



Bright
SHENG

Northern Lights

Dan Zhu, Violin
Julian Schwarz and Trey Lee, Cellos
Robert Black, Double Bass
Yoobin Son, Flute/Alto flute
Pius Cheung, Marimba
David Friend, Marika Bournaki, Bright Sheng, Pianos

Bright SHENG (b. 1955)

Northern Lights (2009) • Melodies of a Flute (2011) • Four Movements for Piano Trio (1990)

Sweet May Again (2007) • Hot Pepper (2010)

Northern Lights (2009)

for violoncello and piano

1. ♩ = 88
2. ♩ = 69
3. ♩ = 63-66
4. ♩ = 144-152

The work is dedicated to Inger G. Ginsberg.

Northern Lights was jointly commissioned by The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, La Jolla Music Society, and the Bergen Festival with a generous gift from William Ginsberg in honour of his wife, Inger G. Ginsberg. It was finished on December 28th, 2009, in New York City.

Folk music has been my fascination and creative resource for over four decades. In the early 1970s, I became infatuated with the folks songs of Qinghai (eastern Tibet), a rare fusion and crossover of several ethnic folk cultures in the region. Subsequently, during my undergraduate years at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, I systematically studied Chinese folk music traditions in more detail. Shortly after I moved to the United States in the early 1980s, my interest was broadened to include the music cultures surrounding China, and the study of how these cultures had influenced, intermingled with, and infiltrated each other. This led to my series of studies of the music cultures along the Silk Road, an ancient trading route between the old empires of China and Rome, while helping my friend Yo-Yo Ma launch the Silk Road Project. I have also been captivated by American folk music for decades, especially Bluegrass and Country music, and I have long hoped to find a pretext to include these elements in my work.

My friends Inger and Bill Ginsberg live in New York City and in Helle, Norway, where Inger was born.

During one conversation, Bill, well versed in Norwegian culture, introduced me to Norwegian and Scandinavian folk music. I became even more excited when, after further examination, I noticed its kinship with some forms of American country music, such as Appalachian and Bluegrass.

In many ways, composing music in various styles is similar to an author writing in different languages. On the one hand, an opus is usually at its most effective when written in a mother tongue, but on the other, many literary giants wrote in their second (or even third) language with great results. *Northern Lights* is my first attempt to integrate Norwegian/Scandinavian folk music into my work, and it probably has a linguistic 'accent'. However, as a student who is embarking on his first performance with a newly learned language, I am very excited by the prospect of incorporating another musical language into my works.

The title of the work, *Northern Lights*, refers to an astronomical natural phenomenon also known as the *Aurora borealis*: shafts or curtains of fantastically colored lights visible on occasion in the night sky, particularly in countries near the North Pole (such as Norway.)

Melodies of a Flute (2011) 幽幽簫聲

for flute/alto flute, violin, violoncello & marimba (and one small suspended cymbal)

- I. Flute and Phoenix 鳳舞簫鳴
- II. Lotus Flowers 藕花深處

Melodies of a Flute was commissioned by Luci Janssen, for her husband Richard, on the occasion of their 40th wedding anniversary. It was written for Camerata Pacifica, who gave the première performance on April 10th, 2012, at the Huntington Library of San Marino,

California, with Adrian Spence on flute and alto flute, Catherine Leonard on violin, Ani Aznavoorian on violoncello, and Ji Hye Jung on marimba and small suspended cymbal.

Melodies of a Flute was inspired by the poetry of Li Qing Zhao (李清照1084–c.1151), arguably the most important female poet in the history of Chinese literature. Unlike her (mostly male) contemporaries during the Song Dynasty (960-1279), Li was audacious in expressing her deep feelings, sometimes in a rather direct and sensuous way. According to the Confucian tradition, unwavering expression of love and passion was considered taboo and distasteful. Most of the love poems found in ancient Chinese poetry were often used as metaphors for articulating something else (such as the author's loyalty to the emperor) and when love was the true intended theme, it was often implied in other symbolic forms such as flowers or weather. However Li Qing Zhao, expressively or metaphorically, often wrote about her love life with her husband and soulmate Zhao Ming Cheung, a government official.

