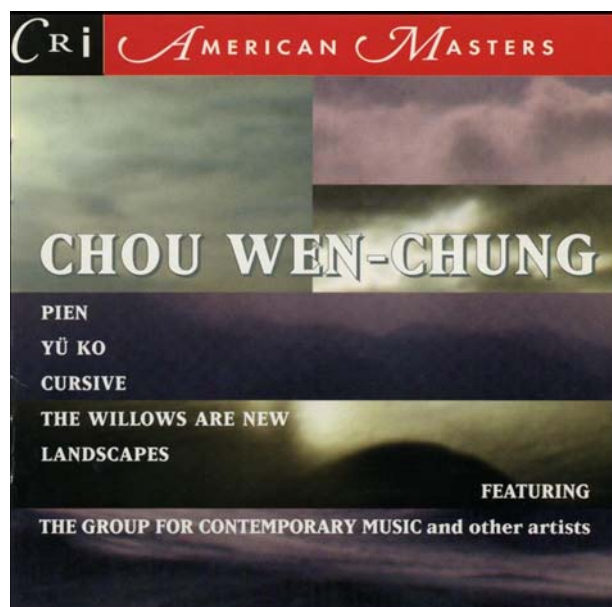


# NWCR691

## Chou Wen-chung



1. *Pien* for Piano, ten winds and four percussion (1966) ..... (12:50)  
Group for Contemporary Music at Columbia University; Erich Louis Graf, flute; Sophie Sollberger, alto flute; Josef Marx, English horn; Donald MacCourt, bassoon; Jack Kreiselman, clarinet; Barry Benjamin, French horn; Ronald Anderson, trumpet; Gerard Schwarz, trumpet;

James A. Biddlecome, trombone; Robert E. Biddlecome, bass trombone; Charles Wuorinen, piano; Claire Heldrich, Raymond Des Roches, Richard Fitz, Howard Van Hyning, percussion; Harvey Sollberger, conductor

2. *Yü Ko* for violin, wind instruments, piano and percussion (1965) ..... (4:58)  
Group for Contemporary Music at Columbia University; Jeanne Benjamin, violin; Erich Louis Graf, flute; Sophie Sollberger, alto flute; Josef Marx, English horn; Jack Kreiselman, bass clarinet; James A. Biddlecome, trombone; Robert E. Biddlecome, bass trombone; Charles Wuorinen, piano; Raymond Des Roches, Richard Fitz, percussion; Harvey Sollberger, conductor
3. *Cursive* (1963) ..... (12:28)  
Harvey Sollberger, flute; Charles Wuorinen, piano
4. *The Willows Are New* (1957) ..... (7:04)  
Yi-an Chang, piano
5. *Landscapes* (1949) ..... (8:08)  
Peninsula Festival Orchestra; Thor Johnson, conductor

Total playing time: 61:04

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## Notes

“It is difficult to over-estimate Chou Wen-chung's importance. [His work] is of considerable significance in the slow rapprochement of Western and Eastern music in the second half of the twentieth century. . .”

—Brian Morton, *Contemporary Composers*, 1992

“But a really profound ‘meeting of East and West’—on the philosophical, aesthetic, and technical levels—has rarely been achieved. Perhaps it required a composer from the East, but one with thorough mastery of Western traditions and techniques, to accomplish this creative synthesis. Such a composer is Chou Wen-chung. . .”

—Gilbert Chase, *America's Music*, 1966

“As in the case of Schoenberg, an approach to music that seemed violently extreme and intensely personal turns out to have unexpectedly seminal possibilities.”

—Alfred Frankenstein, *High Fidelity*, April, 1956

For half a century, **Chou Wen-chung** has been advocating what he termed “a re-merger of Eastern and Western musical concepts and practices”—believing the two traditions once shared the same sources but witnessed a thousand years of divergence. To Chou, merging the East and West requires a process of cross-pollination that transcends cultural colonialism or chauvinism and places equal value on both traditions. It is the unwavering commitment to this vision that critics have deemed his work seminal, significant, and profound.

