



WANG LISAN
(1933–2013)
Complete Piano Works
Yiming Zhang, Piano



**Wang Lisan
(1933–2013)
Complete Piano Works**

CD 1	Children's Hearts (1973–2007) *	18:16
<p>1 A Miniature – Impression of a Dulcimer (1950–1951) * 1:25</p> <p>2 Lanhuahua, the Beautiful Girl (1953) 2:56</p> <p>Sonatina (1957) 7:37</p> <p>3 I. Under the Sunshine 2:29</p> <p>4 II. After the Rain 2:20</p> <p>5 III. Dance of the Mountain People 2:48</p> <p>6 Poem (1957–58) * 5:17</p> <p>7 We Are Walking Along the Broad Road (1964) * 2:42</p> <p>8 Ballade – Song of the Guerrilla (1977) * 7:44</p> <p>9 Brother and Sister Cultivate the Wild Land (1977) 5:33</p> <p>Impressions of Paintings by Higashiyama Kaii (1979) 19:45</p> <p>10 Winter Blossoms 5:51</p> <p>11 Autumn Dress for the Forest 1:32</p> <p>12 The Lake 3:24</p> <p>13 The Sound of the Waves 8:58</p>	<p>14 Baby Tricycle 1:28</p> <p>15 Little Raindrops 0:40</p> <p>16 Amusement 0:47</p> <p>17 Clear Up 1:20</p> <p>18 Phone Call 0:37</p> <p>19 Distorting Mirror 0:49</p> <p>20 Barcarolle 1:18</p> <p>21 Little Friends 0:39</p> <p>22 Dream 0:52</p> <p>23 Folk Song 0:48</p> <p>24 Idyll 1:34</p> <p>25 Seven Mouths and Eight Tongues 0:42</p> <p>26 Folk Song 2 1:54</p> <p>27 Sunset Glow (Dream) 1:46</p> <p>28 Morning Song 1:11</p> <p>29 Dolly 0:56</p> <p>30 Folk Song 3 0:55</p> <p>31 Morning Dew (the original first piece of <i>Children's Hearts</i>) * 1:16</p>	

CD 2

<p>Other Mountains (1980) 26:18</p> <p>1 F# Shang: Calligraphy and Chinese Lyre 4:17</p> <p>2 A Yu: Geometrical Pattern (ca.1959–1963) 2:44</p> <p>3 A♭ Zhi: The Song of Earth 10:50</p> <p>4 G Jiao: Folk Toys 3:27</p> <p>5 F Gong: Village in the Mountain * 5:00</p> <p>Two Fantasies after Li He's Poems (1980) 11:57</p> <p>6 A Dream of Heaven 4:14</p> <p>7 Emperor Qin Drinking * 7:43</p> <p>Window Flowers (unknown) * 9:48</p> <p>8 Nursery Rhymes 1:06</p> <p>9 Yangko Dance 1:05</p> <p>10 Mountain Song 3:10</p> <p>11 Elegy 3:16</p> <p>12 Big Painted Face (1989) 1:11</p> <p>Three Music Poems (unknown) * 11:55</p> <p>13 Floating Clouds with Golden Edges 3:14</p> <p>14 The Legend of Mountains 5:35</p> <p>15 Magician's Tricks (1992) 3:06</p> <p>Paintings by the Little Brother (1999) * 4:21</p> <p>16 Indomitable Little Flower 1:49</p> <p>17 Dance of The Big Headed Doll 1:16</p> <p>18 Under the Traffic Lights 1:16</p> <p>The Prophet (2003–2007) * 13:42</p> <p>19 The Prophet 3:34</p> <p>20 The Vast I.IV.V 2:55</p> <p>21 Schumann's 'Foreign Country' 2:26</p> <p>22 As If in a Dream 3:46</p> <p>23 Sparkling and Flowing River 1:01</p>	
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CD 3