In the first movement, I tried to capture the mood of longing in *Memories of a Flute on the Phoenix Terrace*, in which Li compares her marriage with an old myth about love and music in order to utter her sadness on the eve of Zhao's departure to a far-away post designated by the emperor. This fable, known as *Flute and Phoenix*, was a recurrent reference in her poems: Nong Yu, an avid jade flute player and the daughter of a Duke, fell in love with a virtuoso musician named Xiao Shi, who, when playing the (vertical) flute, could recreate the song of the phoenix. Later the two were married and played flutes everyday on the Phoenix Terrace built by the Duke, until one day, charmed by the music, the phoenix came and brought them to heaven.

Memories of a Flute on the Phoenix Terrace
鳳凰臺上憶吹簫

*No more aroma from the gilt incense burner,
Only the crimson waves of quilts left in bed;
No mood to disentangle my curls,
Only me watching the morning sun staring at the dusty
jewel box.*

*So much sadness of separation I am terrified to endure;
So many words I crave but hesitate to utter.
I have grown thinner as days have gone by,
Not for over drinking, nor for the sorrow of autumn.*

*This is it! This is it! This time when he leaves,
I won't retain him even with the thousands of farewells I
sing*

*I fret with the thoughts of my beloved being far, far away,
Leaving me alone in this empty chamber locked by fog
and smog;
None but the passing-by stream will keep me company,
Watching over my fixed gaze day in and day out where
Only solitude is my new companion.*

The inspiration for the second movement, *Lotus Flowers*, came from a poem in which the author tells of a spontaneous boating race in which she lost her way among the lotus flowers. As in many of Li's works, this poem may suggest itself as a sensuous metaphor:

To the Tune: Like a Dream 如夢令

*I always remember that dusk at a pagoda by the creek.
In our boats, we were exultant but exhausted,
Too tipsy to remember our way home;
We got lost into the deep place of lotus flowers.*

*Row! Row!
We startled a flock of egrets and gulls.*

鳳凰臺上憶吹簫

香冷金猊，被翻紅浪，起來慵自梳頭。
任寶奩塵滿，日上簾鉤。
生怕離懷別苦，多少事欲說還休。
新來瘦，非干病酒，不是悲秋。

休休！這回去也，
千萬遍陽關也則難留。
念武陵人遠，煙鎖秦樓。
唯有樓前流水，應念我終日凝眸。
凝眸處，從今又添一段新愁。

如夢令

常憶溪亭日暮，
沉醉不知歸路。
興盡晚回舟，
誤入藕花深處。

爭渡！爭渡！
驚起一灘鷗鷺。

Four Movements for Piano Trio (1990)

1. ♩ = 54
2. ♩ = 72
3. ♩ = 112
4. ♩ = 66 (Nostalgia)

Four Movements for Piano Trio was commissioned by the Walter W. Naumburg Foundation for the Peabody Trio, winner of the Naumburg Chamber Music Award. The work was first performed by the Peabody Trio at Alice Tully Hall, Lincoln Center, New York City on April 24th, 1990. The folkloric style and prelude-like first movement of *Four Movements for Piano Trio* is constructed through the use of heterophony, a device typical of Asian music. The second movement of the work is based on a humorous and joyful folk song from Si-Chuan. In the third movement, a savage dance, the melody grows through a series of 'Chinese sequences' (my own term to describe a type of melodic

8.579014

development whereby the initial motif is repeated, each time lengthening its duration and widening the tessitura). The last movement evokes a sense of lonesome nostalgia.

