

eXchange: China



1. Ying Zhang: *The Woodman's Song* (1992) (4:49)
Ziu Changfu, erhu; Sun Guisheng, xiao; Gao Hong, pipa; Li Mengfan, zheng; Zhao Taisheng, daruan
2. Ge Gan-Ru: *Yi Feng* (1982) (13:12)
Frank Su Huang, cello
3. Kawai Shiu: *winter tide* (1995) (4:40)
Richard Foster, violin; Jameson Platte, cello; Kim Felder, flute; Katie Helms, clarinet; Kenneth Saxon, piano; Kawai Shiu, conductor
4. Luo Jung Jing: *Mosquito* (1991) (4:16)
Evelyn Luest, piano
5. Jason Kao Hwang: *Flight of Whispers* (1996) (14:43)
Music for Homemade Instruments: Lisa Karrer, four cloud chamber bowls; Jody Kruskal, ninety-six-octave zither; Skip La Plante, kanon (zither); David Simons, eight propane canisters; Carole Weber, two broiler pans; Sima Wolf, thirty-one-octave metal pipes; Jason Kao Hwang, violin
6. James Fei: *Chinese Music* (1997) (2:06)
James Fei, bass clarinet
7. Chen Yuanlin: *Flying Swan* (1992) (11:37)
Ying Yeh, soprano; Michael Lowenstern, clarinet; Ying Zhuo, violin; Chen Yuanlin, electronics
8. Byron Au Yong: *Edge* (excerpt) (1994) (5:10)
Tessa Brinckman, Karl Seely, Loren Dempster, conch shell; Byron Au Yong, Anna Vinten Johansen, prayer bowls; Ian Rashkin, string bass
9. Fred Ho: *Absolute Solo!* (Farewell to the New World Order) (1994) (6:46)
Fred Ho, saxophone
10. Jin Xiang: *Sad Melody at Yanshi City* (1998) (4:50)
Chinese Instrument Orchestra; Jin Xiang, conductor

Total playing time: 72:12

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Notes

As the United States continues to become a home for new immigrants and their children, our culture is continually enlivened by their presence, their living traditions, and their fresh perspectives. This is especially the case in American music, where the weaving of styles and traditions into new musical fabrics is a tradition in itself. There may be no better evidence of these phenomena than the vital Chinese music scene in American today.

CRI has had a long history of recording new music by Chinese American composers. In 1958, the label released the first professional recording of music by Chou Wen-Chung. Because of his distinctive body of music, Chou is recognized as a pioneer at the integration of Chinese music into Western classical traditions, and through his long career at Columbia University and his leadership of its U.S.-China Arts Exchange program, he has been a mentor to many younger Chinese composers living and working in the U.S. today. More recently, in the early 1990s, CRI was the first American label to record and distribute the music of composer and conductor Tan Dun, who has quickly become an internationally known artist. And through our series eXchange: Music at the Crossroads, other important Chinese American composers are being recorded for the first time.

In conceiving the project eXchange: China, CRI sought to highlight quality work of some lesser-known composers who are of Chinese heritage and currently living and working in the U.S. The large number of tapes and scores that came from our "call for submissions" confirmed our belief that there is a great deal of activity not yet documented on disc and that much of it is very good indeed.

Now we are proud to introduce new work from ten distinguished composers. Some of these artists have already made an impact on audiences and the direction of new music, while others are at the beginning stages of their careers. The diversity of their styles and the individuality of their approaches (both musical and political) is ample testimony that they are now a part of the grand and freewheeling tradition of American music!

As with all CRI recordings and especially our recent compact disc collections, we hope listeners find here some comfort and some challenge and are sparked to keep listening and exploring.

— Joseph Ridings Dalton,
— Executive Director, Composers Recordings, Inc.

