



NAXOS

QIGANG CHEN

Enchantements oubliés

Er Huang

Un temps disparu



Chun-Chieh Yen, Piano

Jiemin Yan, Erhu

Taiwan Philharmonic

Shao-Chia Lü

Qigang Chen (b. 1951)

Er Huang • Enchantements oubliés • Un temps disparu

Qigang Chen was a teenager studying music at the Central Conservatory in Beijing when the Cultural Revolution broke out in 1966, and he endured three years of 'ideological re-education'. Despite this, he remained determined to pursue a musical career. The state reopened the Conservatory in 1977, and he underwent a further five years of study with Zhongrong Luo (b. 1924). He won a postgraduate scholarship to travel abroad in 1983, and was to be Olivier Messiaen's last and only student from 1984-88, after the eminent composer's retirement from the Paris Conservatoire. Messiaen described Chen's compositions as showing 'real inventiveness, very great talent and a total assimilation of Chinese thinking with European musical concepts.'

Chen has received commissions from the BBC, Radio France, Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie, Stuttgart RSO, Orchestra Symphonique de Montréal and the Koussevitzky Foundation. He was composer-in-residence at the Orchestre Philharmonique de Strasbourg from 2004 to 2006, and was the musical director for the opening ceremonies of the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing.

Er Huang was commissioned by Carnegie Hall, New York and received its première there in 2009. It is Chen's second orchestral work to feature a solo pianist. The piece is based on a number of melodies from Peking operas – melodies which, for Chen, are bound up with memories of his past and his family, and which would be extremely familiar to all those who grew up as part of his generation in Peking. Now that Chinese musical life is so permeated with European and American pop culture, these traditional melodies have begun to fade from the aural landscape. For Chen, this is a cause for regret, and the presentation of these melodies is tinged with nostalgia. The incorporation of such music into his own works is a fundamental part of his compositional process, imbuing his music with a strong sense of its Chinese heritage. The work begins gently and lyrically, with a calm and sustained orchestral texture from which melodies

emerge and fade, the piano taking a *concertante* rôle throughout. This gives way to a more energetic central section, driven once more by the piano and featuring a variety of percussion instruments – until the tension subsides and long-breathed lyricism returns, the piano rippling beneath the surface of the strings' leading melody. The music once again builds and swells, fading away to leave the piano alone, as it was when the music began.

Enchantements oubliés, composed in 2004, was premièred in 2008 by the Orchestra Philharmonique de Radio France and Alan Gilbert. It is an expansive work in a somewhat unusual form, for string orchestra, harp, piano, celesta, timpani and percussion. Recalling his inspiration for this piece, Qigang Chen explains: 'Human beings are never content with what they have at the present time, always yearning for something they remember from their past, which seems superior in comparison. But what we can achieve through striving is not necessarily an improvement upon the original, unrefined idea. Refined beauty often shows too many traces of deliberate planning and, on close inspection, signs of deception and falseness. The most powerful beauty is of course the *least* processed: that is, nature. Many human creations of today overlook the heart and essence of a subject, instead [they are] intent on demonstrating new concepts and techniques. As a result, we find much on the surface, but the work might not bear closer examination. In writing this piece, I wanted to set myself free of the usual technical constraints and let the music lead me to wherever it seemed willing to go by itself – and I would simply record the journey of this natural force by notating it. Of course, the end result is never exactly the same as what we have in our minds; but I do hope that this is a truthful depiction of how I felt about the essence of beauty at the time.'

Un temps disparu is a 2002 adaptation of *Reflet d'un temps disparu* (1995-1996), originally written for cello and orchestra. Here the cello's part has been recast for *erhu*,

a two-stringed Chinese fiddle (the bow passes between the strings), completely altering the soundworld of the composition. *Un temps disparu* also makes use of a well-known, ancient Chinese melody called *Three Variations on the Plum Blossom*, originally conceived for the *guqin*, a zither-like instrument. This melody is presented by Chen in harmonics, and serves as his principal theme, recurring throughout the piece. His title, *Un temps disparu* – a vanished time – is a reference to the precious early experiences of life: childhood, first love, first vocation, and so on, a time he sees as reflecting the spiritual harmony between humanity and nature.

Since the *erhu* is a much more limited instrument (both in terms of range and resonance) than the cello, this piece is extremely challenging for its soloist. Rapid passagework, extended cadenzas, harmonics, pizzicato, singing melodies and figurations which fade in and out of the orchestral texture – all this and more is required of the *erhu* player, in the midst of an accompanying ensemble of full strings, winds, harp and percussion. Chen's decision to adapt the work in this way is an attempt to both explore expanded possibilities for the instrument, and lead performers away from traditional repertoire towards a new and more innovative musical approach.

