

The Complete Solo Piano Works of Chen Yi

A Recording, Analysis, and Interpretation

by

Qing Nadia Feeken

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Musical Arts

Approved November 2012 by the  
Graduate Supervisory Committee:

Baruch Meir, Chair  
Ellon Carpenter  
Walter Cosand  
Russell Ryan

ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

December 2012

## ABSTRACT

This dissertation focuses on seven solo piano works written by contemporary Chinese-American composer Chen Yi. It is presented in the form of a recording project, with a written analysis of each recorded composition.

The seven recorded pieces are *Variations on "Awariguli"*, *Duo Ye*, *Guessing*, *Two Chinese bagatelles: Yu Diao and Small Beijing Gong*, *Ba Ban*, *Singing in the Mountain*, and *Ji-Dong-Nuo*. They were written between 1978 and 2005, presenting a wide range of Chen Yi's compositional style.

The written portion consists of five chapters. After the introductory chapter, a sketch of Chen Yi's life is presented in Chapter Two. This chapter specifically uncovers Chen Yi's deep roots of Chinese traditional and folk music through her experiences during the Cultural Revolution. Chapter Three analyzes each of the seven pieces. Through formal structure realization, motivic analysis, and folk music implication, the author discovers the blend of Chinese and Western cultures throughout Chen Yi's music. Chapter Four discusses the performance aspect of these compositions through the author's recording experience. In this chapter, the author provides background information as well as suggestions on specific performance practice. The last chapter summarizes the entire dissertation.

To my loving parents Xiuying Zhang and Dongli Li,  
and to my beloved husband Kevin Feeken

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I extend my deepest gratitude to my committee chair, advisor, mentor, and teacher for the past six and a half years, Dr. Baruch Meir. He has taught me with inspiration and passion. He transformed me from a piano player to an artist. He helped me mature as a musician as well as a person. His guidance and advice in this research project are invaluable to me.

I would also like to thank the members of my research committee. Dr. Ellon Carpenter provided very helpful and detailed advice in analyzing each of the works. Mr. Walter Cosand and Mr. Russell Ryan also provided insightful advice and guidance. I appreciate their support in not only this research paper, but also in my years of study at Arizona State University.

Dr. Chen Yi has provided generous support and assistance in this research. She has provided me with scores and invaluable information on all the compositions in this dissertation. Her prompt correspondence and advice have also been essential to make this research project complete.

I would also like to thank recording engineer Clarke Rigsby from Tempest Recording for working with me on the recording portion of this project. His professionalism made the recording experience truly enjoyable. It was a privilege to work with him.

I would not be where I am now without my parents' constant encouragement and support. Their support in my music career started when I was five, and they continue to support me today. I am forever indebted to them for their love and sacrifice all these years.

Lastly, I would like to thank my husband, Kevin, for his unconditional love and support. His words of encouragement and unwavering faith kept me strong in my years of study. He has also provided invaluable assistance in this research project. He is my motivation and my inspiration.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|   | Page |
|---|------|
| LIST OF TABLES .....                    | vii  |
| LIST OF FIGURES.....                    | viii |
| LIST OF EXAMPLES.....                   | ix   |
| CHAPTER                                 |      |
| 1 INTRODUCTION.....                     | 1    |
| 2 BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF CHEN YI.....   | 3    |
| 3 ANALYSIS .....                        | 7    |
| <i>Variations on "Awarilugli"</i> ..... | 7    |
| <i>Duo Ye</i> .....                     | 22   |
| <i>Guessing</i> .....                   | 40   |
| <i>Two Chinese Bagatelles</i> .....     | 55   |
| <i>Ba Ban</i> .....                     | 66   |
| <i>Singing in the Mountain</i> .....    | 86   |
| <i>Ji-Dong-Nuo</i> .....                | 90   |
| 4 PERFORMANCE NOTES.....                | 102  |
| <i>Variations on "Awarilugli"</i> ..... | 102  |
| <i>Duo Ye</i> .....                     | 104  |
| <i>Guessing</i> .....                   | 107  |
| <i>Two Chinese Bagatelles</i> .....     | 109  |
| <i>Ba Ban</i> .....                     | 111  |
| <i>Singing in the Mountain</i> .....    | 114  |

|  | Page |
|--|------|
| <i>Ji-Dong-Nuo</i> .....   | 115  |
| 5 CONCLUSION .....   | 118  |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY .....   | 120  |
| APPENDIX   |      |
| A A RECORDING OF THE COMPLETE SOLO PIANO WORKS OF CHEN<br>YI, RECORDED BY QING NADIA FEEKEN, PIANO ..... | 123  |
| B COPYRIGHT PERMISSION LETTER FROM THEODORE PRESSER<br>COMPANY .....                                     | 125  |

## LIST OF TABLES

| Table |  | Page |
|-------|--|------|
| 1.    | Formal structure of <i>Variations on "Awariguli"</i> ..... | 9    |
| 2.    | Formal structure of <i>Duo Ye</i> .....                    | 25   |
| 3.    | Formal structure of <i>Guessing</i> .....                  | 43   |
| 4.    | Formal structure of <i>Yu Diao</i> .....                   | 57   |
| 5.    | Formal structure of <i>Small Beijing Gong</i> .....        | 63   |
| 6.    | Formal structure of <i>Ba Ban</i> .....                    | 70   |
| 7.    | Formal structure of <i>Singing in the Mountain</i> .....   | 87   |
| 8.    | Formal structure of <i>Ji-Dong-Nuo</i> .....               | 91   |



## LIST OF FIGURES

| Figure |  | Page |
|--------|--|------|
| 1.     | The original pattern of The Sum of Eight ..... | 26   |
| 2.     | Structure of The Golden Olive .....            | 30   |
| 3.     | Ba Ban folk music form .....                   | 69   |
| 4.     | Lyrics of the folk song “Awariguli” .....      | 102  |
| 5.     | Lyrics of the folk song “Guessing” .....       | 107  |

## LIST OF EXAMPLES

| Example   | Page |
|---|------|
| 1. Theme of <i>Variations on "Awariguli"</i> , mm. 1-16 ..... | 10   |
| 2. Original folk song Awariguli .....                         | 10   |
| 3. Variation 1, mm. 17-25 .....                               | 12   |
| 4. Three voices in Variation 2, mm. 39-42 .....               | 13   |
| 5. Chordal structure in Variation 3, mm. 55-59 .....          | 13   |
| 6. Two contrasting voices in chorale style, mm. 95-96 .....   | 14   |
| 7. Melodic range of Variation 5, mm. 110-124 .....            | 16   |
| 8. Fugue subject, mm. 139-141 .....                           | 17   |
| 9. Fugue countersubject 1, mm. 142-144.....                   | 17   |
| 10. Fugue countersubject 2, mm. 145-148 .....                 | 18   |
| 11. Melodic displacement in Variation 7, mm. 170-174 .....    | 19   |
| 12. Ostinato in Variation 8, mm. 209-211 .....                | 19   |
| 13. 6/8 ostinato accompanying 2/4 melody, mm. 222-228 .....   | 20   |
| 14. Lisztian-style cadenza, mm. 278 .....                     | 21   |
| 15. Motives 1 and 2 in Duo Ye, mm. 1-7 .....                  | 25   |
| 16. Chen Yi's application of The Sum of Eight, mm. 1-14 ..... | 27   |
| 17. Enriched melody of the dance section, mm. 32-37 .....     | 28   |
| 18. Percussive imitation, mm. 48-51 .....                     | 28   |
| 19. Motive 3, beginning of m. 71 .....                        | 29   |
| 20. Beijing Opera style writing in Section B, m. 71 .....     | 29   |
| 21. Chen Yi's usage of The Golden Olive, m. 71 .....          | 31   |

| Example   | Page |
|---|------|
| 22. Chen Yi's usage of The Golden Olive, m. 72 .....                            | 31   |
| 23. Left hand ostinato, m. 73 .....   | 33   |
| 24. Right hand melody, mm. 75-78 .....  | 33   |
| 25. Right hand Motive 3 jumps over left hand ostinato, mm. 89-101 ....<br>..... | 34   |
| 26. First motivic development in m. 115 .....                                   | 35   |
| 27. Second motivic development in m. 115 .....                                  | 36   |
| 28. Usage of The Sum of Eight, mm. 116-119 .....                                | 37   |
| 29. Rhythmic diminution of left hand ostinato, mm. 142-168 .....                | 39   |
| 30. Ending of <i>Duo Ye</i> , mm. 176-178 .....                                 | 40   |
| 31. The folk song Guessing .....  | 41   |
| 32. Theme of Guessing, mm. 1-11 .....   | 42   |
| 33. Break between the Theme and Variation 1, mm. 36-39 .....                    | 43   |
| 34. Break between Variation 3 and Variation 4, mm. 114-118 .....                | 43   |
| 35. Break between Variation 5 and Coda, mm. 163-167 .....                       | 44   |
| 36. <i>Yu Diao</i> , break between Section A and Section B, mm. 12-14 ....      | 44   |
| 37. <i>Ba Ban</i> , break between Section A and Section B, mm. 45-49 .....      | 44   |
| 38. <i>Duo Ye</i> , break between Section A and Section B, mm. 69-71 .....      | 45   |
| 39. Call and response of the theme, mm. 1-22 .....                              | 45   |
| 40. Countermelody of the theme, mm. 2-5 .....                                   | 46   |
| 41. Acceleration and hemiola at the end of the theme, mm. 30-37 ..              | 47   |
| 42. Melody in Variation 1, mm. 40-45 .....                                      | 47   |

| Example  | Page |
|--|------|
| 43. Right hand ostinato in Variation 1, mm. 38-39 .....                            | 47   |
| 44. Instrumental interlude at the end of Variation 1, mm. 57-60 .....              | 48   |
| 45. Canon in Variation 2, mm. 67-73 .....  | 48   |
| 46. Climax of Variation 2, mm. 83-95 .....   | 49   |
| 47. Alternation of chords and melodic fragments, mm. 97-100 .....                  | 50   |
| 48. Obscured rhythm in the beginning of Variation 4, mm. 116-124.....<br>.....     | 51   |
| 49. Beginning of the first statement of the melody in Variation 4, m.<br>119 ..... | 51   |
| 50. Beginning of the second statement in Variation 4, mm. 127-128.....<br>.....    | 51   |
| 51. Beginning of the third statement in Variation 4, mm. 138-141 ..                | 52   |
| 52. Transition from triplets to 4/4, mm. 144-146 .....                             | 53   |
| 53. Toccata-style writing of Variation 5, mm. 151-154 .....                        | 53   |
| 54. Stretto in Coda, mm. 170-173 .....   | 54   |
| 55. Ending of <i>Guessing</i> , mm. 187-193 .....                                  | 55   |
| 56. Motives 1 and 2 in <i>Yu Diao</i> , mm. 1-2.....                               | 58   |
| 57. Duet in Section A, mm. 6-8 .....   | 59   |
| 58. Melody in Section B, mm. 14-18 .....   | 60   |
| 59. Instrumental interlude, mm. 24-27 .....  | 61   |
| 60. Left hand ostinato, m.1 .....  | 64   |
| 61. Beijing Opera style melody, mm. 3-6 .....                                      | 64   |

| Example   | Page |
|---|------|
| 62. The gong imitation, mm. 7-9 .....   | 64   |
| 63. <i>Erhu</i> melody, mm. 13-16 .....   | 65   |
| 64. The ending gong imitation, mm. 19-20 .....                                    | 66   |
| 65. Pitch material 1, Ba Ban folk tune .....                                      | 67   |
| 66. Pitch material 2, 12-tone row .....   | 67   |
| 67. Pitch material 3, ascending five-note motive .....                            | 67   |
| 68. Theme in <i>Ba Ban</i> , mm. 1-12 .....                                       | 71   |
| 69. First appearance of pitch material 2 and 3, mm. 14-16 .....                   | 72   |
| 70. Toccata-like interlude mm. 18-29 .....  | 73   |
| 71. Rhythmic diminution, mm. 45-48 .....  | 74   |
| 72. First complete twelve-tone row, mm. 61-63 .....                               | 75   |
| 73. Fusion of all three pitch materials, mm. 64-70. PM=Pitch material<br>.....    | 75   |
| 74. Pentatonic phrase, mm. 81-85 .....  | 77   |
| 75. Theme with embellishment based on pitch material 3, mm. 112-<br>114 .....     | 78   |
| 76. Twelve-tone row, mm. 154-156 .....  | 79   |
| 77. Fusion of three pitch materials in section D, mm. 157-164 .....               | 80   |
| 78. Pitch materials in the climactic build up section, mm. 175-179 .....          | 81   |
| 79. Application of the Fibonacci series in the ostinato, mm. 193-222 ...<br>..... | 83   |

| Example |  | Page |
|---------|--|------|
| 80.     | Pitch materials in mm. 223-232 .....                     | 84   |
| 81.     | Coda, mm. 233-257 .....                                  | 85   |
| 82.     | First melodic phrase, mm. 1-4 .....                      | 88   |
| 83.     | Second melodic phrase, mm.7-10 .....                     | 88   |
| 84.     | Third melodic phrase, mm. 14-16 .....                    | 88   |
| 85.     | Bass voice, mm. 4-7 .....                                | 89   |
| 86.     | Bass voice, mm. 11-13 .....                              | 89   |
| 87.     | Repeat of the melody, mm. 17-19 .....                    | 89   |
| 88.     | Melody in <i>Ji-Dong-Nuo</i> , mm. 1-13 .....            | 92   |
| 89.     | Motive 1, m. 14 .....                                    | 93   |
| 90.     | Motive 2, mm. 15-17 .....                                | 94   |
| 91.     | Motive 3, m. 18 .....                                    | 95   |
| 92.     | Motive 4, m. 22-23 .....                                 | 95   |
| 93.     | Inversion of Motive 2, mm. 27-28 .....                   | 96   |
| 94.     | Motive 5, mm. 43-46 .....                                | 96   |
| 95.     | Fusion of Motives 1, 3, and 4, mm. 62-67. M=Motive ..... | 97   |
| 96.     | Variation of Motive 3, m. 80 .....                       | 97   |
| 97.     | Inversion of Motive 5, mm. 86-88 .....                   | 98   |
| 98.     | Motive 6, mm. 89-90 .....                                | 98   |
| 99.     | Motive 7, mm. 136-137 .....                              | 100  |
| 100.    | Presentation of the motives, mm. 157-169 .....           | 101  |

CHAPTER 1  
INTRODUCTION

The Chinese born contemporary composer Chen Yi has written music for a wide spectrum of instrumentations as well as for voice. Her works include symphonic and chamber orchestras, chamber ensembles, works for choir, as well as works for Chinese traditional instruments, both solo and ensembles, and they have been widely performed and recorded.

Chen Yi's solo piano music was introduced to me by my undergraduate piano professor, Dr. Xiaoli Ding, when she recommended *Duo Ye*<sup>1</sup> to me. The piece was programmed in my junior recital in 2003. The same year, I had the honor of meeting Chen Yi. We had a long visit, and she told me about her experience of collecting folk melodies in China. She also gave me some suggestions on how to interpret the piece, as I played on her keyboard in her apartment in Kansas City. Since then, I have always kept an interest in her music, which eventually led me to my decision to write my dissertation on Chen Yi's piano solo works.