Ying Zhang (b 1939) was born in the province of Hebei, China. As a boy of 12, Zhang heard traveling flute master Liu Guan-Yeh play. After the concert, he begged to be accepted as a student, and from that moment on, music was his life. Other teachers include Feng Zi-Cun on flute, Luo Zhong-Rong on composing, and Shen Wu-Jiong on conducting. As a woodwind soloist, Zhang performed throughout China, and in Russia, Poland, Romania, France, Belgium, Switzerland, and the U.S. His compositions earned him the title of first class composer, a place in the 1988 Register of Great Musicians, and the coveted Wen Hua Prize. Since moving to the U.S. in 1993, Zhang continues to compose and perform out of his home in Minneapolis, Minnesota. He has received a 1995 McKnight Composer's Fellowship and a 1997 Bush Artist Fellowship Grant, and, most recently, a commission from the American Composers Forum to complete a seasonal cycle of choral works for the Dale Warland Singers. Zhang's new CD, *Stone, Cloud, Water: Chinese Meditations on American Landscapes*, is due out this winter on the Innova Label.

The Woodman's Song (1992)

"I composed *The Woodman's Song* in celebration of simpler times and simpler lives. The anonymous woodcutter who 'rises at dawn and returns at sunset' represents the idyllic life spent doing useful work in nature. Surrounded by the sounds and smells of the forest, the woodcutter is carefree and content, untouched by modern urban noise, pollution, overcrowding, and complexity. *The Woodman's Song* is an instrumental quintet of erhu, xiao, pipa, zheng, and daruan composed in my interpretation of the style of the Ming dynasty."

Ge Gan-Ru (b 1954) was born in Shanghai, China. He received degrees in violin (1978) and composition (1981) from the Shanghai Conservatory of Music where he served as assistant professor of composition from 1981 to 1983. Immigrating to the United States to study composition, he earned his D.M.A. at Columbia University in 1991. His composition teachers include Chen Gang, Alexander Goehr, Chou Wen-Chung, and Mario Davidovsky.

Today Ge leads a dual career as a composer and as a businessman, having co-founded Peony Inc., a leading commodity information provider in New Jersey. As a composer, he has received many commissions and awards including from the NEA, Lincoln Center, and ASCAP, and he has written music for theater, dance, documentary, and films. His concert music has been performed by the New York Philharmonic, BBC Orchestra, Tokyo Philharmonic, American Composers Orchestra, and Hong Kong Philharmonic, among others.

Yi Feng (1982)

"In 1982, when I was teaching at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, Frank Su Huang, a student in my music theory class and also then the principal cellist of the Shanghai Ballet Orchestra, persuaded me to write a piece for him.

"At the time I was at the cross-road of my composing, I felt an uncompromising gap between the twelve-tone music with which I was experimenting and my root music. I was, therefore, exploring how the four basic elements of music (pitch, rhythm, timbre, and dynamic) affect Western and Chinese music.

"I found that the way these elements were represented in Western and Chinese music was very different. For instance, in Western music, the pitch relationship is paramount. But in the Chinese music what is important is the particular pitch and its microtonal and timbral character. Differences in timbre are due to the type of instruments used and to the many and

varied performance techniques. The concept of meter and tempo differs also. The relative consistency of accentuation found in Western music, dictated by meter, is not always present in Chinese music.

"With the above understanding in mind, I started writing *Yi Feng* later in 1982 and completed it within a week. It was premiered by Mr. Huang in Shanghai in the spring of 1983. In the title, "Yi" means something which is lost but could be traced back, and "Feng" means style.

"In *Yi Feng* the cello is tuned in fourths an octave lower than normal for the purpose of setting a new frequency of sound. Because of the loosened strings, the part behind the bridge can be fully utilized. The strings are bowed and plucked in many unconventional ways, and the body is struck in different parts to produce timbres simulating Chinese percussive instruments. All the complexity of rhythm and polyphonic treatment of voices serve to reflect a legacy of the ancient Chinese spirit as the title of the piece expresses.

"*Yi Feng* became a very controversial piece after its premiere. It was the first composition in mainland China to explore extreme individualism. It rebelled against the political and conservative artistic environment then prevailing in China. Its strikingly avant-garde methods of sound production and notation were unheard of at a time when China was barely exposed to twentieth-century music."