Eastern concepts in his music include Taoist affinity to nature, *I Ching's* (Book of Change) concept of change, the yin-yang theory of complements, the poetics of motion in calligraphy and painting, the timbral and imagistic richness of *ch'in* (or Chinese zither) music, the pictorialism of Chinese poetry, the elegant formal designs of East Asian music (from which Chou developed his theories of single tones and variable modes), and the music theory and practices of India and Southeast Asia. Western tradition, as embodied by the contrapuntal and harmonic discipline of Bach, the rhythmic and thematic plasticity of Brahms, the coloristic and formal inventions of Debussy, and the spatial and geometric concepts of sound of Varèse, is absorbed into his music.

Chou shares with these composers independence in musical thinking, showing in his music deep philosophical underpinning, technical integrity, formal elegance, and executive finesse.

Chou was born in Chefoo (Yentai), China in 1923, to a family of *wenren*, or “literati.” Urged to help rebuild war-torn China, he studied civil engineering, earning a baccalaureate. He came to the U.S. in 1946 on an architecture scholarship at Yale University but gave it up to pursue music instead, studying with Varèse, Martinů, Slonimsky, and Luening, and attending the New England Conservatory of Music and Columbia University.

He secured his international reputation with such orchestral works as *Landscapes* (1949), *All in the Spring Wind* (1953),

and *And the Fallen Petals* (1954). Over the years, the aesthetics of fusion has become ever more all-embracing. And his recent works, *Echoes from the Gorge* (1989), *Windswept Peaks* (1990) and *Concerto for Violoncello and Orchestra* (1992), continue to break new grounds for Chou—the last being among his first traversals into an established Western idiom (a concerto). He is member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters (1982), honorary member of the Asian Composers League (1981) and the International Society for Contemporary Music (1994).

Chou has involved himself not only as artist, but as teacher, scholar, cultural advocate and administrator, adhering to the *wenren* tradition of service as an integral part of a complete artist. As Varèse's executor, Chou completed the unfinished *Nocturnal*, and edited and prepared new editions of other works. He has written widely on contemporary and Chinese music. He was the first technical assistant at Columbia's Electronic Music Laboratory (1955–7). A teacher for three decades at Columbia (1964–1991), Chou became its first Fritz Reiner professor of musical composition (1984). He also served as academic dean of its School of the Arts (1976–1987) and chairman of its doctoral composition program (1969–1989). He was president (1970–1975) of Composers Recording, Inc. In 1978, Chou founded the Center for U.S.-China Arts Exchange. Its recent projects include the Pacific Music Festival, involving Asian countries and the West, and the Yunnan Project, created to preserve and develop minority cultures in that Chinese province. He was honored by a John D. Rockefeller Award (1992) for "significant contribution to the understanding, practice or study of the visual or performing arts of Asia."

The *wenren* impulse of leadership, vision, service and contribution that impels Chou to work so widely and deeply on behalf of others also ultimately explains the pioneering spirit in his music: "If the future of creative music really is a 'Pacific' synthesis which absorbs the best of the European émigré avant-garde, native American and Commonwealth music, and the arts of South and East Asia, then Chou Wen-chung is already at the vanguard. He belongs with the *wenren*, the 'engineer-pioneers in art.'" (Morton)

*Pien* (1966), meaning transformation, is synonymous with "i" of *I Ching*. In philosophy, it evolves from simplicity to complexity, complexity to phenomena, phenomena to its conglomeration and dispersion, and finally invariability. Also at work is the yin-yang concept of complement, which controls instrumental interaction. The piano and winds, the pitched entity, alternate horizontally to form a composite line, while the percussion, the non-pitched entity, interacts vertically with the pitched entity by amplifying and reflecting its material.

*Pien* uses six variable modes. Their progression "takes the form of six interacting textures, each of which has not only six variable modes in pitch organization but also six each in the organizations of duration, intensity, and articulation." These thematic, rhythmic and timbral cells, constantly recombined, produce prismatic gatherings and dispersals of energy.

