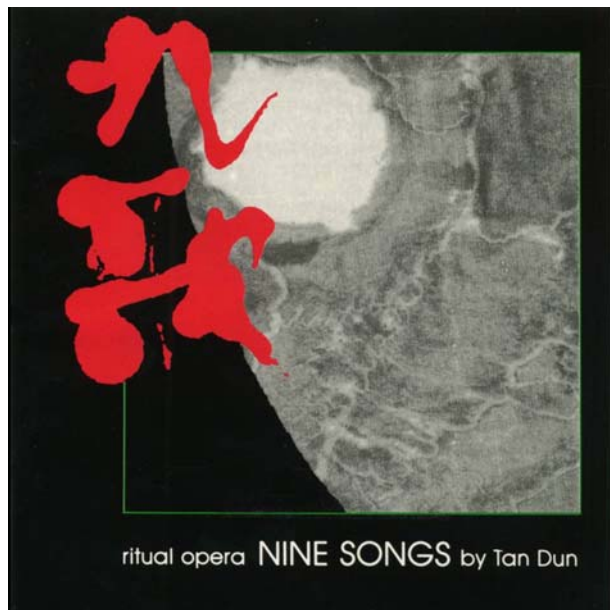


NWCR603

Tan Dun

Nine Songs (*a ritual opera after Qu Yuan*)



Nine Songs (70:33)

1. Sun and Moon (16:21)
2. River (4:06)
3. Water Spirit (5:00)
4. Masters of Fate (12:45)
5. Echo in the Distance (3:43)
6. Eclipse (7:12)
7. In the Mountain (7:48)
8. Souls of the Fallen (7:44)
9. Cycles (5:44)

Performed by Nine Songs Ensemble and
Chorus, Conducted by the composer

Total playing time 70:33

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Notes

Nine Songs

Music and text by Tan Dun

Based on poetry by Qu Yuan (340–277 BC)

Performed by Nine Songs Ensemble and Chorus

Conducted by the composer

with Chen Shi-Zheng

and solo voices in order of appearance:

Tan Dun, Chen Shi-Zheng, Rugh Flugistaller, Milene
Bey, Keith-Frederic Howard, Minako Ohashi, Christine
Sperry, Yasuko Yokoshi, Ching Gonzalez

Chorus:

Nien-Mari Chatz, John Eppler, Carol Flamm, Wang Zuo-
Xin, James Adlesic, Doug Elkins, Navtej Johar, Margery
Segal

Percussion and winds:

Paul Guerguerian, David Anthony, Yiu-Kwong Chung

Chinese winds and percussion:

Liu Qi-Chao

Chinese plucked instruments and percussion:

Yao Ann, Tang Liang-Xing

Contrabassoon and percussion:

Ethan Silverman, Jorge Morera

Xun and percussion:

Tan Dun

Ceramics by Ragnar Naess with the composer

Blowing on bamboo, drumming on
ceramic, playing the snakeskin with
the bow; singing the plain, rough
sounds of the earth, dancing the
movements of spirits... What is
between nature and human beings?
Each day, spirit and environment
become more polluted. Humanity
grows colder, more ignorant, not
respecting even itself.

Har tsei! a shock from the primitive
silence.

Nine Songs is based on ancient poems of the same name by
the great poet Qu Yuan. Written for performance with dance,
music and drama, they are filled with the beauty of nature and
the mysteries of shamanistic ritual. These qualities resonated
with me, because they were also part of life in the remote rural
area where I grew up. In writing *Nine Songs* I drew on ideas
which Qu Yuan's poetry liberated in me. I learned to begin from
the familiar, from the materials I know and love best.

There are several areas which are interesting to talk about
here. One is the design of the voice. I took the tones and
sounds of Chinese dialects, and the declamatory style of local
opera, to compose a kind of vocalizing in between chanting,
yelling, speaking and singing. The vocal line is handled in an
absolutely atonal way (but not in the sense of twelve-tone
pitch design). It is concerned with the relative space between
pitches, of single and multiple voices, and develops single
lines into more complex patterns, creating a texture similar to
Chinese calligraphy.

Then I began to think of my own method for notation of voice movement, as the classical western system was not sufficient. Using the five lines and spaces in between, each one represents a register area of a singer's voice, from highest (the top) to lowest (the bottom). Graphic drawing around horizontal and vertical axes is also used, with timing units noted in seconds. This method can capture almost exactly the vocal character I seek.

In instrumentation, I used the ancient Chinese idea which classifies instruments according to their material, and divided sound into six sections: skin (drums), wood, bamboo, silk (in the strings of plucked instruments), metal, and ceramic, plus the human voice. I thought of a system of ceramics consisting of four sections: struck, blown, bowed and plucked.

