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***Contemporary Chinese Piano Repertoire for Teaching and Performing***

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Abstract

In this multimedia lecture recital, a selection of contemporary Chinese piano pieces suitable for teaching and performing are introduced and demonstrated. These works range from intermediate to advanced levels. Composed and arranged by internationally renowned living Chinese composers, these pieces have their roots in music from various regions of China. Pedagogical and performance issues are discussed, and artworks or photographs of scenery pertaining to the music are displayed as Powerpoint slides during the performance.

The intermediate level pieces consist of imaginative works taken from *Melodies of China*, a collection of twenty arrangements of Chinese Folk Songs by Zhang Zhao, professor of composition at Minzu University in Beijing. Published by Schott Music in 2009, these colorful works have their roots from Yunnan Province, and use singing style, dance, a broad keyboard range, accidentals in the notation, and a wide range of tempo.

Early advanced pieces are selected from internationally renowned composer Tan Dun's *Eight Memories in Watercolor*, a set of beautiful and evocative pieces composed in 1978-79 and published by G. Schirmer, Inc. The works are based on folksongs from Hunan Province, where Tan was born and raised. These lyrical, playful and dance-like pieces explore the use of trills, singing style, free notation without meter, a wide range of tempo, and extreme dynamic ranges.

The advanced pieces in this presentation are selected works by award-winning composers Chen Yi, Zhou Long and Zhang Zhao.

Chen Yi's *Two Chinese Bagatelles: Piano Solo for Children* were composed in 1984 and 1993 respectively and published by Theodore Presser Company in 2000. Expressing elements of opera from China, these lively and dramatic pieces imitate operatic singing and various instruments, and exhibit the use of ornaments, changing meter, counterpoint, and rhythmic complexity.

Pulitzer Prize 2011 winner Zhou Long's *Pianobells* is a work commissioned by the presenter and published by Oxford University Press in 2012. It is a powerful and colorful

work inspired by a Chinese legend, Chinese philosophy, Chinese literature, Italian church chimes and French impressionism. It involves playing on the strings of the piano to evoke the mysterious sounds of bells.

Zhang Zhao's dramatic, multi-sectional *Pi Huang (Peking Opera)* expresses the composer's memories of his youth and portrays various moods and musical effects in Peking Opera. It was published by Schott in 2007.

Through this multimedia lecture recital, the presenter hopes that such interesting and lesser-known modern Chinese repertoire would be introduced and disseminated more widely nationally, and that teachers would benefit from the experience and gain a wider collection of repertoire for their students. Such projects would also help to promote further understanding and appreciation among our various cultures, and help the world to move towards being a smaller and more beautiful place.

Although the music itself is undoubtedly complete and does not need to be enhanced in any way, the presenter hopes that such multimedia presentations could enrich the aesthetic experience of the audience, who may be inspired to contemplate on the extra-musical ideas that the composers possibly had in mind when writing the pieces. The presenter chose works of art that closely match the character and title of each piece of music.

From a pedagogical perspective, the presenter hopes that the experience would present another angle of approaching the music that would stimulate the imagination, connect the visual and aural senses, and provide some alternative ideas for students to interpret the music.

### Recording

The presenter's recording of Tan Dun's *Eight Memories in Watercolor* and other works by major living Chinese composers was released by Naxos in 2015. The CD is entitled *Echoes of China: Contemporary Piano Music* -

[http://www.naxos.com/catalogue/item.asp?item\\_code=8.570616](http://www.naxos.com/catalogue/item.asp?item_code=8.570616)

### Scores

- \* *Melodies of China* (2009), *Pi Huang* (2007)  
Zhang Zhao (b. 1964) - Schott Music, Germany
- *Eight Memories in Watercolor*, Op. 1 (1978-9)  
Tan Dun (b. 1957) - G. Schirmer, Inc., USA
- \* *Two Chinese Bagatelles: Piano Solo for Children* (2000)  
Chen Yi (b. 1953) - Theodore Presser Company, USA
- \* *Pianobells* (commissioned piece 2012)  
Zhou Long (b. 1953) - Oxford University Press, UK