



if the tide had once

Chen-Hui Jen
Portrait Recital

September 5th / 3:00 PM
Holsclaw Hall

Program

Two Preludes (2020), for solo piano 7'

I. *Distant Birds* (*light-vented bulbuls*)

II. *Wind from the other shore*

...d'un songe (2010), for piano and electronics 13,

Into the tree waves (2023), for solo piano 10'

Approaching somber waves (2023), for piano with extended techniques 17'

Into darkening moon (2022), for solo piano 11'

Onto the silent peaks (2020), for piano and electronics 13'

Composition / Piano: Chen-Hui Jen
Live Electronics Assistant: Jacob David Sudol



About

Chen-Hui Jen is a composer, poet, and pianist, whose music presents an imaginative, spiritual, and poetic space with subtlety and sophistication. Her musical works reflect an angle of contemporary art music and often evoke a captivating atmosphere that integrates time, sound, color, and poetry. Holding a Ph.D. degree in music at the University of California, San Diego, she was also one of the awardees of League of American Orchestras Women Composers' Reading and Commission Project and the Copland House Residency.

Two Preludes: (2020)

I. *Distant Birds (light-vented bulbuls)*

II. *Wind from the other shore*

I composed the work in early summer 2020, when was a memorably unusual time for all: We suddenly became isolated in unpredictable silence. For the following couple of years, we were surrounded by the quietness, daily gazing at the colors in the sky outside the window, while everything else seems absent, distant, and nostalgic.

Distant Birds (light-vented bulbuls) recalls my memories of each summer when light-vented bulbuls came to my hometown, nested, and hatched in the trees on my parents' balcony. *Wind from the other shore* evokes a calm, nostalgic aura of river waves under the sky lights emerged in the ocean wind. This set of works reflect my longing during those time being solitary for the intangible other shore, as well as a lament for the ceasing time.

Before I wrote this set of works, I had never written much for the musical instrument I play, because I felt extremely challenging to transcend existing repertoire to find my creative voices. Nevertheless, those days of pandemic isolation reopened the gate to a path where I innerly reconnect with my piano music.

...d'un songe (2010)

dew,
a sound approaching eternal desolation

...d'un songe, j'ai entendu des rosées
...d'un songe, j'ai entendu un chant pleurant
... d'un songe, j'ai entendu ma prière
... d'un songe, je suis éveillée
et je me souhaite que ce soit juste un songe...

...d'un songe for solo piano and live electronics was committed by UCSD resident-performer's project, played and recorded by the pianist William Fried in UCSD recording studio in May, 2010. This work is a lament, dedicated to my only sister, Hsuan-Hui Jen, who passed away in late 2009.

The electronics part in this work includes live effects, pre-recorded piano sounds, and retuned piano midi samples in just intonation. The electronic sounds and interactive performance patch were realized by the composer and computer musician Jacob David Sudol.

Into the tree waves (2023)

I began this work during my residence in February 2023 at the Copland House in Cortlandt Manor, New York, while a recipient of the Copland House Residency Award, and completed it during the summer of the same year.

During those days at the Copland House, I was surrounded by quiet woods and constantly watched the changing light between branches day and night. I was inspired to explore my reflections on the piano and then create this work. Enjoying such a peaceful solitude, I heard many beautiful cross-sensory moments: dancing leaves in the wind, changing glows over the sky, sporadic moonlight penetrating through the dark woods, occasional trains, wind chimes, and bells approaching and fading into the distance.

The work's syntax resembles the tree waves in the wind and is filled with a constant rhythmic flow and flexible tempo that evokes a spontaneous nature and consists of five continuous states: wind rising from the dancing lights; whispering tree shadows; in the breezy waves; fading bells in twilight colors; and moonrise over the calming woods. This work, *into the tree waves*, reflects one of the most exquisite memories in my life and was commissioned by and is dedicated to my dear pianist friend, Yi-Chung Chen.

Approaching somber waves (2023)

The work's title reflects a state of drifting, gradually towards the gloaming and also represents my intimate interpretation of being internally solitary. This work, *approaching somber waves*, carries a continuous poetic flow between a few of my recent works in which I convey a longing for peaceful, reclusive life, and almost like a solo prelude of my following project *Meandering on a cypress boat*, a choral work based on the Book of Songs, about voiceless sorrow.

Han Yü (768-824) *Song of Returning* :

Approaching the dark autumn water
Where my boat drifts towards, but never reaches
Through light waters, pebbles roll into my feet.
In deep waters, the dragon intrudes into my boat
I feel repentant and wander my way.
Why not return?
Thus no more pebbles interruptions; no longer tolerate the dragon.

In the work, I largely explored the piano harmonics, timbral lines, and performance choreography, to convey a personal, profound, and internal musical expression. Distinct from the lush, pianistic multi-layered texture in my recent other piano works, I intended to expand the piano musical language and correspond to the lyricism in the Lute Song,

through a maximized “almost-mostly monophonic” texture. The work was commissioned by and written for the pianist Eunmi Ko.

Into darkening moon (2022)

This work is completed in early 2022, commissioned by pianist Dr. Hsin-Hsin (Stella) Hsu. The work was recorded and published in 2024 in Hsin-Hsin (Stella) Hsu’s solo album “Reflection”.

I have been thinking about issues of losing and seeking certain part of oneself, human culture, history, memories, or some abstract thoughts, thinking how to locate my mind and connect to time, internal and material worlds. At the same moment, last summer I had a chance to read the namesake poems “Substance, Shadow, and Spirit” by Tao, Yuan-Ming and Yang Mu and feel extraordinarily touched by one sentence “how would (the rest of the world) be aware of the lack of one” for its expressing of such extreme loneliness. Therefore, in this work I elaborated the two implications of “Shadow” from the poems: one reflects my own shadow and inner mind; the other refers to the umbra and darkness. The title “into darkening moon” overall represents a poetic meaning of seeking inwards, into darkness, and being in the darkening time.

Onto the silent peaks (2020)

Still in the days of my aging, I shall do so for you –
play the piano, see you to the ship bound for

Byzantium

with music close to fading. Silence
here is beyond all summits

- Yang Mu "Propositions of Temporality"
English translation by Wen-chi Li and Colin
Bramwell

The piece's title evokes Yang Mu's poem "Propositions of Temporality." After I wrote into silence, and keep falling four years ago, this composition is another work where I seek a state of silence. Specifically, I drew a particular interest and made an intimate connection to the concept of "silence" in the poem – the ultimate moment after all the waves of a lifetime. I have been repeatedly thinking about this idea in the last few years to make up a specific part of myself from the past – to awaken and hear those inner voices. To realize this goal, I created a musical texture full of many symbols such as ocean waves, distant bells, and fading traces on the water, to aurally send myself to both an initial and the final state of silence.