Kawai Shiu (b 1967) was raised in Hong Kong and has resided in the U.S. since 1991. He received degrees from Hong Kong Baptist College and the University of Texas at Austin and is a doctoral candidate at the University of Alabama. He has studied with Charles Wuorinen, John Harbison, Peter Westergaard, Robert P. Morgan, Russell Pinkston, Donald Grantham, and Douglas Knehan. He has received a number of American and international awards and fellowships.

His orchestra piece *some other time* was recently released on a Vienna Modern Masters compact disc and a full-length disc of his work entitled *pornography* was released in late 1998 in Hong Kong.

winter tide (1995)

"Born in a place like British Hong Kong, where culture is compressed, diverse, and instantaneous, I grew up as a kind of cultural window-shopper, and Hong Kong is a pretty huge shopping mall in that sense! We have influences reflected in mass media, trends, language, and so forth, from around the world. Churches and Tao temples stand side by side. We race dragon boats and have Christmas Mass. Televisions are flooded with programs from all over the world. The term 'foreign' has no national bias and does not imply rarity. Hong Kong's attitude is open and reckless. Yet, it is not unlike a shopping mall which has trillions of trivialities that may all add up to nothing too important. Spending my formative years in Hong Kong influenced my openness, self-worth, sense of survival, and made me something of a sponge with strong absorption capabilities!

"*winter tide* was written in 1995 when I first moved to Tuscaloosa, Alabama. It was a cold and solitary winter, which inspired me to meditate on the perspective of gradual temporal progression. The piece was also motivated by my several conversations with composer Peter Westergaard concerning visual perception. *winter tide* is a commentary of those thoughts. "Musically, *winter tide* experiments with the cumulative effect of a nuclear two-pitch set, which gradually evolves into a complete harmonic structure of the piece with subtle timbre modulations."

Luo Jing Jing (b 1956) was born in Beijing and studied at Shanghai Conservatory, Columbia University, the New England Conservatory and New York State University at Stony Brook, where she received her Ph.D. in music composition. Her teachers were Sang Tong, Chen Gang, Chou Wen-Chung, Robert Cogan, Malcolm Peyton, and Bulent Aral. She also studied with Jacob Druckman and Bernard Rands at the Aspen Music Festival. Luo is currently teaching at Ashland University in Ohio as an adjunct professor.

Among her awards are a joint fellowship from the Ford and the Rockefeller Foundations in 1983, Individual Artists Fellowships from the Ohio Council on the Arts in 1993, 1995, and 1997, and the 1996 Walter Hinrichsen Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Her music has had performances in China by the China Central Symphony and the Shanghai Symphony Philharmonic, among others, and in the U.S. by the Cleveland Chamber Symphony, the Dale Warland Singers, the Cassatt String Quartet, and the Women's Philharmonic.

Mosquito (1991)

"The music in my piano solo *Mosquito* is meant to convey the insect's persistence power to penetrate in a small but very pointed way, and also something of the irritability of being bitten. The idea of the mosquito provided a starting point for this piece from which I freely improvised. One might think of the mosquito as the dominant of the piece and my own flesh and blood as the tonic.

"The piece is dedicated to my friend Evelyn Luest, who premiered it at the Bloomingdale House of Music in New York City in 1992. Since then, the piece has been performed by various other pianists more than a dozen times around the world. It was awarded an honorary prize from the Fourth Fanny Mendelssohn International Composition in Germany, 1993."

Jason Kao Hwang (b 1957) was born in Waukegan, Illinois, and now resides in Jersey City, New Jersey. In addition to his concert music, he has composed for films, most recently source music for Martin Scorsese's *Kundun*, and also worked with a number of choreographers including Nai-Ni Chen and Risa Jaroslow. His operatic poem *Immigrant of the Womb* was presented by Dance Theater Workshop with support from the NEA. His ensemble, the Far East Side Band, performed in the Beijing International Jazz Festival and has two CDs, *Caverns* (New World) and *Urban Archeology* (Victo). As a violinist, Hwang has also performed with Vladimir Tarasov, Reggie Workman, Anthony Braxton, and many others. He was in the original cast of the Broadway musical *M Butterfly*, performing music he co-arranged. Hwang recently received a Meet The Composer/New Residencies grant to work in Chinatown/Lower East Side of New York City in partnership with the Asia Society, the Museum of Chinese in the Americas, University Settlement House, and Music From China.

