

# **Bright Sheng**

## **A NIGHT AT THE CHINESE OPERA**

**Dance Capriccio • String Quartet No. 5**

**My Song • My Other Song**

**The Shanghai Quartet • Peter Serkin**

**Weigang Li • Bright Sheng**

# Bright Sheng

## A Night at the Chinese Opera

The Shanghai Quartet • Peter Serkin  
Weigang Li • Bright Sheng\*

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❷	<b>String Quartet No. 5 'The Miraculous' (2007)</b>	<b>17:19</b>
❸	<b>A Night at the Chinese Opera for Violin and Piano (2005)*</b>	<b>9:19</b>
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❹	1/8 note = 54	3:00
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❻	1/4 note = 112	2:20
❼	<i>Nostalgia</i> 1/8 note = 63	2:55
	<b>My Other Song for solo piano (2007)</b>	<b>20:43</b>
❽	quarter note = 63	2:33
❾	quarter note = 80 sempre, non rubato	4:25
❿	Prestissimo (quarter note = 144-160)	3:20
⓫	Slow funeral march (eighth note = 60 sempre)	10:25

### Dance Capriccio (2011)

for piano and string quartet

*Dance Capriccio* was commissioned by the Maxine and Stuart Frankel Foundation in honor of Lois Beznos, the President of the Chamber Music Society of Detroit. The work was written for Peter Serkin and the Shanghai String Quartet, who premièred the work on February 11, 2012, at the Seligman Performing Arts Center in Detroit. It is approximately twelve minutes in length.

*Dance Capriccio* was inspired by the dance folk music of the Sherpa, a small ethnic group (population ca. 150,000) mostly living in western Nepal, in the high mountains of the Himalayas. In the Tibetan language, Sherpa means 'People of the East', as it is believed that the Sherpa moved from Eastern Tibet to their current site centuries ago. Sherpa are regarded as excellent mountaineers and guides for expeditions of the Himalayas, especially Mount Everest.

The Sherpa language is essentially an atypical dialect of Tibetan. The same phenomenon is reflected in Sherpa folk music which is similar to Tibetan but with its distinctive characters and twists of melodic turns. Like the Tibetans, the Sherpa love to dance and, along with love songs and drinking songs, dance music is an important genre within Sherpa folk music. In *Dance Capriccio*, I have tried to capture the various characters of Sherpa Dance, from slow to fast, tender to raucous, and even wild.

This work is dedicated to Maxine and Stuart Frankel, my dear friends, and passionate patrons and promoters for arts and art education.

### String Quartet No. 5 'Miraculous' (2007)

*String Quartet No. 5 'The Miraculous'*, written between March and July 2007, was co-commissioned for the Emerson String Quartet by the State University of New York at Stony Brook, Stanford University, and the University Musical Society at the University of Michigan. It was premièred by the Emerson String Quartet on October 18th, 2007. The work is dedicated to the Emerson String Quartet.

The subtitle of the quartet is inspired by two sources. Firstly, it is quite unusual to hear a string quartet in which each member is not only a splendid virtuoso, but also a passionate and superb musician. That was the thought which went through my mind when I first heard the Emerson Quartet in the summer of 1983 at Aspen Music Festival where I was a student, new to the USA. Throughout its three decades, the Emerson's performances have become greatly more profound; yet they have not lost any of their passion and virtuosity.

*String Quartet No. 5* is based on two very different musical motifs, like two strangers from different cultural backgrounds who meet and become lovers. Throughout their courtship, neither of them changes but they get to know and understand each other on a much deeper level. Most importantly, they learn to live happily with each other with each other.

## A Night at the Chinese Opera (2005)

for violin and piano

*A Night at the Chinese Opera* was commissioned by the 2006 Indianapolis International Violin Competition. The basic materials in this work are derived from an instrumental interlude of the well-known Peking Opera, *Farewell My Concubine*, in which Princess Yü bids farewell to General Xiang, her lover and master, with a sword dance before she kills herself at the climactic point of the dance. Here I imagine the violin part delivers the female singing voice while the piano part often gives the rhythm of the Chinese opera. Nonetheless, the feeling of dance should be prevalent.

## My Song (1989)

for solo piano

1. 1/8 note = 54
2. 1/4 note = 66-72
3. 1/4 note = 112
4. *Nostalgia* 1/8 note = 63

*My Song* sprang from two-fold inspiration: firstly, Peter Serkin's musicality and virtuosity, and secondly, my attachment to Chinese folk music. The phonetic pronunciation of *My Song* (m'ai-sang) in Chinese can coincidentally be translated as 'pulsating voices'. And my personal 'm'ai-sang' is the folk music and dance of my native land.