Chen Yi has written seven pieces for solo piano so far. Although *Variations on "Awariguli"*, *Duo Ye*, and *Ba Ban* have been individually recorded by different artists,<sup>2</sup> there has not been a recording of her complete

---

<sup>1</sup> Chen Yi, *Duo Ye*, (King of Prussia, PA: Theodore Presser, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> Amy Lin, *Amy Lin interprets contemporary piano works*, Karlsruhe: ABW Classics, 2004, Compact Disc; Heidi Louise Williams, *Drive American*, Albany, NY: Albany Records, 2009, Compact Disc; Gulimina Mahamuti, *Xinjiang: Piano Music From Western China*, 2012, AAC Audio File.

solo piano works. It is for this reason that I have decided to produce this recording project, in hopes of filling this gap.

In order to fully explore the depth of Chen Yi's unique musical language, I have also written an analysis to accompany each recorded piece. Through this paper, I discover how Chen Yi is able to combine Chinese folk roots with Western compositional techniques. Her usage of motivic development, harmonic language, and structural layout are all the result of this seamless fusion.

Performance notes are also included in this dissertation, expressing my own experience as a pianist through this journey. There are some cautionary suggestions and personal interpretative ideas. For a few of the shorter pieces, I also include some pedagogical observations.

The recording contains all seven solo piano works in chronological order by the years in which they were composed: *Variations on "Awariguli"* (1978), *Duo Ye* (1984), *Guessing* (1989), *Two Chinese bagatelles: Yu Diao* (1984) and *Small Beijing Gong* (1993), *Ba Ban* (1999), *Singing in the Mountain* (2005), and *Ji-Dong-Nuo* (2005). The sequence of the analysis and performance notes in this dissertation stay consistent with the recording.



## CHAPTER 2

### BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF CHEN YI

Chen Yi was born in Guangzhou,<sup>3</sup> China, in 1953, into a family of doctors who had a strong interest in music. Both her parents played Western instruments, and collected records of classical music. They played those records at home every day during and after dinner. One day, Chen Yi's father told her that it would be great if one day she could play her own works like Heifetz and Kreisler.<sup>4</sup> That left a deep impression in Chen Yi's heart.

Chen Yi started playing the piano when she was only three years old, and violin when she was four. She also took theory lessons from her first theory teacher, Zheng Zhong, when she was a teenager. This teacher had a great influence on her, and he told her that since she drank from the Yangtze River and was born with black hair and black eyes, she understood Chinese culture better, and should carry on the culture and share it with more people.<sup>5</sup> This became another guiding light in Chen Yi's career as a composer.

In 1966, the Cultural Revolution struck China. Being well educated intellectuals with ties to Western culture, Chen Yi's family was targeted to be "re-educated" among millions of other people. At first, she was able to

---

<sup>3</sup> Guangzhou is the capital city of Guangdong province in China. It is located in Southern China, close to Hong Kong.

<sup>4</sup> John de Clef Pineiro, "An Interview with Chen Yi," *New Music Connoisseur*, 2001, [journal on-line]; available from [http://www.newmusicon.org/v9n4/v94chen\\_yi.htm](http://www.newmusicon.org/v9n4/v94chen_yi.htm); Internet; accessed 30 August 2011.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

continue to practice in secret, with a heavy metal mute on her violin, and a blanket inside the piano. That had to stop, for in 1968 she was separated from her family and was sent to the countryside to do hard labor.<sup>6</sup>

“In order to help the army to build military battle castles, I had to walk all the way up to the big mountain. I sometimes had to get up at 4 am just to avoid the heat of the sun. There were days when I also had to carry 100 pounds of stone and mud 22 times, from the foot of the mountain to the very top,” said Chen Yi in an interview as she recalls the dark two years of her life.<sup>7</sup>

She was able to bring her violin with her, and she played revolutionary songs for the farmers and country children. She would make up fast passages based on melodies of Paganini, thus continuing to nurture her creative mind.<sup>8</sup> She also found a silver lining during her suffering years, in that she gained a wider knowledge of life and the music of her motherland. She “learned from the common people, who have carried on the rich Chinese culture for thousand of years.”<sup>9</sup>

In 1970, Chen Yi returned to her hometown, and served as concertmaster and composer for the Beijing Opera Troupe Orchestra. The

---

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Chen Yi, “Tradition and Creation,” *Current Musicology* (Fall-Winter 1999): 59-72.

Cultural Revolution ended in 1976, and the school system began to be restored. In 1978, she was amongst the very first group of composition students to be admitted to the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing. As part of her undergraduate academic studies, Chen Yi took several field trips with her classmates to the countryside to collect folk songs. This also enabled Chen Yi to dig deeper into her roots. In 1986, Chen Yi became the first woman composer ever to receive a master's degree in composition in China.<sup>10</sup>

During her conservatory years, Chen Yi had already become an established composer, winning multiple competitions in China, and being featured on several radio programs, including *Duo Ye* for piano solo, which won first prize in the China National Composition competition in 1985.<sup>11</sup>

Chen Yi started to explore twentieth-century compositional styles and techniques in the early 1980's and further expanded that knowledge when she came to the United States in 1986 to pursue a DMA degree at Columbia University under the guidance of Chou Wen-Chung and Mario Davidovsky. She loved the music of Bartok, Debussy and Stravinsky, and began to recognize their influence on her own compositional styles.<sup>12</sup> Upon receiving

---

<sup>10</sup> John de Clef Pineiro, "An Interview with Chen Yi," *New Music Connoisseur*, 2001, [journal on-line]; available from [http://www.newmusicon.org/v9n4/v94chen\\_yi.htm](http://www.newmusicon.org/v9n4/v94chen_yi.htm); Internet; accessed 30 August 2011.

<sup>11</sup> Chen Yi, *Duo Ye*, (King of Prussia, PA: Theodore Presser, 2000).

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

her DMA degree in 1993, Chen Yi had established herself as one of the leading active composers of our time.

Extremely prolific, Chen Yi has received commissions from numerous distinguished orchestras and musicians, such as The Cleveland Orchestra, the Seattle Symphony, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the Singapore Symphony Orchestra, the traditional Chinese instrumental chamber ensemble Music From China, Yo-Yo- Ma, Evelyn Glennie, and the Ying Quartet.<sup>13</sup>

Currently, Chen Yi is a Distinguished Professor at the Conservatory of Music and Dance at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, and was presented with the UMKC Kauffman Award in Faculty Service in 2012. She was also the 4-time recipient of the prestigious Charles Ives Living Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters from 2001 to 2004, and was elected to the American Academy of Arts & Sciences in 2005.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> Theodore Presser, "Chen Yi," *Theodore Presser Company*, [bio online]; available from <http://www.presser.com/composers/info.cfm?name=chenyi>

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER 3

### ANALYSIS

#### *Variations on “Awariguli”*

##### **Overview**

*Variations on “Awariguli”* was written in 1978 during Chen Yi’s freshman year at the Central Conservatory of Music.<sup>15</sup> It was published by Theodore Presser Company in 2011. Awariguli (阿瓦日古丽) is a very popular folk song of the Uygur ethnic minority from Xinjiang province in China. This largest province in China spreads over a vast portion of the northwest region of the country. The title describes the name of a beautiful girl from that region, and it is a love song that is supposed to be sung by handsome young men who seek her love.

Chen Yi’s composition consists of a theme, nine variations, and a coda. The theme is Chen Yi’s own writing based on the original folk song. All of the variations are tied together by this theme; therefore, this is a sectional variation, similar to classical-style variations. The sectional structure is also influenced by Chinese folk music, where the theme is developed into more embellished versions throughout the composition.

Following the theme, each variation features a different style of writing, but they can be grouped into larger sections by their textures and

---

<sup>15</sup> Chen Yi, *Variations on “Awariguli”*, (King of Prussia, PA: Theodore Presser, 2011), back cover.

keys.<sup>16</sup> The first three variations are one group. Variation 1 is a straightforward melody plus accompaniment structure, followed by Variation 2, where the melody switches to the left hand, and the texture becomes three voices. Variation 3 is in a toccata style. Variation 4 stands alone, a chorale. Variations 5 and 6 are both complex in texture. Variation 5 has a much more embellished melody and a more involved accompaniment pattern, while Variation 6 features a three-voice fugue. Variations 7 and 8 are both dance-like. First a grand dance, then a playful dance that plays around with the melody, presenting it in two ways simultaneously in different rhythms. The last section consists of the last variation and coda. Variation 9 seems like the peace before the storm, with a tranquil mood, and serves as the dominant preparation. The coda is quite turbulent, but it eventually calms down, and the entire piece ends peacefully.

There is a clear tonal structure that ties the theme and each variation together. The piece is in B Dorian mode. It starts in this mode and continues through the first three variations. The fourth variation is in Ab Dorian, which enharmonically is the submediant key of B. The following two variations are in E Mixolydian, which is the subdominant key. The piece goes back to B Dorian for the next two variations, and then transitions to F# Dorian in Variation 9. This becomes the dominant-key preparation for the coda. The coda ends the piece in B Dorian.

---

<sup>16</sup> Email correspondence with the composer, September 2012.

Table 1. Formal structure of *Variations on "Awariguli"*

| Section:  | Theme    | 1     | 2     | 3     | 4         | 5            | 6       | 7        | 8       | 9         | Coda     |
|-----------|----------|-------|-------|-------|-----------|--------------|---------|----------|---------|-----------|----------|
| Mm:       | 1-16     | 17-38 | 39-54 | 55-94 | 95-109    | 110-138      | 139-169 | 170-208  | 209-261 | 262-277   | 278-317  |
| Length:   | 16       | 22    | 16    | 40    | 15        | 29           | 31      | 39       | 53      | 16        | 40       |
| Meter:    | 2/2      | 2/4   | 3/4   | 2/4   | 4/4       | 3/4          | 3/4     | 3/8      | 6/8     | 2/2       | 2/4      |
| Mode:     | B Dorian |       |       |       | Ab Dorian | E mixolydian |         | B Dorian |         | F# Dorian | B Dorian |
| B Dorian: | i        |       |       |       | vi        | IV           |         | i        |         | v         | i        |

### Theme

The "Awariguli" theme is presented in the upper register with two hands two octaves apart, with hardly any harmonic support (Ex. 1). This preserves the original scenery of the folk song. In Xinjiang province, the geographical profile of the land is expansive and vastly open. The songs are often described as one singing passionately in an open field that stretches as far as the eyes can see.

**THEME Andante** (♩ = 66)

Example 1. Theme of *Variations on "Awariguli"*, mm. 1-16<sup>17</sup>

Example 2. Original folk song *Awariguli*<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> Chen Yi, *Variations on "Awariguli"*, (King of Prussia, PA: Theodore Presser, 2011). Reprinted with the permission of Theodore Presser Company. All subsequent examples of this musical work are from this source.

<sup>18</sup> Shi Fu, *Awariguli*, in Chinese traditional notation, [score online]; available from <http://www.tom163.net/yuepuku/gequyuepu/yueyoushangchuan/200605/5543.html>; Internet; accessed 12 September 2012. Transcribed to standard notation by the author.



The phrase structure of the theme is similar to that of the original folk song (Ex. 2), both having four phrases. However, the original song opens with a longer first phrase—eight measures, then followed by three shorter phrases of five measures each. Chen Yi's theme has a more conventional structure, with each phrase four measures long. In order to accommodate the fewer beats in the first phrase, Chen Yi eliminates the opening repeated notes and condenses the end of the phrase.

The melodic contour evolves slightly in Chen Yi's theme. The original folk song ranges a ninth, with the peak placed at the second phrase. Chen Yi's theme stays similar to the original folk song in phrases one and two. However, the third phrase expands its range even further, stretching to an interval of a tenth. This phrase becomes the peak of the theme. The meter of the original song is 3/8. Chen Yi adjusts it to a 2/2 meter, providing fewer rhythmic pulses. As a result, the theme becomes more linear in motion.

Both the song and the theme are in Dorian mode, with a half cadence at the end of the second phrase. Unlike the folk song, which ends on tonic, Chen Yi adds another dominant chord at the end of her theme, to take the piece to the first variation.

### **Variations 1-3**

As mentioned before, Chen Yi's Awariguli theme is more condensed than the folk song. The pattern continues with rhythmic diminution of the first variation, condensing the theme this time. The meter switches from 2/2 to 2/4, but the overall pace of each quarter note stays about the same.

Therefore, while maintaining about the same speed, the theme takes the time of sixteen quarter notes to complete one phrase, the first variation only takes eight. This creates an illusion of the piece moving in a faster pace.

The left hand provides a simplistic harmony. It mostly revolves around tonic, subdominant, and dominant harmonies, in a continuous Alberti bass style (Ex. 3). This clear and transparent texture truly preserves the purity of the original song.

VAR. I Allegro (♩ = 120)

17 *mf spinato*

*legato*

23 *rit.*

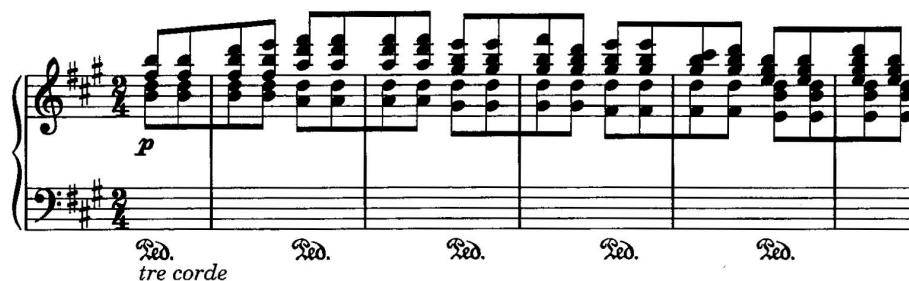
Example 3. Variation 1, mm. 17-25

The first three variations are unified by their key, B Dorian. However, each variation continues to develop the piece's texture. Moving from the monophonic texture in the theme, the first variation presents a straightforward melody plus accompaniment. Variation 2 thickens that texture by adding a third voice for bass support, as well as moving the melody to the left hand (Ex. 4). Variation 3 produces both hands playing large octave chords, and the texture becomes much more vertical.



Example 4. Three voices in Variation 2, mm. 39-42

The pace of the piece continues to move forward through these first three variations. The introduction of the sixteenth notes in Variation 2 makes it seem faster. Meanwhile, Variation 3 starts with a faster tempo marking, and many passages are marked *stretto*. The hyperbeats are also augmented by addition of beats per group. The first variation is in duple meter, and Variation 2 is in triple meter. Variation 3 goes back to 2/4, but it produces a feel of four, because the music is more chordal, with each group containing four chords (Ex. 5).



Example 5. Chordal structure in Variation 3, mm. 55-59

Through these three variations, the overall character moves from a melodious serenade to an energetic uproar. This is especially evident in the third variation. Toccata-like chords spill all over the music. Some of them are gentle and precise, such as the ones in measures 55-59 and 78-82. At the same time, some are bombastic and powerful, such as in measures 63-66 and

86-89. This instability is also expressed with drastic dynamic changes from *forte* to *piano*, and extremely quick *crescendos*. Rapid arpeggios sweep across the piano at measures 60-62, 72-77, and 83-85, acting as bridges to the chords. The last sweep ends the variation on an energetic tremolo in measure 94.

#### Variation 4

Without any preparation, the next variation changes to a different mood completely. This chorale-like variation provides a solemn atmosphere. There are two contrasting characters in this variation. In between the deep low sounds of the chorale, there is a layer of melodic voice placed in the upper register moving in parallel motion (Ex. 6). One could relate this variation to Chopin's *Scherzo No. 3, Op. 39*, at measure 155.