<p>Red Soil (2003–2007) *</p> <p>1 Green Wheat, Yellow Barley 3:14</p> <p>2 Danc 2:54</p> <p>3 Spring 3:05</p> <p>4 Nuo Drama 5:17</p> <p>5 Fantasy-Sonata 'Black Soil', The Memory of Er-ren-zhuan (1981, 2003, 2007) * 14:22</p> <p>Capriccio of Animals (2003–2007) * 18:56</p> <p>6 Dance Steps of an Elephant 2:04</p> <p>7 Camel's Bells in the Desert 1:26</p> <p>8 Band of Frogs 2:00</p> <p>9 The Accordion-playing Bear 1:09</p> <p>10 The Eight Diagrams of the Spider 2:58</p> <p>11 The Swallows Eager to Return 0:58</p> <p>12 The Coral in the Glass Vat 3:14</p> <p>13 A Butterfly Dream 2:49</p> <p>14 An Encaged Serpent 2:18</p> <p>15 After Reading Lu Xun's 'Wild Grass' (2003–2007) * 5:10</p> <p>16 Lanhuahua, the Beautiful Girl (1953) – first version* 2:25</p> <p style="text-align: center;">* WORLD PREMIÈRE RECORDING</p>	
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Wang Lisan (1933–2013) Complete Piano Works



Photo taken in 1995

Wang Lisan was born in Wuhan 1933, but his hometown was Qianwei, Sichuan. In 1937 the family moved to Chengdu, a wartime refuge. As a child, Wang took advantage of the family's intellectual heritage and developed a variety of interests, including Taoist philosophy, Chinese painting, folk music, calligraphy and Chinese opera. In 1951 he entered the East China Branch of the Central Conservatory of Music (the present Shanghai Conservatory of Music) and in 1953 wrote *Lanhuahua, the Beautiful Girl*, which launched his career. In 1957, with Liu Shiren and Jiang Zuxin he published an article in *People's Music* in which he criticised Xinghai, the composer of *The Yellow River Cantata*, a work praised by Chairman Mao Zedong.

Largely because of this, Wang was labelled a rightist and in 1959 was exiled to the North-Eastern corner of China to work with the Hejiang Reclamation Bureau's Art Troupe. In 1963, when the Troupe was disbanded, he entered the Harbin Art Institute (later Harbin Normal University's Arts Institute) as a teacher. The Cultural Revolution brought further difficulties, and Wang was suspended from the teaching staff and able to resume teaching only in 1972, continuing at the Institute until his retirement to Shanghai in 2002. He served as the Institute's Chairman from 1985 to 1996, and during this period his compositional output suffered, largely as a result of his administrative duties. In 2003 Wang suffered a stroke, yet still managed to compose until 2007. He died in Shanghai in 2013.

Wang's earliest existing composition, *A Miniature – Impression of a Dulcimer*, was finished while Wang was in Tianjin, between 1950 and 1951. It offers a nostalgic memory of the Sichuan dulcimer, a percussive string instrument popular in Chengdu. *Lanhuahua, The Beautiful Girl*, composed in 1953, was written for his harmony class, but later became his signature piece. It was based on a folk song describing the fate of Lanhuahua, who failed to fight for her love and died. The original manuscript was discovered in 2012 by the composer's daughter Wang Duowen.

Sonatina was composed in 1957 but remained unpublished until 1981, when titles were added to help children understand the music. *Under the Sunshine* is characterised by its ostinato accompaniment, typical of Chinese instrumental ensemble playing. *After the Rain* suggests Yunnan folk music, and *Dance of the Mountain People* evokes the Northern Sichuan Province.

Poem was written not long before the composer was condemned as a rightist and expresses Wang's subversive feelings by deftly hiding within the melody a fragment of *Flowing River*, symbolising tears, and an extract from *Plum Blossom Melody*, thought to represent innocence. This composition was finally given its première in 2013.

We Are Walking Along the Broad Road (composed in May, 1964) was adapted from a well known song by Li Jiefu in 1963. It is one of only two extant musical works by Wang written between 1959 and 1976, a period of great political difficulty. Although the content was 'politically correct', Wang still applied musical techniques considered subversive, such as dissonance and polytonality.

Composed in 1977, *Ballade – Song of the Guerrilla* is Wang's homage to his mentor He Luting, composer of the 1937 work *Song of the Guerrilla*. Although there are elements of polytonality, this work is more conservative, no doubt out of respect for his mentor's musical tastes.

Brother and Sister Cultivate the Wild Land (1977) is a free arrangement of a *Yangko* drama with the same title. The brother, to cheer up the sister, pretends to be lazy, and is reported by his sister to the headman, leading the brother to explain matters and work hard. The short drama has three songs and some dialogue. Wang's piano work, while strictly following the songs, has innovative harmony and unusual techniques such as polytonality.