Sweet May Again (2007)

for string bass and piano

Sweet May Again was jointly commissioned by Emanuel Ax, Edgar Meyer and the Carnegie Hall Corporation. It was premièred on April 17th, 2007 in Nashville, Tennessee, and the New York City première took place on April 20th, 2007 at the Zankel Hall at Carnegie Hall. It is dedicated to Edgar Meyer and Emanuel Ax.

Aside from the obvious virtuosity of these two great musicians, my inspiration for the work also came from a short poem with the same title by William Carlos Williams (1883-1963).

I was especially intrigued by the structure of this short poem and the surprising final line. I wondered if I could emulate it in music: a work beginning with material which seems to be going its own way but unexpectedly turns into something almost unrelated, though gentle and comforting.

Hot Pepper (2010)

for violin and marimba

1. ♩ = 50-52
2. ♩ = 126-144

Hot Pepper was commissioned for Camerata Pacifica by Bob Peirce as a birthday celebration for his wife, Sharon Harroun Peirce. The première of the work took place on September 10, 2010, and was given by Catherine Leonard (violin) and Ji Hye Jung (marimba). The two-movement *Hot Pepper* for violin and marimba is based on a folk song from China's Si Chuan province, which is well known for its hot and spicy cuisine.

Bright Sheng

4

Dan Zhu, Violin

Photo by LJO



Dan Zhu is a leading violinist of his generation, performing with conductors such as Christoph Eschenbach, Zubin Mehta, Krzysztof Penderecki and Muhai Tang, symphony orchestras in Boston, Washington DC, Munich, Paris and Florence, and the festivals of Salzburg, Tanglewood, Verbier, Marlboro, Schleswig-Holstein, Prades-Casals, Ravinia, and Spoleto. Praised by the press as “an artist of affecting humility, truly brilliant, compelling, and polished” by the press, he has collaborated with pianists such as Michel Dalberto, Philippe Entremont, Richard Goode, Lang Lang, KunWoo Paik, and Jean-Yves Thibaudet. He has collaborated with composers including George Benjamin, György Kurtág, Gian Carlo Menotti, Wolfgang Rihm, Bright Sheng, and Ye Xiaogang. Zhu’s involvement with the Antarctica Forum led him to be the first violinist to perform on the continent of Antarctica in 2013.

www.danzhumusic.com

Julian Schwarz, Cello



Born into a musical family, Julian Schwarz is recognised as a cellist destined to rank among the finest of the 21st century. Recent highlights include performances with the Charlotte, Des Moines, West Virginia, Chicago Camerata, Toledo, Amarillo and Washington/Idaho, Hartford and Boca Raton Symphony Orchestras, the Louisville Orchestra Northwest Sinfonietta, the Queensland Symphony, Brisbane, Boca del Rio Orchestra, Veracruz, the Mexico City Philharmonic, and a début appearance at the Intimacy of Creativity Festival in Hong Kong. He has also recorded Samuel Jones’ *Cello Concerto* for PBS television with the All Star Orchestra. Other recordings include Saint-Saëns’ *Cello Concerto No. 1* and the Haydn C Major *Cello Concerto* with the Seattle Symphony on Naxos 9.70125.

Trey Lee, Cello



Trey Lee has performed worldwide as a soloist under Lorin Maazel, Vassily Sinaisky, Juanjo Mena, Yuri Bashmet and Hannu Lintu, and with the Moscow Soloists, the London Philharmonia, the BBC Philharmonic, and the Munich and Romanian Radio Chamber Orchestras, among others. The winner of the Janigro Cello Competition, Lee has been featured in the *Financial Times* and on CNN, CCTV, the *Corriere della Sera*, and RTHK. Lee has released recordings on EMI Classics and other labels, including Bright Sheng’s *The Blazing Mirage*, and *Dream of the Red Chamber Suite* with the NCO Taiwan. Lee established the groundbreaking Musicus Fest in 2013. As a UNICEF HK ambassador, he performed at the UN General Assembly with Yoko Ono and Hugh Jackman, among others, to launch the Imagine Project in 2014.