**VAR. IV Sostenuto** (♩ = 60) *8va*.....

Example 6. Two contrasting voices in chorale style, mm. 95-96

Midway through the variation, the roles are reversed. The chorale moves to the upper register, and the melody now is in the bass. The characters of the registers remain the same; the chorale becomes the gentle one, with the melody booming in the bass.

Although this composition is written in a more traditional way than Chen Yi's other piano solo works, there are still many modern Western elements that are embedded in the music. In Variation 4, the constant meter change is quite unusual. The music switches from 4/4 to 6/4 back and forth persistently. There are some interesting harmonic progressions in this variation as well. The most noticeable one is that the variation starts in Ab Dorian mode, and it ends with an open fifth of E and B, setting up for the new tonal center for the next variation. The key relationship of E and Ab (G#) is a reference to the chromatic mediant relationship, which is commonly found in the music throughout the Romantic era, such as in Robert Schumann's *Widmung* for voice and piano, where the piece starts in Ab major and modulates to E major in the B section. In Chen Yi's piece, the modulation happens in measure 108, where the Ab minor seventh chord on beat two serves both as tonic in Ab Dorian and mediant in E. Chen Yi applies this tonal key relationship to a modal and pentatonic setting, thus creating a unique harmonic progression.

### **Variation 5-6**

The following two variations can be considered as one group, since they are both in E Mixolydian mode. Variation 5 has an elaborate melody and harmony, while Variation 6 presents a three-voice fugue. In a way, the pair can be looked at as a prelude and fugue.

With an addition of G#, the E-B open fifth at the end of the last variation becomes more defined as an E major chord in Variation 5. Moving

further into the variation, one discovers that this variation is actually built on the Mixolydian mode, containing a D $\flat$  instead of D#. This Romantic-style variation stays in E Mixolydian for fifteen measures from measure 110 to 124. In measure 125, the left hand shifts the bass from E to C#, which becomes the dominant in F# minor, and this variation arrives in F# minor in measure 129. The mood shifts as well and becomes much more passionate. This outburst is short-lived, as the variation calms down and turns back to E Mixolydian seven measures later in measure 135.

The melodic range of this variation is much wider than that of the theme, stretching an interval of a fourteenth (two octaves minus a whole step) instead of a tenth (Ex. 7). The melody is well embellished with sixteenth-note decorative non-chord tones along with triplets and dotted rhythms. These characteristics make the melody quite flexible.

The image shows three staves of musical notation in treble clef, 3/4 time, with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The first staff starts with the dynamic marking 'mp espr.' and contains a melodic line with various ornaments. The second staff includes triplets and a sixteenth-note run. The third staff continues the melodic development with more triplets and sixteenth-note patterns.

Example 7. Melodic range of Variation 5, mm. 110-124

The phrase structure is more unusual in this variation. Unlike the four-measure phrases in the theme, this variation starts with two three-measure phrases, ending on the dominant harmony. The third phrase is

twice as long, expanding over six measures. The last phrase mirrors the first, finishing the phrase in three measures.

A quick three-measure transition at measure 125 takes the music to “*poco appassionato*.” Here, the right hand roars with octaves, and the left hand supports with a booming bass, and the mood becomes much darker with a minor tonality. However, before this mood change can really sink in, the music already calms back down. The variation finishes with one more statement in measure 136. This last statement is taken directly from the first statement of this variation, creating melodic and harmonic closure for this variation.

Variation 6 starts with the subject in the alto voice in measure 139 (Ex. 8). Three measures later, the soprano voice answers with a real answer on the dominant, while the alto voice supports the answer with a countersubject (Ex. 9). The bass provides the third subject entry in measure 145, at which point the soprano supplies countersubject 1, and the alto voice presents countersubject 2 (Ex. 10).



Example 8. Fugue subject, mm. 139-141



Example 9. Fugue countersubject 1, mm. 142-144



Example 10. Fugue countersubject 2, mm. 145-148

The entire fugue is built on these three ideas. After the first appearance, the subject is either supported by countersubject 1, or both countersubjects. There are a total of six statements of the subject, each one with its own key area: I—V—V—V/V—iv—I.

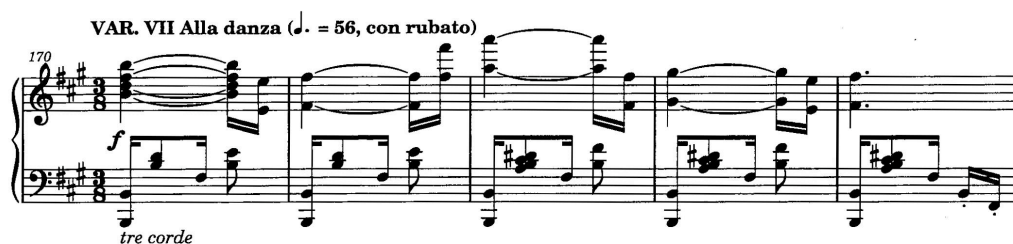
The fugue wraps up with a cadential phrase based on a fragment from the first countersubject, E-D-E. It ends with one last reflection of the original subject. It contains only a fragment of the subject, ending on the note B, and setting up for the next set of variations.

### **Variation 7-8**

The piece veers into a dance mood in the next two variations with two contrasting dances, Variation 7, a fiery dance, then Variation 8, an elegant dance. The texture of Variation 7 is thick vertically, with octaves and clusters of chords. Its character is precise and assertive. The right hand melody is based on the theme; however, it is obscured by octave displacement (Ex. 11). This veils the melodic aspect of the variation, and highlights the dance character of it.

The left hand provides a rhythmic dance pattern that also consists of large leaps. Both hands bounce up and down the piano producing a high level of energy.





Example 11. Melodic displacement in Variation 7, mm. 170-174

A cadenza is inserted in the middle of this variation in measure 197.

This long fluent run imitates the sound of the *Zheng* instrument,<sup>19</sup> when the player brushes the strings up and down the entire instrument.

Variation 8 is quite a charming little dance. It has an ostinato that stays very close to the first phrase of the original folk song both rhythmically and melodically (Ex. 12). Instead of 3/8 meter, Chen Yi combines every two measures into a 6/8 dance pattern. The staccato nature of the ostinato marks the humorous atmosphere of this variation.



Example 12. Ostinato in Variation 8, mm. 209-211

Once the ostinato is established, the left hand introduces a melodious singing voice. What is remarkable about the relationship between the right hand and the left hand is that while the ostinato remains in 6/8, the left hand

---

<sup>19</sup> *Zheng* is a 21-string traditional Chinese instrument that is played by plucking the strings. For more information on the instruments *zheng*, see *The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music*, v.7, East Asia, Instruments: *Zheng*. Available from:

<http://glnd.alexanderstreet.com.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/View/330921>

melody is in 2/4 meter (Ex. 13). This unusual marriage of the two voices does not seem artificial at all. The melody sings expressively while the playful ostinato dances around it. They blend together perfectly.



Example 13. 6/8 ostinato accompanying 2/4 melody, mm. 222-228

After two phrases of the melody, the roles switch at measure 236: the right hand becomes the melodic one, and the left hand plays the ostinato. To add another interesting factor to this variation, after the first phrase, the right hand adds a countermelody underneath the second phrase of the melody at measure 244. Both hands reunite with the ostinato at measure 251, and the variation slows down with a written out *ritardando*, first three eighth notes per beat, then two. Finally it ends with two quarter notes.

### Variation 9 and coda

The final variation provides multiple meaning and purposes. With the same tranquil characteristics as the theme, it reflects the beginning before the end, and the calm before the storm. The structure of a slow variation before the last variation is often found in the Classical style sectional variations. Chen Yi here again applies a Western compositional style in a tonally Oriental piece.

The entire theme is repeated in this variation in the key of F# Dorian. The left hand holds a sustaining F# as the pedal tone while a decorative

middle voice embellishes the melody. The tonal center F# provides the dominant preparation to the tonic key of B Dorian, which arrives in the coda.

A rumbling run from the bass to treble starts the dramatic coda in measure 278. This Lisztian-style passage is based on the notes from the theme, but they are expressed here in a completely different manner (Ex. 14). With both hands playing in alternation, it creates a sense of instability and tension.

278 CODA Vivace (♩ = 152)

*p*

(una corda)  
Sost. Ped.

Ped. sempre

tre corde

Example 14. Lisztian-style cadenza, mm. 278

The running passage is resolved with satisfaction, arriving on a B minor chord that booms in the bass at measure 280. The theme sings out for one last time in this final section of the piece. This time, it is passionate and dramatic in triple octaves. It truly expresses the love and passion of the Uygur people.

After the final statement of the theme, the coda reflects fragments of melodies that occurred throughout the piece. The bass voice in measures 296 and 297 recalls the opening intervals, and then in measures 299 and 300 it reflects the opening of Variation 5. The treble voice in measures 302 to 303 as well as measures 305 to 306 both refer to measures 97 and 104 of the chorale in Variation 4. These reminiscences bring peace and comfort, and the

piece ends with a peaceful B major triad, with the treble voice flying away with open fifth B-F#.

## **Conclusion**

The theme and variations structure of “Awariguli” has both the sectional feature often found in traditional Chinese music, as well as the development of a large-scale composition. Each variation has its own feature and personality. At the same time, each of them contributes to the progression of the entire piece as a whole. Chen Yi captures the essence of the folk tune, and transforms it into something bigger and more colorful.

The piece is quite “Chinese sounding” when one listens to it, expressed by its modality; however, there are Western influences still to be found throughout the piece. The most noticeable ones are the usage of sectional variations, as well as the usage of a fugue. The harmonic language also has the same influence, namely the chorale variation, which has the harmonic progression of a typical Romantic-era key relationship. These Western elements unite with the Chinese language, and become one meaningful composition.

*Duo Ye*

## **Overview**

In 1980, during her undergraduate years in the Central Conservatory of Music, Chen Yi traveled to Guangxi province in Southern China with fellow composers to explore the Dong and Yao minority groups. There, the natives sang and danced in circles to welcome their guests from Beijing and to

celebrate this special occasion. The warm and sincere welcome left a deep impression in Chen Yi's heart, and the piece *Duo Ye* was written as a depiction of her memorable experience in Guangxi.<sup>20</sup>

The title *Duo Ye* (多耶) is from the traditional song form that is used by the minority groups in that region. During the song, people gather in a circle by the bonfire, singing while dancing in slow steps. A lead singer improvises short melodies and phrases drawing inspiration from the celebration. The words *Ya Duo Ye* (呀多耶) are meaningless syllables that the people use in response to the improvisation the lead singer provides.<sup>21</sup>

Chen Yi uses the song as her melodic motive, especially in places descriptive to the ethnic group. She also utilizes Beijing Opera tunes<sup>22</sup> and Mountain Songs<sup>23</sup> to depict the guests from Beijing. The rhythmic development is derived from two sophisticated folk rhythm organizations,

---

<sup>20</sup> Chen Yi, Tradition and Creation, *Current Musicology* (Fall-Winter 1999): 59-72.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Beijing Opera, or Peking Opera, is a type of Chinese Opera, a traditional theatrical art in China. For more information on Beijing Opera, see *The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music*, v.7, East Asia, Peking opera: Jingju. Available from:  
<http://glnd.alexanderstreet.com.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/View/331060>

<sup>23</sup> Mountain Song (山歌) is a genre of Chinese folk song. It describes one singing freely in the mountain range, expressing their emotions. For more information on Mountain Song, see *The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music*, v.7, East Asia, Folk Song in China. Available from:  
<http://glnd.alexanderstreet.com.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/View/330897>

one called The Sum of Eight (鱼合八), and the other, The Golden Olive (金橄榄).<sup>24</sup>

The formal design of the piece has been analyzed in several ways; some say it closely resembles a sonata Allegro form,<sup>25</sup> some say it has a free rhapsody-like form,<sup>26</sup> and others say a sectional form works the best.<sup>27</sup> In this case, the piece will be analyzed as a sectional form, with each section symbolizing a different character and serving a unique purpose. There is also a discrepancy in the measure numbers in the B section between this and previous researches, which will be clarified later in this dissertation.

---

<sup>24</sup> Chen Yi, Tradition and Creation, *Current Musicology* (Fall-Winter 1999): 59-72.

<sup>25</sup> Wendy Wan-Ki Lee, "Chinese Musical Influences, Western Structural Techniques: The Compositional Design of Chen Yi's Duo Ye," *iSCI*, Society of Composers, Inc. Fall 2009 [journal on-line]; available from [http://www.societyofcomposers.org/publications/isci/vol1\\_1/](http://www.societyofcomposers.org/publications/isci/vol1_1/); Internet; accessed 7 September 2011.

<sup>26</sup> Xiaole Li, "Chen Yi's Piano Music: Chinese Aesthetics and Western Models" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Hawai'i, 2003).

<sup>27</sup> Chia-Ching Shen, "The Asian Inspiration: Chinese Influences in the Solo Piano Music of Chen Yi" (DMA Treatise, Florida State University, 2011).

Table 2. Formal structure of *Duo Ye*

|               |                      |                       |                |                   |                         |
|---------------|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------|-------------------|-------------------------|
| Section:      | A: 1-70              | B: 71-114             | C: 115         | D: 116-133        | E: 134-178              |
| Length:       | 70                   | 44                    | 1              | 18                | 45                      |
| Meter:        | vary                 | 4/4--3/4--5/8         | free           | 7/4--4/4          | 2/4                     |
| Tempo:        | <i>Largo-Allegro</i> | <i>Adagio-Andante</i> | <i>Allegro</i> | <i>Meno mosso</i> | <i>Vivo con Animato</i> |
| Significance: | Ethnic group         | Beijing Opera         | Transition     | Climax            | Coda                    |

### Section A

The piece opens with a free style call and response section, imitating the Dong minority's singing. The aspect of freedom comes from irregular rhythm and accents, frequent meter and tempo changes, as well as indications of flexible shift in speed, such as *ad lib.* and *accelerando*.

The opening motive E-C# symbolizes the calling of Duo Ye. The second motive is also introduced right away, in the rhythmic dancing response in measures two to four, D-E-G, a major second plus a minor third. Motive 1 and Motive 2 become the fundamental pitch material of the entire piece (Ex. 15).

Motive 1

*ad lib.*

**Allegro** (♩ = 120)

Motive 2

*pp*

Example 15. Motives 1 and 2 in *Duo Ye*, mm. 1-5<sup>28</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Chen Yi, *Duo Ye*, (King of Prussia, PA: Theodore Presser, 2000). Reprinted with the permission of Theodore Presser Company. All subsequent examples of this musical work are from this source.

There is also a fascinating rhythmic principle embedded in the call and response section of the piece (mm. 1-14). Chen Yi utilizes the Sum of Eight,<sup>29</sup> a very popular rhythmic principle in Chinese traditional percussion ensembles. In this design, each phrase consists of two groups of strikes. The length of each group varies systematically, but they always add up to eight strikes total in each phrase (Fig. 1). In *Duo Ye*, Chen Yi applies this principle with her own arrangement. Each pair of the call and response adds up to a total of eleven beats, with the quarter note equal to one beat. The first call is three beats, and the response is eight beats. From there, each call becomes longer, and each response becomes shorter, until the length of beats is reversed (Ex. 16).