In 1978 Japanese painter Kai Higashiyama held exhibitions in China. Wang Lisan saw Higashiyama's paintings in *China Pictorial*, and wrote the suite of *Impressions of Paintings by Kai Higashiyama* along with some poems:

Winter Blossoms

*Still and solitary,
Stands the silver-white tree,
Shining crystal clear.*

*Its thick and knotted branches,
In the chilly light,
Singing the song of life.**

Autumn Dress for the Forest

*The trees
Are also drunk;
O little white pony,
Will you still linger
In your golden dream?**

The Lake

*Mirror, mirror!
You have made the humble mountain
forest recognise
its native beauty.
Mirror, mirror!
How I admire your profound stillness.**

The Sound of the Waves

*O ancient Tōshōdai-ji!
So I think of
The devotion of him who sails a boat of reeds,
And seem to hear the winds of heaven,
and the waves,
Fading into the evening drums and morning bells.**

The Sound of the Waves tells the story of Ganjin, the Chinese monk (688–763 CE) who brought Buddhism to Japan. Ganjin attempted to travel to Japan six times in eleven years, and finally succeeded.

Composed between 1973 and 2007, *Children's Hearts* was originally written as a piano study for Wang Lisan's nephew. *Folk Song 3*, from the Hebei folk-song *Dealing with Liancheng*, is a piece about paying visits during the Chinese New Year, with some parts implying flirtation between lovers. *Folk Song 2* is an adaptation of a Mongolian folk-song *Bo Ru Lai*, an orphan girl's lullaby for her baby brother:

*Oh, such a fine cradle
Is made by father's skilful hands
If you cry in the dark night,
Mother will come to give you milk.
Mother,
Dear Mother!
Don't cry, Bo Ru Lai,
Mother is here.*

Morning Dew was originally the first section from *Children's Hearts*, and the score was only discovered in Wang's apartment in Shanghai by Yiming Zhang in 2014.

Other Mountains is a suite of five preludes and fugues, each in one of the five Chinese Modes (*Gong, Shang, Jiao, Zhi* and *Yu*). Its name comes from the saying *Stones from other mountains may serve to polish the jade of my hill*. It is clear, however, from the poem for *Calligraphy and Chinese Lyre* that the composer would describe his musical beliefs as stemming from other mountains (symbolising the tradition of Western music) and looks back to things symbolising ancient Chinese aesthetics:

*I would mount another mountain to look back,
and to look afar.
Are those undulating lines the strokes of
the calligraphy brush?
Are those rumbling echoes the sound of
the Chinese lyre?
As I see, in the art of ancient China,
The souls that are untiringly
searching truth. ***

The composer's poem for the *Geometrical Pattern* reads as follows:

*A little whirlpool mirrors the dazzling lights and
shadows of the boundless world.**

This piece is related to a regional drama called *Hunan Flower-Drum*, a piece staged by peasant strolling players with simple instruments.

The Song of Earth is related to the Shaanxi mountain song *Xin-Tian-You*. North Shaanxi is part of the Loess Plateau, and is full of cracks and gaps. The composer writes:

*The earth is still alive, still alive.
The earth drenched in pain,
The earth full of hope,
The earth that is ordinary,
And the earth that is miraculous;
I sing for you,
I weep for you,
And I root deeply in your heart. ***

The *Folk Toys* movement depicts a Temple Fair that is a children's paradise. The composer writes:

*Are you also fond of cloth tiger, clay rooster,
painted candy, and pinwheel?
And the tireless revolving lamp, the silly,
dippy puppet...
O my childhood reveries! ***

The eponymous *Village in the Mountain* is located in Daliangshan, close to Wang's hometown. An ethnic group named the Yi reside there. In 1972 the composer visited that village as a painter. The villagers initially thought that he was a spy, but after realising that he posed no threat, treated him well. This experience inspired the composer to write this poem for the piece:

*Steep mountains,
Pure folks,
Songs and dances after drinks,
O flowers and grasses sending out exotic
fragrance,
May the springtime be with you forever! ***

Two Fantasies after Li He's Poems was composed in 1980, but *A Dream of Heaven* and *Emperor Qin Drinking* had different fates. The former was the first published twelve-tone piano piece in China, while the latter, applying the same tone row, was not published until 2006. *A Dream of Heaven* depicts the poet descending on a chilly moonlit night, rain falling gently from the sky as if the moon-dwelling rabbit and toad of Chinese folklore are weeping; when the poet enters the palace of the moon and looks down, the mountains and lands on the earth appear tiny to him and time down there passes swiftly.

