

MBU 3990: ENTERTAINING CHINA

Musical Artist Review

David Moser (Put your own name here)

PART 1: GENERAL INFORMATION

Artist's Full Name (and any aliases used): Sa Dingding (Note: For Chinese, the last name or family name is specified first)

Country: China

Date of Birth: December 23, 1983

Artist's Genre(s): Chinese folk singer, songwriter who combines traditional Chinese music, Mongolian influences, Tibetan chant, and modern electronica.

Languages (of Recordings): Mandarin Chinese, Tibetan, Sanskrit

Instruments: Vocals, zheng (Chinese 25 string zither), Chinese drum, gong and horsehead fiddle

Current/Most Recent Album: "Alive" - European/U.S. release in April, 2008; A new album is planned for late 2009 release).

Album Sales: About 2 million in Asia; 10,000 in UK in first 4 months of release

Current/Most Recent Single(s): "Alive"

Record Label(s): Universal Music China (in China only); Wrasse Records (U.S./European licensee - distributed by Universal in Europe & Fontana in U.S.).

Publisher(s): Universal Music (worldwide)

Booking Agent(s): Musicians Incorporated (UK)

Management: Sunny Wu

Artist Website(s):

UK Site: <http://www.sadingding.co.uk/>

Blog (Chinese): <http://blog.sina.com.cn/sadingding/>

Japanese Site: http://www.universalmusicworld.jp/sa_ding_ding/

Record label Bio: http://www.wrasserecords.com/Sa_Dingding_102/biography.html

MySpace:

<http://profile.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=user.viewprofile&friendid=90932367>

Facebook Fan Group: <http://www.new.facebook.com/group.php?gid=38762659000>

Last FM: <http://www.last.fm/music/Sa+Dingding>

YouTube Videos:

Alive (Sanskrit version) - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5BLBkepCL4c>

Alive (Mandarin version) - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IizqzMG1noA&feature=related>

Alive, Making of (Tibet) - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8lqMk1iraIw&feature=related>

PART II: WRITTEN SUMMARY

[Sa Dingding](#) is a Chinese artist who has become very popular in Asia and is currently trying to crossover into the European and American markets. Her background is somewhat unusual in that she was born in [Mongolia](#) to a Mongolian mother and a Han Chinese father. She spent her first 6 years living a nomadic lifestyle with her grandmother and later ended up going to college at a Beijing university. In addition to speaking [Mandarin Chinese](#), she learned Tibetan, [Sanskrit](#) and Lagu (a near-extinct language) during her travels. She also created her own language based on memories of her grandmother talking to her as a baby.

Sa learned to play several traditional Chinese instruments, including the [zheng](#) (a 21-stringed Chinese zither), the [morin khuur](#) (horse head fiddle) and percussion. She released her first album, *Dong Ba La*, in 1998 at age 18 which met with modest success in China.

She is different from most of the current Chinese pop stars who tend to be stereotypical teen idols, high on visual appeal and image and performing mostly simple dance-oriented songs and ballads. Although recordings from Sa's first album seem to fit this pop-star mold (see [this video](#) which apparently is one of her earlier recordings) her musical style has evolved into a more interesting blend of styles and influences. While she certainly relies somewhat on her attractive image and a stage show featuring elaborate costumes and kung fu dancers, her music is a mixture of traditional Chinese music, influences from indigenous cultures and modern electronica and hip-hop. Her vocal style may take some getting used to by Western listeners, but if you can get over that hurdle, she has a pleasant voice and is a talented singer. Her vocal sound has been compared to [Bjork](#), [Enya](#) and [Kate Bush](#). One very unique aspect of her music is that she sings in 4 different languages (Mandarin Chinese, Tibetan and Lagu) as well as her self-created language. Maybe, this illustrates that music can be a "universal language and, regardless of language, listeners can relate at least to the musical expression.

Sa Dingding is signed to Universal Music China which releases her recordings in Asia and has a licensing agreement for distribution in Europe and the U.S. with [Wrasse Records](#). Universal and Wrasse seem to believe that Sa has the potential to appeal to Western audiences and have embarked on a serious promotional campaign to build her career first in Europe and then in the U.S. in the hopes of creating a Chinese international superstar.

Sa's 2007 album, *Alive*, showcases her eclectic mix of influences while also displaying some pop sensibility that may translate to Western audiences. Much of *Alive*'s music is inspired by [Buddhist](#) themes. For instance, the song [Holy Incense](#) deals with nature and the progression of life through the seasons. [Mama Tien Na](#) incorporates a mantra expressing appreciation for teachers and nature. *Alive* won Album of the Year in China and Sa won the 2007 Best New Artist award (although she's been around for almost a decade).

One criticism that might be asserted against Sa Dingding is that her music and image have been carefully cultivated to exploit Chinese minority cultures in a non-controversial way. Similar criticism was directed at [Dadawa](#), a Chinese singer who has recorded Tibetan-influenced music and adopted a Tibetan sounding name and image despite not being Tibetan. Sa Dingding does not seem to be trying to portray herself as Tibetan and is in fact half Mongolian. She apparently prefers to stay clear of making any political statements and, when asked about the Tibetan independence issue, tends to tow the party line - "I am a musician so I concentrate on making music, but I am also Chinese so I definitely support our government policy on this issue" (from [this article](#)).

During the summer of 2008, Sa has spent most of her time in Europe, promoting her album and performing at concerts, including dates at the Royal Albert Hall, the [World of Music & Dance Festival](#) and the [Festival of World Cultures](#) in Ireland. She took a brief detour from her European schedule to return to China to appear in Beijing during the Olympic Games. She is scheduled to perform in October in the new Olympic Stadium in a concert to raise money to rebuild schools destroyed in the recent earthquakes in Sichuan Province. She will also return to Europe in October to do 10 concert performances.

Sa Dingding's *Alive* album has been released in about 30 markets worldwide which certainly reflects a major commitment on the part of her management and record label to make her an international star. She seems to be off to a decent start in Europe. Although she seems to have had at least some success in Europe, her exposure and acceptance in the United States thus far appears to have been very limited. Whether her melding of ancient Chinese and Tibetan traditions with modern musical styles can achieve some degree of mainstream success in the very hard to crack American market remains to be seen.

Main Sources:

1. Artist's Website Bio, <http://www.sadingding.co.uk/>
2. Made in China: The Singer Poised to Sweep the Globe, *The Independent*, April 2, 2008, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/made-in-china-the-singer-poised-to-sweep-the-gl>

obe-803547.html

3. Sa Dingding, the Asian Bjork, Times Online, April 27, 2008,
http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/music/article3805225.ece