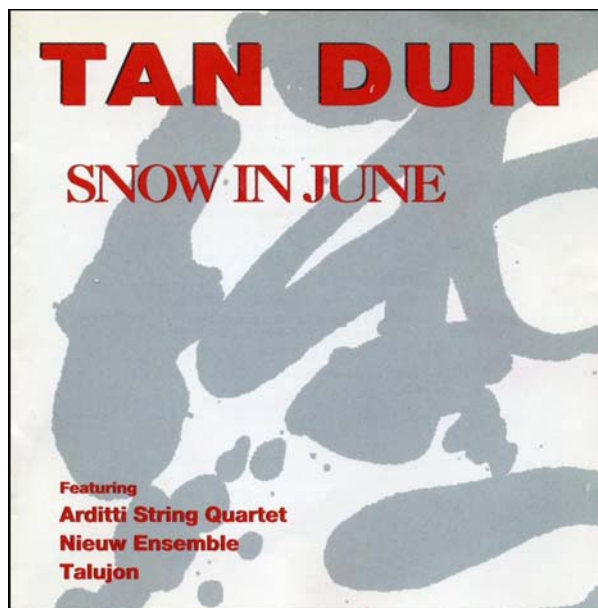


NWCR655  
**Tan Dun**  
*Snow in June*



1. *Circle with Four Trios, conductor and Audience* (1992) ..... (13:20)  
 Nieuw Ensemble; Ed Spanjaard, conductor
2. *Eight Colors for String Quartet* (1986-88) ..... (15:37)
  - I. Peking Opera
  - II. Shadows
  - III. Pink Actress
  - IV. Black Dance
  - V. Zen
  - VI. Drum and Gong
  - VII. Cloudiness
 The Arditti String Quartet
3. *Silk Road* (1989) ..... (11:35)  
 Susan Botti, soprano; Paul Guerguerian, percussion
4. *In Distance* (1987) ..... (13:25)  
 Keri-Lynn Wilson, piccolo; Gillian Benet, harp;  
 Tan Dun, bass drum
5. *Elegy: Snow in June* (1991) ..... (23:03)  
 Anssi Karttunen, cello; Talujon Percussion Quartet;  
 Ed Spanjaard, conductor

Total playing time: 63:27

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## Notes

“What is very little heard in European or Western music is the presence of sound as the voice of nature. So that we are led to hear in our music human beings talking only to themselves. It is clear in the music of Tan Dun that sounds are central to the nature in which we live but to which we have too long not listened. Tan Dun’s music is one we need as the east and the west come together as our one home.”

—John Cage

*Did you see the sound?  
 Hear the shape  
 Catch the wind  
 Can you write it on the sky?*

—Tan Dun,  
*Circle with Four Trios,  
 Conductor and Audience*

Like a Zen master proposing a ko-an riddle to his disciples, composer **Tan Dun** (b1957) challenges us to experience our world in new and provocative ways. Indeed, listening to one of his pieces can actually feel like hearing music for the first time: Tan’s accessible sound world seems familiar, yet remains intriguingly unfamiliar, as he arranges compositional elements into priorities that are astonishing to Western ears. Kaleidoscopically changing tone colors reign supreme, and everyday sounds—like the tearing of paper, clacking of stones, and exhaling of breath—become startlingly poetic. Not surprisingly, Tan’s music was shaped by extraordinary life experiences.

Born in Hunan, China, Tan Dun was raised in a rural area

filled with magic, ritual, and shamanism. Sent to plant rice on a commune during Mao’s Cultural Revolution, Tan was later summoned to play fiddle with the provincial Peking Opera troupe when a number of its musicians drowned in a boat accident. His extensive knowledge of native folksongs led to his acceptance, in 1978, at Beijing’s exclusive Central Conservatory, where he studied with Li Yinghai and Zhao Xingdao. Here Tan intertwined the aesthetic of traditional Chinese music and the mysterious sounds of his childhood in remarkable compositions that stunned and inspired many; in 1983, his *String Quartet: Feng Ya Song* was awarded a Weber Prize in Dresden.

