

The background of the entire page is a photograph of a desert landscape. In the foreground, there is a dark, rocky, and somewhat barren plain. In the middle ground, there are large, smooth sand dunes that are illuminated by a warm, golden light, likely from the setting or rising sun. In the background, there are dark, silhouetted mountains under a clear blue sky with a few wispy clouds.

Bright
SHENG

The Blazing Mirage

The Song and Dance of Tears
Colors of Crimson

Hui Li • Tong Wu • Trey Lee • Sa Chen • Pius Cheung

Hong Kong Philharmonic • Bright Sheng

Bright Sheng (b. 1955)

The Song and Dance of Tears • Colors of Crimson • The Blazing Mirage

The Song and Dance of Tears (2003, rev. 2013)

In the summer of 2000, I received a grant from the University of Michigan to collect classical and folk music along the ancient Silk Road within the contemporary Chinese border. I spent two months travelling through the most remote corners of the world in the mountains and deserts.

The result was both fascinating and eye-opening. Not only was I profoundly touched by the beautiful music from the region, I also realized how significantly the musics of different ethnic groups have been inspiring and infiltrating each other for thousands of years. And just as there is no pure blood in any race, there is no true nationalistic music either. Bartók, speaking of Slavic folk music, believed that the most interesting music was the music from the regions bordering more than one ethnicity. And that can certainly be said of all the musical styles I encountered during my trip. However, a border line has never truly existed on the Silk Road. This is true fusion in its finest sense.

In *The Song and Dance of Tears* I did not attempt to recreate the scenes and music I heard during the trip. Rather, the work serves as an evocation of the impressions and emotions that stayed with me deeply. The tune I constructed for the last section of the work, *Tears*, was based on materials of several folk songs I heard during the trip. One of them was titled *Tears*, in which an old man laments his lost youth.

In 2013, preparing for the recording with the Hong Kong Philharmonic, I revised the work quite substantially.

Notes on the *sheng* and *pipa*

The *sheng*, a Chinese mouth organ, is arguably the ancestor of all reed instruments, including the Western organ and accordion. We now have evidence of the Chinese people having played this instrument for at least twenty-five hundred years. The sound of this wind instrument is produced by either exhaling or inhaling

through the mouth-piece while the fingers block the small openings of each bamboo pipe to generate air flow.

The history of the *pipa*, a plucked instrument of the lute family (whose invention has been attributed to the Babylonian civilization that flourished during the third millennium B.C.), is a typical example of how different cultures flirted and integrated with each other. When the *pipa* was first brought into China through the Silk Road over two thousand years ago, it resembled and sounded very much like the present-day lute, with a curved neck held horizontally and played with a plectrum. Over the years, the Chinese have truly assimilated the instrument as one of their own – it is now performed vertically with (plastic) finger nails and the instrument has changed extensively in its range of expression. Like almost all Chinese instruments, the pitches can easily be bent by pushing and pulling the rather loose strings to produce a glissando effect, a feature which comes from the tonal aspect of the Chinese language.

Colors of Crimson (2004)

Colors of Crimson, commissioned by the Luxembourg Philharmonic Orchestra, was composed during the winter and spring of 2004. It is written for and dedicated to Evelyn Glennie, marimba soloist; Bramwell Tovey, conductor and Music Director, and the Luxembourg Philharmonic Orchestra. World première performance: September 16th, 2004, Luxembourg.

To me, one of the most challenging aspects in writing for the marimba is the instrument's limited range of timbral variety. In this work, I've attempted to adjust this limitation by using different orchestral devices; some of them are subtle while at other times some are bold. What I hope to provide is a diversity of tonal hues within the overall monotonic timbre of the marimba – *Colors of Crimson*.

The basic thematic material of the work comes from a

reconstruction of a love song I wrote during my teenage years. At the time, I was living in Qinghai – a remote province of the Qinghai-Tibet plateau in northwest China – where the folk music tradition has always been abundant.

The Blazing Mirage (2012)

The Blazing Mirage for Cello and Strings was commissioned by the Musicus Society and premiered on October 26th, 2012, by Trey Lee and the Munich Chamber Orchestra, Alexander Liebreich conducting, at the Concert Hall of City Hall, presented by the New Vision Arts Festival of Hong Kong.

The Blazing Mirage was inspired by the phenomenon of the Dunhuang Caves, which have arguably preserved the greatest Buddhist art frescos and manuscripts, dating back to the fourth century.