In dramatic structure, *Nine Songs* is non-narrative, even surreal. The text is a multi-language construction of abstract sound and form, making an independent but integral contribu-

tion to the musical scoring. It builds on the ritual form of the original poetry, without dramatic development linking the sections; rather, it is the process of development within each section which is important. The ritual character of the original is also reflected in the score: for example in the opening, the conductor acts as shaman, instructing musician and audience how to begin, and continues to conduct through voice and action.

Through these means, *Nine Songs* may also express the ancient relationship of nature, spirit and humanity which is the essence of Qu Yuan's poetry. I hope it may bring the openness, the longing, the strong and dark sense of fate, the search for all kinds of beautiful things, to contemporary people in a tortured world.

—Tan Dun
October, 1990

Text

	1. SUN AND MOON		
(conductor)	A yin shi a yang Not one knows shi what I do ... Raise drumsticks shi Beat drums: Har Tsei Slowly beat shi A quiet Song:		My lord shi Not yet come Blowing reed pipe shi who thinking of? Promise Not True shi Resenting long Not keeping date shi tell me so No Time
(chorus)	Ji		3. WATER SPIRIT
(conductor)	Pipes and zithers shi: join in harmony	(chorus)	Har Tsei Yi Tsei
(chorus)	Rz shi Tsen Liang	(2 voices)	Spirit does what shi down in water? Ride white turtle shi chase 'wen' fish
(solo and 2 voices)	Ji rz shi tsen liang ¹ Mu jiang yu shi sung huang	(chorus)	Har Tsei Yi Tsei
(solo voice)	Lin liang juen shi ji liou ² Lan zao zao shi wei yang Jien jiang dan shi sou gong Yu rz yue shi chi guang	(2 voices)	With woman wander shi on river island Rushing water shi soon come down
(chorus)	Chi guang chi	(chorus)	Oh Oh Chi
(solo voice)	Ei Yi Ya Ya Zi Yo Ei		4. MASTERS OF FATE
(3 voices)	Going to rest shi in house of life His brightness shi like sun and moon Sunmoon Sunmoon Riding dragon shi dressed in splendor He soaring wanders shi through the sky	(all women)	Yi Yi Yi Yi Yi
(chorus)	Sunmoon Sunmoon	(solo voice)	Aryiyiouyiaryi
	2. RIVER	(solo voice)	Qrg Vtd Xps Klj Rzz
(musicians)	Long Yet Shi Te Noo	(solo voice)	All confusion shi In nine lands Life long Or short shi Why with me?
(solo voice)	For Looking		

5. ECHO IN THE DISTANCE

(man) Hartseitsei?
 (woman) Har
 Tsei
 Tsei!
 (man and woman) Har
 Tsei
 Yi
 Hong?
 (man) Hartseiyihong!
 (man) Har tsei
 1 tsei
 2 tsei
 3 tsei
 4 tsei
 5 tsei
 6 tsei
 7 tsei
 8 tsei
 9 tsei?
 (woman) Har tsei
 9 tsei
 8 tsei
 7 tsei
 6tsei
 5 tsei
 4 tsei
 3 tsei
 2 tsei
 1 tseil

6. ECLIPSE

(chorus) Lar
 Jum
 Li
 Jum
 (11 voices) N
 V X
 W E³
 Z R
 S

7. IN THE MOUNTAIN

(solo voice) Yu chu you huang shi⁴
 Zong bu jian tian
 Lu shian nan shi du hou lai
 Blau du li shi
 San zr song
 Yun rong rong shi
 Er zai shia
 (4 women) Woo
 (man) LD
 T P
 bd dl KZ⁵

(4 women) Lei lien lien shi⁶
 (man) Yu
 ming
 ming
 Yuan
 chou
 chou
 (4 women) shi
 (man) Yow
 yeh
 ming
 (4 women) Feng sa sa shi mu shiau shiau
 (man) Sze-
 gong
 zi

(4 women) shi
 Tu li yow

8. SOULS OF THE FALLEN

(chorus) Heavens now fall shi
 Spirits are angry
 Harsh kill all
 (solo voice) shi
 (solo voice) Leave bodies shi
 On the field
 (chorus) shi
 shi
 shi
 shi

9. CYCLES

(conductor) A yin shi a yang
 Not one knows what I do?
 (chorus) Yi
 Yi
 Yi
 Yi
 Yi
 (solo voice) Ceremony done shi beating drums
 Pass 'ba' flower shi to next ones
 Lovely women shi may lead on
 Spring orchids shi
 chrysanthemums in autumn
 Everlasting shi
 End of time
 End of time

¹ Meaning: Lucky day shi time is good, Worship will please shi, lord on high

² Meaning as in paragraph which follows (3 voices)

³ Improvised soundshape, each letter representing a different sound

⁴ Meaning:

One inch think bamboo grove shi
 endless not see sky.
 Road hard and dangerous shi
 lonely come late.
 Standing alone shi on mountain top.
 Clouds peaceful shi there below.

