



ASIAN MUSIC FOR STRING QUARTET

Tan Dun • Toru Takemitsu
Gao Ping • Chinary Ung • Zhou Long
New Zealand String Quartet



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Zhou Long (b. 1953): Song of the Ch'in (1982)



The *ch'in* (*qin*) is a traditional Chinese seven-stringed, plucked zither, which was associated with sages and scholars. The sophisticated technique of *ch'in* playing involves various ways of plucking the strings, as well as range, timbre and the use of ornaments. In this composition for string quartet, Zhou Long captures the essence of these special musical gestures frequently found in *ch'in* music.

Zhou Long is a Chinese composer of a generation whose experiences during the Cultural Revolution made a deep impression on their creative work. A year after the end of the Cultural Revolution, Zhou Long was one of only a hundred students chosen from eighteen thousand applicants to study at the newly reopened Beijing Central Conservatory in 1977. After graduating in 1983 and a short period in the position of composer-in-residence with the National Broadcasting Symphony Orchestra of China, Zhou Long went to the United States under a fellowship to further his composition studies at Columbia University. Living in New York, he became the music director of Music from China, a group founded in 1984 with the aim of presenting concerts of traditional Chinese music in the United States. Under his direction, Music from China expanded its original goals to encompass contemporary Chinese works that reflect both Chinese and Western sound worlds and musical languages. After more than a decade as music director of Music from China in New York City, he received ASCAP's prestigious Adventurous Programming Award in 1999.

Zhou Long is recognised internationally for creating a unique body of music that brings together the aesthetic concepts and musical elements of East and West. Deeply grounded in the spectrum of his Chinese heritage, particularly its philosophical and spiritual ideals, he is a pioneer in combining the idiomatic sounds and techniques

of ancient Chinese musical traditions with contemporary Western ensembles and compositional forms.

In 2002 Zhou Long served as composer-in-residence at Music Alive!, the Silk Road Project Festival of the Seattle Symphony Orchestra with cellist Yo-Yo Ma. He currently holds the position of Visiting Professor of Composition at the University of Missouri-Kansas City Conservatory of Music.

In 2011, Zhou Long was awarded the prestigious Pulitzer Prize in Music for his first opera, *Madame White Snake*. In their citation the jurors described the work as 'a deeply expressive opera that draws on a Chinese folk-tale to blend the musical traditions of the East and the West.' Zhou Long has been a citizen of the United States since 1999 and is married to the composer-violinist Chen Yi.

Reprinted by courtesy of Oxford University Press

Chinary Ung (b. 1942): Spiral III (1990)



Photo: David Max Steinberg

Chinary Ung was the first American composer to win the highly coveted international Grawemeyer Award (1989), sometimes called the Nobel Prize for music composition. Among other honours, Ung has received awards from The Kennedy Center (Friedheim award), The American Academy of Arts and Letters, Asia Foundation, Asian Cultural Council, Rockefeller Foundation, Ford Foundation, Guggenheim Foundation, Joyce Foundation, and The National Endowment for the Arts.

Now a United States citizen, Chinary Ung was born in Takeo, Cambodia in 1942. He came to New York City in 1964 to further his studies in music at the Manhattan School of Music. Ung received his Doctorate of Musical

Arts in music composition, with honours, in 1974 from Columbia University. Since then, he has taught composition at Northern Illinois University, Connecticut College, The University of Pennsylvania, and Arizona State University. He is currently Professor of Composition at the University of California San Diego.

Spiral III (1990) for string quartet is part of a series of “Spiral” works for different ensembles. The spiritual impulsion behind Ung’s music is Cambodian, deriving from the syncretism of Buddhism and Shamanism found in the village music (and religion) of his youth, although technically he is working in a western art music tradition.

In works such as his *Spirals* series, the textures are reminiscent of the music of Southeast Asia. His synthesis is, in part, a result of a personal and cultural crisis. As a reaction to the horror of the Khmer Rouge genocide, in which much of his family perished, he devoted nearly a decade to the study and performance of Cambodian music and aesthetics. When he returned to composing in the late 1980s, he was able to integrate this into his own personal style in a remarkable manner.

Of *Spiral III* the composer says: “The opening section has a constant shifting of shapes. I relate this passage to the handcrafted native necklace. Each gemstone is slightly different from the rest – they are perfectly imperfect and when strung together they make a whole necklace.”

Gao Ping (b. 1970): Bright Light and Cloud Shadows (2007)

“Creation of music is like a tree manifesting itself in thousands of branches and leaves, and the source that creation is inevitably its own root. That root, for me, is the personal and collective memory of the past.”

Gao Ping

Gao Ping is a composer-pianist, born in Chengdu, Sichuan province of China. Gao was affected by China’s concurrent transformation from a collective to a market economy. This transitional phase between old and new,

and the productive cultural clash between East and West, left traces that would later be evident in his music. The Beijing musicologist, Professor Li Xi-an has referred to Gao Ping as a leading member of the “sixth generation” of Chinese composers.