Emperor Qin Drinking portrays a drunken emperor. Wang used invertible counterpoint to present the story of the Emperor who commanded the moon to move backward, and imitates the sound of the night-watchmen's gongs, the method by which the officer lied to the emperor that it was still midnight.

Big Painted Face appeared in 1989, but the exact composition date of *Window Flowers* remains unknown. A *yangko* is a folk dance and the *Yangko Dance* here might refer to the style of Shanxi province. *Folk Song* and *Elegy* are from folk songs in the northern part of Sichuan province, and the latter is adapted from a Neijiang folk-song entitled *Pointed Mountains* which laments tragic lives. *Big Painted Face* depicts the *Jing* rôle in Peking

Opera. These actors usually play the rôles of eminent persons such as high officials, army generals, or emperors. The accompanying music is played mainly by percussion instruments.

The composition date of *Three Music Poems* is also unclear. *Floating Clouds with Golden Edges* offers a picture in which the gold clouds float closer and then gradually float away. *The Legend of Mountains* has an ABA structure. The serene and mysterious part A depicts various sounds in nature at night, while part B mimics the convivial style of the dances of the Yi ethnic group. The third piece, *Magician's Tricks*, was probably inspired by Wang's childhood experiences. The story goes that Wang and his family were once at the Temple Fair, when a conjuror came to greet Wang Lisan. His parents asked how he came to know a folk conjuror. Wang confessed that he had been away from school the year before for a month to learn tricks from the conjuror, in a vain effort to conjure the shade of his deceased grandmother. The piece suggests the mysteries of death and the success of the conjuror's magic.

Paintings by the Little Brother (1999), comprising *Indomitable Little Flower*, *Dance of the Big-Headed Doll* and *Under the Traffic Lights*, was the only work for piano by Wang during the 1990s. Wang was a painter and the youngest son in his family, so it is possible that the little brother referred to in the title is Wang himself.

The Prophet was written between 2003 and 2007, when the composer was retired. During these years his language ability deteriorated after his stroke. His daughter bought him a copy of the book *The Prophet* by Khalil Gibran, which he read, and was then inspired to write this suite. Wang paid homage to his mentor and harmony teacher Sang Tong with *The Prophet* by hiding the melody of *In the Distant Place*. Sang Tong's free arrangement of this folk song in 1947 was the first atonal piece in China. *The Vast I.I.V.V* is likely also to be a homage to Sang Tong. *Schumann's 'Foreign Country'* is a deconstruction of Schumann's *Von fremden Ländern und Menschen*.

Red Soil was also composed between 2003 and 2007. The title may refer to his home province, Sichuan. The last time Wang visited Sichuan was between spring and summer in 2002, when the wheat was green and the barley was yellow. *Dance* embodies the melody of a tune of the Yi people called *Xi Dance under the Moon*. *Spring*, a peaceful miniature, uses ostinato to represent the flow of water. The *Nuo* drama described in *Nuo Drama* was a ceremony combining religion and drama which was popular in south China.

Originally commissioned by pianist Jeffrey Jacob, *Fantasy-Sonata*, *'Black Soil'*, *The Memory of Er-ren-zhuan* is a contemplation of the composer's memory of his difficult years from 1959 to 1963, when he worked as a troupe musician in the Great Wilderness of the North. With an extended revision process across twenty-six years and three versions with three different titles (1981, 2003 and 2007), this work reveals the composer's complex feeling about that time. Wang wrote a poem for this piece:

*In the North,
The North further than Xiao Hong's Hulan River,¹
Remained my footprints and dreams.*

*Days of gales, blizzards and hardships
faded in my head,
Yet the songs, gongs and drums in the field
I never forget.
How I wish my music
Will not violate
Your wildness
Your boldness
And your balminess. ***

Er-ren-zhuan (Song and Dance Duet) is a regional drama in Northeast China. Usually performed by two people on a shabby stage, it blends and symbolises the North-East's music, dance and drama. In this piece, Wang juxtaposed the *Er-ren-zhuan* style with music reminiscent of his own experience in the North East.