*Yü Ko* (1965), or "fisherman's song," is originally an ancient

*ch'in* (zither) melody in tablature notation composed by Mao Min-chung (c.1280). The fisherman is a symbol of man in communion with nature. Through the deciphering of the tablature notation, this work produces a modern adaptation that realizes the rich variety in tone production found in the precise *ch'in* finger technique, one that employs over a hundred symbols to achieve an elusive yet vital expression that is the essence of this art. The composer clarifies: "I have magnified . . . these inflections in pitch, articulation, timbre, dynamics and rhythm to a more perceptible level by expanding the articulations and timbres possible on each instrument used and by controlling the microtonal modifications in pitch according to the nature of each instrument."

*Cursive* (1963) "refers to the type of script in which the joined strokes and rounded angles result in expressive and contrasting curves and loops," Chou explains. This script epitomizes the Chinese calligraphic art, as its expressiveness hinges on the spontaneous movement of the brush under the calligrapher's control to project density, texture and poise.

Musically the cursive concept influences "the use of specified but indefinite pitches and rhythm, regulated but variable tempo and dynamics, as well as various timbres possible on the two instruments." The piano serves as reflection of the flute by "extending" its range into the lower register and by matching the flute's varied timbral resources, such as microtonal trills and flutter tonguing, using plucked piano strings and foreign materials between these strings.

*Yang Kuan*, another *ch'in* work bearing the name of the poem by Wang Wei (689–759) that inspires it, has been refashioned into a composition in which "mutations of the original material are woven over the entire range of the piano and embroidered with sonorities that are the magnified reflexes of brushstroke-like movements." The title *The Willows Are New* (1957) comes from a line of the poem. The composer's translation follows:

In this town by the river,  
morning rain  
has cleared the light dust.

Green, green around the tavern,  
the willows are new.\*

Let us empty another cup of wine

For, once west of Yang Kuan\*\*  
there will be no more friends.

\*Sprigs of willow, used in farewell ceremonies, are a symbol of parting.

\*\*Yang Kuan is a mountain pass, known as the point of no return for a traveler.

*Landscapes* (1949) employs three traditional Chinese melodies to create three "landscapes": "Under the Cliff in the Bay," "The Sorrow of Parting," and "One Streak of Dying Light." The poems, postdating these melodies associated with them by centuries, are in the composer's translation.

—David Tsang © 1995

I.  
Old fisherman, with a fishing rod,  
Under the cliff, in the bay,  
Sailing a small boat freely here and there,  
Dots of sea gulls afar over the light waves,  
Expanse of rustling reeds chilly under the bright sky;  
Singing a song aloud with the sun setting low;  
All of a sudden, the waves rock in the golden light;  
Looking up—the moon has climbed over the eastern hill.

*Cheng Hsieh (1693-1965)*

II.  
My carriage has barely paused,  
    yet he is already beyond the plains,  
In no time, far away at the edge of the sky.  
Pleasant dreams tonight—where can they be found?  
Instead, only the sound of the temple bell,  
    the midnight rain, the ravens' cry at the break of dawn.  
Too grieved to face the fallen petals floating in the wind,  
Too frightened to see the evening sunlight reflect in the clouds;  
The sorrow of parting—I tell it to the lute.  
Broken heart left at the river—into whose courtyard has it been blown?  
Dreams are coming, the candle is flickering, pillows awry.

*Ting P'eng (c.1661)*

III.  
Green, green the grass west of the pavilion,  
The clouds low, the cries of the wild geese faint,  
Two lines of sparse willows,  
One streak of dying light,  
Hundreds of homing ravens dotting the sky.

*Liu Chi (1311-1375)*

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## Production Notes

Originally produced by Carter Harman

From CRI SD 122:

*Landscapes*

Recorded in the Gibraltar Auditorium in August 1957, The Peninsula Music Festival, Fish Creek, Wisconsin.

From CRI SD 251"

*Pien, Cursive, The Willows Are New*

*Pien* recorded by Jerry Bruck, engineer. *Cursive* and *The Willows Are New* recorded by Jerry Newman, engineer. Funded by an award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the Martha Baird Rockefeller Fund for Music, and the Alice M. Ditson Fund of Columbia University.

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