



Touches and Traces

Piano Music by
Leonard Bernstein and Tan Dun
Warren Lee, Piano



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Leonard BERNSTEIN (1918–90)

1	I. For Felicia Montealegre	6:49
2	II. For Johnny Mehegan	2:19
3	III. For David Diamond	0:43
4	IV. For Helen Coates	2:26

Five Anniversaries (1949–51)

5	I. For Elizabeth Rudolf	7:45
6	II. For Lukas Foss	1:15
7	III. For Elizabeth B. Ehrman	1:51
8	IV. For Sandy Gellhorn	0:46
9	V. For Susanna Kyle	1:56

10	Touches (1981)	10:08
	(Chorale, Eight Variations and Coda)	

TAN Dun (b. 1957)

	Eight Memories in Watercolor (1978 rev. 2002)	16:50
11	1. Missing Moon	3:04
12	2. Staccato Beans	1:29
13	3. Herd-boy's Song	2:05
14	4. Blue Nun	1:07
15	5. Red Wilderness	2:12
16	6. Ancient Burial	2:47
17	7. Floating Clouds	2:26
18	8. Sun-rain	1:40

19	Traces (1989 rev. 1992)	10:10
20	Dew-Fall-Drops* (2000)	7:51

*Dew-Fall-Drops is played with only the fingertips and nails brushing the piano strings and is hence a low volume work.

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Although there seems little in the way of a direct connection between the solo piano music of the American composer Leonard Bernstein (1918–90) and Chinese-born American composer Tan Dun (b. 1957), both have had recourse to this instrument for collections of shorter and/or occasional pieces, along with larger works that were written to exploit particular aspects of piano technique. Put another way: while the reputations of neither composer is likely to be determined through their piano output, those works in question feature a wealth of idiomatic and attractive music which deserves to find a place in the repertoire of present-day recitals.

Bernstein's piano output mainly comprises miniatures written as groups of 'anniversaries' over four decades. The *Four Anniversaries* were written in 1948, each of them dedicated to a person to whom Bernstein was close at some stage in his career. The first piece is inscribed to Felicia Montealegre (1922–78), the Chilean-born actress who was Bernstein's wife from 1955, and is a winsome study in elegant figuration with a subtle folk-music inflection and then a hint of Copland in its limpid central section. The second piece is inscribed to Johnny Mehegan (1916–84), the jazz pianist and author, and is a purposeful study in rhythmic syncopation. The third piece is inscribed to the composer David Diamond (1915–2005), and seems both pensive and understated as it reaches unexpected depths before heading to its dissonant culmination and barely resolved final cadence. The fourth piece is inscribed to Helen Coates (1899–1989), the piano teacher who was to become Bernstein's personal secretary from 1952, and has a driving energy that brings Prokofiev to mind prior to an ending as terse as it is decisive.

The *Five Anniversaries* were composed during 1949–51. Here the first piece is inscribed to Elizabeth Rudolf (b. 1894), the American mother of a friend of Bernstein from Tanglewood, and unfolds with audible reticence as regards its rhythmic and harmonic profile, with maybe a nod to Respighi (albeit as arranger) in its melodic content. The second piece is inscribed to Lukas Foss (1922–2009), the German-born pianist and composer, and feels appreciably more equivocal in its intricate figuration that evinces no mean harmonic subtlety as it unfolds. The third piece is inscribed to Elizabeth B. Ehrman (b. 1883), the American mother of a friend of Bernstein from Harvard, and is a study in jazz idioms that anticipates the 'Alcibiades' finale of Bernstein's *Serenade*. The fourth piece is inscribed to Sandy Gellhorn (b. 1951), daughter of the author Martha Gellhorn, and the most forward looking in its exploitation of the upper range of the piano's compass and methodical deployment of its motifs. The fifth piece is inscribed to Susanna Kyle (b. 1949), the daughter of Bernstein's friend and collaborator Betty Comden, making for a conclusion of great poise that most resembles a lullaby in its rapt inwardness.

Very different in both its concept and content is *Touches*, written as a test piece for the Sixth Van Cliburn International Piano Competition in Fort Worth, Texas and first performed there on 28th May, 1981. The piece is subtitled *Chorale, Eight Variations and Coda* and the initial chorale is almost secretive in its restraint, while throwing up a wealth of harmonic possibilities that the eight variations duly exploit. Variation I is brief though lively, its insouciant humour carrying over into II with its forceful opening gesture

and dextrous rhythmic side-steps, and then into III with its decided nonchalance. Variation IV favours a more rhetorical manner in its pronounced dynamic contrasts and close imitative writing, whereas V is a brief yet potent 'nocturne' which abounds in subtle harmonic ambiguity. Variation VI resembles an unsettled intermezzo, while VII is a scherzo of acerbic character fairly abounding with rhythmic irregularity. Variation VIII brings the sequence to a climax with a heightened transformation of the chorale, whose climactic chords are allowed to resonate for a considerable time before the coda emerges to offer the most understated – as well as ruminative – of concluding gestures.

