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A Confluence Of Cultures: Echoes From the Pacific Rim

Stacey Fraser

Chen-Hui Jen

Jacob Sudol

Nick Terry

Susan Ung

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CHAPMAN UNIVERSITY
Conservatory of Music

Presents

Guest Artists in Recital

A Confluence Of Cultures: *Echoes From
the Pacific Rim*

Stacey Fraser – soprano

Chen-Hui Jen – piano

Jacob Sudol – electronics

Nick Terry - percussion

Susan Ung - viola

January 14, 2011 • 8:00 P.M.
Salmon Recital Hall

Program

- Ancient Songs* Koji Nakano
Stacey Fraser: soprano
- d'un songe* Chen-Hui Jen
Chen-Hui Jen: Piano
Jacob Sudol: Electronics
- Spiral XI: Mother and Child* Chinary Ung
Susan Ung: Viola/Voice
- ~ **Intermission** ~
- Element Metal* Yumiko Morita
Chen-Hui Jen: piano
- "...wash yourself of yourself" Jacob Sudol
Chen-Hui Jen: Piano
Jacob Sudol: Electronics
- Neak Ta* Sean Heim
Susan Ung: Viola
Nick Terry: Percussion

Ancient Songs for solo soprano commissioned by the *Northeast Council of Teachers of Japanese* and its 14th Annual *Harumatsuri* was premiered by Stacey Fraser at the opening ceremony of 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 piece, *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 gave birth to a baby girl. I would like to thank the MacDowell Colony and the Millay Colony for the Arts for their generous support.

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)

*The first and second songs are *attacca*.

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.)

Spiral XI: Mother and Child was composed in 2007 for Susan Ung, the composer’s wife and longtime musical interpreter. Part of a series of works begun in the 1980’s that involves a broad variety of instrumental genre, each *Spiral* piece focuses on a single idea that is re-imagined and re-contextualized over the course of the work. In earlier instantiations of the series one might identify a musical motif as the central image, but more recently—and in *Spiral XI* in particular—the focus is on broader issues. This

work investigates the notion of musicality as something beyond instrumental practice. Rather, the use of vocal sounds (singing, humming, chanting, and whistling) is equally as important as are the variety of techniques that form the rich vocabulary of Ung's string writing. The balance between voice and viola shifts throughout the work, and the combination of these two dimensions produces a world that is more than the sum of its parts.

Element Metal was composed for one of the five-piece cycle of my recent composition for chamber music. The theme of the cycle is taken from the Chinese philosophy, *Yin Yang and the five elements*— wood, fire, earth, metal, and water. In *Yin Yang*, these elements are considered to be the essence of everything that is part of the dynamic process and cyclic movements of nature.

For the solo piano piece, I chose the element “metal”. According to *Yin Yang and the five elements*, the element metal is assigned characteristics such as solidity, vitality, purification, dryness, grief, whiteness, among others. These characteristics are reflected in this piece as texture, rhythm, tempo, and structure. I composed this piece imagining that a lump of massive metal gradually weathers and breaks down into pieces by the force of nature, changing its texture from a solid mass to fine, dry sand. It represents the process of purification of nature, and at the same time, the grief of the decaying metal.

“...wash yourself of yourself” incorporates two electronics techniques that I developed in 2008 and 2009. One technique uses real-time spectral analysis to create timbres by both subtractive and additive synthesis. These timbres imitate the original sounds as well as the combination tones that our brains create when hearing these sounds. The other technique uses real-time spectral analyses to create statistically transforming “clouds” of microtonal samples. In the case of my recent piano works, the samples used to create these clouds are also piano sounds. Both of these techniques aim to provide the listener with novel methods to explore his or her own listening.

“...wash yourself of yourself” is the second modular part to my other recent work for piano and electronics “*Be melting snow...*” While the latter work explores strictly notated algorithms, “...wash yourself of yourself” presents the same techniques in an open yet highly structured manner. The combined quote “Be melting snow; wash yourself of yourself” comes from a poem by Rumi. Both these works along with a third work for piano and electronics – “...approaching a prayer” – comprise a set of works that explore similar electronic techniques and

contemplative interests.

Pianist Xenia Pestova and composer Jacob David Sudol premiered “...*wash yourself of yourself*” in the Experimental Music Theatre at the University of California, San Diego in November 2009. The entire collection of works was written for and is dedicated to the Taiwanese composer and pianist Chen-Hui Jen.

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 uniting 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 through at times as it oscillates between worlds to reach its conclusion – 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.