



ZHOU | CHEN
LONG | YI

Symphony
'Humen 1839'

ZHOU LONG

The Rhyme of Taigu

The Enlightened

New Zealand
Symphony Orchestra

Darrell Ang

Zhou Long (b. 1953)

Symphony 'Humen 1839' (with Chen Yi (b. 1953)) • The Rhyme of Taigu • The Enlightened

The Rhyme of Taigu, composed in 2003, was co-commissioned by the Barlow Endowment for Music Composition (Brigham Young University) and the Singapore Symphony Orchestra. The concept of the work derives from an earlier chamber composition by Zhou Long, *Taigu Rhyme*, for clarinet, violin, cello and three drummers, members of a modern Japanese Taiko ensemble. This commission prompted the composer to consider in greater detail the history of traditional Japanese drumming.

Taigu is the Chinese pronunciation of the Japanese word *taiko*, meaning 'fat drum'. Although the tradition of Japanese *taiko* drumming has existed for many centuries, its origins can be traced back to the *taigu* tradition that grew out of Buddhist doctrines and courtly ceremonies in China. In Japan, *taiko* developed into a series of very specific categories and variations of drumming depending on the purpose and context of the performance. These include *gagaku* (court music); *noh* and *kabuki* accompaniment (theatre music); Buddhist and Shinto religious ceremonies; the simple marking of the hours in daily life; and even as a means of communication in battle. *Taiko* also became an essential part of village life in Japan and was used in farming and fishing rituals to encourage successful harvests, or to appease the spirits of ancestors. Whilst the Japanese tradition thus became very strong, Chinese *taigu* has scarcely survived: it formed the basis of court music during the Tang dynasty (618-907 AD), but only fragmentary musical sources survive. *The Rhyme of Taigu* is Zhou Long's attempt to revivify this ancient art form and capture something of its energy and spirit, by drawing both Chinese and Japanese traditional elements (including a large number of percussion instruments) into a contemporary western orchestral ensemble.

The piece consists of three sections. Beginning with three drummers on the *dagu* (Chinese bass drums), a slow rhythmic pattern is spelled out beneath a heavy bass line. The texture become increasingly dense, and the



strings join the ensemble before the appearance of a solo clarinet prompts the fading of the *dagu* into the background. New patterns now emerge, each in a faster tempo than the last, building to a climactic closure to the first part of the work. A brief clarinet solo cadenza connects this to the next section, which is inspired by ancient *zhijia* temple music from Beijing. The winds evoke the sound of the *guanxi*, a double reed instrument used in the temple ensemble, and they present a singing, improvisational melody whilst the ensemble accompanies in a loose, unspecified tempo. This haunting, almost ritual atmosphere is broken by the arrival of the brass; the music now accelerates into the final section, in which vivid, pulsing rhythms drive the piece on to its conclusion. *The Rhyme of Taigu* is dedicated to the composer's wife, Chen Yi, for her 50th birthday in 2003. It was premiered by the Singapore Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Lan Shui, on 23 May 2003 in Singapore.

Commissioned by the Guangzhou Symphony Orchestra and completed in 2009, *Symphony 'Humen 1839'* is the only collaborative work by Zhou Long and

Chen Yi. The *Symphony* is divided into four movements, and is intended to commemorate the public burning of over 1000 tonnes of opium in June 1839 in Humen, Guangdong. The opium had been seized from British traders, and was piled by the Pearl River and set alight, in an attempt to ban the formidable – and illegal – trading of opium by the British in Qing Dynasty China. The event was to prompt Britain to declare war on China – a conflict now known as the First Opium War (1839-42).

A native of Guangzhou, Chen Yi constructed the first movement, *Andante luminoso*, from pitch materials drawn from three popular Guangdong melodies: *Thunder in a Drought*, *Dragon Boat Race*, and *Hungry Horse Rattles*. The second movement is entitled *Allegro feroce*, and uses powerful rhythms and angular intervals to represent the scholar and national hero Lin Zexu (1785-1890), who led the battle against opium smuggling and destroyed so much of the drug at Humen in 1839. The third movement, *Adagio tragico*, uses long, lyrical, mournful melodies to express the humiliation and indignity of the Chinese people during the war. Finally the fourth movement, *Allegro trascinate*, reflects the nation's spirit, and the preservation of national dignity, as the wars were overcome and the country was free once again to develop and grow through history. The pride and power of the Chinese people is evident in the energetic and prominent percussive writing in this finale. The work was premiered on 13 September 2009 by the Guangzhou Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Long Yu. It won the First Prize of the Sixteenth Chinese National Composition Competition for Symphonic Works, sponsored by the Chinese Ministry of Culture in 2012.

The Enlightened is a companion piece to *The Immortal*, performed by the BBC Symphony Orchestra at the Royal Albert Hall, London in July 2004. *The Immortal* was the first BBC World Service commission in its seventy-year history, and pays tribute to the influence of Chinese artists and intellectuals in the twentieth century. *The Enlightened* is an expression of contemporary world struggles, and reflects the composer's belief that through

music we can reflect upon our relationships with all people, the planet and the universe. Ancient Chinese philosophy teaches that physical, mental and spiritual well-being can be achieved through harmony and balance in exercise, diet, breathing, meditation and positive mental attitude. The three central principles are thus: Peace, Light and Love.

