



# ECHOES OF CHINA

Contemporary Piano Music

Zhou Long

Doming Lam

Alexina Louie

Tan Dun

Chen Yi

Susan Chan, Piano

## Echoes of China

### Contemporary Piano Music

I am honoured to collaborate with these renowned living Chinese composers and to record their music, which mixes old and new, East and West – elements that resonate with me. The commissioning project with Chen Yi and Zhou Long resulted in the birth of two stunning works that bring together eastern and western aesthetics, and their cultures of origin. Heartfelt thanks go to these composers who make the world smaller and more beautiful, and to all who contributed to this project.

Thanks to Portland State University for support towards the project.

#### Susan Chan

### Zhou Long (b. 1953): Pianobells (2012)



A 2011 Pulitzer Prize winner for his opera, *Madame White Snake*, Zhou Long was born in Beijing in 1953. In 1978 he enrolled in the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing. Five years later he was appointed composer-in-residence with the China Broadcasting Symphony. He travelled to the United States in 1985 to attend Columbia University, where he received a Doctor of Musical Arts degree in 1993. He is currently serving as Distinguished Professor at the University of Missouri-Kansas City Conservatory.

#### Zhou Long

#### Composer's Note

*Pianobells* was commissioned by Susan Chan and first performed on 20th April 2012 at the Musica Nova concert of the UKMC Conservatory of Music and Dance. The commission was made possible by May Lui, the Portland State University Foundation, the Regional Arts & Culture Council, and Oregon Arts Commission.

The legend of great bells that ring spontaneously without being struck has its origins in the ancient text *Classic of Mountains and Seas*, in which we read:

*"Upon the Mountains of Plenty,  
Nine Bells ring with Knowledge of the Frost."*

Tales of those blasts of wind that pulse like a heartbeat through caverns in the limestone cliffs, setting off a mysterious sympathetic ringing from bells encrusted in frost, led to *Frost-Bell* becoming a word during the Tang dynasty, almost a millennium after the *Mountains and Seas* classic first appeared. The music takes two contrasting musical images, *Mighty Bells* and *Frost Bells*, as the motive through out the entire piece. The striking of low strings inside the piano makes a rumble of sound waves, accompanied by micro-vibrations from the highest register that dart in and out of hearing; together they recall the voices of bells borne on the wind from valleys and canyons. Fluttering and circling, the sounds gradually disperse into the distance. The deep up-swellings of sound slowly rouse the pulse of all earth's things and creatures, much like the interplay between Heaven and Earth.

### Doming Lam (b. 1926): Lamentations of Lady Chiu-Jun (1964)



Born in 1926 in Macau, Doming Lam is a former composer-in-residence of the University of Hong Kong and the winner of 2010 and 2012 CASH Golden Sail Music Awards. He is the Founding Director of the Asian Composers' League. Lam studied music in Canada, the United States and Germany. His goal has been to create new Chinese music by instilling avant-garde compositional techniques into traditional Chinese musical sensibilities. *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (2001) includes a detailed biography of Lam.

Doming Lam writes in his score that this work is based on one of the best known ancient Chinese melodies of Lingnan. It depicts the famous tragedy of Chiu-Jun, a young Chinese lady who was sent to marry the Mongolian king in return for peace between China and Mongolia. This piece was his first attempt at reinterpreting Chinese ancient melodies by using an opera performance as a main source. Lam spent an entire year researching [Chinese Opera] harmony, the structure of the accompaniment and instrumentation, until he embarked on the idea of imitating the sound effects of Chinese instruments. Subsequently, the work was completed after a month of experimentation. This compositional style of imitating the sound of Chinese instruments became dominant in his early works. Imitations of Chinese gongs and drums in *Lamentations* highlight the atmosphere of staged opera, and the sound imitating *pipa* expresses Lady Chiu-Jun's determination when leaving her home country.

#### Susan Chan

### Alexina Louie (b. 1949): Music for Piano (1982)



Alexina Louie is one of Canada's most highly regarded and most often performed composers. Her desire for self-expression, her recognizable sound world, as well as her explorations of Asian music, art, and philosophy, have contributed to the development of her unique musical voice. Louie's work is communicative and highly dramatic, and it pushes the boundaries of convention and tradition. Her orchestral works have been performed by such esteemed conductors as Sir Andrew Davis, Leonard Slatkin, Kent Nagano, and Charles Dutoit. Her extensive catalogue can be found at [alexinalouie.ca](http://alexinalouie.ca).

