



Romantic Violin Concertos

DDD
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Gang CHEN and Zhanhao HE The Butterfly Lovers

Parting of the Newly Wedded • Love in Spring
Street Musician

Takako Nishizaki, Violin
Shanghai Conservatory Symphony Orchestra
Fan Chengwu



The Butterfly Lovers Concerto

Chen Gang & He Zhanhao

The Butterfly Lovers was written by He Zhan-hao and Chen Gang in 1959 while they were students of the Shanghai Conservatory. Musically, the concerto is a synthesis of the Eastern and Western traditions although the melodies and overall style are derived from the opera of Shanghai. The original version of the concerto (presented here) has a marked traditionally oriental colour. In the spirit of the Shanghai opera, the concerto, as a whole, conveys on a musical level aspects of a traditional Chinese painting in its light and calm mood.

Chen later revised the original score in an attempt to intensify the dramatic power of the music by further contrasting both the tempi and the dynamics of the concerto. The result is that the later version sounds far more Western and further removed from the Shanghai opera which inspired its antecedent.

Although the concerto is written in sonata form it is also strongly programmatic. The narrative is based on Chinese folklore and tells the story of the lovers Liang Shan-po and Zhu Ying-tai. Liang Shan-po has been studying with Zhu Ying-tai, disguised as a boy, for many years during which Ying-tai has fallen in love with Shan-po who is ignorant of her true gender. One day, Ying-tai is summoned home, where her family has arranged for her to marry a wealthy neighbour. She is, therefore, forced to part from Shan-po, in a tender scene by a bridge. After a time, Shan-po, greatly missing his companion, attempts to visit Ying-tai's house where he finds out from a servant that Ying-tai is a girl and about to be married. Only then does he understand what Ying-tai had so often tried to tell him, and in his bitter despair he falls ill and dies. On learning of the death of Shan-po, Ying-tai visits his grave and in her grief begs his tomb to open. There is a clap of thunder, the tomb breaks open and Ying-tai leaps into the grave, from which the two lovers emerge as butterflies and fly away together, finally reunited.

Techniques of the Chinese string instrument, the er-hu, are used by the violin in this concerto and this serves to emphasise the Chinese character of the work.

Street Musician

arr. Yan Huichang

San Bang Gu (drum with three sticks), popular in Hunan and Tianmen, is a kind of traditional folk art form. The theme of *Street Musician* is based on the melody of *San Bang Gu*, depicting the bitter life of folk musicians. The introduction provides a background of misery and the sad tune played by the cello expresses the wretched fate of the musicians. The technically demanding violin cadenza is followed by a cry of anguish at the unfairness of life. In a quicker section the main theme re-appears, in different speed and rhythm, as the music reaches a climax.

Love in Spring

Zhu Xiaogu

Love in Spring was specially written for the Japanese violinist Takako Nishizaki. By using various folk-songs and operatic themes from the North and South of China, the composer attempts to show the great beauty of Chinese melodies transcribed for the solo violin. The orchestral introduction, its shifting harmonies recalling the changing colours of spring, leads to a tender and sensuous theme for the solo violin. The melody suggests the transience of spring or perhaps a dream of the past, the dialogue of soloist and orchestra like that of spring breezes and the willow. In conclusion the theme appears in fragmented and poignant form. There is an orchestral crescendo, leading to a climax, in a work that conveys the character of spring, something beyond words, a love that embraces the whole earth.

Parting of the Newly Wedded

Zhu Xiaogu & Zhang Xiaofeng

Zhu Xiaogu and Zhang Xiaofeng wrote *Parting of the Newly Wedded* in 1980, basing it on a poem of the same name by the famous Tang Dynasty poet Du Fu. It tells the tragic story set in the period of the Rebellion of An and Shi, in which a newly married couple are forced to part. The piece shows the tragic scene in which the bride bids her husband farewell, as he is enlisted in the army.

Parting of the Newly Wedded is in three sections. The first of these, *The Wedding*, is based on a work by a well known Song Dynasty poet. The graceful melody depicts the shy gesture of a girl waiting to be wed, followed by the loud sound of wedding gong and drum. The dialogue between violin and cello, with the glockenspiel, shows the deep love and gentle feelings of the couple, the beauty of the nuptial chamber. The second part, *Surprised by the Change*, is introduced by an ominous drum roll, the Chinese operatic “reckless beat” combined with the free melody of the solo violin, serene harmony totally disturbed. There is strong dramatic conflict, as officers come to seize the bridegroom and take him away to join the army. The bride weeps, as they part, beating her breast and stamping her feet. The “rapid beat slow singing” of opera shows the vulnerability of the characters. In the third part, *Farewell*, the principal theme re-appears, slow and heavy. The weeping melody represents the helpless sighs of the bride, now her husband is going to his death. The rapid cadenza speaks of the girl’s indignation, and in conclusion the orchestra plays sad and grieving music, representing the great tragedy that has taken place.