Adapted from the composer's notes by Katy Hamilton

Chun-Chieh Yen



Chun-Chieh Yen has performed in Europe, Asia, and America, embracing a wide range of repertoire. Concerto performances take Yen to orchestras all over the world including the Russian National Orchestra, the Staatsorchester Rheinische Philharmonie, and the National Symphony Orchestra of Taiwan. He has enjoyed collaborations with many conductors, including Mikhail Pletnev, Henry Mazer, Uri Mayer, Shao-Chia Lü, Gernot Schmalfuss and Günther Herbig. Yen has won numerous prizes, including Third Prize at the International Tchaikovsky Competition for Young Musicians in St Petersburg (1997), First Prize at the 4th Hamamatsu International Academy Piano Competition in Japan (1999), and Third Prize at the 4th Prokofiev International Competition in St Petersburg (2004). His debut album on Universal earned him the award of Best Classical Performer at the 19th Golden Melody Awards in Taiwan. Yen's various concert projects have included performing Chopin's complete *27 Études* in one recital, premiering Tchaikovsky's *Piano Concerto No. 2* in Taiwan, and giving three different recitals in one day at the One Day Piano Festival x 3. Yen is Currently Assistant Professor of Piano at the National Taiwan Normal University.

Jiemin Yan



The *erhu* artist Jiemin Yan is currently a Professor at the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing, China. She graduated from the Central Conservatory of Music, where she studied *erhu* and composition under Guotong Wang and Zhenmin Xu. She is a very welcome guest artist not only in China, but also on the international music scene. As a recording artist, she has a number of solo albums to her credit. As a performing artist, she has given numerous recitals in many countries and regions in Asia, Europe, North America and Australia, and has worked with many composers and orchestras at numerous international music festivals. Billions of people around the world have watched her on CCTV, China's most watched TV station.

Taiwan Philharmonic



Founded in 1986, the Taiwan Philharmonic, also known as the National Symphony Orchestra (NSO), is hailed as one of the leading orchestras in the Asian region. The 99-member Taiwan Philharmonic became the resident orchestra of the National Concert Hall and an artistic affiliate of the National Performing Arts Center in April 2014. Since August 2010, Shao-Chia Lü has been Music Director of the Taiwan Philharmonic. The Taiwan Philharmonic has worked with internationally acclaimed conductors, including Jahja Ling, Wen-Pin Chien, Günther Herbig, Lorin Maazel, Krzysztof Penderecki, Rudolf Barshai, Gerard Schwarz, Michael Sanderling, Leonard Slatkin, Christopher Hogwood, Gennady Rozhdestvensky and many others. Tour performances are also regularly offered throughout Taiwan and overseas, with concert tours to Vienna, Paris, Berlin, Geneva, Milan, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Sapporo, Tokyo, Yokohama, Hong Kong, Guangzhou, Shanghai, and Beijing.

Shao-Chia Lü



Shao-Chia Lü, music director of the Taiwan Philharmonic since August 2010 and principal conductor of the South Denmark Philharmonic since 2014, studied in Taipei, at Indiana University and the Hochschule für Musik in Vienna, going on to win first prize at renowned conducting competitions in Besançon, Trento and Amsterdam. He has held posts in Koblenz (1998-2004) and at the Staatsoper Hannover (2001-2006) in addition to appearing as guest conductor with the major opera houses of Berlin, Sydney, Brussels, Oslo and Stuttgart, and with numerous orchestras throughout Europe and Asia, including the Royal Concertgebouw of Amsterdam, the Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra, the Orchestra dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia, Rome, the Orchestre National de France, the Oslo Philharmonic, the New Japan Philharmonic, the NHK Symphony Orchestra in Tokyo, the Seoul Philharmonic in South Korea, and leading orchestras in China.

Qigang Chen is one of the most prominent Chinese composers working today, whose music has been commissioned and performed by leading orchestras and musicians around the world. *Er Huang*, commissioned by Carnegie Hall, is based on a number of melodies from Peking operas, nostalgically recollected, while the unusual structure of *Enchantements oubliés* explores a journey into the essence of beauty. *Un temps disparu* features the *erhu*, a two-stringed Chinese fiddle, and makes use of an ancient Chinese melody called *Three Variations on the Plum Blossom*.



QIGANG CHEN

(b. 1951)

- 1 **Er Huang**
for piano and orchestra (2009) **17:22**
- 2 **Enchantements oubliés**
for large string orchestra, harp, piano,
celesta, timpani and percussion (2004) **26:31**
- 3 **Un temps disparu**
for erhu and orchestra (2002) **26:04**

WORLD PREMIÈRE RECORDINGS

Chun-Chieh Yen, Piano 1 • Jiemin Yan, Erhu 3
Taiwan Philharmonic • Shao-Chia Lü

Recorded at the National Concert Hall, Taipei, Taiwan, on 3rd and 4th January, 2014
(tracks 1 and 2), and on 2nd June, 2014 (track 3)

Producer: Shao-Chia Lü • Engineer and editor: Louis Yu

A co-production with Muse Art and Culture Management Co., Ltd.

Publishers: Boosey & Hawkes Music Publishers, Ltd. (track 1);

Gérard Billaudot Éditeur (tracks 2 and 3)

Booklet notes: Qigang Chen • Cover: *Plum Blossom* by Ooyoo (iStockphoto.com)