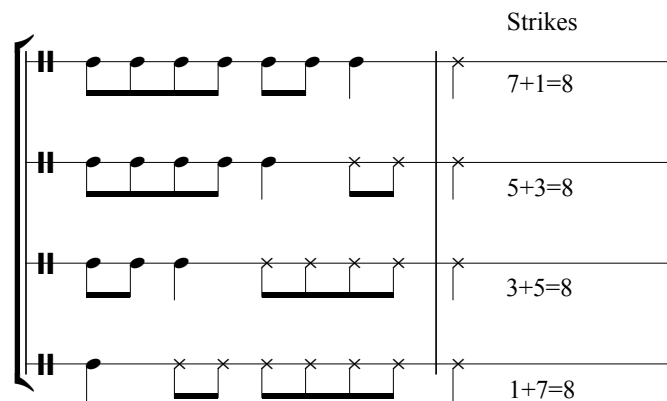


Figure 1. The original pattern of The Sum of Eight<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup> For more information on The Sum of Eight, see *The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music*, v.7, East Asia, Ensemble: Percussion Music. Available from: <http://glnd.alexanderstreet.com.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/View/330951>

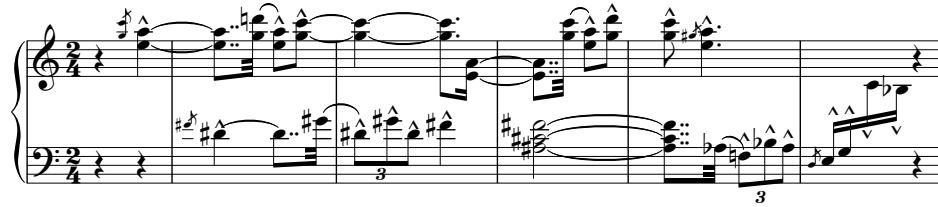
<sup>30</sup> Chen Yi, Tradition and Creation, *Current Musicology* (Fall-Winter 1999): 59-72.



Example 16. Chen Yi's application of The Sum of Eight, mm. 1-14

The two motives continue to lead throughout the first portion of the A section. The piece speeds up to *Allegro* in measure 17, and both hands play parallel octave eighth notes. Chen Yi emphasizes the important notes with accents and highlights the minor-third interval. The call and response style is still present, but now it is between voice and instruments. The upper groups remain lyrical, while the lower groups are more percussive.

A dance section (mm. 28-46) follows the call and response section. The motivic intervals of a major second and a minor third continue to dominate. Here, Chen Yi also incorporates the perfect fourth and fifth intervals that she often uses to enrich the oriental language in her music (Ex. 17).



Example 17. Enriched melody of the dance section, mm. 32-37

The dance feel becomes more and more rhythmical and percussive. At measure 47, the piece shifts to the style of a Chinese percussion ensemble. Cluster-like chords are used to imitate sounds of different kinds of drums. At the same time, the motivic intervals can still be traced as the top voice of the chords, adding another dimension (Ex. 18). This section is loud and festive. It perfectly depicts a scene of celebration.



Example 18. Percussive imitation, mm. 48-51

## Section B

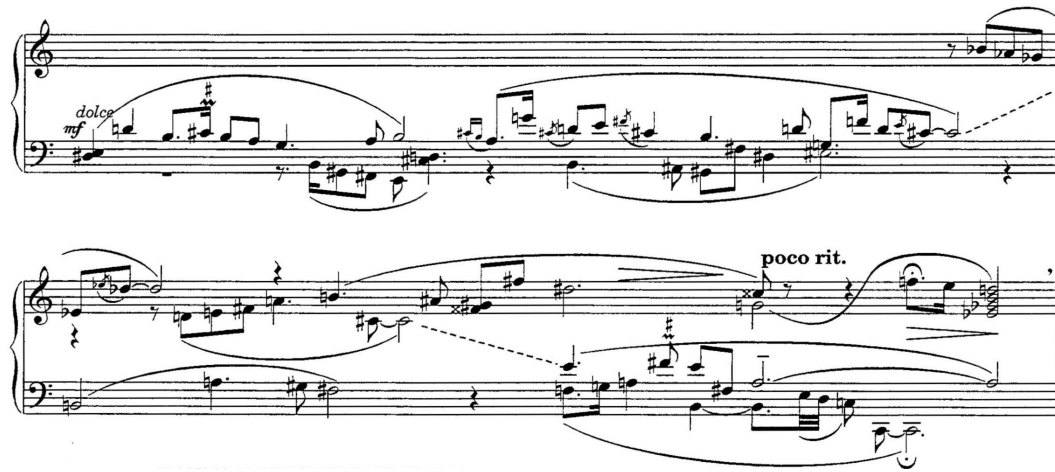
This lyrical section symbolizes the guests from Beijing, by the usage of Beijing Opera music and Mountain Song as the melodic and rhythmic base. Marked *Adagio*, measures 71 and 72 are two long measures of improvisatory style melodies. Right in the beginning of the measure, Motive 3 makes its appearance (Ex. 19). The characteristic of this motive is the interval of a minor seventh. However, it maintains its connection to the first two motives.

The interval of a minor third is still evident, and Motive 2 is embedded in retrograde form in the center of Motive 3 (D-B-A).



Example 19. Motive 3, beginning of m. 71

In Beijing Opera, the instrumental ensemble accompanies the main singer in a different way from that of a Western opera. Instead of playing harmonic progressions, the ensemble supports the main melody by playing intertwining countermelodies at the same time as the singer sings. This is done here in *Duo Ye* as well (Ex. 20).



Example 20. Beijing Opera style writing in Section B, m. 71

The rhythmic principle employed here is called The Golden Olive (金橄榄).<sup>31</sup> The phrase starts with few strikes, and then the next phrase is developed and expanded with more strikes, and the one after even more. Upon reaching a certain number, the phrases start to diminish in number of strikes, until it has few strikes again, thus creating an olive shape (Fig. 2).

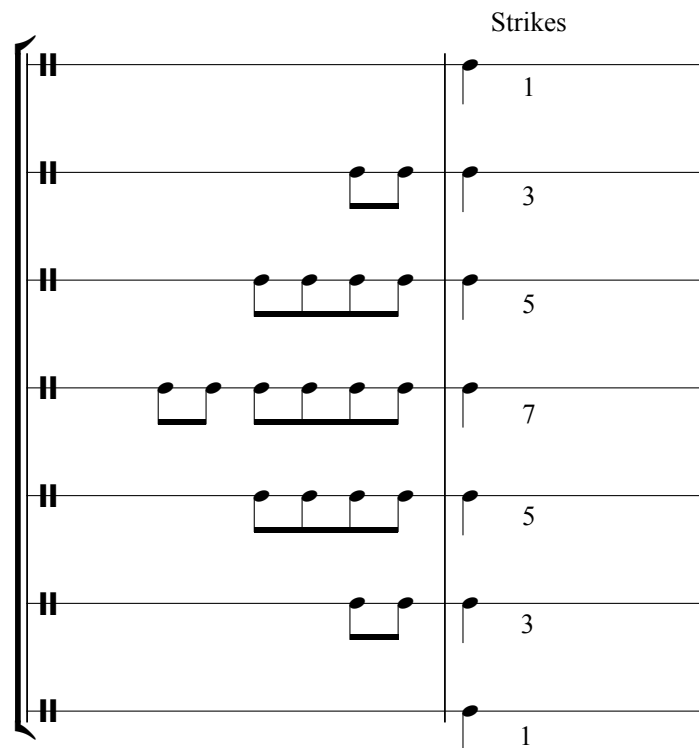


Figure 2. Structure of The Golden Olive<sup>32</sup>

The *Adagio* section is based on the same rhythmic principle. Each phrase increases the number of beats, with the quarter note equal to one

<sup>31</sup> For more information on The Golden Olive, see *The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music*, v.7, East Asia, Ensemble: Percussion Music. Available from: <http://glnd.alexanderstreet.com.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/View/330951>

<sup>32</sup> Chen Yi, Tradition and Creation, *Current Musicology* (Fall-Winter 1999): 59-72.

beat. It starts with three beats and eventually reaches nine. After that point, the beats are reduced gradually to the original number of three beats at the end of the section (Ex. 21).

The musical score for Example 21 consists of three systems of piano and bass staves. The first system is marked 'Adagio' and 'p con espr.', with a 3-beat measure in the piano staff and a 6-beat measure in the bass staff. The second system is marked 'dolce' and 'mf', with an 8-beat measure in the piano staff and a 9-beat measure in the bass staff. The third system is marked 'poco rit.', with a 6-beat measure in the piano staff and a 5-beat measure in the bass staff, ending with a 3-beat measure in the piano staff. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and dynamic markings.

Example 21. Chen Yi's usage of The Golden Olive, m. 71

This principle is used again in the bass of the following measure. This time The Golden Olive shape is even more apparent (Ex. 22).

The musical score for Example 22 shows a piano and bass staff. The piano staff is marked 'a tempo' and 'f', with a 3-beat measure. The bass staff is marked 'mf' and has a sequence of measures with beat counts: 1, 3, 5, 7, 5, 3, 1. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and dynamic markings.

Example 22: Chen Yi's usage of The Golden Olive, m. 72

The discrepancy in measure numbers happens here in the *Adagio* section. There are two measures that take up lines three through six on page three in the Theodore Presser edition of the piece. There is a dotted bar line at the end of line three. In previous researches and dissertations, authors count line three as measure 71, and lines four and five as measure 72, and the last line of the page as measure 73.<sup>33</sup> During this research, the author came to the conclusion that the dotted bar line is merely a separation mark to clarify melodic phrases, not an actual bar line. To consider line three separately from lines four and five would not only break the flow of the music, but also create a gap in the middle of The Golden Olive principle. Confirmation with the composer proved this observation to be correct;<sup>34</sup> therefore, lines three through five will be counted as measure 71 in this dissertation.

Chen Yi utilizes a Western compositional method, a 12-tone row, in the following portion of the lyrical section. The left hand ostinato consists of eight eighth notes, in groups of 3+2+3, and is made out of all twelve notes of the chromatic scale (Ex. 23).

---

<sup>33</sup> Songwen Li, "East Meets West: Nationalistic Elements in Selected Piano Solo Works of Chen Yi." (DMA Dissertation, University of North Texas, 2001); Xiaole Li, "Chen Yi's Piano Music: Chinese Aesthetics and Western Models" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Hawai'i, 2003); Chia-Ching Shen, "The Asian Inspiration: Chinese Influences in the Solo Piano Music of Chen Yi" (DMA Treatise, Florida State University, 2011).

<sup>34</sup> Email correspondence with Chen Yi, August 2012.



Example 23. Left hand ostinato, m. 73

There are several hidden layers in this 12-tone ostinato. First, the lowest notes of the ostinato (C-F-D) are based on Motive 2 (D-E-G), only out of order. Also, the first five notes in the top voice of the pattern (C-Bb-G-F-Eb) are derived from Motive 3.

Meanwhile, the right hand sings a richly embellished melody in the style of a Mountain Song (Ex. 24). Grace notes and quick trills are used to imitate the sliding, almost coloratura-like singing style. The opening interval of Motive 3, a minor seventh, is the foundation of this section.



Example 24. Right hand melody, mm. 75-78

The melody continues after seven measures, but there is a parallel fifth added to further enrich the melody in measure 82. This Andante section gradually becomes quicker in pace. First the eighth notes become eighth note triplets in measure 85, then the meter changes from the previous 4/4 to 5/8 in measure 87 while maintaining the same triplet speed, creating a shorter grouping of notes, and an illusion of faster movement. At this point, the character of the section becomes more and more percussive as well, with shorter melodic phrases and more accented notes. The right hand jumps over

the left hand back and forth between the high and low registers from measure 89 to 106. This provides a fast paced duet between the treble and bass, using the same pitch material from Motive 3 (Ex. 25).

Example 25. Right hand Motive 3 jumps over left hand ostinato, mm. 89-101

At the last step, eighth notes become sixteenth notes in measure 113, and both hands sweep upward with a minor seventh and perfect fourth arpeggio. They reach the top with the triple octave F#-D#, reinforcing the first motive and taking the piece to the next section.

### Section C

Measure 115 is another long measure with no meter indications; this time it is in the style of a cadenza. Both hands fly up and down the entire range of the piano playing groups of sixteenth notes, some of which are indicated to be played “as fast as possible.”<sup>35</sup> Chen Yi stays true to the three motives that build the piece, and this entire section is built on these three ideas.

---

<sup>35</sup> Chen Yi, *Duo Ye*, (King of Prussia, PA: Theodore Presser, 2000), 5.



The section starts with a call just like the very opening, this time in a triple octave followed by an echo. The response here consists of rapid running passages. Each group starts with one of the motives. The right hand starts with F-D, G-E, and Bb-G, which is Motive 1. At the same time, the first notes from these three groups (F-G-Bb) make up Motive 2. The same observation can be made for the left hand. It starts with D-C-A, E-D-B, G-F-D, which is Motive 3. Then the first note from each group add up to D-E-G, Motive 2. Following these three groups, both hands climb up with material from Motive 3 in parallel octaves (Ex. 26).

The musical score for Example 26 is presented in two systems. The first system shows the initial call and response structure. The right hand begins with a call consisting of three groups of notes: F-D, G-E, and Bb-G. Simultaneously, the left hand plays a call with three groups: D-C-A, E-D-B, and G-F-D. The response is marked 'Allegro' and 'mf', featuring rapid running passages in both hands. The first notes of these passages (F, G, Bb in the right hand and D, E, G in the left hand) combine to form Motive 2 (D-E-G). The second system shows the hands climbing up with material from Motive 3 in parallel octaves. The key signature is one flat (Bb) and the tempo is marked 'Allegro' with a tempo indicator of 8♩.

Example 26. First motivic development in m. 115

The same call and response structure happens again. This time the call reflects the second call in the beginning of the piece. The response has the same motivic structure as the first appearance (Ex. 27).



Example 27. Second motivic development in m. 115

The last portion of section C resembles a canon texture. The right hand starts first, and the left hand follows with the same material two octaves lower. The canon gradually merges into a written-out trill in both hands. The usage of trills is similar to a typical cadenza ending, but Chen Yi adds an oriental element by arranging the trills a twelfth apart (perfect fifth plus an octave).

### Section D

The celebration reaches its climax in measure 116. The piece refers back to the beginning call and response structure, only this time the roles are reversed. The top voice provides a percussive tone cluster with an F minor chord layered on top of an F major chord, and the call of Duo Ye appears in the bass voice. The rhythmic principle of The Sum of Eight is also employed here just as at the beginning of the piece (Ex. 28). The top voice starts with seven beats of chords, and the bass responds with Motive 1 (A-F#) for two

and half beats, then the chords appears for five beats, and the response become a variation of Motive 2 (F#-B-A) in three beats. The following chords take over three beats, and the call four beats using material from Motive 3, and lastly the chord only one beat, and the call five beats.

The musical score for Example 28, measures 116-119, is presented in two systems. The first system consists of two staves: a treble clef staff (RH) and a bass clef staff (LH). The RH part features a series of chords, with a triplet of eighth notes (labeled '3') and a group of five chords (labeled '5'). The LH part has a melodic line with accents and a 2 1/2 note value. The second system shows a single treble clef staff with a triplet of eighth notes (labeled '3') and a group of five chords (labeled '5').

Example 28. Usage of The Sum of Eight, mm. 116-119

In this application of the rhythmic principle, Chen Yi again alters it slightly. Unlike its first application in the beginning of the piece, where the call and response add up to eleven beats, the total number of beats changes at this occurrence. Each group diminishes in the total number, from nine and a half beats to six beats.