The prelude-like first movement, in folkloric style, is constructed through the development of heterophony, a typical device in Asian music. A humorous and joyful folk song from Se-Tsuan inspired the second movement. The third movement is a savage dance in which the melody grows through a series of 'Chinese sequences'. This is a term of my own invention that describes a type of melodic development in Chinese instrumental music in which each repetition of the initial motive increases the number of notes, duration, and tessitura. The last movement evokes a sense of lonely nostalgia.

*My Song* was commissioned and premiered by Peter Serkin on November 11, 1989 in New York City.

## My Other Song (2007)

for solo piano

1. quarter note = 63
2. quarter note = 80 sempre, non rubato
3. Prestissimo (quarter note = 144-160)
4. Slow funeral march (eighth note = 60 sempre)

*My Other Song* was commissioned by Music Accord for Yefim Bronfman, to whom the work is dedicated. The premiere took place on May 20th, 2007 at the Rose Theater in the Lincoln Center, New York City.

In 1990, after eight years in the U.S., I wrote my first work for solo piano, entitled *My Song*, commissioned for Peter Serkin. At the time my primary compositional concentration was to develop a melodic and harmonic style within the boundaries of Chinese folk music, which are mostly in pentatonic modes, and contemporary Western Classical music. As a result, all the four movements in *My Song* were either based on existing Chinese folk tunes or written in the style of it. Seventeen years later, I was asked by another virtuoso pianist friend – Yefim Bronfman – to write a work for solo piano. After the passing of so many years, I was intrigued to see if there would be any change in my compositional writing style. I therefore entitled the new suite *My Other Song*.

There are four movements in the composition, the first three of which are brief and provide contrast in character. The theme of the last movement, the longest, is based on a Buddhist chant heard at the wake for my mother in February 2005.

Bright Sheng

## Weigang Li, Violin



Born into a family of well-known musicians in Shanghai, Weigang Li began studying the violin with his parents when he was 5 and went on to attend the Shanghai Conservatory at age 14. In 1985, upon graduating from the Shanghai Conservatory, Weigang Li left China to continue his studies at Northern Illinois University and later studied and taught at The Juilliard School as teaching assistant to the Juilliard Quartet. His teachers have included Shmuel Ashkenasi, Isadore Tinkleman, and Tan Shu-Chen. Mr. Li made his solo debut at 17 with the BBC Symphony Orchestra and has appeared as soloist with the Shanghai Symphony, China Philharmonic, BBC Scottish Symphony and the Asian Youth Orchestra. Weigang Li is a founding member and has been first violinist of The Shanghai Quartet since 1983. Now in its 31st season, the Shanghai Quartet has performed well over 2000 concerts in 30 countries and recorded 34 albums.

Weigang Li is a violin professor at Montclair State University in New Jersey and Bard College Conservatory of Music in New York. He also holds the title of guest concert-master of the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra and guest professor at Shanghai Conservatory and Central Conservatory in Beijing. Mr. Li plays on the 1600 Giovanni Paolo Maggini violin (ex-Burmester), which is on a generous loan from Mr. Rin Kei Mei.

## Peter Serkin, Piano



Recognized as an artist of passion and integrity, the distinguished American pianist Peter Serkin is one of the most thoughtful and individualistic musicians appearing before the public today. Throughout his career he has successfully conveyed the essence of five centuries of repertoire and his performances with symphony orchestras, recital appearances, chamber music collaborations and recordings are respected worldwide.

Peter Serkin's rich musical heritage extends back several generations: his grandfather was violinist and composer Adolf Busch and his father pianist Rudolf Serkin. In 1958, at age eleven, he entered the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia where he was a student of Lee Luvisi, Mieczysław Horszowski and Rudolf Serkin. He later continued his studies with Ernst Oster, Marcel Moyse and Karl Ulrich Schnabel. Peter Serkin has performed with the world's major symphony orchestras with such eminent conductors as Seiji Ozawa,

Pierre Boulez, Daniel Barenboim, Claudio Abbado and Simon Rattle. An avid proponent of the music of many of the most important composers of the 20th and 21st centuries, Mr. Serkin has been instrumental in bringing the music of Schoenberg, Webern, Berg, Stravinsky, Wolpe, Messiaen, Takemitsu, Henze, Berio, Wuorinen, Goehr, Knussen and Lieberman, among others, to audiences around the world.