As a pianist Gao Ping’s repertoire is extensive; he has performed to acclaim all over the world. In 2008 he gave the première of his *Piano Concerto* with the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Kenneth Young. *The Listener* enthusiastically acclaimed the two-movement work as “a major concerto”. The critic Ian Dando called Gao “the man with 1001 tone colours”. His pianistic proclivities and understanding of contemporary music have led Gao Ping to become sought after by living composers, including George Crumb and Frederic Rzewski.

In demand as a composer, Gao Ping has received commissions and performances from musicians around the world. Many prestigious venues have presented his work, including the Aspen Music Festival, Dresdener Musikfestspiele, and the Beijing-Modern International Music Festival. Gao Ping’s chamber music on the Naxos label has been critically acclaimed and was described by a German critic as “music which wants to be heard with the ears of a child, full of wonder and amazement... deep and vulnerable.” Gao is the recipient of the 2010 CANZ (Composers Association of NZ) Trust Fund Award.

In his most recent works, Gao returns to China as a creative theme. His *Night Alley* (2006) mingles his China-inspired melodies with quotations from Chopin’s *Mazurkas*, creating a unique sound world which once resonated in the corridors of Chinese communes. At the Fourth China International Piano Competition in 2007, the piece was performed as the obligatory work, reflecting the appeal of Gao’s fusing of Western and Eastern idioms, as well as the expanding interest in his compositions dealing with China and its multiple pasts.

Bright Light and Cloud Shadows was commissioned



by the Adam Chamber Music Festival and given its world première by the New Zealand String Quartet at the Festival in Nelson in January 2007.

Reprinted by courtesy of Gao Ping

天光云景 八大山人
春山无近远, 远意一为林。
未少云飞处, 何来入世心。

*Spring mountains have no near or far,
A thought of the past instantly becomes a forest.
With no place where clouds are not flying,
how did a worldly thought come to mind?*

Bright Light and Cloud Shadows, from the first of ten album leaves
by Ba Da Shan Ren (Ming Dynasty), translated by Arthur Sze
(*Silk Dragon*, Arthur Sze, Copper Canyon Press, 2001)

Toru Takemitsu (1930-1996): A Way a Lone (1981)

Tokyo-born Toru Takemitsu was the first Japanese composer to make an impression on Western consciousness. Largely self-taught, his wartime experiences under the Japanese Nationalist government, and the music he heard through the U.S. Armed Forces Network, initially saw him avoid Japanese music and invent a style of his own. His music has an ephemeral quality with poetic titles often evoking the presence of water in a shimmering sound world. One of Takemitsu's favourite analogies was to compare composing and listening to music to walking through a formal Japanese garden.

A Way a Lone was commissioned by the Tokyo String Quartet to commemorate their tenth anniversary in 1981. The title comes from James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, one of literature's most enigmatic and abstract works – "The keys to. Given! A way a lone a last a loved a long the".

Takemitsu was a leading intellectual and throughout his life he remained interested in a wide range of music, also modern painting, literature, theatre and cinema. He scored close to a hundred films, including movies by Akira Kurosawa, but also wrote a detective novel, arranged songs by Gershwin and The Beatles, and appeared on Japanese television as a celebrity chef.

"To hear Takemitsu is to be immersed in a new world, a world where the strange can seem hauntingly familiar, the familiar made strangely distant, and everything seems touched with a luminous beauty." (Allen B. Ruch, Editor, *The Modern Word*, 2000 www.themodernword.com)

Joy Aberdein

Tan Dun: Eight Colors (1986)



Photo: Nana Watanabe

A winner of today's most prestigious honours — the Grawemeyer Award for classical composition, GRAMMY® Award, Academy Award, and *Musical America's* "Composer of The Year", the conceptual and multifaceted composer/conductor Tan Dun

has made an indelible mark on the world's music scene with a creative repertoire that spans the boundaries of classical, multimedia, Eastern and Western musical systems. His music has been played throughout the world by leading orchestras, opera houses, international festivals, and on radio and television.

Composer's Note

Eight Colors for String Quartet was the first piece I wrote after coming to New York in 1986. It shares the dark, ritualised singing, very dramatic form, tone colours and dynamics of my works written in China, such as *On Taoism* (for orchestra, voice, bass clarinet and

contrabassoon), yet is very different from them. This string quartet (together with *In Distance* and *Silk Road*) marks the period of my contact with the concentrated, lyrical language of western atonality. From it I learned how to handle repetition, but otherwise responded in my own way, out of my own culture, not following the Second Vienna School. I drew on Chinese colors, on the techniques of Peking Opera – familiar to me since childhood.