⁵ Improvised soundshape on sounds of percussion ensemble

⁶ Meaning:

Thunder crash crash shi rain dark dark
 Monkey cry cry shi ape night sound
 Wind sigh sigh shi tree blow blow
 Think of man shi in vain grieve alone

Notes on the Text

Qu Yuan (370–277 BC) was one of the greatest Chinese poets, statesman and exile. His work represents the flowering of the ancient culture of Chu, an important kingdom of the Warring States period, located in the area which includes present-day Hunan. Chu culture was rich and distinctive, deeply influenced by shamanism. Qu Yuan's *Nine Songs* appears to have been written as a ritual cycle, and is considered one of the most beautiful works in all of Chinese literature. It is part of *Chu Ci (Songs of the South)*, one of two collections which are the ancestors of Chinese poetry.

Tan Dun's text contains elements of the original poetry, English loosely based on a literal translation of that poetry; and rhythmic devices such as 'shi' (used in every line of the original text) and other syllables created by the composer. In the interests of clarity, only roman orthography is used, not in any formal system of transliteration, but in simple English phonics conveying the—partly imagined—sounds of the ancient Hunan dialect.

Composer **Tan Dun** was born in 1957 in Hunan, China, a region rich in rural tradition and ancient magic. He was deeply influenced by the simple, rough music of celebration and country life, as he grew up in his grandmother's village, and then during the Cultural Revolution was sent with a work brigade to plant rice. He became a fiddle player in local Peking Opera, and later received formal academic training at the Central Conservatory in Beijing for nine years, where he studied with Li Ying-Hai, Zhao Xing-Dao, and visiting western professors. After moving to New York City in 1986, he entered the doctoral degree program at Columbia University, studying with Chou Wen-chung, Mario Davidovsky and George Edwards. Tan won many national prizes for composition in China, and, has received international awards such as a Weber International Composition Prize (Germany), a Bartók Prize (USA), the New Zealand Visiting Composer fellowship, and the Irino Prize (Japan).

His works have been selected for ISCM World Music Days 1988 (Hong Kong) and 1989 (Amsterdam), and the Edinburgh Festival (1990), and are played by major orchestras and ensembles such as the BBC Scottish Symphony, Soviet Broadcast Orchestra, Radio Symfonie Orkest (Netherlands), Tokyo Symphony Orchestra, Lontano (London), the New Music Consort (New York) and the Seymour Group (Australia). Tan's recent United States performances include Music by Tan Dun (Lincoln Center, 1988), the ritual opera *Nine Songs* (New York, 1989) and *Soundshape: for ceramics, voice and movement* (Guggenheim Museum, 1990). He is currently working on his next opera, on the theme of Marco Polo, and preparing *Soundshape* for BAM's Next Wave and other international festivals. Tan Dun has also written many film scores as well as collaborative works for dance and visual arts, and often conducts and performs as soloist.

Nine Songs was first performed in New York City, May 12-21, 1989

Conductor: Tan Dun

Director and choreographer: Yoshiko Chuma

Set, costume and graphic design: Yeh Yung-Ching

Artistic advisor: Chen Shi-Zheng

Ceramics: Ragnar Naess with the composer

Lighting design: Carol Mullins

Producer: Mary Scherbatskoy

Assistant producer: Chao Mei-Wah

Director, Pace Downtown Theater: Dawn Knipe

Nine Songs was commissioned by ARTS, Inc. with public funds from the New York State Council on the Arts, the National Endowment for the Arts, Mary F. Cary Charitable Trust, Meet The Composer, the Albert Kunstader Family Fund, and the family of Buddhist scholar Theodore Stcherbatsky.

Nine Songs received a new production by the City Contemporary Dance Company of Hong Kong, choreographed and directed by Helen Lai, for the Hong Kong Arts Festival in 1991.

Production Notes

Recorded, mastered and manufactured in the United States

Producer: Mary Scherbatskoy

Recording engineer: James Mageras

Mixing at RCA studios, New York by Larry Frank and Dick Baxter

Cover design: Yeh Yung-Ching