In the following section, measures 120 to 133, with a time signature of 4/4, the left hand plays a constant sixteenth-note ostinato that consists of six notes in each group. At the same time, the right hand portrays the calling of Duo Ye and Ya Duo Ye, with embellishments in between. Although the material is very similar to that of the opening of the piece because of the left

hand rhythmic ostinato and the fast tempo, this section sounds much more upbeat and festive.

Here Chen Yi utilizes another shortening of the number of notes to depict *accelerando*. At measure 128, the left hand ostinato becomes three notes per group, and at measure 132, it gets shortened again to two notes per group. The intensity builds up more and more in the right hand as well. It reinforces the first motive over and over again, F-D, Eb-C, Bb-G, etc. When the left hand switches to three-note ostinato, the right hand emphasizes E-C#-F#-E-C#, the second call from the beginning of the piece. The section ends with the right hand playing a percussive B major chord over the left hand's two-note ostinato based on Motive 1 (G-E), stopping abruptly after reaching the peak of a *crescendo*. A dramatic pause sets up the coda of the piece.

### **Section E**

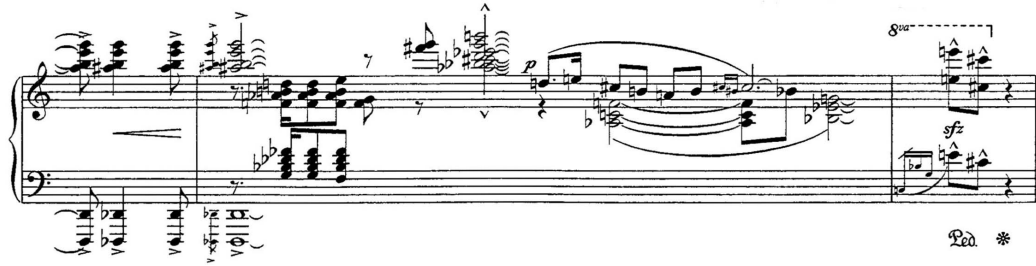
The coda starts quietly and low on the piano, making plenty of room for the build up. Maintaining the same percussive character, first the right hand plays constant sixteenth notes while accenting the notes directly drawn from Motive 2 (D-E-G). Then the left hand ostinato reappears, still six notes per group, drawing pitch material from Motive 3 (Db-Cb-Ab).

One phenomenon in the left hand ostinato is that there is a sequential pattern in the pitch material as well as in the number of groups. What is fascinating about it is not just the duration of this phenomenon (covering from measure 142 to measure 168), but also how Chen Yi is able to utilize it so subtly and seamlessly. The ostinato first starts on Db and continues for

eleven groups. Then it moves up to Bb, and this time it repeats nine times. From that point, each new group moves up a perfect fifth, and shortens the number of groups by two groups; F for seven groups, C for five groups, G for three groups, and finally, D only one group (Ex. 29).

Example 29. Rhythmic diminution of left hand ostinato, mm. 142-168

At the same time, the right hand continues to portray the ethnic group's dancing and singing using Motive 2. Both hands join together dancing with material from Motive 2 at measure 169. With a toccata-like motion, the piece reaches the final peak, at which point both hands boom energetic chords at the outer ends of the piano. The piece quickly reflects the beautiful tune from the Adagio section in measure 71. Before that sinks in, the piece implies Motive 3 with grace notes in measure 178, and ends with a last declaration of the first motive (Ex. 30).



Example 30. Ending of *Duo Ye*, mm. 176-178

## Conclusion

Being one of Chen Yi's first major compositions, *Duo Ye* stands at a significant place in modern Chinese compositional platform. The piece possesses a rich blossoming of motivic development, as well as sophisticated rhythmic organization. Chen Yi is also able to blend the Chinese folk music with some Western compositional technique such as twelve-tone writing and motivic development. At the same time, she employs many of the traditional Chinese music principles such as The Sum of Eight and The Golden Olive.

The piece fully captures the primitive spirit of the ethnic group in Southern China, and the festive atmosphere created by the warm welcome to their guests from Beijing. The sincerity Chen Yi felt during her trip truly comes to life in her music. And many others felt the same, as the piece won first prize at the Chinese National Composition Competition in 1985, and has been transcribed for chamber orchestra, as well as symphonic orchestra.

## *Guessing*

### Overview

Written in 1989, *Guessing* was composed during the years of Chen Yi's doctoral study at Columbia University. It was based on a popular Southern

Chinese folk song with the same title (猜调) (Ex. 31). Chen Yi writes in her program notes for the piece:

“I often remember the very popular Chinese folk song called ‘Guessing’ which is in a humorous antiphonal singing style. For this piano piece, I took a fragment of the tune from the song and developed it in pitch, range, dynamics, rhythm, and expression, using basic techniques of piano performance. The piece shows a simple and rustic feeling in an obviously strong Chinese musical style.”<sup>36</sup>



Example 31. The folk song Guessing<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup> Chen Yi, *Guessing*, (King of Prussia, PA: Theodore Presser, 2000), 2.

<sup>37</sup> Notated from memory by the author.



Example 32. Theme of Guessing, mm. 1-11<sup>38</sup>

Chen Yi's theme preserves the 2/4 meter from the original song, but she varies the contour and rhythmic pattern to make it her own (Ex. 32). The two main components of this theme are the intervals of a major second and a minor third. Combining these two intervals, a perfect fourth also becomes the driving force of this composition. Besides motivic development, other Western compositional influences can also be found in this piece, such as bitonality, polyphonic writing, and rhythmic displacement.

A sectional structure driven by the theme, the piece can be labeled as theme and variations. On top of that basic structure, the variations can be grouped into larger sections according to their sense of speed, fast—slow—fast. The entire piece is labeled *scherzando* with no drastic tempo changes; Chen Yi creates different sense of speed by meter changes and obscuring the rhythmic pattern.

---

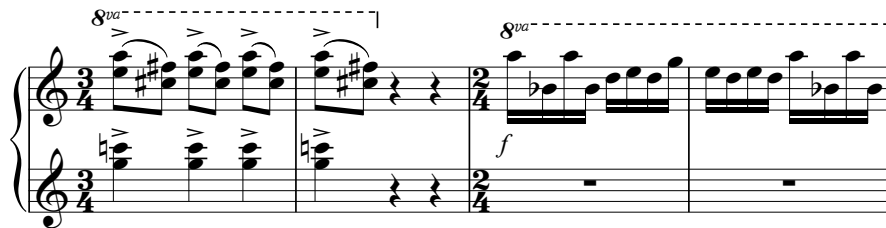
<sup>38</sup> Chen Yi, *Guessing*, (King of Prussia, PA: Theodore Presser, 2000). Reprinted with the permission of Theodore Presser Company. All subsequent examples of this musical work are from this source.



Table 3. Formal structure of *Guessing*

| Section: | Theme             | Var. 1              | Var. 2      | Var. 3              | Var. 4          | Var. 5              | Var. 6 (Coda) |
|----------|-------------------|---------------------|-------------|---------------------|-----------------|---------------------|---------------|
| Mm:      | 1-37              | 38-66               | 67-96       | 97-115              | 116-144         | 145-165             | 166-193       |
| Length:  | 37                | 29                  | 30          | 19                  | 29              | 21                  | 28            |
| Meter:   | 2/4,<br>3/4       | 2/4,<br>3/4,<br>4/4 | 2/4,<br>3/4 | 2/4,<br>3/4,<br>4/4 | 4/4<br>obscured | 4/4,<br>3/8,<br>3/4 | 3/4, 2/4      |
| Tempo:   | <i>scherzando</i> |                     |             |                     | slow            | fast                |               |

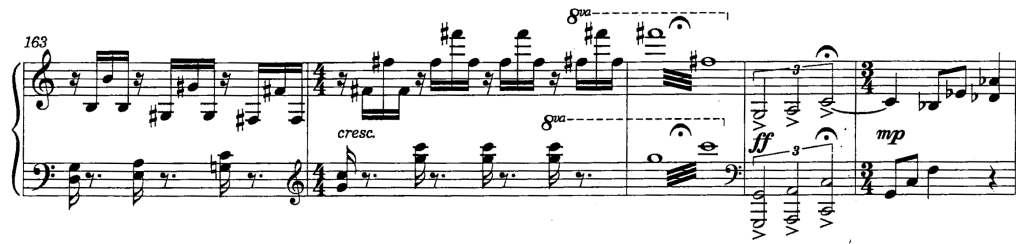
The sectional form is clearly marked by rests and long notes, as identified from the below examples 33, 34 and 35. This is a writing technique frequently found in Chen Yi's compositions (Ex. 36, 37, and 38).



Example 33. Break between the Theme and Variation 1, mm. 36-39



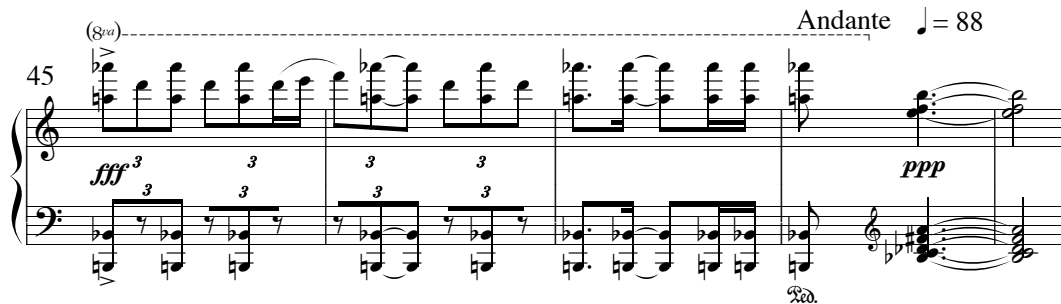
Example 34. Break between Variation 3 and Variation 4, mm. 114-118



Example 35. Break between Variation 5 and Coda, mm. 163-167



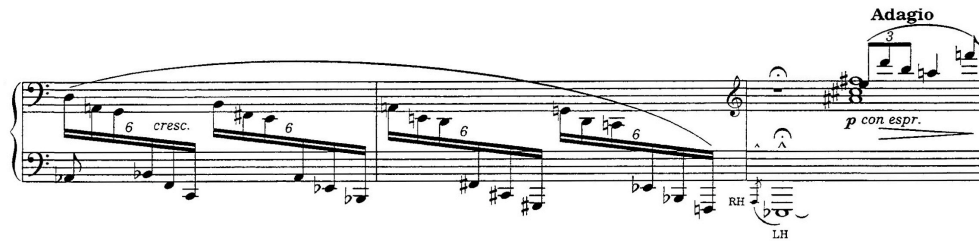
Example 36. *Yu Diao*, break between Section A and Section B, mm. 12-14<sup>39</sup>



Example 37. *Ba Ban*, break between Section A and Section B, mm. 45-49<sup>40</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Chen Yi, *Two Chinese Bagatelles: Yu Diao*, (King of Prussia, PA: Theodore Presser, 2000). Reprinted with the permission of Theodore Presser Company.

<sup>40</sup> Chen Yi, *Ba Ban*, (King of Prussia, PA: Theodore Presser, 1999). Reprinted with the permission of Theodore Presser Company.



Example 38. *Duo Ye*, break between Section A and Section B, mm. 69-71

### Theme

The theme stays close to the form of the original song, mainly the antiphonic style of phrasing. In the original song, the melody stays the same between the call and the response; only the lyrics change. Here in Chen Yi's composition, she preserves that characteristic. The theme is first played in the right hand, and then played with the left hand from measure twelve an octave lower as the answer (Ex. 39).



Example 39. Call and response of the theme, mm. 1-22

Meanwhile, during each statement of the melody, a countermelody appears in the other hand (Ex. 40). The countermelody consists of accented single notes and chords on weak beats. This percussive style creates a primitive and rustic feeling. It also presents chromatic notes distant from those in the melody. This presents Chen Yi's usage of bitonal writing.



Example 40. Countermelody of the theme, mm. 2-5

After the initial call and response, the piece veers into transitional material in measure 23. This portion of the music resembles a percussion ensemble, with lots of staccatos and accented chords. The section reaches its peak at *fortissimo* in measure 30, and continues to accelerate the tempo as well as the excitement. The right hand flies with parallel perfect-fourth eighth notes, and the left hand does not fall behind a bit with its parallel perfect-fourth quarter notes. This interval is extracted from the first two notes of the theme. The meter has been switched to 3/4; however, Chen Yi maintains a sense of duple meter by employing a hemiola effect from measure 30 to 34. Finally an abrupt pause ends the theme in measure 37 (Ex. 41).

Example 41. Acceleration and hemiola at the end of the theme, mm. 30-37

### Variation 1

While the foundation of the melodic material remains the same, the melody in Variation 1 is in a more fragmented style. The left hand dominates in this section. Here the theme becomes augmented and more grandeur, supported by octaves and perfect fourths (Ex. 42).

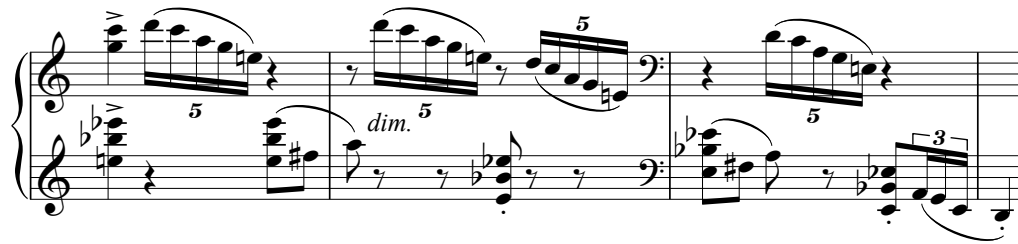
Example 42. Melody in Variation 1, mm. 40-45

The right hand primarily consists of a 12-note ostinato, with notes and intervals derived from the theme. The notes A and Bb are borrowed from the theme, and D-E-D-G are based on the opening interval G-A-C (Ex. 43).

Example 43. Right hand ostinato in Variation 1, mm. 38-39

A series of short running segments takes the section from the high register to the low register in measure 57 (Ex. 44). These bursts of

pentatonic fragments imitate the sound of the *Zheng* instrument perfectly. In between segments, dissonant chords strike as percussion sounds. This kind of writing resembles a Chinese traditional instrumental ensemble playing interludes between scenes at a Chinese opera performance.



Example 44. Instrumental interlude at the end of Variation 1, mm. 57-60

## Variation 2

The composition up to this point is essentially homophonic. As it arrives at the second variation, polyphonic writing and vocal imitation become the highlight. It starts with a canon at the major third at measure 67, with the left hand one beat behind the right hand (Ex. 45). Slightly faster in tempo, and in a much softer dynamic, the sound depicts children playing and chasing each other in the playground.



Example 45. Canon in Variation 2, mm. 67-73

The two voices eventually become unified in measure 83. At this point, the piece reaches *fortissimo*, with both hands playing octaves. This exciting

moment is filled with the motivic intervals of a major second and a minor third (Ex. 46).



Example 46. Climax of Variation 2, mm. 83-95

### Variation 3

The excitement lands on bombastic chords in both hands at the extreme ends of the piano at measure 97, which take the piece to its third variation. This portion of the music serves as a transition into the slow section. Here the music alternates between booming chords on irregular beats and playful melodic fragments (Ex. 47). The chords in the extreme registers of the piano are derived from the thematic intervals. The interval of a perfect fourth (D-G in the right hand and E-A in the left hand) is taken from the opening two notes of the theme. The tritone (Ab-D in the right hand and A-D# in the left hand) refers to measure 2, where the right hand plays a C and the left hand plays a Gb.



