

NWCR804
Chen Yi
 Sparkle



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| <p>1. <i>Sparkle</i> (1992) (12:03)
 New Music Consort: David Fedele, flute, piccolo;
 Sean Osborn, E-flat clarinet; Rolf Schulte, violin;
 Theodore Mook, cello; Victor Kioulphides, bass;
 William Trigg, percussion; Michale Lipsey,
 percussion; Christopher Oldfather, piano; Claire
 Heldrich, conductor</p> | <p>2. <i>Song In Winter</i> (1993) (6:40)
 Joyce Lindorff, harpsichord; Wei Lai-Gen, dizi;
 Yang Yi, zheng</p> <p>3. <i>Qi</i> (1997) (10:10)
 New Music Consort: David Fedele, flute;
 Theodore Mook, cello; Philip Bush, piano;
 William Trigg, percussion</p> <p>4. <i>Duo Ye</i> (1984/1995) (7:26)
 Min Xiao-Fen, pipa solo</p> <p>5. <i>Shuo</i> (1994) (8:26)
 Members of the Manhattan String Quartet: Eric
 Lewis, Calvin Wiersma, violins; John Dexter,
 viola; Chris Finckel, cello; Donald Palma, bass</p> <p>6. <i>As In A Dream</i> (1988/1994) (7:46)
 Rao Lan, soprano; Min Xiao-Fen, pipa;
 Yang Yi, zheng</p> <p>7. <i>Near Distance</i> (1988) (8:43)
 New York New Music Ensemble: Jayn Rosenfeld,
 flute, alto flute; Jean Kopperud, clarinet, bass
 clarinet; Laura Frautschi, violin; Christopher
 Finckel, cello; Edmund Niemann, piano; Pablo
 Rieppi, percussion; Jeffrey Milarsky, conductor</p> |
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Total playing time: 62:04
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Notes

I express my feelings through my music, which combines Chinese and Western musical materials and media. This disc presents most of my important chamber works from the last ten years. The inspirations and ideas behind the pieces are mostly Chinese. But the instrumentations of the pieces usually came from the musicians in America who suggested or commissioned them. I am pleased that so many of the outstanding performers and good friends who premiered the works are performing them here.

In *Sparkle*, I want to express my impressions of sparks—everlasting flashes of wit, so bright, nimble and passionate. The material of pitch, rhythm and form in the piece are drawn from the tune and the structural method of traditional Chinese *baban* (eight beats) rules of the grouping of notes.

Sparkle was commissioned by the New Music Consort with funds provided by the Mary Flagler Cary Charitable Trust. Claire Heldrich conducted the premiere on October 21, 1992, at the Borden Auditorium, Manhattan School of Music. The piece is dedicated to professor Mario Davidovsky, who enthusiastically encouraged me to share my experience with audiences in America and abroad.

Song in Winter is a trio written for harpsichord, dizi (bamboo flute), and zheng (Chinese zither). My idea for this piece came from the pine and the bamboo. Such persistent and dauntless trees! Standing in the frigid winter, they are

evergreens. In Chinese paintings, they are the featured characters, while in Chinese literature, they are praised as symbols against evil influences and unhealthy trends. I admire their beautiful appearances and their strong spirits. Using the harpsichord, an old Western instrument, and the zheng and dizi, two old Chinese instruments, I mix keyboard, plucking, and blowing instruments into a whole.

Song in Winter was commissioned and inspired by professor Joyce Lindorff, the winner of Pro Musicis Foundation's international competition, for her March 23, 1994 concert at the Weill Recital Hall in New York, sponsored by the Foundation. It is dedicated to Ms. Lindorff and Ms. Susan Cheng, the founder and executive director of Music From China, who has been enthusiastically supporting Chinese new music in New York for many years.

In *Qi*, I used a mixed combination of western instruments, to create the sound from east and to abstractly express my feelings of *Qi* (also written as "chi," it is a name for the life force). It is untouchable, mysterious, yet strong and powerful. It melts into air and light, like the space in Chinese paintings, filled into the dancing lines in Chinese calligraphy. It is also the spirit in the human mind. In my composition, I translate my general feeling of the *Qi*, the element of nature, into my musical language in a quite free and slow tempo. There are also exaggerated textures with tension, in which I try to sound

the inner voices and spirit of human beings, to experience this eternal power.