The work consists of eight very short sections, almost like a set of brush paintings, through which materials are shared and developed. The subjects are described by the eight interrelated titles and form a

drama, a kind of ritual performance structure. Not only timbre, but the actual string techniques are developed from Peking Opera; the vocalisation of opera actresses and Buddhist chanting can be heard. Although a shadow of atonal pitch organisation remains in some sections of this piece, I began to find a way to mingle old materials from my culture with the new, to contribute something to the western idea of atonality, and to refresh it. I found a danger in later atonal writing to be that it is too easy to leave yourself out of the music. I wanted to find ways to remain open to my culture, and open to myself.

Tan Dun

Photo: Maarten Holl



New Zealand String Quartet

Helene Pohl and Douglas Beilman, Violins • Gillian Ansell, Viola • Rolf Gjelsten, Cello

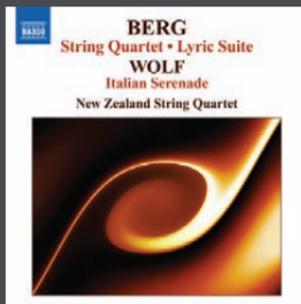


Photo: Maarten Holl

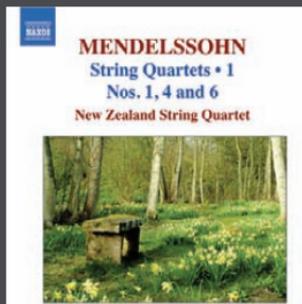
With its dynamic performing style, eloquent communication and beautiful sound the New Zealand String Quartet has distinguished itself internationally through imaginative programming, insightful interpretations of the quartet repertoire and championing of works from New Zealand composers. Career highlights have included acclaimed débuts in London at Wigmore Hall, in New York at the prestigious Frick Collection, and at the Library of Congress in Washington. The Quartet, New Zealand's première chamber ensemble, maintains a busy touring schedule, appearing regularly in North America, Europe and Asia, as well as performing

over forty concerts a year in its own country. The New Zealand String Quartet has recorded all of Mendelssohn's string quartets in a three volume set for Naxos (8.570001-03). They have recorded for Deutsche Welle, CBC in Canada and Australia's ABC, as well as regularly appearing on Radio New Zealand Concert, the national fine music network. The group's extensive discography includes works from the standard quartet repertoire by composers such as Bartók, Ravel, Debussy, Beethoven, Dvořák, Berg and Wolf, as well as the première recording of the remarkable Zoltán Székely quartet, and numerous works by acclaimed New Zealand composers. They have performed with internationally renowned artists such as Colin Carr, Anton Kuerti, James Campbell, Stephen Dann, Frans Helmerson, Alexander Lonquich, Piers Lane, Nobuko Imai, Hariolf Schlichtig, Christoph Richter, Atar Arad, Martin Roscoe and Peter Nagy; the Lafayette, Lindsay, Michelangelo, Pražák and Goldner quartets, as well as jazz greats Mike Nock, Jim Hall and Wayne Marshall. Dedicated teachers as well as performers, the group has been quartet-in-residence at Victoria University of Wellington's New Zealand School of Music faculty since 1991. In North America they have been artists/teachers-in-residence at the Banff Centre, Quartet Fest West, and The Quartet Program at Bucknell, Pennsylvania. For more information, please visit <http://www.nzsq.co.nz>

Also available



8.557374



8.570001



8.570002



8.570003



DDD

8.572488

Playing Time
58:09

www.naxos.com

Booklet notes in English

Made in Germany

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This programme brings together aesthetic and musical elements of East and West. Zhou Long captures the essence of the Chinese plucked ch'in, and Cambodian aesthetics are preserved in Chinary Ung's expressive *Spiral III*. Tan Dun's *Eight Colors* combines the exotic timbres of Peking Opera with Second Viennese School tonalities. Gao Ping's *Bright Light and Cloud Shadows* has been admired for its 'long-breathed brush strokes' (*Washington Post*). Taking its inspiration from James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, Toru Takemitsu's beautifully crafted *A Way a Lone* evokes a shimmering sound world.

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|---|---|-------|---------------------------------|-------|
| 1 | Zhou Long (b. 1953):
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Eight Colors (1986) | 15:47 |
| 2 | Chinary Ung (b. 1942):
Spiral III (1990) | 10:01 | 5 No. 1: Peking Opera | 1:56 |
| 3 | Gao Ping (b. 1970):
Bright Light and Cloud
Shadows (2007) | 11:33 | 6 No. 2: Shadows | 1:11 |
| 4 | Toru Takemitsu (1930-1996):
A Way a Lone (1981) | 11:50 | 7 No. 3: Pink Actress | 1:44 |
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| | | | 10 No. 6: Drum and Gong | 0:55 |
| | | | 11 No. 7: Cloudiness | 2:38 |
| | | | 12 No. 8: Red Sona | 1:48 |

New Zealand String Quartet

Helene Pohl, Violin • Douglas Beilman, Violin
Gillian Ansell, Viola • Rolf Gjelsten, Cello

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