The Enlightened begins with a pulse-like rhythm in the percussion and low instruments; the strings play cluster-chords and micro-tonal trills whilst the trumpets and horns exchange calls over this texture. The tension builds throughout this opening section – and at last the appearance of a flowing theme in the woodwind dissipates the energy, moving the music into a more peaceful mood. The music of the winds now begins to expand, prompted by the appearance of string harmonics, and gradually develops into a multi-layered, chant-like theme (given the unusual timbres created here, it is worth stressing that the instruments involved are all standard to a western orchestra: flutes, clarinets and oboes). The tempo remains slow and stately: single-note repeated patterns ring out from various percussion instruments whilst the low strings provide a pedal bass. The texture becomes increasingly dense through repetition, leading to another climax, and the harp has a prominent role here.

The middle section commences with a dialogue between the solo wind and percussion, later supported by further string harmonics. This is punctuated with sharp, *sforzando* chords from the percussion and later, the low strings join with a quaver pattern reminiscent of chanting. The music now builds, the tempo quickening whilst the meters become irregular. Finally the closing section returns the music to the mysterious atmosphere of the work's opening.

The Enlightened was commissioned by the Kansas City Symphony, and premiered by that orchestra, under the direction of Michael Stern, in Kansas City on 30 September 2005.

Zhou Long, edited by Katy Hamilton

New Zealand Symphony Orchestra



The New Zealand Symphony Orchestra is New Zealand's national orchestra. One of the world's oldest national symphony orchestras, it has charmed audiences with memorable concerts and recordings for 68 years. Today, the NZSO is recognised as an outstanding orchestra of international stature. It continues to grow and develop artistically, taking a challenging and varied programme of music to communities throughout New Zealand. The NZSO has an extensive catalogue of recordings, mostly on the Naxos label. More than one million of these CDs have been sold internationally in the past decade. nzso.co.nz

Darrell Ang



Darrell Ang's triumph at the 50th Besançon International Young Conductor's Competition, where he took all three top awards, Grand Prize, Audience Prize and Orchestra Prize, launched his international career, leading to the music directorship of the Orchestre Symphonique de Bretagne and numerous guest conducting engagements with the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, Orchestre National de Lyon, Orchestre Philharmonique de Strasbourg, Orchestra Sinfonica di Milano 'Giuseppe Verdi', St Petersburg Philharmonic Orchestra, Konzerthaus Orchestra Berlin, Vienna Chamber Orchestra, Copenhagen Philharmonic Orchestra, RTVE Symphony Orchestra, Madrid, and the Hong Kong Philharmonic, among others. Three years later Darrell Ang was selected to join the

International Conductors' Academy of the Allianz Cultural Foundation and invited to undertake residencies with the London Philharmonic Orchestra and the Philharmonia Orchestra. He has several recording projects for Naxos Records and ARS Produktion of works by French and Chinese composers. In his native Singapore Darrell Ang became the youngest Associate Conductor of the Singapore Symphony Orchestra and served as Music Director of the Singapore National Youth Orchestra. His gifts were discovered at the age of four when he began to play violin and piano, then turning also to composition. He went on to study conducting in St Petersburg and then at Yale, where he became its first Conducting Fellow. He is grateful to his mentors Lorin Maazel, Vladimir Jurowski and Esa-Pekka Salonen for their invaluable advice and support.

Widely regarded as one of China's leading composers, Pulitzer Prize-winning Zhou Long writes music which is consistently compelling. *The Rhyme of Taigu* revives the spirit of Chinese court music from the Tang dynasty (618-907 AD), drawing on traditional percussion instruments. *Symphony 'Humen 1839'*, co-composed with Chen Yi, vividly commemorates the public burning of over 1000 tonnes of opium, an event that was to lead to the First Opium War between Great Britain and China.

ZHOU LONG

(b. 1953)

CHEN YI

(b. 1953)

1 Zhou Long: The Rhyme of Taigu (2003) 11:00

Zhou Long and Chen Yi:

Symphony 'Humen 1839' (2009) 28:33

2 I. Andante luminoso 3:17

3 II. Allegro feroce 9:05

4 III. Adagio tragico 9:55

5 IV. Allegro trascinate 6:16

6 Zhou Long: The Enlightened (2005) 16:57

WORLD PREMIÈRE RECORDINGS

New Zealand Symphony Orchestra

Darrell Ang

Recorded at the Michael Fowler Centre, Wellington, New Zealand, from 4th to 6th June, 2013

Producer and editor: Wayne Laird • Engineer: Paul McGlashan

Publishers: Oxford University Press (tracks 1, 6); Theodore Presser Co. (tracks 2-5)

Booklet notes: Zhou Long • Cover: kn1 (iStockphoto.com)