Judging from the manuscripts, *Capriccio of Animals* (2003–2007) is probably Wang's last work. This suite, consisting of nine small pieces, reflects Wang's fondness towards animals and his loneliness.

After Reading Lu Xun's 'Wild Grass' is one of Wang Lisan's final pieces, and was probably finished in 2007.

He had, however, discussed Lu Xun's *Wild Grass*, a collection of dark and depressed prose poems, with the philosopher Su Mutian as early as the late 1990s, and Lu Xun is known to have been one of Wang's favourite writers.

Yiming Zhang

* Verse translation by Wei Chunxiao

** Translated by Gao Lu

Yiming Zhang, piano



Yiming Zhang has a wide spectrum of musical interests ranging from the Baroque period to the present day. In recent years, he has pursued a particular interest in contemporary Chinese piano music, and has comprehensively researched and performed the piano music of the composer Wang Lisan. Besides this recording project of the complete piano works of Wang Lisan for Naxos, he has also written a substantial biography of the composer, for publication by the People's Music Publishing House. In addition, he is a frequent collaborator with other contemporary Chinese composers such as Ge Gan-ru (b.1954) and Wang Xilin (b.1937). As a translator, Zhang has translated and published several books from English to Chinese, including Carl Czerny's *On the Proper Performance of All Beethoven's Works for the Piano* and Charles Burney's *The Present State of Music in Germany, the Netherlands, and United Provinces*.

Yiming Zhang was awarded his doctoral degree in piano performance from Temple University in 2015, where he studied with Harvey Wedeen and Lambert Orkis. Prior to 2008, his piano teachers included Mikhail Yanovitsky, Su Bin and Yao Shizhen.

¹Xiao Hong (萧红) wrote a novel called *Tales of Hulan River* in 1942. Hulan county, now a district of Harbin, is about 300 kilometres southwest of Jiamusi, where Wang Lisan lived from 1959 to 1963.

Wang Lisan, a leading Chinese composer, suffered under a repressive political system but continued to compose pieces deeply rooted in the various folk traditions of his country. He was the first Chinese composer to publish a twelve-tone piano piece – *Two Fantasies after Le He's Poems* – whilst also writing piano studies, adaptations from well-known songs, pieces with typical instrumental ensemble sonority, free arrangements of *Yangko* drama, and suites of impressions. This recording, comprising several world premières, is the first time his complete piano works have appeared together.

WANG LISAN (1933–2013) Complete Piano Works

CD 1

①	A Miniature – Impression of a Dulcimer (1950–1951) *	1:25
②	Lanhuahua, the Beautiful Girl (1953)	2:56
③-⑤	Sonatina (1957)	7:37
⑥	Poem (1957–58) *	5:17
⑦	We Are Walking Along the Broad Road (1964) *	2:42
⑧	Ballade – Song of the Guerrilla (1977) *	7:44
⑨	Brother and Sister Cultivate the Wild Land (1977)	5:33
⑩-⑬	Impressions of Paintings by Higashiyama Kaii (1979)	19:45
⑭-⑳	Children's Hearts (1973–2007) *	18:16
㉑	Morning Dew (the original first piece of <i>Children's Hearts</i>) *	1:16
Total Time 72:31		

CD 2

①-⑤	Other Mountains (1980)	26:18
⑥-⑦	Two Fantasies after Li He's Poems (1980)	11:57
⑧-⑫	Window Flowers (unknown) *	9:48
⑬-⑮	Three Music Poems (unknown) *	11:55
⑯-⑲	Paintings by the Little Brother (1999) *	4:21
⑳-㉓	The Prophet (2003–2007) *	13:42

Total Time 78:01

CD 3

①-④	Red Soil (2003–2007) *	14:30
⑤	Fantasy-Sonata 'Black Soil', The Memory of Er-ren-zhuan (1981, 2003, 2007) *	14:22
⑥-⑮	Capriccio of Animals (2003–2007) *	18:56
⑯	After Reading Lu Xun's 'Wild Grass' (2003–2007) *	5:10
⑰	Lanhuahua, the Beautiful Girl (1953) * —first version *	2:25

*** WORLD PREMIÈRE RECORDING**
Yiming Zhang, Piano

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