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Confluence of Cultures

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Confluence of Cultures

Authors

Kelly Anderson, Tom Buckner, Stacey Fraser, Chinary Ung, Susan Ung, and Lynn Vartan

CHAPMAN UNIVERSITY
Conservatory of Music

presents

Confluence of Cultures

with

*Kelly Anderson, Tom Buckner, Stacey Fraser,
Chinary Ung, Susan Ung, and Lynn Vartan*

July 10, 2008 • 8:00P.M.
Salmon Recital Hall

Program

SPIRAL XI: Mother and Child, for amplified viola/voice mix Chinary Ung

Susan Ung: viola

Ancient Songs, for solo soprano (2007) Koji Nakano

I. *Ancient Voices*

II *Ritual Song*

III. *Lullaby for All*

Stacey Fraser: soprano

Neak Ta, for amplified viola and percussion Sean Heim

Susan Ung: viola Lynn Vartan: percussion

-----Intermission-----

Between Stream and Hills, for piano solo Chih-Chen Wei

Kelly Anderson: piano

SPIRAL IX: Maha Sathukar, for amplified baritone, viola,
and percussion, mvts.1 & 2 Chinary Ung

Tom Buckner: baritone, Susan Ung: viola, Lynn Vartan: percussion
Chinary Ung: conductor

Ancient Song, for solo soprano, commissioned by the *Northeast Council of Teachers of Japanese* and its 14th Annual *Harumatsuri* was premiered at the opening ceremony by Stacey Fraser at the at the United Nations International School (UNIS) theater in New York City on March 25, 2008. The first song *Ancient Voices* explores primitive singing. It demonstrates various vocal gestures, such as the hand trill, as well as cupping or covering the mouth. For the second song, *Ritual song*, a soprano sings a repetitive melody inspired by *Minyoo* (a melismatic style of Japanese folk singing), while playing finger cymbals. The rhythmic patterns of finger cymbals celebrate the continuing friendship between Japan and the United States. The third song, *Lullaby for All*, is a tribute to the Japanese lullabies of my childhood. Throughout the piece, a soprano sings simple melodies while playing two chords continuously on a miniature electric keyboard. In this last song a mother croons a tender lullaby to her child.

Ancient Voices is dedicated to nature Gods. *Ritual Song* is dedicated to people who participated in the 14th Annual *Harumatsuri* (“Spring Festival”) at the UNIS Theater. And *Lullaby for All* is dedicated to soprano Stacey Fraser, who recently gave birth to a baby girl.

Japanese and English Texts (Translations) by Koji Nakano

II. *Ritual Song*

Tooku no Uta (A Song from the Past)

Tooi Koe (Voice from Afar)

Tooku karano Hanasi (Story from Ancient Times)

III. *Lullaby for All*

Minna no Uta

This is a song for you.

Komori Uta lu lu lu-

Lullaby for you, lu lu lu-

Minna ni Komori Uta Utau yo

I will sing a lullaby for all.

Neak Ta is a work that exists in two worlds: the realm of reality, and that of the spirit – of the conscious and the subconscious. While reading Haing Ngor’s book, *Surviving the Killing Fields*, I began to reflect on the way in which he was able to endure the torture he had been put through. To me it seemed that he had at times slipped into a state of existence that was outside of perceptible reality and relied on his spiritual self in order to survive. Reading his book in conjunction with stories I have heard from friends who were deeply affected by the atrocities of the Khmer Rouge regime prompted me to not only delve deeper into the actual events of that time period, but also into the culture and history of those who were most affected. In my research I found several stories of harrowing escapes to border countries and the ever-present dangers in the forests as survivors fought to make their way to freedom. I also came across many references to various types of supernatural entities that inhabit the natural world and act as tutelary spirits. Perhaps most prevalent of these are the Neak Ta, who are not merely spirits, but an unifying energy force

symbolizing the link between the people, their land, and their ancestors. As my work on the piece progressed I began to see the piece being influenced by my continued thoughts of these protectorate spirits, aiding the people in their struggle to survive. And in a way, it is through their realm that the piece travels at times as it oscillates between worlds to reach its end – as did those who took flight through the forests to find refuge from the darkness that followed close behind them. The piece was written for Susan Ung and is dedicated to the strength and enduring beliefs of the Cambodian people.

Between Stream and Hills

The composer was inspired by Chinese paintings while composing this piece. What all prominent Chinese painters sought after was the mental world that they could dwell in comfortably. This, in return, would liberate them from worldly burden. Therefore, to refine their characters and to liberate them spiritually is the base of Chinese painters' technique. How do their minds approach to this state? Being close to hills and stream is the only way. There is a strong emphasis on the relation between people and nature here. While composing this piece, the composer went hiking very often. However, in this piece, there is no literally metaphor from "stream" and "hills." Instead, the composer tried to transform the energy of the Nature and painters' spirits into her music, creating the new sound that still belongs to her heritage while using a western instrument.

Spiral IX "Maha Sathukar" refers to the Cambodian traditional musical form *Sathukar*, which is often played at the opening of a ceremonial event. In the case of *Spiral IX* the source is expanded (*Maha*) to such a profound extent that it is unrecognizable. Here, the musicians traverse an astonishingly diverse landscape of activity. There are moments of dense clusters contrasted with suspended, stretched sonorities, such as a vocal "fry" – a vocal sound expressed while inhaling. The contrast between measured and unmeasured time is explored throughout the piece, both in a sectional, juxtaposed manner, as well as with a heterophonic, simultaneous approach. In this regard, two performers often perform strictly timed materials while the third is given looser constraints, operating more or less independently. Eventually, the extended temporal spaces that emerge in the work refer to the Buddhist principle of *Shunyata*, a complex idea meaning a void or bubble, but which can be interpreted as spiritual openness. The startling array of behaviors and colors Ung creates are construed as textures of compassion. When one considers that the amplification applied to the performer's voices and instruments removes the distance between audience and musician, it is clear that the composer intends for the listener to become immersed in this compassionate space.

It is worth noting that the phenomenon of recurrence – in this case of ideas that dominate Ung's musical pursuits, such as vocal-instrumental performance, and the spiritual concept of *Shunyata* -- is in the very nature of the spiral metaphor. The bands of the spiral became larger in the last decade, incorporating more referential material, but it still operates in ways, perhaps, that surprise the composer himself. *Spiral IX* is the result of a commission by the baritone Thomas Buckner. It was composed for Ung's longtime friends and colleagues Buckner, violist Susan Ung (the composer's wife), and percussionist Steven Schick. The premiere performance, conducted by Scott Voyles, was facilitated with the support of the Asia Society, Mutable Music Productions, the World Music Institute, the Asian Cultural Council, and the Spiral Foundation.