Robert Black, Double bass

Photo by Thomas Girard



Robert Black tours the world creating unheard-of music for the solo double bass, collaborating with the most adventurous artists and technophiles from all walks of life. He is a founding and current member of the Bang On A Can All-Stars. Current projects include a solo *Partita* from Philip Glass and *Possessed* – a series of improvisations performed in Utah’s rugged canyon-desert landscape. Solo recordings include *Modern American Bass* (New World Records), *The Bass Music of Christian Wolff* and *Giacinto Scelsi* (Mode Records), and *State of the Bass* (O.O. Discs). Robert Black teaches at the Hartt School/University of Hartford, the Manhattan School of Music, and the Festival Eleazar de Carvalho in Brazil.

Yoobin Son, Flute/Alto flute



Flautist Yoobin Son was the first Korean to join the New York Philharmonic’s wind section when she became a member of the Orchestra in November 2012. She has served as the principal flute of the Mostly Mozart Festival Orchestra and principal flute of the New Haven Symphony Orchestra. Ms. Son has performed as a soloist with many ensembles including the New Haven, New Jersey, Florida and Korean Symphony Orchestras and the Seoul Philharmonic Orchestra. A dedicated chamber musician, Ms. Son has participated at festivals including the Marlboro Music Festival and Music from Angel Fire. She is an alumna of Carnegie Hall’s The Academy.

Pius Cheung, Marimba



Hailed by *The New York Times* as “deeply expressive” for his groundbreaking recording of Bach’s *Goldberg Variations*, Pius Cheung is widely known as one of the most important percussionists of his generation. He has performed solo concerts globally in venues such as Carnegie Hall, The Kennedy Center, and the National Center for the Performing Arts in Beijing. As a composer, he has been commissioned by Dame Evelyn Glennie, the Ju Percussion Group and the National Taiwan Symphony Orchestra. Cheung is currently an Assistant Professor of Percussion at the University of Oregon, Yamaha Performing Artist and Innovative Percussion Artist.

www.piuscheung.com

David Friend, Piano



A chamber musician and soloist, David Friend focuses primarily on new and experimental music and the exploration of the boundaries of contemporary pianism. He has performed at major venues around the world and his performances have been recorded by major labels and featured on programmes including NPR's Performance Today, WQXR's Hammered!, and WNYC's New Sounds. He is a founding member of TRANSIT New Music, Bent Duo, Hotel Elefant, and the Grand Band piano sextet, and often plays with Ensemble Signal, the Bang on a Can All-Stars, Alarm Will Sound, the International Contemporary Ensemble, and the American Composers Orchestra.

Marika Bournaki, Piano



Marika Bournaki's recent performances include recitals at the Onassis Cultural Centre in Athens, Greece, the Plaza Hidalgo in Mexico, the Glenn Gould Foundation at Carnegie Hall, the National Arts Center in Ottawa, the Flanders Festival in Belgium, the Konzert Accordate Series in Aachen Germany, the EMMA Concert Association in Florida, Chamber Music Northwest in Oregon and at the Luminato Festival. She has made guest appearances with L'Orchestre symphonique de Montréal and the St Petersburg Symphony Orchestra, and has given recitals in South Korea, Romania, Italy, Switzerland, and England.

Bright Sheng, Piano



Bright Sheng is recognised as one of the leading composers of our time, whose stage, orchestral, chamber and vocal works are performed regularly by the most important performing arts institutions and artists worldwide.

Proclaimed by the MacArthur Foundation in 2001 as “an innovative composer who merges diverse musical customs in works that transcend conventional aesthetic boundaries”, Bright Sheng writes music with a strong Asian influence. However, it is the synthesis with Western musical tradition that makes his work truly distinctive and original, thanks to his profound understanding of both cultures. As Sheng admits: “I consider myself both 100% American and 100% Asian.”