The work was commissioned by New York's New Music Consort, the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players, and the Los Angeles Philharmonic, with a grant provided by the Meet The Composer/Reader's Digest consortium commissioning program. I've dedicated the work to professor Chou Wen-chung on his seventy-fifth birthday in 1998, to express my deep gratitude to his mentorship in my composition concept and artistic thoughts.

Duo Ye is a form of age-old traditional song and dance of the Dong minority of the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region of China, in which people stand in a circle and dance in slow steps while singing "Ya Duo Ye" in chorus. The lead singer extemporizes the words of the song to perhaps welcome guests or to celebrate a happy occasion. In 1980, I traveled to the district of the Dong and Yao minorities in Guangxi province with a group of composers from the Central Conservatory of Music. The warm scene left such a deep impression on me that I wrote the piano solo piece *Duo Ye* as a result of this field trip. The piece won the first prize at the Fourth Chinese National Composition Competition in 1985.

For Music From China's Premiere Works V concert, I rewrote the piece for pipa solo, with the fingering by Min Xiao-Fen, who gave the premiere of this version at Merkin Concert Hall in New York, October 28, 1995.

Shuo is written for string orchestra or string quintet. The word "shuo" in Chinese means initiate. It represents the first day of every month in the lunar calendar. In my piece *Shuo*, I applied initial materials taken from Chinese folk music, in terms of tunes and mountain song singing gestures, and developed them for string instruments. The pentatonic lines are woven vividly in different layers to paint a delicate oriental landscape.

Based on the first movement of my 1982 string quartet, the work was commissioned by San Jose Chamber Orchestra (directed by Barbara Day Turner) for the opening concert of its 1994-95 season and is dedicated to professor Wu Zu-Qiang, my composition teacher at the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing, who brought me into the professional composition field and guided me to find my own voice in new music creation.

As in a Dream is a set of two songs for soprano, pipa (Chinese lute), and zheng (Chinese zither). Sung in Chinese, the words of the songs come from two poems by a famous poetess, Li Qing-Zhao, of the Song Dynasty (960-1279). The reciting speech and lingering charm of the Chinese traditional opera are absorbed as nourishment to transmit sentimental feelings—remembering happy past times, treasuring flowers and spring scenery.

The original version of *As in a Dream* was written for soprano, violin, and cello and premiered by the Inoue Chamber Ensemble at Weill Recital Hall in New York in 1988. The alternative version for Chinese instruments was written in 1994, and premiered at Music From China's Premiere Works IV concert at Merkin Hall; it is dedicated to soprano Rao Lan, who inspired me to write this piece.

Near Distance is a sextet subtitled "lost in thought about ancient culture and modern civilization." It expresses my thinking about the parallels and contrasts between the East and the West. *Near Distance* takes us through a journey that covers thousands of miles and thousands of years. Contrasting moments of dense, busy activity with sparse, haunting lines, I try to bridge the gap between the timeless history of my homeland and the ever-changing, energetic life in the modern society.

The work was originally written under the request of professor Jacob Druckman, for a composition workshop at the Aspen Music Festival. It is dedicated to his memory with admiration and respect.

—Chen Yi

As In A Dream

I. I remember many times

We were in the sunset

At the pavilion by the rivulet,

Got drunk and lost our way back.

Returned by boat after thoroughly enjoying ourselves,

By mistake we went into the recesses of the clusters of lotus.

Paddled by bending to the oars,

Roused the gulls and egrets to flight

From the sand bars.

II. Last night fine rain, gusts of wind,

Deep sleep could not dissolve the leftover wine.

I asked the person who was rolling up my curtains,

The answer was: "The begonias are still the same."

"Don't you know? Don't you know it is time

For the green to flourish and the red to wither?"

Chen Yi (b 1953) is recognized as one of the most important and talented composers of her generation. Her orchestral, chamber, and vocal works are widely performed in the U.S. and abroad, and she has received commissions and awards from numerous prominent performing organizations and funding institutions.

Chen Yi is a native of Guangzhou, China, and a graduate of the Central Conservatory of Beijing, where she studied composition with Wu Zu-Qiang and Alexander Goehr. She came to the United States in 1986 and received a D.M.A. degree with distinction in May 1993 from Columbia University, where her principle teachers were Chou Wen-chung and Mario Davidovsky.