Considered the leading composer of China’s “New Wave,” Tan received a fellowship from Columbia University to study for a doctor of musical arts degree with Chou Wen-chung, George Edwards, and Mario Davidovsky. In 1986 he journeyed to America, where New York City’s rich musical life both stimulated and shocked him. Tan struggled to reconcile his powerfully direct creative impulses with the detached academic compositional style then in favor at American universities; he conscientiously rewrote pieces to add personal touches and elements from Chinese culture.

The five works on this CD, all composed in America, provide a wonderful introduction to Tan Dun’s music. *Eight Colors for String Quartet* (1986–88), the first piece he wrote in New York, shows traces of the Second Viennese School in its atonal harmonic design and thick textures. Nevertheless, it reveals Tan’s distinctive compositional voice in the overlaying of performance techniques borrowed from Peking

Opera (including nasal timbres, glissandi, microtonal pitch bending, and scratchy string bowings). The quartet's eight evocative movement titles provide a compendium of images and colors from Peking Opera, and reflect Tan's feelings about the genre.

Two other works of Tan's dating from this period are *In Distance* for piccolo, harp, and bass drum (1987) and *Silk Road* for soprano and percussion (1989). *In Distance* deals with "distances" both personal and musical. Through its juxtaposition of, and conflict between, Chinese folk materials and Western atonality, Tan explores how far he had traveled geographically. (The "folk" tunes in Tan's music are actually original melodies of his.) Likewise, he creates an ethnically diverse color palette by sonically transforming the work's Western instruments into a bamboo flute, koto, and Indian drum through the use of Eastern performance techniques. Musical "distance" is measured by the wide variation in register, timbre (tone color), and dynamic level between the instruments. Other compositional concerns germane to Tan's work as a whole also may be observed here. Silence, achieved in part through transparent textures and pointillistic attacks, has been a primary element in Tan's music since his hallmark *On Taoism* for voice and orchestra (1985). Tan's melodies, which he weaves into complex patterns like aural calligraphy, follow the Chinese aesthetic that inflected melodic lines play a more crucial role in music than harmony or counterpoint; in Peking Opera, the attack and decay of pitches, and their inventive sustaining through ornamentation and subtle microtonal shadings, are of paramount importance. Consequently, although the rhythmic subdivision of its individual beats is intricate and highly variable, Tan's music more characteristically reflects the Chinese emphasis on fluid linear movement than the prominent metric pulse of the West.

Tan's fascination with sound is evident in the song *Silk Road*, set to an English text by the contemporary New Mexican poet Arthur Sze. Attracted by the sound of the poetry, Tan deconstructed its words into syllables that he treats primarily as abstract sounds rather than meaningful linguistic units. By performing these in the nuanced style of Peking Opera—which explores gradations of vocalization between whispering, speech, song, and yelling—Tan unites the rhythmic quality of English with the more singing nature of Chinese.

*Elegy: Snow in June* for cello and four percussionists (1991) and *Circle with Four Trios, Conductor, and Audience* (1992) typify Tan's recent works: they are filled with striking, varied contrasts and express, in the composer's words, "the deep singing of the soul and the longings of the human spirit." Initially inspired by Tan's reaction to the Tiananmen Square riots, *Elegy* draws upon a thirteenth-century Chinese drama about a woman wrongly executed. "Even nature cries out for her innocence," Tan explains. "Her blood does not fall to earth, but flies upward; a heavy snow falls in June and a drought descends for three years." Not just a sorrowful lament, *Elegy* is an agitated, personal political statement. It is set in a free variation form, with the cello's fragmentary phrases building to a complete, transcendent thematic statement at the work's conclusion. The romantic, Western melodic style of the cello contrasts with the percussion's hint of jazz and ethnic culture; rough, decaying percussive sounds oppose the soloist's sustained lyricism. *Elegy* also exemplifies the extremely significant role percussion plays in Tan's music, due to its ability to produce myriad timbral sonorities ranging from the primitive to quasi-electronic. Indeed, timbral development is so important in Tan's compositions that it—

and not functional harmony—governs his large-scale formal plans.