Peter Serkin's recordings also reflect his distinctive musical vision. His recording of the six Mozart concerti composed in 1784 with Alexander Schneider and the English Chamber Orchestra, was nominated for a Grammy® and received the prestigious Deutsche Schallplatten as well as being named 'Best Recording of the Year' by *Stereo Review* magazine. Mr. Serkin currently teaches at Bard College Conservatory of Music and the Longy School of Music.

## Bright Sheng, Piano



Proclaimed 'an innovative composer who merges diverse musical customs in works that transcend conventional aesthetic boundaries', composer/conductor Bright Sheng received the coveted MacArthur Foundation Fellowship — the so-called 'Genius Award' — in November

2001. 'Sheng is a fresh voice in cross-cultural music', the Foundation Committee further noted. 'He will continue to be an important leader in exploring and bridging musical traditions.'

Among the major organizations that have commissioned and performed his works are: The White House, Beijing 2008 Olympic Games, the Boston Symphony, Philadelphia Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, Cleveland Orchestra, Chicago

Symphony, St. Louis Symphony, San Francisco Symphony, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Minnesota Symphony, The National Symphony, San Francisco Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Houston Grand Opera, Santa Fe Opera, City Opera of New York, New York City Ballet, San Francisco Ballet, Orchestre de Paris, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, London BBC Symphony Orchestra, Orchestra Sinfonica dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia, Hamburg Radio Symphony, Frankfurt Radio Symphony, Dusseldorf Symphony Orchestra, Dortmund Philharmonic, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, National Symphony of Russia, Warsaw Symphony, Danish National Radio Symphony, Denmark, Finnish Radio Symphony, National Symphony of Spain, Tokyo Philharmonic, Tokyo Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra, China National Symphony, Shanghai Symphony, and festivals throughout North America, Europe and Asia.

In addition to being an active composer, Bright Sheng is also a highly regarded conductor and pianist. His guest conducting engagements includes the Detroit Symphony, Seattle Symphony, the San Francisco Symphony, the St. Petersburg Philharmonic Orchestra of Russia, Dortmund Philharmonic Orchestra of Germany, Grand Rapids Symphony, New York Chamber Symphony, New York City Ballet, San Francisco Ballet, China National Symphony, Hong Kong Philharmonic, Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra, Thailand Philharmonic, New West Symphony Orchestra, Lexington Symphony Orchestra, Orchestra 2001, principles from the New York Philharmonic, principles from the Chicago Symphony, Lincoln Center Festival, Spoleto USA Festival, Tanglewood Music Center, Brevard Music Center Festival Orchestra, The Banff Centre, Bowdoin Summer Music Festival, Prince Music Theater, Asian Youth Orchestra. And he has performed throughout the country including Carnegie Hall, the Kennedy Center and Lincoln Center. In March 2014 Naxos released his debut conducting album [8.570610 / *The Blazing Mirage*] with the Hong Kong Philharmonic in three of his concertos.

As a pianist, he has recorded his *Red Silk Dance*, a capriccio for piano and orchestra, with the Seattle Symphony, among other chamber music of his. He has also appeared at some of the most important music festivals in this country including Tanglewood Music Center, Spoleto USA Festival, Brevard Music Festival, Bravo! Saratoga Performing Arts Center, Vail Valley Music Festival, Bowdoin Summer Music Festival, Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival, Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, La Jolla Chamber music Festival, Seattle International Music Festival Seattle Chamber Music Festival, Eastern Music Festival in North Carolina.

From 1998 to 2003 Sheng was the Artistic Advisor to Yo-Yo Ma's "Silk Road Project", and conducted its first workshop at Tanglewood in 2000. From January 1st, 2006 to December 31st, 2007 he served as the first Composer-in-Residence for the New York City Ballet, for whom he also served both as a conductor and composed two new ballets. He has been the Director of the Festival of Contemporary Music at Tanglewood, Composer-in-Residence for the Art Institute of Chicago, Brevard Music Festival, the Winnipeg New Music Festival, Co-Artistic Director of the Seattle Symphony's "Pacific Rim" Festival, Artistic Director of the San Francisco Symphony's "Wet Ink" Festival, Composer-in-Residence with the Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival, and from 1992-1994 resident composer of the Seattle Symphony. From 1989-1992 he held the same position for the Lyric Opera of Chicago.