While his output for solo piano is not extensive, Tan Dun's music for the instrument comes at key junctures in his career. Among the earliest acknowledged of his works, *Eight Memories in Watercolour* was written in 1978 and then revised in 2002. *Missing Moon* opens the sequence with a suitably twilight study, its enveloping figuration shot through with discreetly Oriental overtones. *Staccato Beans* is a propulsive study in rhythmic imitation between left and right hands, energetic and engaging by turns, while *Herd-boy's Song* evokes the music of its title through the context of a harmonic landscape as expansive as it is inviting. *Blue Nun* exudes a gentle equanimity of purpose, then *Red Wilderness* evokes its title through a figuration whose initial limpidity opens out in texture and harmony as it proceeds. *Ancient Burial* is the most evocative of its title in its measured solemnity which builds to a resounding climax before regaining its earlier poise, while *Floating Clouds* conjures its imagery with delicate and almost impressionistic means. *Sun-rain* then rounds off the sequence with an unbridled rhythmic vivacity, driving the sequence as a whole on to its decisive and forceful conclusion.

Written in 1989 then revised in 1992, *Traces* was inspired by a bus journey that the composer took through the mountains in southern China. The sound of the wind seemed to be outlining the notes A-C-D, which came to encompass that of the natural environment as a whole, and it is these notes that constitute the only pitch materials to be found in this work. Emerging both quietly and hesitantly, the music alights upon a number of distinct and yet discreetly related motifs whose essential contrast in terms of timbre and dynamic accordingly set the expressive parameters for the piece as a whole. At around its mid-point the music comes across repeated chords in the right hand that presage the main climax, and which subsequently resound into silence before a return to the initial stark motivic contrasts and then a concluding passage of decidedly equivocal calm. As the composer remarked, "Two thousand years ago, the Chinese philosopher Lao Tse said that the greatest sound can be heard only in silence. I think so too."

Silence – whether as a concept or as a phenomenon – is the basis of *Dew-Fall-Drops*, written in 2000 as a contribution to the Carnegie Hall Millennium Piano Book, and which is the most characteristic of Tan Dun's piano pieces in terms of its playing techniques – in this instance, using merely the fingertips and the fingernails as they brush the strings inside the instrument. Beginning as if from afar, the music gradually and poetically comes into focus – the 'internal' means of playing evoking such as the Hungarian cimbalom or the Finnish *kantele* in its gentle and intricate filigree. A greater harmonic and textural intricacy is latterly evident, though the underlying aura of restraint never wavers all the way through to the ethereal final moments.

Richard Whitehouse



Warren Lee, Piano

After his televised début with the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra at the age of six, Warren Lee embarked on a career in music, both on and off the stage. A graduate of the Royal Academy of Music and the Yale School of Music with the highest honours, he was the first-prize winner of the 1995 Stravinsky Awards International Piano Competition and the Grand Prix Ivo Pogorelich. Warren Lee has been hailed by *The Straits Times* as a musician with "superb pianism... a wonderful sense of colour and impeccably controlled articulation", and his artistry has brought him to four continents, gracing stages of all sizes and forms and in collaboration with eminent artists and leading orchestras in Asia.

As an educator off the stage, Warren Lee is the Music Director of St. Paul's Co-educational College and is the Hong Kong Representative of the Royal Academy of Music. He has also served as an adjunct faculty and visiting artist in various institutions in Hong Kong, China, Singapore, Australia and the United Kingdom. His solo album, "*From Bach To Gershwin*", released on the Universal Music label (Hong Kong) was lauded as "a success that Hong Kong can be proud of"; while his album "*Ebony and Ivory*" with clarinetist Andrew Simon on Naxos Music, also garnered favourable reviews worldwide; *Fanfare* magazine calls it "a winner".

A Steinway Artist as well as an MBA graduate, Warren Lee is also an award-winning and internationally published composer. With a vision of bettering the community through the arts, he enjoys a long history of engagement in charity projects with organisations such as the Yale-China Association. In recognition of his achievements in the fields of performing arts and education, in 2012 Warren Lee was one of ten recipients of an Outstanding Young Persons Award in Hong Kong and was elected an Associate of the Royal Academy of Music in 2015.

For more information, please visit www.warren-lee.com.

Both Leonard Bernstein and Chinese-born American composer Tan Dun have used the piano for collections of shorter and/or occasional pieces, along with larger works that were written to exploit particular aspects of piano technique. Bernstein's piano output is mainly comprised of characterful, subtle miniatures written, over four decades, as groups of 'anniversaries'. *Touches* was composed as a test piece for the Sixth Van Cliburn International Piano Competition. Tan Dun's piano music was composed at key junctures in his career and is both evocative and propulsive, *Dew-Fall-Drops* being one of his most intricate and ethereal sound pictures.

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