A sense of timelessness pervades *Circle*, which spatially distributes four trios (representing the Chinese classifications of struck, plucked, bowed, and blown instruments) around the concert hall to enfold listeners in a "sacred circle of sound, space, and silence." Based on a haunting fragment of ancient Greek music, *Circle* was conceived as a ritual, with the conductor as high priest and the audience briefly participating as improvisers of "twittering, gossiping, and shouting." (This renewing of the audience's active role in musicmaking is one of Tan's major concerns.) Influenced by John Cage and Taoist philosophy, Tan uses silence—and degrees of silence—both as "melody" and to carry subtle thoughts and movement. The score is filled with breath and the wind, which Tan considers an echo of the soul, as well as sounds of nature both peaceful and foreboding ("The tree waits to rest, but the wind never stops"). Through these voices of nature and silence, we hear the unexpected and unknown.

Today, Tan's music is performed and celebrated internationally; recently he became the youngest recipient of Japan's prestigious Suntory Commission. Indeed, he has traveled a great distance from the Chinese villages where he once led peasants in impromptu musical celebrations on cooking pots. And although the future is impossible to predict, certainly Tan Dun will continue to offer us a singular chance to reconnect with the earth and the authentically human, and to hear, and sing, the songs of our souls.

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**The Arditti String Quartet** Since its foundation by Irvine Arditti in 1974, the Arditti String Quartet has acquired a worldwide reputation as preeminent interpreters of contemporary music, and of earlier twentieth-century music. With a handful of exceptions, the Quartet has worked with every contemporary composer whose music they play: they consider this vital to the process of interpreting modern music. Part of their objective is to encourage composers of all styles to compose for the string quartet. As a result, each season brings a fresh crop of first performances for the Arditti Quartet. Recent seasons have included premieres by Aperghis, Boesmans, Bryars, Bussotti, Cage, Carter, de Pablo, Donatoni, Dusapin, Fernyhough, Gubaidulina, Harvey, Kagel, Kurtag, Nancarrow, Nono, Pousseur, Reynolds, Rihm, Scelsi, Sciarrino, Sorensen, Xenakis and Yim. Future commissions include works by Ligeti and Stockhausen.

The Arditti String Quartet have given master classes in many countries for performers and composers, and since 1982 its members have been resident string tutors at the Darmstadt Summer Courses for New Music. The Quartet's discography numbers well over thirty CDs which are available worldwide. Many of these have been awarded prizes including the *Choc du Monde de la Musique* for their CD of John Cage's String Quartets on Mode; the *Grand Prix du Disque* awarded by the Académie Charles Cros, the International Record Critics' Award for their Elliott Carter recordings; and the Deutsche Schallplattenpreis for their recording of Hans Werner Henze's String Quartets. The members of the Arditti String Quartet include: Irvine Arditti, violin; David Alberman, violin; Garth Knox, viola, and Rohan de Saram, cello.

The **Nieuw Ensemble** was created in 1980 with the aim to not only perform modern music, but to encourage its composition. They have therefore given many world premiere performances both in Holland, their base, and abroad. Their growing reputation and public success mark them as one of today's outstanding modern music ensembles. They have

recently been working with Boulez, Donatoni, Kurtag, Ferneyhough and Kagel, and have appeared at international festivals including Brussels, Strasbourg, Huddersfield, Turin, Venice, and the Holland Festival. Ed Spanjaard has been conductor of the Nieuw Ensemble since 1982. Members of the Nieuw Ensemble performing on this recording include: Harrie Starreveld, flute; Ernest Rombout, oboe; Arjan Kappers, clarinet; Hans Wesseling, mandolin; Helenuis de Rijke, guitar; Ernestine Stoop, harp; John Sniijders, piano; Herman Halewijn, percussion; Marijke van Kooten, violin; Miriam van Dixhoorn, viola; Taco Kooistra, cello; and Niek de Groot, contrabass.

**Talujon Percussion Quartet** is dedicated to exploring and expanding contemporary percussion repertory. Through the performance of twentieth-century percussion classics as well as the music of new and emerging composers, Talujon presents programs which are diverse, educational and provocative. Based in New York City, the group maintains a busy and expanding concert schedule. Talujon members also play regularly with other outstanding contemporary ensembles including the New Music Consort, Parnassus, Group for Contemporary Music, Speculum Musicae, Newband, and the Tibetan Singing Bowl Ensemble. They have recorded on New World, Nonesuch, Mode, Bridge, CRI, and Musical Heritage Society labels and have appeared at international festivals from Bang on a Can to the Moscow New Music Festival. Members of Talujon performing on this recording include: Paul Guerguerian, Daniel Kennedy, John Ferrari, and Michael Lipsey.

