

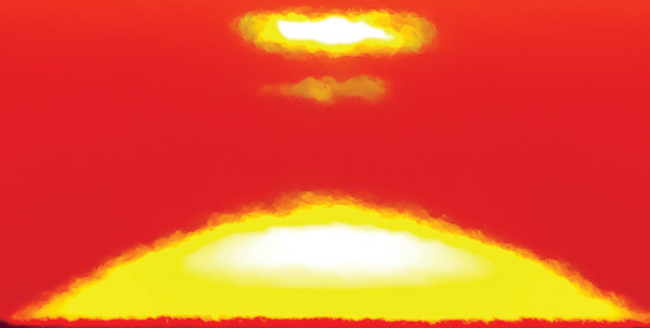
TAN DUN

Eight Memories in Watercolor

C-A-G-E- (In Memory of John Cage)

Film Music Sonata • Traces • The Fire • Blue Orchid

Ralph van Raat, Piano



Tan Dun (b. 1957)

Piano Music

Tan Dun's piano music forms an intimate reflection not only of the broad range and history of his composing, but also of the journey of his artistic soul, of his musical and philosophical discoveries and of his personal memories. The list of prizes and awards for the Chinese-born composer and conductor includes the Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement at the 2017 Venice Biennale, a Grawemeyer Award, the D.D. Shostakovich Award from the Yuri Bashmet International Charitable Foundation, the Bach Prize of the City of Hamburg, an Academy Award, a GRAMMY award and the honorary titles of Dean of the Bard College Conservatory of Music, New York and UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador. The variety of these awards is a reflection of the striking versatility of his works and of the worldwide recognition he has gained as a powerful artistic representative of intercultural exchanges. Averse to any sort of stylistic musical rigidity or prejudice, his works range from symphonic compositions to operas, using instruments from both the East and West, and from chamber music to film scores. All of these diverse works fuse traditional Chinese and Western classical and avant-garde musical languages in unprecedentedly natural ways. These include the influences of ancient rituals and natural sound sources such as ceramics, water or paper, but also the newest technological developments such as the internet and even smartphones. As a conductor, Tan Dun feels equally at home working with symphony orchestras and rock groups, expanding his popularity ever more beyond traditional and contemporary classical audiences.

In light of Tan Dun's relationship to the piano, it is no coincidence that his first official work was written for the piano, *Eight Memories in Watercolor* (1978, rev. 2002). At that time, the young student of the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing greatly missed the mountains, the rivers, the water and the land of his childhood: the province of Hunan, China. He composed this piece as audible, multicoloured paintings of his memories; the word 'watercolor' in the title specifically refers to the delicate and intimate nature of the different movements. *Missing Moon* creates an atmosphere of lament, while *Staccato Beans* refers to an energetic children's game. *Herdboy's Song* and *Blue Nun* evoke rustic folk song, but *Red Wilderness* contrasts this by depicting the Hunan region's vast and perilous nature. *Ancient Burial* recalls feelings of grief, followed by the soothing sights and sounds of the peaceful *Floating Clouds*. The set is concluded with a forceful ritualistic dance, *Sunrain*. At the time of this composition, the Cultural Revolution had just ended, and as Western classical music was permitted again, one can hear how Tan Dun, at an early age, had already masterfully assimilated his strong Chinese cultural roots with his curiosity for the sounds of Western composers such as Claude Debussy and Béla Bartók.

About a decade later, Tan Dun revisited the piano once again to reminisce about his youth. He had moved to New York in 1986 to study composition at Columbia University where he was exposed to abstract Western avant-garde composition styles. *Traces* (1989, rev. 1992) follows a memory of a field research trip to the mountainous lands of Guangxi, during which the composer heard the whistling of the wind in three alternating pitches (A, C and D) through the gap of a bus window. This 'windy music' created the deepest impression on Tan Dun, as it proved to him how beautifully nature could sing. Tan used these pitches throughout his composition, which carefully balances sound with silence, loud with soft, and dissonance with consonance, encompassing all aspects of life according to the yin and yang principle of balancing forces. The title refers mainly to tracing back to the composer's memory of hearing this innate music of nature. Tan Dun's exceptional openness to include fully consonant textures in a seemingly Western avant-garde language was already evident here, as well as the remarkably strong spiritual approach to the work.

A major factor in the development of Tan Dun's artistic approach as a young composer in New York was the acquaintance and ensuing friendship with someone who was to become his most admired teacher, colleague, philosopher and musical and spiritual compass: John Cage (1912–1992). Cage, who was deeply interested in combining Eastern philosophies with Western art music, taught Tan Dun to always listen to the existing sounds around oneself, which was evidenced by *Traces*. In fact, Cage was the first Western composer to make Tan Dun discover his Eastern roots, partly by introducing him to the ancient Chinese *Book of Changes*, the *I Ching*. After Cage passed, Tan Dun immediately paid homage to his deceased friend by composing a 'fingering for piano' called *C-A-G-E- (In Memory of John Cage)* (1993), using the experimental possibilities and tone colours of almost exclusively the pitches corresponding to his mentor's name: C, A, G and E. These pitches sound strikingly Chinese, and they are most often plucked, strummed or muted, often using playing techniques from the Chinese stringed instrument, the *pipa*. The resulting overtones form a kaleidoscope of unlimited changes in colour, rhythm and gestures in honour of Tan Dun's mentor, transforming a conventional piano with minimal means into a surprisingly folkloric-sounding Chinese instrument.