Flight of Whispers (1996)

"Music for Homemade Instruments commissioned *Flight of Whispers* in the fall of 1996, about five months after my father's stroke. This music honors his spirit, shares his pain and aspires to incarnate a healing force. The composition has a narrative architecture of both improvisation and traditional notation. As an American-born Chinese, cultural survivals and transformations forge both my unconscious and socialized being. The language of the music intuitively emerges from this experience.

"Music for Homemade Instruments, founded by Skip La Plante and Carole Weber in 1975, is an ensemble of

classically trained musicians who invent, build, compose for, perform on, and teach with musical instruments built from trash and found objects. *Flight of Whispers* employs 'found' propane canisters, cloud chamber bowls (sawed off wine gallon bottles), thirty-one notes to the octave zither ('found' wire strings resting on a steel rod), and broiler-pan gongs, along with my violin. My thanks to Skip for introducing me to this wild array of instruments and for giving me constructive feedback on the first sketch. And my thanks to the musicians who illuminated the music with their dedicated and highly individual imaginations. Finally, my thanks to CRI for sharing the musical diversity of the Chinese American experience with the public."

James Fei (b 1974) was born in Taipei, Taiwan. He began his studies in electrical engineering at Princeton University, subsequently entering Wesleyan University's graduate program in composition. He has studied with Anthony Braxton, Alvin Lucier, Steve Mackey, and Louis Andriessen. A woodwind multi-instrumentalist and conductor, he has been active in the performance of works by himself, Braxton, Lucier, and his colleagues. He has written compositions for soloists, small ensembles, and orchestra. His *for orchestra* (March 1998) was performed by the Wesleyan University Orchestra in May 1998.

Chinese Music (1997)

"Growing up in Taiwan, Chinese music to me was almost exclusively nationalistic songs. Next to nothing else was taught in music classes, and we had to sing these songs several times during the school day (the national anthem was also played before all concerts and movies). Music was a tool to control the masses, used to cast Chinese communists as villains and to establish nationalist heroes such as Chang Kai-Shek firmly in the minds of children.

Chinese Music (1997) asks the performer to sing the melody of "Remembering Sun Yat-Sen" through the bass clarinet. This was a song which I memorized—like many others—well before understanding the significance of the text. Sun, the revolutionary who helped overthrow imperial China, is uniquely revered by the governments in both China and Taiwan.

Chinese Music, like Rzewski's *The People United will never be Defeated* (1975), is a setting of a political song. However, "folk" material here is treated as an autonomous object, rather than a subject for variations. The melody is used to activate a fixed enclosure (the bass clarinet is kept at a constant fingering), a process which reveals the instrument's harmonic properties (similar to Alvin Lucier's *I am Sitting in a Room*, where melody is used to activate a fixed enclosure).

"I am not interested in music that promotes a particular ideology: *Chinese Music* is an attempt to present my ambivalence towards both cross-cultural music and political art—which is too often one-sided propaganda equally as dangerous as the bad guys it opposes."

Chen Yuanlin (b 1957) was born in Guiyang, China. He began studying the violin at age nine. From 1972 to 1978 he was a professional violinist with the Guiyang Beijing Opera Troupe. He studied composition at the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing under its president, Chinese composer Wu Zuqiang, and there received degrees in 1983 and 1986. He went on to teach at the Conservatory and to establish its computer and electronic music studio, the first of its kind in China. In 1988 Chen traveled to Australia on a cultural exchange program, and he participated in the First Pacific Composers Conference in 1990 in Japan. In 1991 he entered the State University of New York at Stony Brook where he

received a Ph.D. in 1996. He currently lives in Brooklyn and works as a freelance composer. His most recent major work, *Away from Xuan*, was performed by the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra in December 1997.

