

# *Techniques and Stage Performance of Zhongruan in Man Jiang Hong*

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**Abstract:** The Zhongruan is a quintessential Chinese traditional instrument, resonant with cultural heritage. Over the centuries, countless musicians have composed diverse pieces for the Zhongruan, shaping it into a profound medium for preserving China's musical legacy. This article delves into the unique techniques employed in performing Man Jiang Hong on the Zhongruan and explores the nuances of stage performance. It posits that mastering this piece demands not only technical proficiency but also a deep interpretative insight, allowing the performer to infuse it with distinct artistic expression.

## 1. The Zhongruan and Its Education

The Zhongruan stands as the most widely used member of the Ruan family, composed of a headstock, straight neck, round resonator, and bridge. Its sound is warm and mellow, often bridging and blending different parts within an ensemble. The Zhongruan's rhythm is both strong and flexible, with a brightness that enhances each performance. Typically serving as an accompaniment, it nevertheless shines by enriching the ensemble's sonic texture with rhythmic dynamism. Within such musical settings, the Zhongruan creates a soundscape that captivates listeners with its lush, resonant quality<sup>[1]</sup>.

Historically, Chinese historians and musicologists have verified the Zhongruan's prolific musical repertoire. Classics like Bo Ruan Fingering, Qin Ruan Er Playbook, and Ruan Xian Notations exemplify its rich musical legacy. Like other traditional Chinese instruments, such as the guzheng, guqin, and pipa, the Zhongruan embodies deep historical significance, offering students not only technical mastery but also an enduring appreciation for Chinese musical heritage. Since the 1960s, higher institutions in China have introduced specialized Ruan courses, inspiring young musicians to immerse themselves in this instrument's intricate technique and profound heritage. Through systematic training and stage experience, these young musicians become vital carriers of Ruan culture, breathing life into the legacy of Chinese traditional music.

## 2. Introduction to Zhongruan Man Jiang Hong

Composed in 1981 by Lin Jiliang and later adapted into a Zhongruan concerto by He Zhanhao, Man Jiang Hong stands as an evocative narrative piece. Through expressive techniques—such as glissando, vibrato, harmonics, and sweep strumming—it powerfully captures the spirit of resistance embodied in Yue Fei's courageous stand against invaders<sup>[2]</sup>. Using narrative and realistic depictions,

this piece brings to life the epic grandeur of Yue Fei's march to battle, allowing listeners to feel the stirring resonance of his inner strength and determination.

In this concerto, the Zhongruan's distinctive timbre harmonizes with the dramatic intensity of Yue Fei's heroic journey, blending beauty with somber undertones to convey a tapestry of courage tinged with sorrow and anxiety. The Zhongruan's timbre exudes an unmistakable ethnic flavor, while its seamless integration with Western instruments breathes a modern energy into this historic tale, bridging tradition with the pulse of contemporary times.

### 3. Performance Techniques in Man Jiang Hong

This article unpacks the performance techniques of Man Jiang Hong by examining its musical structure (Introduction—A—B—C—A').

The Introduction unfolds with a series of measures built around repetitive rhythmic motifs, gradually intensifying from a slow burn to a fervent climax. Here, the performer's right-hand sweep technique must mirror the piece's escalating passion and fury. To convey the raw anger and anguish of Yue Fei's incarceration, the performer must carefully modulate the tempo and intensity of each strum, contrasting shifts to capture this profound emotional landscape. Preceding the strum, the right hand must maintain a certain tension; during the sweep, the plectrum should swiftly move from the fourth to the first string with a unified, vigorous sweep to create a cohesive, sustained sound<sup>[3]</sup>. Mastery of this motion ensures a robust, resonant tone rather than a dull or muted sound—a challenge that demands rigorous control and explosive hand strength. The Introduction's crescendo underscores the need for the performer to build gradually from double-string to triple-string and ultimately four-string sweep techniques—a gradual, methodical process, never rushed.

In Section A (Fast Tempo), the vibrato technique comes into play, capturing Yue Fei's deep sense of national concern. Vibrato, a frequently employed left-hand technique on the Zhongruan, requires precision and posture. The thumb and fretting finger must form a solid anchor, grounding the hand while avoiding tension that might produce a harsh sound. After each vibrato, the fingertip should return seamlessly to its original position, ensuring pitch accuracy. Additionally, right-hand push-and-pull string techniques can add further depth. While pushing and pulling, both the pitch and finger pressure must remain balanced. Mastery of these techniques demands daily training to hone both control and dexterity.