**Ed Spanjaard**, conductor, has established his name internationally, conducting the London Philharmonic in Mozart's *Così fan tutte* during the Glyndebourne Festival, the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, and the Ensemble Intercontemporain among others. He has been an assistant to Bernard Haitink, Herbert von Karajan, and Sir Georg Solti, and has worked with singers including Elisabeth Söderström, Frederica von Stade, and Elly Ameling. His repertoire covers a broad spectrum of opera, orchestral and chamber music. In 1991, he gave highly successful performances of a new production of *Aida* in Amsterdam with Maria Chiara. As a conductor/pianist, he performs Mozart and Beethoven concertos. Ed Spanjaard has been the chief conductor of the Nieuw Ensemble (Amsterdam) since 1982.

**Anssi Karttunen**, cello, leads a busy career as a soloist and interpreter of contemporary and baroque works, performing

extensively in Europe and the Americas. Esa-Pekka Salonen has called him "one of the brightest talents of his generation." He has participated in many of the leading European festivals such as Edinburgh, Spoleto, Venice, Montpellier, Darmstadt and Helsinki. In 1992 he will perform four concerts with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, and two at the Barbican Centre in London as well as recitals at the Centre Pompidou and Merkin Hall. He records principally for Finlandia.

**Susan Botti**, soprano, specializes in twentieth-century works, and has performed music by composers such as Boulez, Berio, Kurtag, Walton, York, Pennycook, and Partch, as well as performing her own compositions. Ms. Botti is frequently featured in works by Tan Dun, and has performed his music at the Edinburgh International Festival, Aldeburgh Proms, and Hong Kong Arts Festival. In 1990 after winning the first Marzena New Music performance competition, she presented a recital as part of the Seattle Spring Festival of Contemporary Music. She recently has worked with composers Sofia Gubaidulina, and Toshio Hosokawa. In the theater, she has worked with Robert Wilson and Andre Serban.

**Keri-Lynn Wilson**, piccolo, flutist, and conductor, made her Carnegie Recital Hall debut on flute in 1988 and her conducting debut with the National Arts Center Orchestra of Canada in 1990. She has been a soloist with Canada's leading orchestras and regularly appears on Canadian Broadcasting Corporations television and radio broadcasts. A recipient of the Bruno Walter conducting fellowship, she is currently pursuing her master's degree at the Juilliard School under the tutelage of Otto-Werner Muller. She holds both bachelor's and master's degrees in flute from Juilliard, where she studied with Julius Baker.

**Gillian Benet**, harp, was recently lauded by *Gramophone* magazine as performer of "the best recent recording" of Debussy's *Sonata for Flute, Viola, and Harp* with the Atlantic Sinfonietta. Miss Benet won two first prizes in the American Harp Society's National Competition and recently was first prizewinner in the society's Anne Adams competition. She was appointed principal harpist of the New Haven Symphony in 1989 and has appeared with the American Ballet Theater, New York Virtuosi Chamber Society, and the Juilliard Orchestra under the batons of Zubin Mehta, Otto Werner-Muller, Gerard Schwarz, Leonard Slatkin, and Samuel Wong at Carnegie and Avery Fisher halls and at the Metropolitan Opera House.

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## Production Notes

Produced by Tan Dun

Executive Producer: Mary Scherbatskoy

*Eight Colors* recorded February 28, 1992 at BMG Studios, New York. Engineers: Paul Goodman; Dennis Ferrante. *Circle* recorded May 13, 1992 at Concertgebouw, Amsterdam, by NOS Music Radio. Produced by Co de Kloet. Engineers: Willem Mulder and Hans van der Kant. Used by permission of NOS Radio and the Nieuw Ensemble. *Silk Road, Elegy*, and *In Distance* recorded June 4, 1992 at BMG Studios, New York. Engineer: Jay Newland. Editing and Mastering Engineer: Vince Caro.

*Elegy: Snow in June* first performed at Symphony Space, NYC on June 26, 1991 by the New Music Consort with Madeleine Shapiro, cello, and Claire Heldrich, conductor.

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