



**GRAND
PIANO**

ONE PIANO, TWO CULTURES

**EARLY PIANO WORKS BY
CONTEMPORARY CHINESE COMPOSERS**

**BRIGHT SHENG • CHEN YI • HUANG RUO
TAN DUN • YAO CHEN • ZHOU LONG**

KIU TUNG POON

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KIU TUNG POON, *piano; piano and Chinese opera gongs* 23

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1	CHEN YI 陳怡 (b. 1953) GUESSING 猜調 (1989)	04:14
	TWO CHINESE BAGATELLES – PIANO SOLO FOR CHILDREN 兩首中國鋼琴小曲 (1984/1993)*	01:54
2	I. Yu Diao 豫調	01:20
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4	SONG BENEATH THE MOON: VARIATIONS ON THE THEME OF A DAI FOLK TUNE 《月下歌》傣族民歌主題小變奏曲 (1978)*	02:23
	BRIGHT SHENG 盛宗亮 (b. 1955)	
	PETIT FLOWERS 花兒拾零 (1980)	06:52
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10	THEME AND VARIATIONS FOR YOUNG PIANISTS 小變奏曲 *	02:13
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Composition dates for **10 11** are unknown

* **WORLD PREMIÈRE RECORDING**

	HUANG RUO 黃若 (b. 1976)	
	FOUR TUNES FROM HAINAN ISLAND 黎寨音絮 (1993)*	03:17
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	FIVE COLORS 五色 (1999)*	06:46
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18	III. Shang: Folk Tune 商: 民歌	00:31
19	IV. Yu: Mist...Dream...Rain 羽: 霧...夢...雨	02:44
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22	JI-DONG-NUO 吉冬諾 (2005)	03:31
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23	PIANOGONGS for piano and two Chinese opera gongs 鋼琴鑼 (鋼琴獨奏兼大小京鑼) (2006)	06:51
24	PIANOBELLS 鋼琴鐘 (2013)	10:22

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WORLD PREMIÈRE RECORDING

TOTAL TIME: 55:56

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EARLY PIANO WORKS BY CONTEMPORARY CHINESE COMPOSERS

The idea of returning to the composer's cultural roots as sources of musical inspiration, as clichéd as it may sound, has been embraced as an effective metaphor for musical creativity in much of the 20th century and beyond by Chinese musicians at home and abroad. This album features piano works that represent six leading Chinese composers' early compositional approaches fusing sonic attributes that have been framed as 'Chinese' and 'Western', and documents the transition of Chen Yi and Zhou Long's compositional style from post-cultural revolution China to Chinese diasporas in the US.

With six world première recordings, this album is the result of numerous video conferencing and emails with the composers. I extend my sincere gratitude to each of them for their collaboration and trust.

Kiu Tung Poon

Dr Chen Yi, Distinguished Professor at the University of Missouri-Kansas City Conservatory, is a recipient of the Ives Living Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Published by Theodore Presser Company, her music is performed and recorded worldwide. She holds degrees from the Central Conservatory in Beijing and Columbia University in the City of New York. Her teachers were Wu Zu-qiang, Chou Wen-chung and Mario Davidovsky. She is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, American Academy of Arts and Letters, and Distinguished Visiting Professor in China.

I often remember the very popular Chinese folk song called *Guessing*, which is in a humorous antiphonal singing style. In my *Guessing*, I took a fragment of the tune from the song and developed it in pitch, range, dynamics, rhythm and expression,

using basic techniques of piano performance. The piece shows a simple and rustic feeling in an obviously strong Chinese musical style. It was commissioned for the 1990 Renee B. Fisher Awards Competition in Connecticut for the Senior Division (age 14–18).

Yu Diao won the composition competition for the Beijing Chinese Children Piano Competition in 1984. 'Yu' means 'Henan province' in northern China. 'Diao' means 'tune'. The pitch materials are taken from the local opera in Henan province.

Small Beijing Gong takes its musical style from Beijing Opera. It is written for my childhood piano teacher Li Su-Xin's 70th birthday celebration concert, given in my home city of Guangzhou in 1993.