Takako Nishizaki

Takako Nishizaki is one of Japan's leading violinists. She was the first student of the violin school founded by Shinichi Suzuki and her father Shinji Nishizaki, and later went on to study at the Juilliard School in New York, where she won second prize in the 1964 Leventritt International Competition and first prize in the Juilliard Concerto Competition, as well as many other prizes in competitions of less international importance. In the West she is widely known for her recordings not only of standard concerto and chamber music repertoire for Naxos, but also for her recordings of rarely performed concertos by Rubinstein, Cui, Bériot, Spohr and Respighi among others, for Marco Polo. In China and in Chinese communities throughout the world however, Takako Nishizaki is known as the most important performing and recording artist of Chinese violin music. Her wide repertoire includes number of violin concertos by Chinese composers, several dedicated to her, among them concertos by Du Mingxin and Chen Gang. She also performs and has recorded music for violin and traditional Chinese instruments such as the pipa and the zheng and has a wide following for her performances of well-known Cantonese and Mandarin melodies orchestrated for her by leading European and Chinese composers, given often before popular audiences of thousands. Takako Nishizaki is best known of all for her six recordings of *The Butterfly Lovers*, by far the most popular of all Chinese concertos. Her first five recordings of the concerto on compact disc were with the Nagoya Philharmonic, Gumma Symphony, Slovak Radio Symphony, Singapore Chinese and Shanghai Conservatory Symphony Orchestras, the last of these the orchestra that played at the first performance of the work in 1959. A sixth version was recorded by China Central Television in 1996 with the orchestra of the Beijing Opera for nation-wide broadcast. In recognition of her contribution to the international promotion of Chinese music, she was awarded a Golden Violin by the Chinese Government.

Shanghai Conservatory Symphony Orchestra

The Shanghai Conservatory Symphony Orchestra is formed from staff and wind and strings students of the Conservatory and its purpose there is principally pedagogical. It also gives frequent concerts, often of new compositions, and performs regularly for television and radio and in the recording studio. Over the years the orchestra has introduced more than a hundred new works to the public. The conductors of the Conservatory Orchestra include Yang Jiaren and Wang Xiaotong, as well as Li Delun, Fan Chengwu, Chen Xieyang, Xia Feiyun, Hou Runyu and Zhang Guoyong. It was with this orchestra that the first performance of the *Butterfly Lovers Violin Concerto* was given in Shanghai in 1959.

Fan Chengwu

Fan Chengwu entered the Shanghai Conservatory as a student of composition in 1955, the following year concentrating his attention of conducting, under distinguished Russian and Chinese teachers. In 1959 he conducted the first performance of the best known of all Chinese orchestral works, the *Butterfly Lovers Concerto*, at the Shanghai Spring Festival, and after graduation in 1960 joined the teaching staff of the Conservatory. He was subsequently appointed conductor of the Shanghai Dance School and the Shanghai Opera Orchestra. In 1965 he conducted the first performance of *The White-Haired Girl*, a work that has won continued popularity both in the theatre and the concert-hall. Fan Chengwu has appeared frequently as a conductor with the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra and with foreign orchestras, winning particular success in France in 1982, when he conducted the Lamoureux Orchestra.

The Butterfly Lovers Violin Concerto, the most popular of all Chinese compositions, tells the story of two lovers, parted by fate but united again in death, as butterflies. In China, Takako Nishizaki is recognized as the foremost interpreter of this concerto, having recorded it six times, most recently for China Central Television. In this recording she is joined by the orchestra and conductor who played the world première of the concerto in 1959.

8.554334

STEREO

Gang CHEN and Zhanhao HE The Butterfly Lovers

Three Chinese Violin Pieces

Takako Nishizaki, Violin
Shanghai Conservatory Symphony Orchestra
Fan Chengwu

DDD

Playing
Time:
60'46"

- | | | |
|---|--|---------|
| 1 | Gang CHEN and Zhanhao HE:
The Butterfly Lovers Violin Concerto | (27:48) |
| 2 | Street Musician (arr. Huichang YAN) | (7:55) |
| 3 | Xiaogu ZHU: Love in Spring | (8:38) |
| 4 | Xiaogu ZHU and Xiaofeng ZHANG:
Parting of the Newly Wedded | (16:06) |

Recorded in Shanghai, China, in October, 1992.

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Music Notes: Keith Anderson

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MADE IN CANADA



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