "We played together so well that it is just easy for us to do it, even though she and I have very different interests."

And the duo have focused those interests in an unusual way, as Shenggy explains: "Actually, White for me is kinda like a trip, because we never meet except for practice or a gig. Our only, and pure, collision is when we play music together, other times we never make contact and never meet. We both love this kind of feeling, it makes it easy for us to push White into a high and mysterious domain."

Hopefully, this is a domain that more people will be able to visit in the coming year. White plans to release its first recorded material later this year on [Semi-Formal Recordings](#).

More White:
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By Mason Jones

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