#### Composer's Note

Originally commissioned as a set of pedagogical piano pieces in 1982, *Music For Piano* has become a much loved part of the piano repertoire with performances from professional pianists and students alike. I set out to write pieces that would introduce the pianist to a contemporary sound world, as well as contemporary techniques. *The Enchanted Bells* explores impressionistic and atmospheric keyboard resonances while *Changes* introduces the player to minimalist music (repeated motivic cells that evolve slowly through repetitive patterns). *Distant Memories* frees the pianist through the use of proportional notation (the elimination of bar lines). Within a set of parameters, the pianist is given the freedom to shape these sections of the piece in a personal way. The music moves back and forth naturally between metered and non-metered notation. *Once Upon A Time* serves as a joyful final compilation of the techniques explored in the previous piece.

It was my intention to introduce these new concepts in an engaging fashion and to demonstrate that there is nothing to fear in confronting "the new". I have been told by listeners, as well as the pianists themselves, that

*Music For Piano* is both touching and communicative. The pieces have become more than teaching tools — they have become part of the piano repertoire of professional pianists.

Alexina Louie

### Tan Dun (b. 1957): Eight Memories in Watercolour (1979)



The world renowned artist Tan Dun has made an indelible mark on the world's music scene with a creative repertoire that spans the boundaries of classical music, multimedia performance, and Eastern and Western traditions. He is a winner of the GRAMMY® Award, Academy Award, Grawemeyer Award for classical composition, Musical America's Composer of The Year, Bach Prize of the City of Hamburg, and Moscow's Shostakovich Award, and his music has been played throughout the world by leading orchestras, opera houses, international festivals, and on the radio and television. As a composer/conductor, Tan Dun has led the world's most renowned orchestras, including the London Symphony Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, Berliner Philharmoniker, and The Philadelphia Orchestra, among others. In 2010, Tan Dun served as Cultural Ambassador to the World for World EXPO Shanghai. Most recently, his work was celebrated when UNESCO appointed Tan Dun as its global Goodwill Ambassador. [www.tandun.com](http://www.tandun.com)

Tan Dun

### Composer's Notes

Tan Dun describes *Eight Memories* as a "diary of longing," inspired by the folk-songs of his culture and the recollection of his childhood. It is presented as a series of personal and delicate restorations of time and memory now passed.

The medium of watercolour is vital to an appreciation of this music. It contains none of the extremes of gesture and attack ordinarily associated with virtuoso display. Rather, it is meditation and reverie. *Missing Moon* is a small statement of regret, and *Staccato Beans* a childhood game — simple, direct, bouncing with energy. The *Herdboy's Song* flies on dissonant ornamentation, and the *Blue Nun*, although centring on a traditional E minor, carries a folk melody in its simplest expression. *Red Wilderness* opens and closes in stillness, but its centre is a brief maelstrom of danger and uncertainty. *Ancient Burial* bears a suggestion of anger and loss, modified by the deft and rather French pictorialism of *Floating Clouds*. The set ends with *Sunrain*, a vigorous dance that apparently makes no promises as to its outcome.

### Zhou Long: Mongolian Folk-Tune Variations (1980)

*Mongolian Folk-Tune Variations* for solo piano was composed in the spring of 1980 when Zhou Long was a student at the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing. The theme is based on an *andante* Mongolian love-song. After its initial statement, there are eight variations and a coda. They traverse contrasting styles, keys, speeds, figurations, and durations, expressing various musical emotions. Beginning with Variation 3, each mood is indicated with a traditional Western musical direction: 3 — *Vivace*; 4 — *Accelerando*; 5 — *Adagio*, sombre; 6 — *Scherzando*; 7 — *Allegretto moderato*. Variation 8 is the finale — *Allegretto*, *fermamente*; and the Coda is marked *Andante*, *tranquillo*. In 2010, thirty years after it was composed, Oxford University Press published the piece. This is its world première recording.

Zhou Long

### Composers' photographs

Zhou Long and Chen Yi: Beijing Kuandi Photos  
Doming Lam: Doming Lam  
Alexina Louie: Bo Huang  
Tan Dun: Nana Watanabe

### Chen Yi (b. 1953): Northern Scenes (2013)



Born in Guangzhou in 1953, composer Chen Yi is a recipient of the Charles Ives Living, the largest award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, in 2001. Chen Yi was awarded BA and MA degrees from the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing and a DMA degree from Columbia University in New York. A member of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences, Chen Yi is currently serving as Distinguished Professor at the University of Missouri-Kansas City Conservatory.