Example 47. Alternation of chords and melodic fragments, mm. 97-100

The melodic fragment in measure 99 contains the main melodic interval, G-A-C. It also stays consistent with the opening theme by providing a bitonal left hand voice. Using the perfect fourth interval, the left hand stays on black keys, while the right hand plays melodic notes on white keys. At the end of the fragment, Chen Yi writes a quick flare that is based on the pentatonic scale.

#### Variation 4

Chen Yi ingeniously switches speeds in this composition without drastic changes in tempo. Starting with  $\text{♩} = 120$ , then  $\text{♩} = 132$  in Variation 2, the piece stays in a fairly quick pace. At measure 116, without any tempo changes, the composer creates an illusion of a much slower tempo by using longer note values, half notes and whole notes. She also employs half note triplets throughout this section to obscure the feel of 4/4, creating a completely different feel of pace (Ex. 48).



Example 48. Obscured rhythm in the beginning of Variation 4, mm. 116-124

The motive G-A-C continues to be prominent in this variation. With both hands playing melodies in parallel motion, the first two statements in measures 119 and 127 start with the same notes from the motive (Ex. 49 and 50). And then the last statement in measure 138 starts with a transposition of the motive (Ex. 51).

Example 49. Beginning of the first statement of the melody in Variation 4, m. 119

Example 50. Beginning of the second statement in Variation 4, mm. 127-128

In between melodic phrases, both hands play impressionistic chords that start at the far ends of the piano and work their way toward the middle of the piano. These chords are constructed from an interval of a major second and a major seventh. The major second comes from one of the thematic motives, and the major seventh is an inversion of the open chromatic left hand. These chords intermingle with the slow and open sound of the melody; together they provide a beautiful contrast to the playful and energetic first section.

The piece gradually picks up the tempo in measure 138 during the third statement of the theme. This is achieved by presenting more and more eighth notes while maintaining the half note triplet beats (Ex. 51).



Example 51. Beginning of the third statement in Variation 4, mm. 138-141

### Variation 5

The arrival of Variation 5 at measure 145 is done seamlessly. The time signature maintains 4/4 throughout the entire Variation 4, but it creates a 3/2 feel because of the half note triplets. There are twelve eighth notes in every measure, regardless of whether the triplet grouping is in half notes or in eighth notes. Therefore, the speed of eighth notes stays the same, but the

grouping is shifted from four eighth notes per group to three eighth notes per group (Ex. 52).

Example 52. Transition from triplets to 4/4, mm. 144-146

The left hand brings out notes extracted directly from the original folk melody at the arrival of Variation 5. More detached articulation brings the character back to cheerful and energetic. While continuing to preserve the notes from the original folk melody, the piece brings the excitement up once again by speeding up from triplet eighth notes to sixteenth notes at measure 151 in *fortissimo* (Ex. 53). The style of this section reminds one of a Toccata.

Example 53. Toccata-style writing of Variation 5, mm. 151-154

To highlight the childlike character of this piece one step further, Chen Yi makes unexpected and sudden changes in this variation. After four measures of the 16<sup>th</sup>-note passage, the piece suddenly comes to a stop at

measure 155, pausing for a measure with a 3/8 time signature. Then at measure 156, the same material repeats in a different key, in *pianissimo*.

The written-in acceleration of the fifth variation starts with eighth note triplets, and then speeds up to sixteenth notes. It eventually reaches the peak with both hands climbing upward until they reach the top of the piano with tremolos at measure 165.

### **Variation 6: Coda**

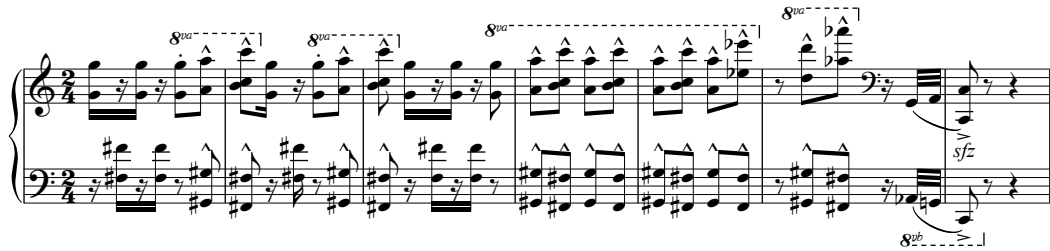
A bold statement of the motive G-A-C brings the piece to its last variation, the coda. Here the motive is reiterated again and again. Starting with the interval of a fourth at measure 167, the coda starts low and quiet, but quickly builds up the speed and intensity by utilizing contrapuntal and stretto writing (Ex. 54).



Example 54. Stretto in Coda, mm. 170-173

The piece arrives at a long passage of fiery chords at measure 178, the most extensive of the entire piece yet. The structure of the chords maintains the same intervallic relationship with the theme, being constructed on the intervals of a perfect fourth and a tritone. At measure 187 the piece takes another run at bitonal harmony, where the right hand is staying on white keys while the left hand plays on black keys. The piece ends with a quick

burst of notes. One can easily imagine children clapping and shouting with excitement (Ex. 55).



Example 55. Ending of *Guessing*, mm. 187-193

## Conclusion

*Guessing* was commissioned for the 1990 Renee B. Fisher Awards Competition for pianists between the ages of fourteen and eighteen.<sup>41</sup> Chen Yi chose a Chinese children’s song for the occasion, as her main focus was to capture children’s lively spirit. This composition successfully portrays that character and more. Each variation of the piece showcases something different, making this piece full of contrasts and surprises. The piece presents its challenges as one learns it, but the finished product is rewarding to perform and share with others.

*Two Chinese Bagatelles*

*Piano Solo for Children*

## **Yu Diao**

*Yu Diao* was written in 1984, during Chen Yi’s conservatory years in Beijing. This short 2-page piece is full of charm and poise. Its roots include Chinese local operatic material, imitation of Chinese traditional instruments,

<sup>41</sup> Chen Yi, *Guessing*, (King of Prussia, PA: Theodore Presser, 2000), 2.

vocal dialogs, as well as call and response antiphonic writing. While some material is based on very specific regional style, some sections of the piece have very typical Asian pentatonic writing.

The piece is in a ternary form, each section marked by an expressive marking. *Allegretto Scherzando* marks the beginning of the piece, *Frescamente* introduces a refreshing, cool middle section in measure 14, and the main material returns to *Spirito* in measure 30.

The melodic material of *Yu Diao* derives from the local opera in the Henan province in Northern China.<sup>42</sup> The Word Yu (豫) is another name for the province, and Diao (调) means tune. The characteristics of the music from this region are antiphonic singing style and pentatonic melodic writing with altered notes as well as pitch bends. Chen Yi exhibits those characteristics thoroughly in this composition.

With a key signature of F# and C#, *Yu Diao* presents a tonal center of D. In the A section, the note C# is frequently lowered to C $\flat$ , providing a sense of D Mixolydian mode. Section B is mostly pentatonic, with a tonal center of G. When the A section comes back, the piece returns to D Mixolydian mode.

---

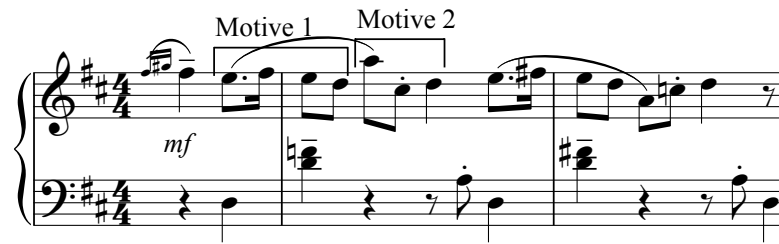
<sup>42</sup> Chen Yi, *Two Chinese Bagatelles: Yu Diao*, (King of Prussia, PA: Theodore Presser, 2000), 2.

Table 4. Formal structure of *Yu Diao*

|               |  |     |             |                    |           |             |                        |           |
|---------------|--|-----|-------------|--------------------|-----------|-------------|------------------------|-----------|
| Section:      | A: 1-13                                |     |             | B: 14-29           |           |             | A <sup>1</sup> : 30-40 |           |
| Tempo:        | <i>Allegretto</i><br><i>Scherzando</i> |     |             | <i>Frescamente</i> |           |             | <i>Spirito</i>         |           |
| Phrases:      | 1                                      | 2   | 3<br>(tran) | 4                  | 5         | 6<br>(tran) | 7                      | 8         |
| Mm:           | 1-4                                    | 5-8 | 9-13        | 14-19              | 20-<br>23 | 24-29       | 30-34                  | 35-<br>40 |
| Length:       | 4                                      | 4   | 5           | 6                  | 4         | 6           | 5                      | 6         |
| Meter:        | 4/4                                    | 4/4 | 4/4-3/4     | 4/4-<br>3/4        | 4/4       | 4/4         | 3/4-<br>4/4            | 4/4       |
| Tonal center: | D                                      | D   | D-G         | G                  | G         | D           | D                      | D         |

The first phrase (mm. 1-4) is in two segments; measures 1 and 2 present the original statement, followed by a slightly altered version in measures 3 and 4. The phrase starts with stepwise motion, and it rises to an A before it comes down to D. The second half of the phrase exhibits the same stepwise motive, but reverses the direction of the leap; thus, the A becomes the low point of the phrase. The rising and falling melodic contour along with grace notes and sixteenth note turns are utilized all in imitation of the operatic singing style. The first half of the statement ends with A-C#-D, and the second half of the statement ends with A-C $\natural$ -D. The interchanging C# and C $\natural$  portrays the pitch bend singing technique that is often found in Henan local operas.

The stepwise turn motion (E-F#-E-D) in the beginning of the phrase creates the first motive that constructs this composition. The ending of the phrase becomes Motive 2, characterized by a leap-step motion, and by pitch changes (C#/C $\natural$ ) (Ex. 56).



Example 56. Motives 1 and 2 in *Yu Diao*, mm. 1-2<sup>43</sup>

While the right hand presents the operatic style melodies, the left hand provides a percussive accompaniment. Chen Yi alters the notes F# and C# back and forth to F $\flat$  and C $\flat$ . This creates a bitonal effect that can be often observed in Chen Yi's composition. In this occurrence, Chen Yi utilizes those altered notes specifically against the right hand melodic notes. In measure 1, when the right hand plays a C#, the left hand accompanies with an F $\flat$ ; while in measure 2, the left hand switches to an F# when the right hand now plays a C $\flat$ . This latter interval of a tritone creates a dissonant sound that imitates the percussion instruments.

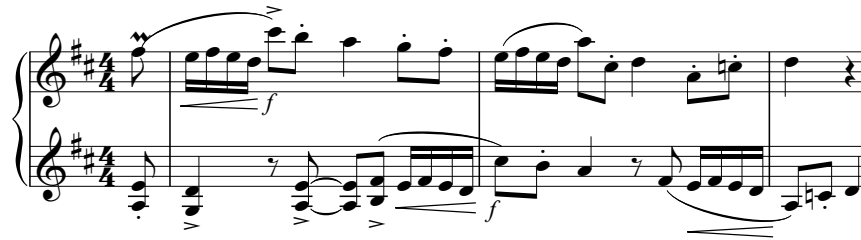
A short bridge in measure 5 takes the A section to phrase two. Up to this point, the melody has been presented by the right hand; however, the left hand joins in measure 6, and provides an imitation that follows the right hand. The solo becomes a duet (Ex. 57). The first motive can be located in the sixteenth notes in both hands. The second motive of A-C#-D and A-C $\flat$ -D can

---

<sup>43</sup> Chen Yi, *Two Chinese Bagatelles: Yu Diao*, (King of Prussia, PA: Theodore Presser, 2000). Reprinted with the permission of Theodore Presser Company. All subsequent examples of this musical work are from this source.



still be observed in this phrase, maintaining the same pitch-bend character of the operatic reference.



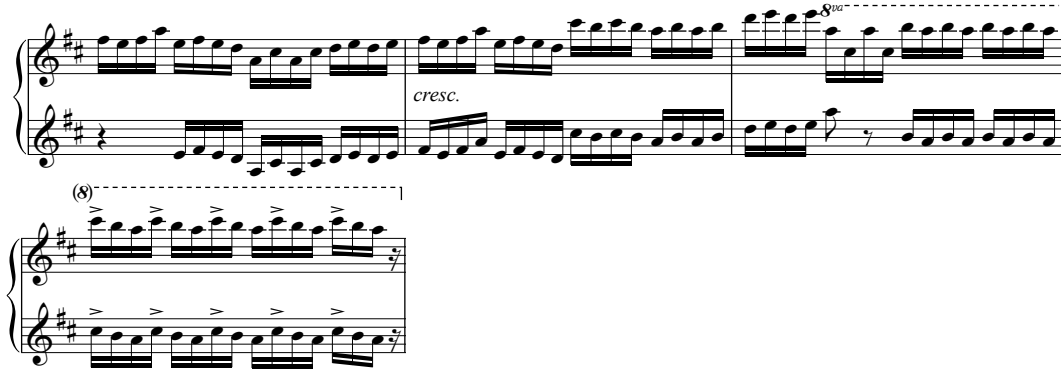
Example 57. Duet in Section A, mm. 6-8

At the second beat of measure 8, a sequential modulation takes the melody to a perfect fifth lower, bringing the tonal center of the piece to G. This modulation is built exclusively on the two motives in the beginning. At the arrival of G, the first half of the theme is presented three times to establish the new tonal center. This section ends on a chord that hints at the dominant-seventh harmony in Western tonal music, with the left hand holding a D and C $\flat$ , and the right hand plays D and F#.

An unexpected pause in measure 13 prepares the B section. Contrasting in character, the B section is calm and tranquil, with both hands in the treble register. Chen Yi describes it precisely with *Frescamente* (freshly).

The length of the first phrase in the B section seems much longer than the first phrase in the A section, even though they both cover about the same number of beats. This is because the first phrase in the A section is more fragmented, containing four segments each extending five beats; meanwhile, the B section presents continuous melodic material that covers eighteen





Example 59. Instrumental interlude, mm. 24-27

The climax of the piece happens in measure 27, during the instrumental interlude. Chen Yi utilizes a written out acceleration to portray this increase of excitement. The grouping of sixteenth notes shortens from four notes per group to three notes per group. The stepwise motion of Motive 1 dominates the climax.

The tonal center shifts back to D at measure 24. After the climax, the B section arrives on a D major triad in measure 28. This chord is reinforced again later in the measure. The climactic section comes down by bouncing on the notes A-C# from the high register to the low register. This interval is based on Motive 2. Finally, the section ends on the note A in measure 30. This becomes another implication of the dominant harmony, setting up the return of the A section.

The main theme comes back on beat two in measure 30, which begins the A<sup>1</sup> section. This time the left hand sings with the right hand at the same time an octave apart. Like the beginning of the piece, the phrase presents the

statement for two measures (mm.31-32), and the embellished statement for another two measures (mm. 33-34).