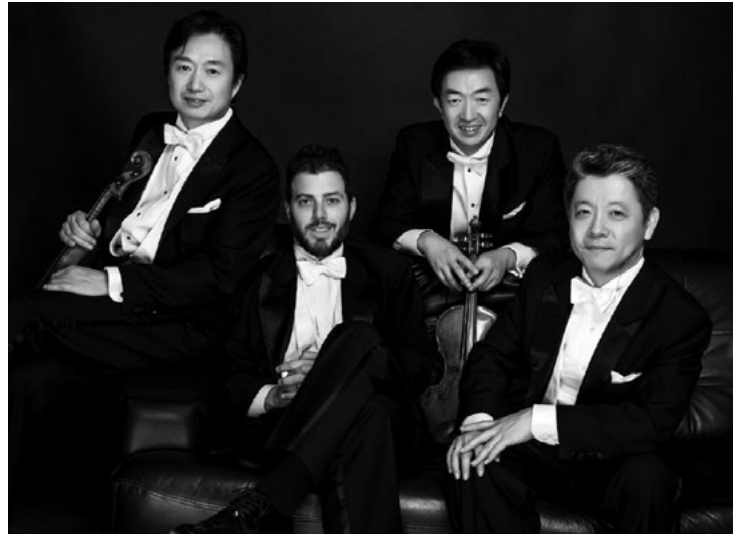
Born on December 6, 1955 in Shanghai, China, Bright Sheng began piano studies at the age of four with his mother. During the Cultural Revolution he was sent to Qinghai where he worked for seven years as a pianist, conductor and percussionist in a folk music and dance troupe. During that time he avidly studied and collected folk music of the area. In 1978 when China's universities reopened, he was one of the first students accepted by the Shanghai Conservatory of Music where he earned his undergraduate degree. He moved to New York in 1982 and received his Masters Degree at Queens College and Columbia University (DMA). He became a student and assistant of Leonard Bernstein in 1985 and studied both composition and conducting under him.

Since 2011, he has been the Founder and Artistic Director of *The Intimacy of Creativity—The Bright Sheng Partnership: Composers Meet Performers in Hong Kong*, an annual two-week workshop with new approach to creativity.

Since 1995 Mr. Sheng has served on the composition faculty at the University of Michigan. He has held The Leonard Bernstein Distinguished University professorship since 2003. Bestowed by the president, it is the institution's highest honor. Since 2010, he has also been serving as the Y K Pao Distinguished Visiting Professor at Hong Kong University of Science and Technology.

Exclusively published by G. Schirmer/Music Sales, his works can be heard on the Sony Classical, Decca, BIS, Delos, Koch International, New World, Naxos and Telarc labels.

### The Shanghai Quartet



Formed at The Shanghai Conservatory in 1983, The Shanghai Quartet has worked with the world's most distinguished artists and regularly tours the major music centres of Europe, North America and Asia. The Quartet has a long history of championing new music and juxtaposing Eastern and Western sounds. Commissions and premières include works by Lowell Lieberman, Sebastian Currier, Bright Sheng and Zhou Long. The Shanghai Quartet currently serves as Quartet-in-Residence at Montclair State University in New Jersey, Ensemble-in-Residence with the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra, and as visiting guest professors of the Shanghai Conservatory and the Central Conservatory in Beijing.

Described as “a fresh voice in cross-cultural music” by the MacArthur Foundation, whose Fellowship he was awarded, Bright Sheng has become one of today’s most widely performed composers. Filtered through Sheng’s rhythmically energetic yet haunting idiom, various types of Himalayan Sherpa dances are captured in *Dance Capriccio*, while characteristic singing voices and Chinese opera rhythms are represented in *A Night at the Chinese Opera*. *My Song* was inspired both by the musicality and virtuosity of pianist Peter Serkin (the work’s dedicatee and the soloist on this recording) and by the composer’s love of Chinese folk music.

## Bright SHENG (b.1955)

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### WORLD PREMIÈRE RECORDING

**The Shanghai Quartet • Peter Serkin, Piano**  
**Weigang Li, Violin • Bright Sheng, Piano\***

Recorded at the Leshowitz Recital Hall, Montclair State University, Montclair, New Jersey, USA  
7 December, 2013 (*Dance Capriccio* and *My Other Song*), 8 March, 2014 (*A Night at the Chinese Opera* and *String Quartet No. 5*)  
and American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters Auditorium, New York City,  
8 September, 1990 (*My Song*), reissue from 1992 New World Records.  
Producers: Steven Epstein (1-3, 8-10), Elizabeth Ostrow (4-7) • Engineers: Steven Epstein (1-3, 8-10), Tom Lazarus (4-7)  
Editors: Steven Epstein (1-3, 8-10), Brad Michel, Soundmirror, Inc. (4-7) • Publisher: G. Schirmer, Inc. • Cover Photo: *Chen Tao*  
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