I consider Dunhuang a miraculous phenomenon – the colossal treasures not only survived over millennia of time, but also endured many political and religious reigns. As a result, Dunhuang represents a cultural *mélange*: although most of the frescos and manuscripts were about Buddhism (of Indian origin), there were images of and documents on other religions such as Taoism, Nestorianism, and even Judaism; and, in addition to the Chinese language, the Dunhuang Manuscripts found in the caverns were also written in Tibetan, Uighur, Sanskrit, Pali, Sogdian, and Khotanese. Along with the Manuscripts,

music scores in a lost notational system were found, and several attempts at 'decoding' have been made in recent decades. Interestingly, there is a stylistic similarity among these diverse interpretations – the musics all sound with a piquant Central Asian flavour.

Perhaps the most important aspect of Dunhuang Caves is that it opened a window letting us observe the lives of ancient times that reflected this fusion. In fact, it was a testimony of how Chinese culture and Central Asian cultures have influenced, infiltrated and, to some extent, shaped each other. And it is from that angle that I approached this composition.

The work starts with a cello recitative based on a Mukam (a Central Asian classical music form) motif I heard in the region during my first Silk Road field trip. The string orchestra introduces a well-known folk song from northern Shaanxi, a province in which Chang An, the ancient Chinese capital, is located. At first, these two ideas appeared to be distinctive, but as the music continues through songs and dances, they gradually transform into a single *mélange*.

The title of the composition comes from a legend: In 366 AD, a Buddhist monk had a vision of a thousand Buddhas glittering in golden lights. And that prophecy inspired him to build the first cave on the rocks of Dunhuang.

Bright Sheng

Yaniv Segal is the assistant conductor for the project.

Hui Li



First prize winner at the 2001 China National Pipa Competition, Hui Li is a Professor of Music at China's Central Conservatory of Music and a member of the China Maggie Ensemble founded by Yo-Yo Ma's Silk Road Project. She has appeared with many leading orchestras and in major festivals in over twenty countries. Recent highlights include performances with the China Philharmonic, China National Symphony, and the Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra, and recitals at Carnegie Hall, the Berlin Contemporary Music Festival and the Beijing International Music Festival. She has also performed in Bright Sheng's new opera *The Silver River* at Lincoln Center, New York, and the Prince Theater, Philadelphia.

Tong Wu



Born into a musical family in Beijing, Tong Wu has become his generation's most visible proponent of traditional Chinese music. As a founding vocalist of the pioneering rock band Lunhui (Again), which merges Western and Asian traditions, a performer with the Silk Road Ensemble, and a soloist with the New York Philharmonic, London Sinfonietta and Singapore Symphony Orchestra, Wu has achieved an unparalleled following for Chinese music on three continents. He has released his personal album *Tong Wu / The Sound from My Heart* and was chosen as the Musician of the Year by the China Institute in New York for his achievements in 2012.

Trey Lee



Hailed as a "miracle" by *Gramophone*, Trey Lee's concerto debut at Carnegie Hall received a rousing standing ovation, with *The New York Times* declaring him an "excellent cellist... with enveloping richness and lyrical sensitivity". Trey works with distinguished conductors, composers and orchestras worldwide including Lorin Maazel, Bright Sheng, the Philharmonia Orchestra of London, the Netherlands Philharmonic and the Munich Chamber Orchestra. He has been featured on CNN, in the *Financial Times*, and on China's national television CCTV. In 2012, UNICEF Hong Kong appointed him as its ambassador. He has founded several groundbreaking festivals, including the Hong Kong International Chamber Music Festival and Musicus Fest.



Trey Lee's participation in this recording is generously sponsored by Musicus Society.

Sa Chen

Born in Chongqing, Sa Chen first studied under Dan Zhaoyi before embarking on an international career in 1996 when she won fourth prize, as the youngest contestant, in the Leeds International Piano Competition. Since then she has appeared with numerous celebrated conductors and leading orchestras, and in major festivals and venues around the world. She was also awarded the Best Polonaise Performance and Fourth Prize at the 2000 International Chopin Competition, and subsequently the Bronze Medal at the Van Cliburn Competition in 2005. In 2010, Sa Chen was awarded the Polish Government's Chopin Art Passport.