The basic material for *Ba Ban* is drawn from the popular Chinese traditional instrumental piece *Ba Ban* (Eight Beats), and from my own *Piano Concerto*, which is entirely based on the form, rhythmic organisation and pitch materials of the original folk tune. General impressions of the style of Chinese mountain song singing and Chinese instrumental playing also influence the texture of the piece. Most Chinese folk solo pieces have a single theme each, with sectional developments in different speeds and performing techniques, with added decorations on the important notes from the melody. Inspired by this, I constructed my solo piano piece in four sections, using the initial seven-measure phrase of the 'Ba Ban' tune as the theme, interweaving with two other pitch material.

My little piano piece *Ji-Dong-Nuo* was inspired by a folk ballad of the Yao ethnic people in southwest China. According to legend, there was a girl who loved singing. She became unhappy after she got married, since her father ordered her not to sing. She was divorced because of her depression. On the way back home, she heard a happy quail singing on the hill, changed her mood, and broke out singing a beautiful song. Her husband was deeply moved and loved her again. The song has been passed on and given the title *Ji-Dong-Nuo* (quail) to describe the

beautiful story. I drew some pitch materials from the folk tune, while keeping the character of the girl and the style of Chinese traditional instrumental performance.

Chen Yi

Zhou Long was the first Chinese American composer to win a Pulitzer Prize in Music for his first opera *Madame White Snake*. Born on 8 July 1953, in Beijing, Mr Zhou graduated from the Central Conservatory in 1983. He was composer-in-residence with the China Broadcasting Symphony. In 1985, he attended Columbia University in the City of New York, where he received a Doctorate in 1993. Dr Zhou is currently Bonfils Distinguished Professor of Composition at the University of Missouri-Kansas City Conservatory.

Song Beneath the Moon was written on 1 October 1978 when I was a freshman at the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing. It offers five variations and a coda on a theme based on Dai folk music. The Dai people are one of China's national minorities in Yunnan province in southwestern China. Their culture bears a certain affinity with the cultures of Southeast Asia.

Pianogongs was inspired by the special sonorities of the percussion section (gongs, drums, cymbals, bells and chimes) of Beijing Opera. As I started to work on the piece, I began to think about how the varied spectrum of bronze could be revealed in musical tone colours as fast repetitive rhythms. This work features a combination of piano (functioning like a percussion ensemble instrument) and gongs as a kind of performing force reminiscent to that of the Beijing Opera percussion ensemble. The two Chinese Opera Gongs are laid on the soft top of a piano bench and are played by the pianist with the left hand.

Pianobells takes two contrasting musical images, 'Mighty Bells' and 'Frost Bells', as the motif throughout the entire piece. The legend of great bells that ring

spontaneously without being struck has origins in the ancient *Classic of Mountains and Seas*. 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, a symbol Tang poet Li Bai (701–762) uses for the union of Heaven and Earth in his piece *Listening to Jun, the Monk from Sichuan, Plucking the Transverse Lute*.

Zhou Long

Bright Sheng was born on 6 December 1955 in Shanghai and moved to New York in 1982 to pursue his graduate works and received a Doctorate at Columbia University. He studied composition and conducting privately with his mentor Leonard Bernstein. A MacArthur Fellow, Sheng has created an oeuvre with a strong synthesis of Western musical tradition and is regularly performed by the world's most prestigious institutions. His music is exclusively published by G. Schirmer, Inc., and his discography spans numerous albums.

Petit Flowers for piano was written when I was a sophomore composer at Shanghai Conservatory. Each of these four short vignettes is based on a folk song of Qinghai China where I lived during my youth. The music was published by People's Music in the early 1980s. It has been widely played by college students at music conservatories in China.

Bright Sheng

The world-renowned artist and UNESCO Global Goodwill Ambassador, 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. A winner of today's most prestigious honours including

a GRAMMY Award, an Academy Award, and a Grawemeyer Award, Tan Dun's music has been played throughout the world by leading orchestras, opera houses, international festivals, and on radio and television.¹

Theme and Variations for Young Pianists integrates a Hunan folk song with modern compositional techniques.² Beginning with an *Andante* theme, it continues with three variations and an *Allegro* coda.

Watching Village Opera is a miniature that resonates the Hunan Flower-drum opera (Huanguxi) *The Story of a Woodcutter and his Fox Wife*, featuring sounds that mimic gongs and drums with a humorous and lively character.³

Kiu Tung Poon

Composer Yao Chen has received commissions and awards from many international organisations including Radio France, Harvard University Fromm Foundation, Leonard Bernstein Foundation, Mellon Foundation, Hong Kong New Music Ensemble, and China's National Center for the Performing Arts. Performed by internationally renowned musicians and ensembles, his music has been enthusiastically received at prestigious music festivals such as ISCM World Music Days, Centre Acanthes, Festival Présences at Radio France, Tanglewood Music Festival, Juilliard School Focus Festival, Aspen Music Festival and Pacific Music Festival, among many others.