### Composer's Note

*Northern Scenes* was composed for pianist Susan Chan in 2013 while in China and Thailand and is dedicated to her. She gave the première of the work in 2013. The commission was made possible by May Lui, John Schumann, the Portland State University Foundation, the Regional Arts and Culture Council, and Oregon Arts Commission. The eight-minute musical poem *Northern Scenes* for solo piano is imaginative and expressive, with passionate and lyrical layers, in vertical soundscapes and space. The following lines show the images from nature that inspired me to compose the music:

*In the north, the vast and magnificent blue mountains,  
Boundless, desolate, and indistinct...*

Chen Yi

## Susan Chan

Photo: Peter Schütte



Susan Chan took first prize in the Hong Kong Young Musicians Award Competition (1988), was a finalist at the American Prize in Piano Performance competition (2011), and was awarded an Oregon Arts Commission Artist Fellowship (2013). She holds a Doctor of Music degree from Indiana University where her main teachers were György Sebök and Menahem Pressler, and is currently on the faculty at Portland State University. She has performed in the Dame Myra Hess Memorial Concert Series (Chicago) and the Seattle International Piano Festival Recital Series, and at Weill Recital Hall in Carnegie Hall, at the house of Chopin's birth in Żelazowa Wola, Steinway Halls (London and Tokyo), and Hong Kong City Hall Concert Hall. She has also appeared as soloist with the Dnepropetrovsk State Philharmonic (Ukraine) and the Hong Kong Sinfonietta.

This recording showcases both the rich variety and the sonic surprises to be heard in contemporary Chinese piano music. Myth and landscape loom large. Pulitzer Prize-winner Zhou Long's *Pianobells* takes legend as its inspiration in an evocation of sonorous bells borne on the wind. For Doming Lam the goal is reinterpreting Chinese ancient melodies and imitating gongs and drums to evoke the atmosphere of Chinese opera. For GRAMMY® Award-winner Tan Dun, his *Eight Memories* are a 'diary of longing' – musical watercolours inspired by folk music.

## ECHOES OF CHINA

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|-----------|--|--------------|-----------|------------------------------|-------------|
| <b>1</b>  | <b>Zhou Long (b. 1953): Pianobells (2012)*</b>                             | <b>9:15</b>  |           |                              |             |
| <b>2</b>  | <b>Doming Lam (b. 1926): Lamentations of Lady Chiu-Jun, Op. 12a (1964)</b> | <b>7:16</b>  |           |                              |             |
|           | <b>Alexina Louie (b. 1949): Music for Piano (1982)</b>                     | <b>10:04</b> |           |                              |             |
| <b>3</b>  | <b>I. The Enchanted Bells</b>  | <b>2:29</b>  | <b>4</b>  | <b>II. Changes</b>           | <b>2:54</b> |
| <b>5</b>  | <b>III. Distant Memories</b>   | <b>1:57</b>  | <b>6</b>  | <b>IV. Once Upon A Time</b>  | <b>2:44</b> |
|           | <b>Tan Dun (b. 1957): Eight Memories in Watercolour, Op. 1 (1979)</b>      | <b>16:08</b> |           |                              |             |
| <b>7</b>  | <b>No. 1. Missing Moon</b>   | <b>2:54</b>  | <b>8</b>  | <b>No. 2. Staccato Beans</b> | <b>1:18</b> |
| <b>9</b>  | <b>No. 3. Herdboy's Song</b>   | <b>1:41</b>  | <b>10</b> | <b>No. 4. Blue Nun</b>       | <b>1:28</b> |
| <b>11</b> | <b>No. 5. Red Wilderness</b>   | <b>2:22</b>  | <b>12</b> | <b>No. 6. Ancient Burial</b> | <b>2:23</b> |
| <b>13</b> | <b>No. 7. Floating Clouds</b>  | <b>2:33</b>  | <b>14</b> | <b>No. 8. Sunrain</b>        | <b>1:29</b> |
| <b>15</b> | <b>Zhou Long: Mongolian Folk-Tune Variations (1980)*</b>                   | <b>8:59</b>  |           |                              |             |
| <b>16</b> | <b>Chen Yi (b. 1953): Northern Scenes (2013)*</b>                          | <b>7:13</b>  |           |                              |             |

**\*WORLD PREMIÈRE RECORDINGS**

**Susan Chan, Piano**

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