After the bridge, instead of developing the theme as in the A section, Chen Yi utilizes closing material at measure 36. Using the material taken from the instrumental imitation at measure 24 in the B section, she concludes the piece with the right hand playing running passages over the left hand drumming percussive beats of open perfect fifths. The usage of C# and C<sup>♮</sup> occurs one more time at this last section of the piece. The right hand uses C# in measure 37, and the left hand takes C<sup>♮</sup> in measure 38. The A-C# from Motive 2 comes back in measure 39. While the appearance at the end of Section B ends on an A implying a dominant harmony, this time the C# resolves to D, bringing closure to the motive as well as the entire piece.

### ***Small Beijing Gong***

Although published as a set, these two bagatelles were written at different times. *Small Beijing Gong* was written in 1993, nine years after *Yu Diao*. In spite of the large time gap, these two pieces work as a set quite well. *Small Beijing Gong* has the same sense of humor and childlike character that *Yu Diao* possesses. At the same time, it is concise and to the point, which also corresponds to the preceding piece.

Only twenty measures and thirty seconds in length, the piece can be divided into two sections, section A from measure 1 to measure 12, and section B from measure 13 to measure 20.

Table 5. Formal structure of *Small Beijing Gong*

|          |         |     |     |                |          |       |
|----------|---------|-----|-----|----------------|----------|-------|
| Section: | A: 1-12 |     |     |                | B: 13-20 |       |
| Phrases: | intro   | 1   | 2   | 3 (transition) | 4        | 5     |
| Mm:      | 1-2     | 3-6 | 7-9 | 10-12          | 13-16    | 17-20 |
| Length:  | 2       | 4   | 3   | 3              | 4        | 4     |

Chen Yi notes, “*Small Beijing Gong* takes its musical style from Beijing Opera.”<sup>44</sup> When listening to this piece, one can clearly hear different instruments from a Beijing Opera ensemble, as well as the voice of a Beijing Opera singer.

The A section introduces three elements that make up the piece, percussive ostinato, vocal singing, and the gong. The left hand plays a 7-note ostinato throughout this section (Ex. 60), which is the main feature in the A section, and the foundation of the entire composition. An ostinato is normally played during a Beijing Opera performance by a stringed instrument in the ensemble, usually *erhu* or *jinghu*.<sup>45</sup> Meanwhile, the right hand sings in the reciting style of Beijing Opera, with long sustaining notes embellished with grace notes (Ex. 61). And of course, there is the gong, playing on the off beats, typical of Beijing Opera style. Chen Yi uses the notes F and Eb, a minor seventh to imitate the dissonant percussive sound made by the gong (Ex. 62).

---

<sup>44</sup> Chen Yi, *Two Chinese Bagatelles: Small Beijing Gong*, (King of Prussia, PA: Theodore Presser, 2000), 4.

<sup>45</sup> *Erhu* and *Jinghu* are both traditional Chinese instruments with two strings, played with a bow. For more information on these instruments, see *The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music*, v.7, East Asia, Instruments: *Erhu*. Available from: <http://glnd.alexanderstreet.com.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/View/330927>



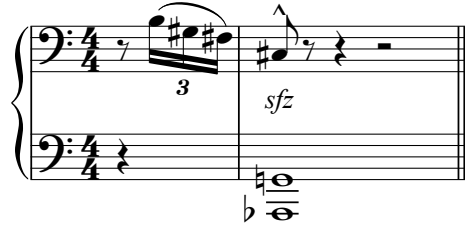
section, the gong is still played by the right hand, but now the left hand is playing a more melodious tune imitating the instrument *erhu* from measure 13 to 16. This melody is constructed exclusively with material from the ostinato. It starts out pentatonic, with the same melodic intervals found in the melody of the A section (E-D-B), which are notes rearranged from the ostinato. At the end of measure 13, the beginning of the ostinato makes a subtle appearance (A-G-E). At measure 15, the melody refers back to the first five notes of the opening ostinato a minor third higher (Ex. 63).



Example 63. *Erhu* melody, mm. 13-16

The piece explores the very high end of the register on the piano at the end of the piece with a fiery tremolo, imitating an ensemble of gongs playing together. The intervals that build the tremolo are based on the intervals found from the ostinato. A minor third and a perfect fourth can be found when the tremolo is analyzed horizontally; at the same time, a minor seventh and a major second appears when the tremolo is analyzed vertically. All these intervals can be located in the ostinato.

Finally, the piece ends with one last strike of a large gong ringing in the ears (Ex. 64). The sixteenth-note triplets in the right hand contain the same intervallic structure of the melody, a minor third and a major second. The last strike of the gong in measure 17 is made out of a major seventh and a tritone, which can be traced to the last three notes of the rhythmic ostinato.



Example 64. The ending gong imitation, mm. 19-20

A unique writing style for *Small Beijing Gong* is, while we can trace all the pitch material to their Beijing Opera roots, the rhythmic writing is very unusual for traditional Beijing Opera. The piece starts in 7/8, which is quite unusual already. Then, there are many time signature changes throughout the entire piece, especially in the B section, having five time signature changes in eight measures. This shows Chen Yi's ability to fuse Chinese traditional language with modern writing seamlessly.

### *Ba Ban*

#### **Overview**

*Ba Ban* (八板) was written in 1999, commissioned by Carnegie Hall to celebrate the new millennium. The word Ba (八) means eight, and Ban (板) means beat or phrase. The words refer to a Chinese traditional compositional form, but are also used as titles for folk tunes. Chen Yi takes both meanings of the words, and uses the original folk tune and the Ba Ban structure as the foundation of her composition.<sup>47</sup>

---

<sup>47</sup> Chen Yi, *Ba Ban*, (King of Prussia, PA: Theodore Presser, 1999), 2.





During her research, Chen Yi found about three hundred variations of the folk tune Ba Ban in China depending on the region and dialect; however, they are all “based on an original folk tune that has a golden section, and also the grouping method follows the numbers of the Fibonacci series.”<sup>50</sup> The original form Ba Ban contains eight phrases, with eight beats per group. The fifth phrase is an exception, which has twelve beats (Fig. 3). The additional beats happen at the golden section, also called golden ratio, which mathematically is 0.618. In the case of the Ba Ban structure, the addition at the end of the fifth phrase in a total of eight phrases possesses the same ratio.<sup>51</sup>

---

<sup>50</sup> Irene Borger, “Chen Yi Interview,” In *The Force of Curiosity*, Santa Monica Ca: CalArts/Alpert award in the arts, 1999, 278-298.

<sup>51</sup> Chen Yi, “Tradition and Creation.” *Current Musicology* (Fall-Winter 1999): 59-72.

|   | Phrase<br>大板 | Number of Beats<br>板数 | Grouping<br>乐逗 |
|---|--------------|-----------------------|----------------|
|    | 1            | 8                     | 3+2+3=8        |
|    | 2            | 8                     | 3+2+3=8        |
|    | 3            | 8                     | 4+4=8          |
|    | 4            | 8                     | 3+2+3=8        |
|    | 5            | 12                    | 3+2+3+4=12     |
|    | 6            | 8                     | 4+4=8          |
|   | 7            | 8                     | 5+3=8          |
|  | 8            | 8                     | 4+4=8          |

Figure 3. Ba Ban folk music form<sup>52</sup>

Chen Yi's composition *Ba Ban* reflects the eight-phrase formal structure, and thematic development writing in Chinese traditional music. Chen Yi states that sectional development is commonly found in Chinese traditional music. The theme becomes more decorated with embellishments, performance techniques and different speeds after the first appearance.<sup>53</sup> This piece is in four main sections, and in that Chinese style of theme and

<sup>52</sup> Material provided by Chen Yi to the author.

<sup>53</sup> Chen Yi, *Ba Ban*, (King of Prussia, PA: Theodore Presser, 1999), 2.

variations. There is a transition to each variation, and a coda at the end of the last variation, bringing the total number of sections to eight.

Table 6. Formal structure of *Ba Ban*

| Section:   | A (1-48)                    | B (49-97)              |               | B <sup>1</sup> (98-156) |                 |         | C (157-257)                 |                           |
|------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|---------------|-------------------------|-----------------|---------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| Structure: | Theme                       | Tran 1                 | Vari 1        | Tran 2                  | Vari 2          | Tran 3  | Vari 3<br>Climax:<br>m. 184 | Coda                      |
| Mm:        | 1-48                        | 49-63                  | 64-97         | 98-111                  | 112-145         | 146-156 | 157-232                     | 233-257                   |
| Length:    | 48                          | 15                     | 34            | 14                      | 34              | 11      | 76                          | 25                        |
| Meter:     | 3/4--2/4                    | 2/4                    | 2/4           | 2/4                     | 2/4             | 2/4     | 4/4--<br>2/4                | 2/4                       |
| Tempo:     | Slow--<br><i>Allegretto</i> | <i>Andante</i><br>♩=88 | ♩=92,<br>♩=96 | ♩=100                   | ♩=104,<br>♩=108 | ♩=112   | ♩=80,<br>♩=100,<br>♩=120    | <i>Piu mosso</i><br>♩=144 |

The influence of Fibonacci numbers can be traced in this structure as well. The starting point of Variation 3 is placed at the point of the golden ratio. This variation bears much significance because it contains the climax of the piece. Also, the character of this variation differs from the previous two variations, and there is a sense of new beginning when the piece arrives at Variation 3.

### **A section**

The piece opens with octaves in the high register of the piano, creating an open and spacious atmosphere. Along with decorative grace notes and an improvisatory character, it truly resembles a Mountain Song (Ex. 68). The notes of the melody are taken from the first two lines of the original Ba Ban melody. Although the Ba Ban rhythm is not applied here,

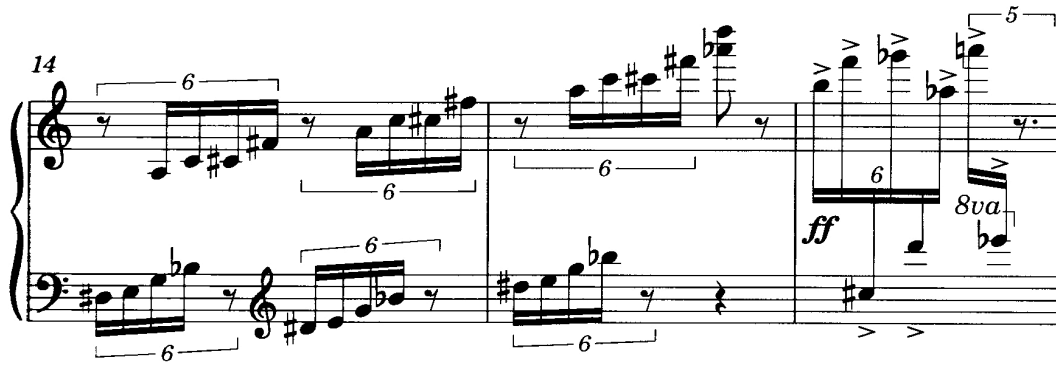
Chen Yi marks the 3+2+3 grouping of notes by using different registers of the piano.

Example 68. Theme in *Ba Ban*, mm. 1-12<sup>54</sup>

The first appearance of pitch material 3, the ascending five-note motive, is at measure 14. The appearance is a subtle one, where the notes are divided between both hands, and the pitch material never presents its original form in its entirety. Pitch material 2 appears immediately following pitch material 3 in measure 16. This is only a partial appearance, with the first eight notes of the twelve-tone row and two notes in reverse order (Ex. 69).

---

<sup>54</sup> Chen Yi, *Ba Ban*, (King of Prussia, PA: Theodore Presser, 1999). Reprinted with the permission of Theodore Presser Company. All subsequent examples of this musical work are from this source.



Example 69. First appearance of pitch material 2 and 3, mm. 14-16

It is noted that although the ascending five-note motive precedes the twelve-tone row in the music, Chen Yi considers the twelve-tone row as pitch material 2 and the ascending five-note motive as pitch material 3.<sup>55</sup> This paper will stay consistent with Chen Yi's labeling.

The beginning of the piece is marked *Slow, ad lib.* Quickly the piece accelerates, and by measure 18, the piece reaches *Allegretto*. A toccata-like texture in *fortissimo* presents a melody that imitates a Beijing Opera instrumental interlude (Ex. 70). Although not a direct quote from the Ba Ban theme, this melody has the same pentatonic character as the Ba Ban folk tune. Perfect intervals are utilized here to enrich the melody, which is another characteristic of a Chinese traditional instrumental ensemble. The left hand here imitates percussion instruments, while the right hand portrays more melodious instruments. There is a spin to this traditional music though, as Chen Yi purposely places the left hand on white keys, and right hand on black keys, creating a bitonal effect.

<sup>55</sup> Chen Yi, *Ba Ban*, (King of Prussia, PA: Theodore Presser, 1999), 2.

The image shows a musical score for a piano piece, specifically measures 18 through 29. The score is written in treble and bass clefs. Measure 18 is marked with 'loco' and '8va'. Measures 22 through 29 are also marked with 'loco'. The music consists of dense, rapid chordal textures with frequent tritones and chromatic movement, characteristic of a toccata-like interlude.

Example 70. Toccata-like interlude mm. 18-29

The overall feel of the following portion at measure 30 becomes more atonal, set up first by the initial interval of pitch material 2, a tritone. Fragments of the twelve-tone row appear everywhere in the section, sometimes in one hand, sometimes splitting in two hands. The direction of melodic lines relentlessly sweeps across the opposite ends of the piano with quick crescendos to *fortissimo* and *sforzando*, creating quite a turbulent mood.

The last sweep across the keys at measure 43 takes the right hand to the highest register on the piano in *fortississimo*. Suddenly the piece drops to *pianississimo* and the character completely changes, taking the piece to the transition and the beginning of B section.

The percussive passage at measure 45 that ends the first section deserves a deeper look. The dissonant major seventh depicts the sound of percussion instruments. This interval is taken from pitch material 3, which is the range of the ascending five notes. Here Chen Yi uses her rhythmic diminution technique that she often applies with ostinatos, such as in the piece *Duo Ye* (Ex. 29). Here, the number of eighth notes in each group diminishes, first seven, then five, then three, then two (Ex. 71).

Example 71. Rhythmic diminution, mm. 45-48

## B section

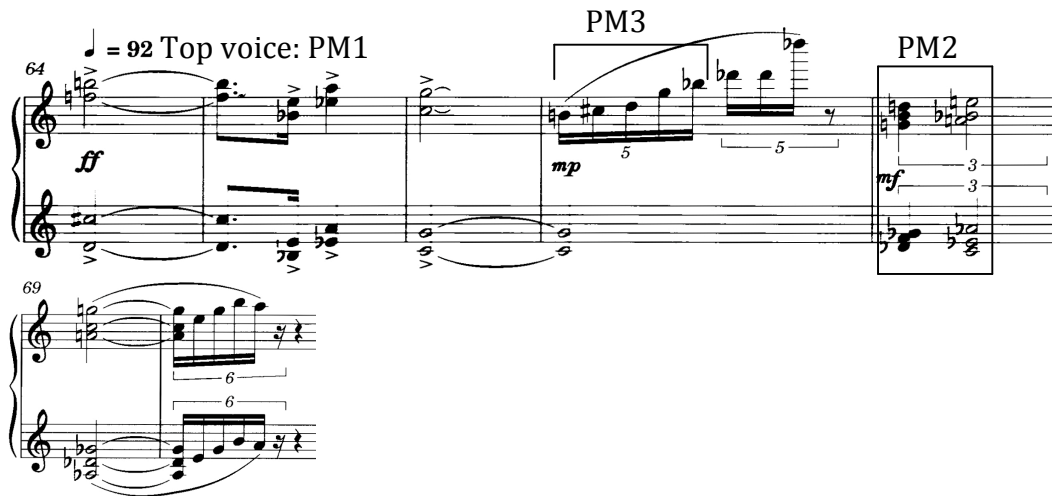
The first transition starts right away at measure 48 with pitch material 3, the ascending five-note motive. All five notes are blocked in the left hand tone cluster. From that point, the five notes dance all over the keys. Although written in 2/4 meter, the beats are greatly obscured by irregular grouping of notes, such as triplets and quintuplets. One can hardly sense a rhythmic pattern. The mood is mysterious and improvisatory. The first complete appearance of the twelve-tone row happens at the end of Transition 1 in the left hand at measure 62 (Ex. 72).