Tan Dun returned to the piano in 1995 with his *Concerto for Pizzicato Piano and Ten Instruments*, followed by a solo piano piece, *Dew–Fall–Drops* in 2000. Both works are highly original studies in extended techniques as introduced in *C-A-G-E- (In Memory of John Cage)*. In the meantime, Tan Dun had also gained much success as a film score composer, and the *Film Music Sonata* (2016) (after the music for *The Banquet*) followed as a reflection of this development. Feng Xiaogang's movie *The Banquet* (2006) deals with an almost Shakespearian struggle between (eternal) love and the pursuit of power, and its music runs the full gamut of Tan Dun's tonal language and stylistic influences. For the *Film Music Sonata*, Tan Dun selected four very different moods of music from his film score to rework into and become a sonata, representing how a film soundtrack could be a powerful inspiration for his classical composing.

The Fire (2020), written for Ralph van Raat, contains some of Tan Dun's most virtuosic, dramatic and rich piano writing up to this point in his career. It combines avant-garde techniques such as clusters to be played by the fist or the arm, with folk song rhythms of his youth and intensely lyrical writing, evoking his film scores. The piece shares a number of musical motifs with piano concerto *The Fire* (2008), but the composer completely transformed them into a showcase solo piece. Its wild and extreme character has its roots with the ritual fire dancers from Tan Dun's grandmother's village, challenging the limits of man versus nature.

Dramatic gestures, consonance versus dissonance, Western classical tradition and an Eastern tendency towards tranquillity once more return in a condensed form in *Blue Orchid (Variation on Beethoven's Diabelli Variations)* (2020). Written for the Diabelli Project of pianist Rudolf Buchbinder, it commemorates Ludwig van Beethoven's 250th anniversary in 2020 by incorporating the characteristic opening motif of Beethoven's *Diabelli Variations*. Here, the historic and present masters of composition are in a direct dialogue. However, as always, Tan Dun questions and redefines tradition once again: the motif is no longer a driving force, but it provides us with a glimpse into the universe, into nature, and into time itself. It was two thousand years ago when the Chinese philosopher Lao Tse said that the greatest sound can be heard only in silence; in the 21st century, Tan Dun proves ever so powerfully its eternal truth.

Ralph van Raat

Ralph van Raat



Ralph van Raat has been completely fascinated by the classical music of the 20th century since the age of fourteen. Although his repertoire ranges from Bach to Boulez, his primary focus has always been on composers from Debussy, Bartók and Ives to present day masters. His aim is to convince his audiences of the immense beauty and diversity of the music of our own time through solo recitals, lecture-recitals, concerto performances, album releases and special projects. Van Raat helps audiences identify with modern day composers by adhering to a classical approach: he firmly believes that a strong sense of classical structure as well as a refinement of tone is essential in conveying the logic and poetry of any music. This has not gone unrecognised: he is the recipient of a substantial number of national and international awards, many composers have written solo works for him, and he has performed over 50 piano concertos with orchestras worldwide such as the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra and the BBC Symphony Orchestra. He has also recorded over 30 albums. Van Raat is a frequent speaker and performer on radio and television shows, and teaches at both the Conservatorium van Amsterdam and the Accademia di Musica di Pinerolo, Turin in between his busy concert schedule. Van Raat was named a Steinway Artist in 2003. www.ralphvanraat.com

Tan Dun's originality has been reflected in worldwide recognition of his music, which draws on both Chinese and Western musical languages. The *Eight Memories in Watercolor* are deft painterly reflections, while in *Traces* he balances sound with silence in this evocation of nature. The vibrant drama of *Blue Orchid* incorporates the opening motif of Beethoven's *Diabelli Variations*. In *Film Music Sonata*, which here receives its first recording on general release, Tan Dun draws on his score for the film *The Banquet*. The kaleidoscopic *C-A-G-E-*, strikingly Chinese in sound, is a tribute to his teacher and spiritual compass, John Cage. *The Fire*, written for Ralph van Raat, contains some of Tan Dun's most virtuosic and dramatic piano writing.

TAN DUN

	Eight Memories in Watercolor (1978, rev. 2002)	15:08
1	No. 1. Missing Moon	3:11
2	No. 2. Staccato Beans	1:19
3	No. 3. Herdboy's Song	1:47
4	No. 4. Blue Nun	1:16
5	No. 5. Red Wilderness	2:14
6	No. 6. Ancient Burial	3:11
7	No. 7. Floating Clouds	2:26
8	No. 8. Sunrain	1:23
9	C-A-G-E- (In Memory of John Cage) (1993)	12:54
	Film Music Sonata (2016)	16:08
10	I. The Mask –	3:02
11	II. After Tonight	3:51
12	III. Sword Dance	3:09
13	IV. Only for Love	5:58
14	Traces (1989, rev. 1992)	8:20
15	The Fire (2020) (for Ralph van Raat)*	13:32
16	Blue Orchid (Variation on Beethoven's <i>Diabelli Variations</i>) (2020)	4:35

***WORLD PREMIERE RECORDING**

Ralph van Raat, Piano

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