



**Name in English:** Jon Jang  
**Name in Chinese:** 郑健良 [鄭健良]  
**Name in Pinyin:** Zhèng Jiànliáng  
**Gender:** Male  
**Birth Year:** 1954  
**Birth Place:** Los Angeles, California  
**Current location:** San Francisco, California  
**Philanthropy:** Yes (remove, if no)

**Profession(s):** Musician, Composer, Bandleader

**Education:** Bachelor of Music in Piano Performance, Oberlin Conservatory of Music, 1978

**Awards:** 1996-2008, ASCAP Composition Awards, American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers; 2006, Ford Foundation Visionary Artist Award; 2000, Distinguished Achievement Award, Oberlin College Alumni Association; 1999, Downbeat 47th Annual International Critics Poll/ Best Composer; 1999, Commendation and Declaration of “Jon Jang Day,” San Francisco Board of Supervisors; Golden Ring Award, Asian American Arts Foundation; 1995, Outstanding Achievement Award for Musical Score in a Drama, Bay Area Theater Critics Circle; 1992, Distinguished Artist Award, Asian Business League of San Francisco.

**Contributions:**

Jon Jang has made a name for himself by combining traditional Chinese music styles and instruments with African American originated jazz to create exciting new sounds. Jang grew up in Palo Alto, California, at a time when the city was almost completely white so he wasn't very well connected to Chinese culture throughout his childhood. His first exposure to Chinese music actually came through listening to 1941 recordings of the African American singer, Paul Robeson, singing Chinese folk songs. His interest in jazz and growing Asian American consciousness came together during the social tumult of the late 1960s and 1970s when school campuses everywhere were convulsed with protests. Jang began piano at the relatively late age of 19. After two years of study, he was accepted as a piano performance major at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music. It was there that he became the only Asian American member of the school jazz ensembles. The perception existed and still exists that Asian students were only interested in Western European classical music. Jang sought to create more diversity by encouraging Asians Americans to study and perform jazz and other forms of non-traditional music and for more Latino and African American students to attend more schools with whites and Asians. His second album in 1984, "Are You Chinese or Charlie Chan?" was the first to explore his Asian American consciousness in light of the Asian American social movement galvanized by the killing of Vincent Chin in Detroit and the Japanese American internment redress movement. Over time, Jang developed his own musical language based on a concept he called “paper son, paper songs.” The surname of Jon's grandfather was Woo and he became a “paper son” by purchasing the legal

citizenship documents from a father named Jang during the time of the Chinese Exclusion Acts. By Americanizing Chinese folk music the melodies look Chinese on paper (music notation) but sound “American.”

Jang co-founded Asian Improv Records (AIR) in 1987. He has also performed with the Los Angeles Philharmonic New Music Ensemble and the Kronos Quartet and composed scores for theater and film. This including the 1994 adaptation of Maxine Hong Kingston's, “The Woman Warrior” and the road documentary by Renee Tajima-Pena, “My America... or Honk If You Love Buddha” that explored the personal experiences of the filmmaker of being Asian American while guided by the late character actor, Victor Wong. In 2003, Jang’s “Far East Suite” with the Asian American Orchestra was nominated for a Grammy Award. His “Chinese American Symphony” of 2007 was written about the Chinese American railroad pioneers of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and dedicated to historian, Philip Choy, who did so much to bring their forgotten history back into public view. Music by Jang has also accompanied performance artists such as Alleleuia Panis of Kulintang Arts, Kelvin Han Yee, and David Mura. Jon Jang has served on panels for Arts International and the NEA, as artistic advisor for the Asia Society of New York’s Crossover series featuring the collaboration of Asian music in jazz, and as a visiting lecturer at UC-Irvine and UC-Berkeley.

**Discography:** Jang (1982); Are You Chinese or Charlie Chan? (1984); The Ballad or the Bullet (1987); Jangle Bells (1988); Self Defense! (1992); Tiananmen! (1994); Two Flowers on a Stem (1996); Immigrant Suite, No. 1 (1997); Never Give Up! (1998); Big Bands Behind Barbed Wire (1999); Self-Portrait (1999); Beijing Trio (1999); River of Life (2002); Paper Son, Paper Songs (2006)

#### **External Links:**

<http://www.jonjang.com/>

<http://www.kenchen.org/writing/jang.htm>

<http://www.inmotionmagazine.com/jjfw1.html>

<http://www.sacbee.com/124/story/163395.html>

<http://www.sacbee.com/124/story/158162.html>