Flying Swan (1992)

"*Flying Swan* is based on an ancient Chinese poem from the Han Dynasty (B.C. 221–A.D. 220). It is one of the ancient 'Xiang He Da Qu'—a performance form with poetry, music, song, and dance. Today, only the poem and the structure of the music still exist. I adopted both the original poem and the structure to create this music. I believe that with this method I found a bridge that spans between ancient time and today.

"The poem tells a beautiful but sad love story. The structure consists of a lyrical introduction, four songs separated by instrumental interludes, a climax, and a conclusion. I used live electronics to process the sounds of the singer and instrumentalists."

Flying Swan

(Ancient Chinese poem, Han Dynasty B.C. 221–A.D. 586) Flying swans migrate to the southeast. Two swans are newly united in love. It is time for them to fly southeast. The female swan is ill and would like to fly but cannot. The male swan looks back and says, "I would like to put you on my back and carry you with me, but my feathers are not strong enough." He hesitates...The tears fall from his cheeks...As he thinks of his departure he sobs...They wish each other well, and knowing that he cannot return, she says, "I will stay alone in my cottage, and I will always be faithful to you. If in this life we will not be together, in death we will meet in heaven. But for now, let us cherish our love forever."

(Summary translation by the composer from the score.)

Byron Au Yong (b 1971) was born in Pittsburgh and grew up in Seattle, where he currently makes his home. His composition teachers include Joel-François Durand, William O. Smith, and Yuji Takahashi.

His work has been performed at the Atlantic Center for the Arts, Boston University, Ernest Bloch Music Festival, Gaudeamus Foundation, and Hamburg Hochschule für Musik, as well as more uncommon venues like the Seattle Aquarium's Northwest Tidesthore Bird Sanctuary. Au Yong was curator for "A Bridge Home: Music in the Lives of Asian Pacific Americans" at the Wing Luke Asian Museum. In conjunction with the exhibition, he produced a compact disc compilation that features twelve musical groups whose genres range from Hmong love song to Samoan rap. He is artistic director of Drum and Voice and performs with Seattle Kokon Taiko. Au Yong can also be heard playing harpsichord on Eyvind Kang's recording *7 Nades* released by Tzadik.

Edge (1994)

"As a second-generation Chinese American, I have to piece together a musical identity based on experiences far removed from anything Chinese. My grandparents fled from mainland China to the Philippines in the late 1930s. My parents left the Philippines in the mid sixties to study, and stay, in the United States. I grew up embracing a pan-Asian identity, a way for me to switch my ethnicity to fit whatever mold was the most convenient. As an adult, I acknowledge these constructions initially imposed by other peoples' perceptions but now reclaimed by myself. This has allowed me to create work that freely blends many adopted cultures and traditions. *Edge* combines Western medieval compositional techniques, Confucian ideas about music, and Korean shinawi in the ur-regions of awareness.

"In *Edge* (which in its complete state is scored for flute, oboe, trumpet, voice, cello, string bass, taiko, conch shells, gong, and prayer bowls), I layer sonic vibrations using alchemical systems, magic squares, and other patterns to produce spiraling meta patterns. These structures transcend the mundane reality and reach toward the realm of dreams and other paranormal modes of existence. This excerpt, which happens towards the end of the twenty-seven-minute work, features the fundamental, cleansing sounds of three conch shell players who slowly walk around the performance space. Prayer bowl and string bass musicians mark time as the conch shell music moves from a seeming chaos towards a resonant unity; myself shifting through my subconscious influences to get to me."

Fred Ho (b 1957) is a Chinese American composer, baritone saxophonist, writer, and revolutionary socialist activist. He leads the Afro Asian Music Ensemble and the Monkey Orchestra. He has been a long-time activist in the Asian Pacific American Movement and has written extensively on the question of Asian American cultural theory, music and social change, and cultural activism. As a composer and a soloist, he has been presented in a wide variety of jazz and contemporary music venues. During the next two years, he will premiere four new staged works: *Warrior Sisters: The New Adventures of African and Asian Womyn Warriors* (libretto by Ann T. Greene, double CD recording on Koch); *Once Upon a Time in Chinese America: A Martial Arts Ballet* (at the Seattle International Children's Festival and the Brooklyn Academy of Music); *All Power To The People! The Black Panther Ballet Suite* (at the Walker Arts Center in Minneapolis), and *Night Vision: A New Third to First World Slaughterhouse Vampyre Opera* (libretto by Ruth Margraff; premiere in Austin, Texas).