In September of 2016, the San Francisco Opera commissioned and premièred Sheng’s opera *Dream of The Red Chamber* to a sold-out month-long run, featuring a libretto by David Henry Hwang and Sheng himself.

In addition to composing, Sheng enjoys an active career as a conductor and concert pianist, and frequently acts as music advisor and artistic director to orchestras and festivals. He is currently the Leonard Bernstein Distinguished University Professor at the University of Michigan, and the Y. K. Pao Distinguished Visiting Professor at Hong Kong University of Science and Technology where, in 2011, he founded The Bright Sheng Partnership: Composers Meet Performers in Hong Kong. He has been the Artistic Director of the Partnership since its inception.

Bright Sheng was born in Shanghai on December 6th, 1955, and moved to New York in 1982 where he pursued his graduate works and studied composition and conducting privately with his mentor Leonard Bernstein.

Bright Sheng’s music is exclusively published by G. Schirmer, Inc.

Acclaimed Chinese/American composer Bright Sheng has been fascinated by folk music for his entire career and *Northern Lights* is his first work to use Scandinavian folk music, exploring its kinship with American sources such as Appalachian and Bluegrass music. Inspired by ancient Chinese poetry, *Melodies of a Flute* captures deep and sensuous moods of love and longing, while *Hot Pepper* refers to the spicy cuisine of Si Chuan province. Bright Sheng combines Chinese and Western musical ideas to create luminous, deeply expressive and rhythmic scores, giving new meaning to the idea of music as a universal language.

Bright SHENG

(b. 1955)

Northern Lights (2009)* 22:17

Julian Schwarz (Cello), Marika Bournaki (Piano)

- | | | |
|----------|-----------------|------|
| 1 | I. ♩ = 88 | 6:43 |
| 2 | II. ♩ = 69 | 4:03 |
| 3 | III. ♩ = 63-66 | 7:37 |
| 4 | IV. ♩ = 144-152 | 3:54 |

Melodies of a Flute (2011)* 16:52

Yoobin Son (Flute/Alto flute), Dan Zhu (Violin), Julian Schwarz (Cello), Pius Cheung (Marimba and suspended cymbals)

- | | | |
|----------|----------------------|-------|
| 5 | I. Flute and Phoenix | 12:12 |
| 6 | II. Lotus Flowers | 4:40 |

Four Movements for Piano Trio (1990) 13:33

Dan Zhu (Violin), Trey Lee (Cello), Bright Sheng (Piano)

- | | | |
|-----------|------------------------|------|
| 7 | I. ♩ = 54 | 4:04 |
| 8 | II. ♩ = 72 | 2:26 |
| 9 | III. ♩ = 112 | 2:55 |
| 10 | IV. ♩ = 66 (Nostalgia) | 4:08 |

Sweet May Again (2007)* 9:25

Robert Black (String bass), David Friend (Piano)

Hot Pepper (2010)* 9:17

Dan Zhu (Violin), Pius Cheung (Marimba)

- | | | |
|-----------|-----------------|------|
| 12 | I. ♩ = 50-52 | 5:13 |
| 13 | II. ♩ = 126-144 | 4:04 |

*World Première Recordings

Recorded at the CMA Lecture Theatre, Cheng Yu Tung Building, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, on 5th November, 2016 (7-10); LaFrak Concert Hall, Queen College, City University of New York, from 6th-7th August, 2016 (1-6, 11-13)

Producer and Engineer: Phil Rowlands

Booklet Notes: Bright Sheng • Publisher: Music Sales/G. Schirmer

This recording was made possible through the generous donation of Inger G. and William Ginsberg, and grants from the University of Michigan and Hong Kong University of Science and Technology.

Cover image: Natalia Walsøe



DDD

8.579014

Playing Time
1:10:47



www.naxos.com

© 2017 Naxos Rights US, Inc.
Booklet notes in English
Made in the USA