Yao Chen's early work, *Five Colors* (1999), though seemingly naïve, is notable for its charm and broad range of moods and techniques, hinting at his later preoccupations. The five-movement cycle contains scant folk-song material, primarily in the third and

¹ "Tan Dun: Biography," Wise Music Classical, accessed December 2, 2024, <https://www.wisemusicclassical.com/composer/1561/Tan-Dun/>.

² Dan Zhaoyi, *Selected Piano Variations 1*, (Shanghai Music Publishing House, 2001), 11.

³ Li Xiaoping et al., *Trial Textbook for Normal Universities: Basic Course for the Piano 2*, (Shanghai Music Publishing House, 2003), 111.

fourth movements. The first movement, *Gong: Peking Opera*, is propulsive with lyrical overtones, while the second, *Zhi: Snow*, is a still life in sound. *Shang: Folk Tune* is brusque and uses clusters, making its source material unrecognisable. *Yu: Mist...Dream...Rain* features a light touch and engages with natural phenomena, a theme in many of Yao Chen's mature works, and the last, *Jiao: Shaman* explores spiritual themes with a more incisive and rhythmic tone.

Dan Albertson

Huang Ruo, born in Hainan Island, China, in 1976, is celebrated as 'one of the world's leading young composers' by *The New Yorker* and praised for his 'distinctive style' by *The New York Times*. His music, inspired by Chinese ancient and folk traditions, Western avant-garde, and various other genres, has been performed by prestigious orchestras and ensembles worldwide. He received both traditional and Western education at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music and completed his doctorate in composition at The Juilliard School.

My piano suite *Four Tunes from Hainan Island* is based on local folk tunes from this most southern tropical island of China. They are newly composed miniatures that capture the essence of folk spirit rather than being directly taken from folk tunes. *Li Li Mei* is from the Li Minorities who live in the Palm Mountain in the central Island. It is like a prelude, free and less rhythmic. *Sui Man* is the song people sing while hunting, so it is the most rhythmic one among the four. *Luo Ni*, the equivalent of the Western nocturne, is the night song that lovers sing to each other. *Diao Sheng* is a kind of dance that accompanied by the Lu Sheng (Chinese pipe mouth organ) Ensemble.

Huang Ruo

KIU TUNG POON

Young Steinway Artist, Kiu Tung Poon, has appeared as a recitalist and collaborative pianist on concert stages worldwide, and at venues and festivals including Tanglewood and Aspen in the United States, Wiener Konzerthaus in Austria, St Martin-in-the-Fields in London and the Great Wall of China in Beijing. Her solo playing was described as 'lyrical and emotionally nuanced... displayed lyricism and virtuosity' by the *Woodstock Times*. Her world première of Mark Morris/Samuel Barber's *Excursions* with the Mark Morris Dance Group at the Tanglewood Music Festival received enthusiastic review in *The New York Times* and *Boston Phoenix*. Her release on Naxos, *Digital Mist* (8.559903), featuring works for violin and piano by George Tsontakis, Chen Yi and Sebastian and Nathan Currier, was noted as being 'lively and authoritative' (*American Record Guide*), having an 'effective presence' (*The Strad*), and 'fresh, adventurous, and beguiling' and 'beautifully crafted and extremely sensitive' (*Fanfare*). Kiu Tung Poon graduated from Indiana University Bloomington and the University of Texas at Austin with a Doctor of Musical Arts in piano performance. She currently teaches at her alma mater, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, as a lecturer in performance, and serves as the performance stream coordinator in the Department of Music.

www.kiutung.com



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This album presents a selection of early piano works by six of China's most internationally lauded composers. The pieces explore elements of Chinese and Western traditions though most are rooted in a traditional national style derived from Chinese opera or folk music. They evoke characteristic Chinese instrumental sonorities, especially percussion – gongs, drums, chimes and bells – from a variety of source material including Beijing opera and ballads. Pianist Kiu Tung Poon has performed internationally and is admired for her 'lively and authoritative' playing (*American Record Guide*) and for her 'lyrical and emotionally nuanced' interpretations (*Woodstock Times*).



KIU TUNG POON

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