



# China's Pioneering Composer Ding Shande

By Dr. Mimi Zhang

**D**ing Shande (1911–1995) was a pioneering 20th-century Chinese composer. He played a pivotal role in the development and advancement of Chinese piano pedagogy, music education and piano performance. This poster provides an overview of Ding Shande's compositional output, available solo piano works, contributions to 20th-century Chinese music and a brief analysis of a selection of solo piano works: *Spring Suite*, Op. 1 (1945), *Three Overtures*, Op. 3 (1947–48) and *Eight Piano Pieces for Children*, Op. 28 (1987). The works selected range from the early-intermediate to late-intermediate level (Magrath 2021).

Ding Shande was born on November 12, 1911, in the city of Kunshan, located in the Jiangsu province, China. From age 6, Ding was inspired by the traditional Chinese festival music from his hometown. Developing a deep love for Chinese folk song and instruments, Ding taught himself to play the pipa, dizi, erhu, sanxian and other traditional Chinese instruments by 8. At 17 years old, Ding Shande enrolled in the Shanghai Conservatory, studying piano under Boris Zahkarov (1887–1943), pupil of Leopold Godowsky (1870–1938). In 1935, Ding performed a solo piano graduation recital, known as the first solo piano recital performed in China. Soon after graduation, Ding Shande was the first pianist to record Chinese solo piano music.

As a pedagogue, Ding Shande made history by composing the first Chinese elementary piano method, *First Lessons in Piano* (1st ed. 1941, 3rd ed. 1957). Throughout his teaching career, more than 105 of Ding Shande's students have won prizes at national and international competitions. As an academic, Ding Shande authored more than 100 academic articles, a composition treatise and translated three French theory textbooks into Chinese. ◀◀

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# China's Pioneering Composer: Ding Shande 丁善德



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## Background

- 1911-1995
- Born in Kunshan, Jiangsu, China
- Pianist, composer, educator, theorist, activist
- Output: 16 piano works, 1 elementary piano method, 31 art songs, 5 symphonies, 4 instrumental ensembles, 1 choral work, 1 violin sonata, film music, 3 theoretical texts, and over 100 scholarly articles on music, piano performance, arts advocacy, theory, and music education.
- Attended Shanghai Conservatory of Music (1928-1935)
  - Mentors: Boris Zakharov, Wolfgang Fraenkel, Huang Zi, and Xiao You Mei
- Attended Paris Conservatoire (1947-1949)
  - Mentors: Nadia Boulanger, Tony Aubin, Noël Gallon, and Arthur Honegger

## Solo piano output:

Early	Spring Suite Op. 1.....	(1945)
	Piano Sonata in E Major Op. 2 .....	(1946)
	Three Overtures Op. 3.....	(1948)
	Variations on a Chinese Folk Song Op. 4 .....	(1948)
Middle	Xinjiang Dance No. 1 Op. 6 .....	(1950)
	Children's Suite "Happy Festival" Op. 9 .....	(1953)
	Xinjiang Dance No. 2 Op. 11 .....	(1955)
	Toccata "Good News" Op. 13 .....	(1958)
Late	Eight Pieces for Children Op.28.....	(1987)
	Four Little Preludes and Fugues Op. 29 .....	(1988)
	Sixteen Easy Studies for the Piano Op. 31.....	(1988)
	Sonatina for the Piano Op. 32 .....	(1988)
	Rondo Op. 33.....	(1988)
	Six Preludes Op. 34 .....	(1989)
	Scherzo Op. 35 .....	(1989)
	Three Piano Pieces on Chinese Folk Song Op. 36.....	(1992)

## Contributions

- First to perform a solo piano recital in China (1935)
- First to record solo Chinese piano music in China (1935)
- Composed the first Chinese elementary piano method (1st ed. 1941, 3rd ed. 1957)



*First Lessons in Piano* (3rd ed. 1957)

- Contains 71 exercises arranged by progressing difficulty
- First Chinese composer to write in traditional large forms including the multi-movement sonata, toccata, and theme and variations.
- Composed the first solo piano collection illustrating the lives of children: *Children's Suite: Happy Holidays, op. 9* (1953).
- Established one of the earliest music festivals in China, "Spring in Shanghai."
- Throughout his career, over 105 of Ding Shande's piano students won prizes in national and international competitions.
- Ding Shande mentored prominent pianists, composers and pedagogues, including Zhu Gong Yi, Zhou Huang Wen, and Zhou Wen Zhong.

## Selected Works

8 Piano Pieces for Children  
— 旋 問 —  
Puzzles  
Lento  $\text{♩} = 76$   
作曲 28  
1987年

**8 Piano Pieces for Children Op. 28 (1987)** consists of a collection of 8 charming character pieces. Op. 28 offers colorful and expressive miniatures ranging from elementary to intermediate levels. Descriptive titles evoke the games played by children. "Puzzles," mimics the strategic scheming of two children focused in a game. "Puzzles" is leveled at a Magrath level 4, appropriate for an early intermediate pianist. Challenges include chromaticism and accidentals, shifting hand positions, sensitive phrasing, two-note slurs, and grace note emphasis.

三、杨 柳 岸  
On the Shore  
Andante  $\text{♩} = 55$   
p  
com  $\text{fz}$   
poco cresc.

**Spring Suite Op. 1 (1945)** was Ding Shande's first composition. The titles depict the imagery of spring: I. *Waiting for Sunrise*, II. *In the Boat*, III. *On the Shore*, and IV. *Breezing in the Morning*. This collection evokes the hopeful arrival of peace following the victory of the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945). Pictured here is III. *On the Shore*. Technical challenges include contrapuntal hand independence, large arpeggiations, hand crossings, rapid rotation, and repeated notes. III. *On the Shore* is appropriate for a late intermediate pianist.

No. 1  
Andante sostenuto  $\text{♩} = 96$   
mp *espressivo*  
p  
No. 2  
Andantino cantabile  $\text{♩} = 76$   
mp *legiero*  
No. 3  
Allegretto con anima  $\text{♩} = 88$   
mp

**Three Overtures Op. 3 (1947-48)** was composed while Ding Shande was attending the Paris Conservatory. This collection consists of three overtures, or sometimes referred to as preludes. The first overture/prelude presents a captivating melody from the Shanbei region, while the third overture showcases a melody drawn from the Chinese opera titled "The Jade Hairpin." Op. 3 is appropriate for a late intermediate pianist. Technical challenges include metric changes, large arpeggiations, rapid passage work, and thick chord voicing.

Selected References:



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