Photo: Hong Wai

Pius Cheung



Dubbed a neo-Romantic marimba virtuoso, Pius Cheung is known as a master soloist on his instrument. His CD of Bach's *Goldberg Variations* was featured in *The New York Times*, which praised his "deeply expressive interpretation, notable for its clear voicing, eloquent phrasing and wide range of colour and dynamics". He has performed in solo concerts around the world in venues such as Carnegie Hall, the Kennedy Center, and the National Center for the Performing Arts in Beijing. He is currently an Assistant Professor of Percussion at the University of Oregon. He is a Yamaha Performing Artist and Innovative Percussion Artist.

Hong Kong Philharmonic



globe, joining its strong core of Hong Kong musicians. In 2012, Jaap van Zweden became the orchestra's Music Director.

The Hong Kong Philharmonic is a vital part of Hong Kong's cultural life, as the city's largest and busiest musical organisation. In 2013/14 the orchestra celebrates its 40th professional season, but its roots are well over a century old, and it has now evolved to become an orchestral powerhouse in the region. Each year it presents over 150 concerts for 200,000 music lovers. Featuring an enviable roster of international conductors and soloists, the orchestra performs a broad variety of music, with many concerts presented free, among them the annual *Swire Symphony Under The Stars*, whilst its acclaimed education programme benefitted over 40,000 young people last year. The Swire Group Charitable Trust has been the Principal Patron of the HK Phil since 2006. The members of the orchestra come from every corner of the

Bright Sheng



MacArthur Fellow Bright Sheng was born in Shanghai in 1955, and moved to New York in 1982. He is currently the Leonard Bernstein Distinguished University Professor at the University of Michigan, and YK Pao Distinguished Visiting Professor at Hong Kong University of Science and Technology. He has collaborated with such renowned musicians as Bernstein, Masur, Eschenbach, Dutoit, Slatkin, Van Zweden, Yo-Yo Ma, Peter Serkin, Emanuel Ax, Gil Shaham, Yefin Bronfman and Evelyn Glennie, among others. He has been commissioned and performed by virtually all the important musical institutions in North America, Europe and Asia, including the White House, Beijing Olympics, the New York Philharmonic, Boston Symphony, Chicago Symphony, Philadelphia Orchestra, Cleveland Orchestra, Royal Concertgebouw, St Petersburg Philharmonic, San Francisco Opera, and the San Francisco Ballet. He has served as Composer-in-Residence at the Lyric Opera of Chicago, Seattle Symphony, and New York City Ballet, and as Artistic Advisor to Yo-Yo Ma's Silk Road Project. He is the Artistic Director of The Intimacy of Creativity, an annual two-week workshop in Hong Kong with a new approach to creativity, which he founded in 2011. As a conductor he has appeared with the St Petersburg Philharmonic, San Francisco Symphony, Detroit Symphony, Hong Kong Philharmonic, China National Symphony, and the Shanghai Symphony Orchestras, among others.

In 2000 Bright Sheng collected music from the remote mountains and deserts along the ancient Silk Road in China. *The Song and Dance of Tears* combines Chinese and Western sonorities in an evocation of the deep emotional impressions made on him by the beautiful music of that region. *Colors of Crimson* expands the timbre of the solo marimba through a fascinating spectrum of orchestral effects, while the skilful fusion of Chinese and Central Asian classical and folk music in *The Blazing Mirage* was inspired by the miraculously preserved artistic and cultural treasures of the Dunhuang Caves.



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Bright
SHENG
(b. 1955)

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| 1 | The Song and Dance of Tears
(2003, rev. 2013) | 22:50 |
| 2 | Colors of Crimson (2004) | 18:06 |
| 3 | The Blazing Mirage (2012) | 18:59 |

Hui Li, *Pipa* **1** • Tong Wu, *Sheng* **1**

Trey Lee, *Cello* **1** **3** Sa Chen, *Piano* **1**

Pius Cheung, *Marimba* **2**

Hong Kong Philharmonic • Bright Sheng

This recording was made possible with the generous support of AIA, and was supported by a grant from the School of Humanities and Social Science and Institute for Advanced Studies of the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology.

Recorded in the Auditorium, Tsuen Wan Town Hall, Hong Kong, on 7th and 8th May, 2013 (track 1), on 9th May, 2013 (track 2), and on 9th and 10th May, 2013 (track 3)

Produced, engineered and edited by Phil Rowlands

Publisher: G. Schirmer, Inc., New York

Cover photograph: *The Caves of Dunhuang* by Jian Wu of Dunhuang Institute