Absolute Solo! (1993)

"Composed in 1993, *Absolute Solo!* is a solo saxophone composition based on a traditional Chinese folk song, 'Soong Lang,' a farewell song. I have recontextualized this song to say 'Farewell to the New World Order,' to support the movement for the amnesty for U.S. political prisoners, and to say farewell to comrades who have passed on still committed and organizing for a just and equitable society. In performance, this work utilizes advanced techniques such as altissimo (more than five octaves), quarter-tone alternate fingerings, and extended breath techniques drawn from Shaolin kung-fu training (absolutely no circular breathing)."

Jin Xiang (b 1935) was born in Zhejiang Province, China. His early studies were in youth classes at Nanjing and Tianjin Conservatories. In 1954, he entered the Central Conservatory of Music, Beijing, and in 1957 he became a victim of the "anti-rightist campaign," beginning with his introducing fellow students to Stravinsky's music. At graduation time Jin was not allowed to receive his degree (B.A. in composition with high distinction) and was immediately exiled to Xinjiang Province for twenty years of brutally hard labor and constant political criticism.

At the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1979, the composer was allowed to return to Beijing. Within months of his return he was chosen as conductor of Beijing Symphony Orchestra and resumed his creative work "restoring the old and adding the new, composing night and day and without regard for the season." Five years later he became professor of composition at China Music Conservatory.

Jin first came to the U.S. in 1988 in connection with the presentation of his opera *Savage Land*, which was performed by the Washington Opera at the Kennedy Center. The opera

has recently been recorded for commercial release by the Shanghai Opera Company, and it remains the only Chinese opera to be performed by an established American opera company. Jin has maintained a New York residency since 1992.

Jin's recent major works include the cantata *Nanjing Lament*, which was premiered at Carnegie Hall in December 1997, and music for "Dunhuang," a forthcoming China Central TV series on the Silk Road. In the spring of 1999 in New York, he will supervise the first concert of the nonprofit East-West Music Exchange Association, of which Jin is president.

Sad Melody at Yanshi City (1989)

"I had been musing about the sad life of the famous writer of the Qing era, Cao Xueqin, whose great novel *The Dream of the Red Chamber* describes the rise and decline of an aristocratic Chinese family. I decided to compose a symphonic work that would reflect several critical periods in Cao Xueqin's own life. This developed into the four-part tone poem *Cao Xueqin. Sad Melody at Yanshi City* is the third section of this four-part suite."

Production Notes

The Woodman's Song; Published by the composer (ASCAP).

Yi Feng; Recorded April 1998 at Shanghai Recording Studio. Published by the composer (ASCAP).

winter tide; Recorded at the F.N.B. Concert Hall Tuscaloosa, Alabama. Mastered by Anthony Yeung Ngor-Wah. Published by the composer (ASCAP).

Mosquito; Recorded at North Pacific Inc., in 1996. Special thanks to Jackie Gable. Published by the composer (ASCAP).

Flight of Whisper; Recorded February, 1997, Full House Productions, New York City; Phil Lee, sound engineer. Published by the composer (ASCAP).

Chinese Music; Recorded by James Fei in Crowell Concert Hall, Wesleyan University, Middletown, Connecticut, August 1998. Published by the composer.

Flying Swan; Recorded in concert, Recital Hall, Staller Center for the Arts, University at Stony Brook, New York, October 24, 1992. Published by the composer (ASCAP).

Edge (excerpt); Recorded May 24, 1994, at Brechemin Auditorium, University of Washington; Gary Louie, engineer. Published by the composer (ASCAP).

Absolute Solo!; Recorded December 12, 1996, at Harmolodic Studio, Harlem, New York, Katsuhiko Naito, engineer; Fred Ho, producer. Published by the composer (ASCAP).

Sad Melody at Yanshi City; Published by the composer (ASCAP).