As part of the Meet The Composer New Residencies program, Chen Yi served as composer-in-residence from 1993 to 1996 for three San Francisco organizations: The Women's Philharmonic, the vocal ensemble Chanticleer, and the Aptos Creative Arts Program for middle school children. The residency culminated in June 1996 with a three-day festival of Chen Yi's music at the Center for the Arts Theater, in the Yerba Buena Gardens of San Francisco. Included were performances by the Philharmonic, Chanticleer, and the Lily Cai Chinese Dance Company, and works from the festival were recorded and released on the New Albion label. The composer continues as a new music advisor to the Philharmonic and Chanticleer.

From 1996 to 1998, Chen Yi was a member of the composition faculty of Peabody Conservatory at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. In the fall of 1998 she became the Lorena Searcy Cravens/Millsap/Missouri Distinguished Professor in Composition at the Conservatory of the University of Missouri-Kansas City. Chen Yi also maintains a home in New York City with her husband, the composer Zhou Long. Since 1986, Zhou and Chen have participated in and advised the Music From China program, which produces annual concerts in New York.

Chen Yi's awards include the first prize from the China National Composition Competition, the NEA composer fellowship, the Guggenheim Fellowship, the Goddard Lieberman Fellowship from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the Lili Boulanger Award from the Women's Philharmonic, the 1996 Sorel Medal for Excellence in Music

from the Center for Women in Music at New York University, and the 1997 CalArts Alpert Award. Commissioning grants have been received from Meet The Composer/Reader's Digest, the Koussevitzky Foundation, the Fromm Music Foundation at Harvard University, Chamber Music America, the Ford and the Rockefeller Foundations, Mary Flagler Cary Charitable Trust, the Creative Work Fund, Eastman School of Music, the San Francisco Art Commission, and the New York State Council on the Arts, among others.

*Chen Yi's family name is Chen; her personal name is Yi. She can be referred to as Chen Yi, Chen, Dr. Chen, or Ms. Chen.

Joyce Lindorff, harpsichord, is the recipient of the National Endowment for the Arts Solo Recitalist Grant, and the Pro Musicis Artist Sponsorship award. She holds degrees from Sarah Lawrence, University of Southern California, and Juilliard, where she earned a doctorate as a student of Albert Fuller. Before she joined the music faculty of Temple University in 1997, she had taught at Baptist University, Chinese University, and the Academy for Performing Arts in Hong Kong, at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, the Lincoln Center Institute, and Cornell University. Her records include music of Meyer Kupferman, several discs of chamber music with members of the Boston Symphony, the complete *Rossignolo* of Poglietti for Titanic Records, and a CD of

contemporary works by Henze, Ligeti, Weber, and Takemitsu.

Min Xiao-Fen, pipa, was born into a famed family of musicians. A winner of numerous competitions, she appeared as pipa soloist with the Nanjing National Music Orchestra. Since her arrival in the United States in 1992, her major performances include appearances with the Brooklyn Philharmonic, the San Francisco Opera Orchestra, the New Music Consort, Chanticleer, and the Women's Philharmonic. Her recording *The Moon Rising* (Cala, UK) was hailed by BBC Music Magazine as "One of the best CDs of 1996." Min Xiao-Fen has also recorded for the Delos, Vanya, Asphodel, and Tzadik labels.

Rao Lan, soprano, was born in Guangzhou, China, where she studied dance and vocal arts. At the age of nineteen she undertook her first concert tour with the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra to Australia, New Zealand, and Hong Kong. Ms. Rao continued her studies in Germany, where she graduated from the Musikhochschule in Frankfurt/Main in 1986, studying with Arleen Auger, and received her degree from Musikhochschule Munich in 1988 under Reri Grist. In 1983, she won the first prize at the international summer course in Vienna, and in 1988, she received a scholarship for "Deutsches Lied" at the BDI international competition in Frankfurt/Main. As a concert soloist, she has performed with many renowned orchestras throughout the world and has also given premieres of many contemporary compositions.

Production Notes

Compact disc produced by Chen Yi and Zhou Long.

Executive producer: Joseph R. Dalton

Engineered by Adrian Carr, Music Designs New York City.

All works recorded 1997–98 at Avatar Studios and Music Designs Studios, New York City, Adrian Carr, recording engineer, except *As in a Dream* recorded at Music From China's concert at Merkin Hall in 1994.

Publishing: All works Theodore Presser (ASCAP).

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