Section B (Fast Tempo) is brimming with narrative and realism, its powerful energy vividly portraying Yue Fei leading his troops to war. The left-hand shifting technique takes center stage here, a complex skill demanding rapid and precise transitions. Despite technical fluency, some performers falter, producing choppy sound due to inadequate posture. In swift shifts, coordinated movement across the shoulders, upper arms, forearms, wrists, and fingers is essential<sup>[4]</sup>. The correct approach involves using the shoulder as an anchor, smoothly driving the upper and lower arm, wrist, and fingers. The right hand, in perfect synchrony, must strike the strings in step with each left-hand shift.

Section C (Moderate Tempo) demands a rich blend of left-hand ornaments, including vibrato, glissando, and more. These techniques fuse with the melody, channeling Yue Fei's patriotic fervor and resilient spirit. The performer must navigate shifts in dynamics and intensity, maintaining evenness in each ornament to avoid disruptive "clumping." Glissando requires steady rhythm control; achieving this entails meticulous rhythmic exercises. In measure 180, the glissando's accelerating tempo is especially demanding. Here, the triple-strum technique calls for rapid, repetitive plucking—a brief but precise motion central to its execution.

The final A' section in F major echoes the beginning, employing double-strum techniques to

amplify the melody, evoking Yue Fei's sorrow and unfulfilled dreams. The double-strum necessitates finely balanced force and speed. On the strength side, each stroke should stem from the shoulder, smoothly transferring controlled power down the arm, wrist, and fingers. On the speed side, the performer must modulate pace to ensure a fluid, harmonious melodic contour.

In sum, Man Jiang Hong challenges the performer with its intricate techniques, requiring unwavering commitment to regular, disciplined practice. While arduous, this process lays the foundation for mastery of the Zhongruan's nuances, demanding rigorous training in plucking, strumming, and shifting techniques, alongside building strength in push-pull motions<sup>[5]</sup>.

#### 4. Enhancing Stage Presence in Man Jiang Hong with the Zhongruan

Widely cherished, the Zhongruan rendition of Man Jiang Hong is a testament to Yue Fei's heroism, rendered through the Zhongruan's uniquely resonant timbre and solemn, meditative melody. To elevate this piece on stage, performers must blend technical prowess with an insightful understanding of its emotional undercurrents, while skillfully engaging with the stage environment and the audience's sensibilities. Achieving this requires careful attention to the following areas.

##### 1) Mastery of Techniques

Technical skill forms the backbone of an impactful stage performance. With its wealth of historical techniques, the Zhongruan challenges the performer to embody centuries of musical heritage. Man Jiang Hong features a broad spectrum of techniques, such as vibrato, harmonics, and strumming, all demanding thorough familiarity. First, adopting a structured learning approach is key, beginning with foundational techniques before advancing in complexity. Second, a deep awareness of the piece's background and the composer's stylistic preferences enhances technique differentiation. Finally, adapting techniques to match the distinct demands of each section ensures that the performance remains faithful to its powerful narrative.

##### 2) Cultivating Musical Sensibility

Musical sensibility reveals the performer's grasp of the piece's emotional core. As Yue Fei's story unfolds—a hero whose valor remains etched in memory—the performer must convey this story with depth and empathy. Before taking the stage, performers should immerse themselves in the composition's themes, exploring characters, events, and emotions to form a bond with the music. On stage, they must balance broad emotional arcs with intricate details, creating an experience that resonates deeply with the audience.

##### 3) Shaping a Unique Style

Every performer brings their own style to Man Jiang Hong, shaped by personal interpretation, technical proficiency, and creative insight. A unique stage style distinguishes exceptional performers. Rather than merely emulating others, each musician should embrace their perspective, crafting a style that reflects their emotional resonance with the piece. Expressive nuances in melody, rhythm, and tempo all contribute to shaping a memorable, individual performance.

#### 5. Conclusion

Zhongruan's Man Jiang Hong is beloved by many for its power and complexity. Playing it requires not only technical skill and hand coordination but also a profound understanding of the character and emotions embedded in its melody. To deliver a compelling stage performance, performers must commit to rigorous technique practice, cultivate a sensitive musical ear, and strive to establish a personal performance style.

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