Example 72. First complete twelve-tone row, mm. 61-63

The first variation starts with pitch material 1, the Ba Ban theme, at measure 64. This time, the pentatonic theme is supported by dissonances built from pitch material 2, the twelve-tone row. In between the first and second group of the theme, pitch material 3 presents as a quick embellishment (Ex. 73). Here is one of many places where Chen Yi employs all three pitch materials “horizontally and vertically” and “simultaneously in a phrase”.<sup>56</sup>

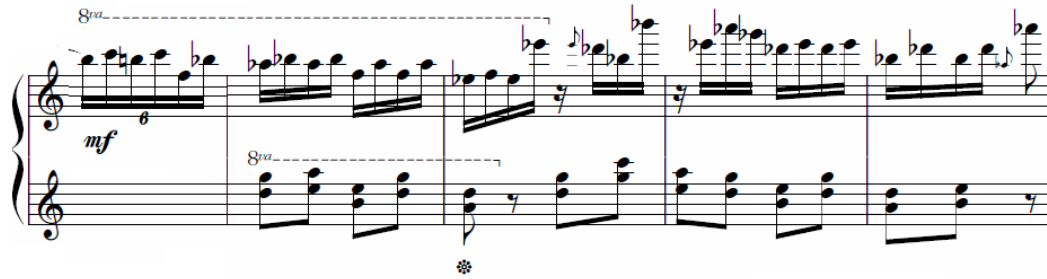


Example 73. Fusion of all three pitch materials, mm. 64-70. PM=Pitch material

<sup>56</sup> Chen Yi, *Ba Ban*, (King of Prussia, PA: Theodore Presser, 1999), 2.

Groups of notes in large irregular leaps of rising and falling pattern are utilized to portray the mysterious and improvisatory atmosphere. They are built from either eleven or twelve notes of the chromatic scale, although not always the row that Chen Yi labels as pitch material 2. The first leaping pattern happens back at measures 54 to 57, then another one at measures 71 to 72, without an F. The next one appears at measures 85 to 86, as well as measures 89 to 90, this time without Bb. The last one happens at measures 95 to 97, this time also without Bb. These patterns appear random at first; however, upon a closer look, they actually are based on the intervals that construct pitch material 2 and pitch material 3, the most prominent ones being a tritone and a major seventh. These leaping patterns appear in between thematic fragments, acting as bridges.

Between the irregular leaping patterns at measures 71 and measure 85, the piece veers into a pentatonic phrase once again in measure 81 (Ex. 74). Like the first pentatonic phrase in measure 18, this one is also bitonal, where the left hand exclusively plays white keys while the right hand stays mostly on black keys, with the exception of F<sup>♯</sup>. In this appearance, the left hand focuses on the perfect-fourth interval of the pentatonic scale, while the right hand predominantly uses the major second and the minor third intervals.

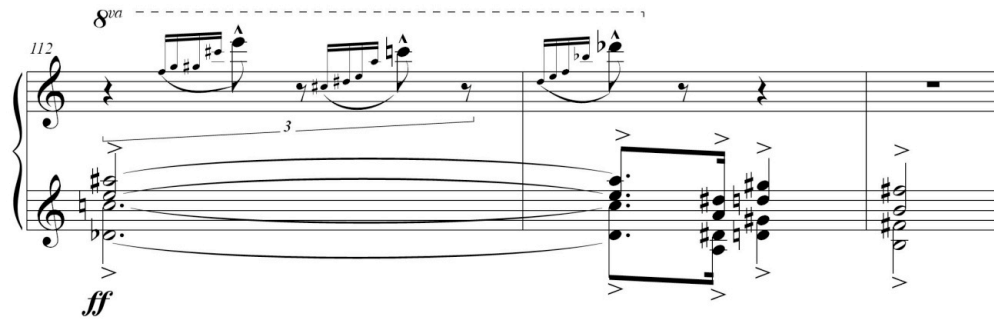


Example 74. Pentatonic phrase, mm. 81-85

### B<sup>1</sup> section

The structures of the second transitional section at measure 98 and the second variation at measure 112 are both almost exact copies of the previous corresponding sections, Transition 1 at measures 49 and Variation 1 at measure 64. In spite of the similarities in phrase shapes and structures, there are actually quite a few subtle changes in these two sections. The most noticeable one is that almost all the material is transposed in the second appearance. Chen Yi keeps the changes unpredictable by transposing sections to different intervals. Transition 2 first appears a minor third lower than Transition 1, but the complete twelve-tone row is a perfect fifth higher at measure 110 than its first appearance at measure 62. The opening theme at measure 112 is only a half step down from measure 64, but the leaping pattern at measure 119 is a whole step down from the previous one in measure 71.

There is also an embellishment added for the theme, using notes from pitch material 3 (Ex. 75).



Example 75. Theme with embellishment based on pitch material 3, mm. 112-114

The pentatonic section at measure 129, although transposed, maintains the same bitonal character as previous statements. The left hand stays on white keys, while the right hand plays on black keys.

The tempo markings of the sections have been evolving during sections B and B<sup>1</sup>. When the piece first arrives at *Andante* at measure 48, the tempo marking is ♩=88. When Variation 1 arrives, the tempo speeds up to ♩=92. At the pentatonic section at measure 81, the tempo marking becomes ♩=96. The piece is slowly but steadily speeding up. This pattern continues in section B<sup>1</sup>. At the second transition at measure 98, the piece accelerates to ♩=100, and at Variation 2 it becomes ♩=104. The pentatonic section now is at ♩=108, and ♩=112 at measure 139. Although the overall writing and structure stay similar between sections B and B<sup>1</sup>, the pace is consistently accelerating.

Transition 3 appears at the pickup to measure 146. The piece continues the flowing and mysterious character, using material loosely based on pitch material 1. This transition finishes with the left hand playing

another leaping pattern that is built on eleven out of twelve notes from an octave (Ex. 76). This time, the intervals of a major seventh and a tritone are almost exclusively used, highlighting the most important intervals that construct pitch material 1 and pitch material 2.



Example 76. Twelve-tone row, mm. 154-156

### **C section**

The new variation at measure 157 completely changes the character and produces a much higher level of energy than the last two variations. This is achieved by the usage of thirty-second notes, as well as sudden and eccentric dynamic changes. The section opens with the Ba Ban theme in the left hand, and the right hand answers with the same theme voiced differently. When the right hand states the Ba Ban theme in measure 159, the left hand answers with pitch material 3. The twelve tone row joins in the next phrase in measure 161, and all three pitch materials once again intertwine amongst each other (Ex. 77).

Example 77. Fusion of three pitch materials in section C, mm. 157-164

A cadenza-like section follows the interweaving themes at measure 166. Both hands focus on material from the Ba Ban theme, and sweep the piano from low to high over and over. There is a sense of dissonance and bitonality created by the distance of the themes in both hands. The right

hand plays D-G-C-Bb, while the left hand develops on G#-C#-F#-E, a tritone apart.

The intensity builds up throughout the cadenza section. By measure 174, the texture thickens from single notes in each hand to perfect and augmented fourths both hands. The intervals enlarge in the next measure to major sixths and sevenths. Both hands reach octaves in measure 176. Here Chen Yi utilizes fragments from all three pitch materials to build up for the climax (Ex. 78).

The musical score for Example 78, measures 175-179, is presented in three systems. Each system consists of a grand staff (treble and bass clefs).  
 - Measure 175: The right hand features a sequence of chords labeled PM1 and PM3, with a '5' indicating a fifth interval. The left hand has a similar sequence with PM1 and PM3. A dynamic marking of *ff* is present.  
 - Measure 177: The right hand continues with PM1 and PM3. The left hand introduces PM2 and PM3. A dynamic marking of *Sforz.* is present.  
 - Measure 179: The right hand features PM1 and PM3. The left hand features PM1 and PM2. A dynamic marking of *Sforz.* is present.  
 The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and interval markings (e.g., '5', '8va').

Example 78. Pitch materials in the climactic buildup section, mm. 175-179

The tempo of Variation 3 continues to accelerate throughout, and pushes especially forward during the cadenza section. The climax arrives at measure 184 with booming bass in Toccata texture. The right hand accents

the notes from pitch material 2. From measure 193 to 222, the left hand plays a constant six-note ostinato using the first six notes from pitch material 2. This writing is similar to the style of the coda from Chen Yi's *Duo Ye*, written fifteen years earlier. This time, the number of grouping reflects the numbering system from the Fibonacci series, 8-5-3-2-1-1 (Ex. 79).



193 *f p* *f* *8ba* 8

198 *8ba*

203 *8ba* 5

208 *8ba* 3

213 *8va* *8ba* *toco* 2

218 *8va* *8va* 1 1

Example 79. Application of the Fibonacci series in the ostinato, mm. 193-222

Meanwhile, the right hand emphasizes on pitch material 1. Fragments of the Ba Ban theme appear again and again all over the keys. Sometimes the theme is supported by a countermelody a major seventh below, adding a layer of pitch material 3 onto pitch material 1. The character of this section is percussive and primitive.

A final sweep across the keyboard at measure 223 takes the piece to its final stage, the coda. This bridge is yet another place that all three pitch materials coincide (Ex. 80).

Example 80. Pitch materials in mm. 223-232

The entire coda is set in *pianissimo* to *pianississimo*, referring back to the mysterious atmosphere in Variations 1 and 2. There are three phrases in this last stage of the piece. It starts with the twelve-tone row running across the piano literally from the lowest note to the highest note from measure 233 to 238. The second phrase states the entire Ba Ban rhythmic structure on the

highest C of the piano (mm. 239-253). Chen Yi marks the number of beats with eighth notes, and separates the groups with rests. Lastly at measure 254, the piece ends with one last sweep across the keys using a combination of pitch material 1 and 2, flying away into the distance (Ex. 81).

233 **Più mosso** (♩ = 144) *pp*

8va... una corda    loco

238

8va...

243

8va...

248

8va...

254

*ppp*

8va... 8va<sub>1</sub>

Example 81. Coda, mm. 233-257

## Conclusion

*Ba Ban* is considered to be one of Chen Yi's largest piano works. The layers of Chinese roots and Western compositional techniques intertwine in such a complicated and sophisticated way in this piece. When one listens to it, it is quite atonal, but upon a deeper look into the piece, one cannot miss the strong connection it has to Chinese traditional music, both in melodic and rhythmic structures. At the same time, the usage of mathematical equation, twelve tone, and bitonality are all signature techniques used widely by twentieth-century composers. This piece is truly a perfect fusion of Chinese and Western musical languages.

#### *Singing in the Mountain*

*Singing in the Mountain* is a wonderful example of how beautiful yet simple a Chinese folk melody and harmony can be. It is loosely based on the Chinese folk song genre Mountain Song. It provides a great opportunity to open up one's imagination, and to enjoy the space in between the notes. Written in 2005, this 2-page piece can be quick to learn, but has endless possibilities behind the obvious notes.

The piece starts with a single melody played by two hands an octave apart. This melody appears two more times in the piece, and each time more developed. Being in the high register of the piano with the pedal held down, these three melodic statements imitate a singer singing with a bright voice, and hearing the voice transform in the mountain range.

After the three statements of the melody, the piece is repeated at measure 17 with parallel fourths and fifths added to each melodic note, creating a symmetrical binary structure.

Table 7. Formal structure of *Singing in the Mountain*

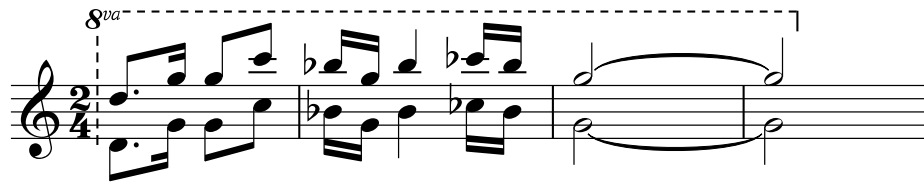
|          |         |      |       |                        |       |       |
|----------|---------|------|-------|------------------------|-------|-------|
| Section: | A: 1-16 |      |       | A <sup>1</sup> : 17-32 |       |       |
| Phrases: | 1       | 2    | 3     | 4                      | 5     | 6     |
| Mm:      | 1-6     | 7-13 | 14-16 | 17-22                  | 23-29 | 30-32 |
| Length:  | 6       | 7    | 3     | 6                      | 7     | 3     |

A bass voice counterbalances the melodic voice in this piece. Between the melodies in the high register, an open fifth in the low range of the piano creates both contrast and balance in register. There is also a tonal contrast between the melody and the bass. Each melody is mostly made out of notes on the white keys, while the bass notes are mostly black keys, thus creating a bitonal atmosphere.

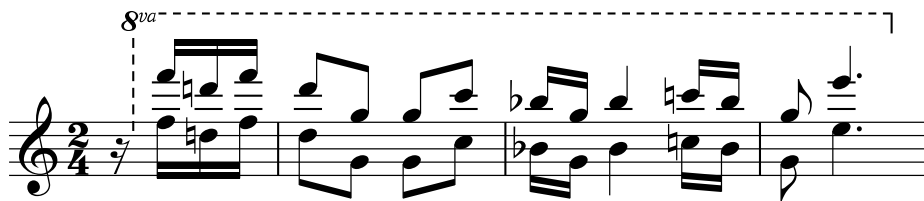
The intervals of perfect fourths and fifths are another characteristics of this particular piece. Right from the beginning, the melody starts with D-G-C, consecutive intervals of a perfect fourth (Ex. 82). Following the first melodic phrase, the notes D, G, and C continue to be prominent in the second and third statements of the melody (mm. 7-13 and mm. 14-16) (Ex. 83 and 84).

Other intervals from the pentatonic scale are also used as building blocks in this piece. The interval of a minor third dominates the second half of the first and second melodic statements. At the end of the first statement, a C<sub>b</sub> appears and creates a minor second interval. Later, at the end of the

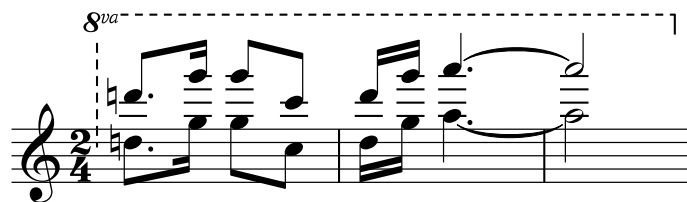
second statement, that C<sub>b</sub> becomes a C<sub>♯</sub>. This creates a pitch bend effect that is often found in Chinese folk singing style and Mountain Songs.



Example 82. First melodic phrase, mm. 1-4<sup>57</sup>



Example 83. Second melodic phrase, mm.7-10



Example 84. Third melodic phrase, mm. 14-16

The bass voice consists exclusively of the interval of a perfect fifth, again emphasizing the importance of that interval in this composition (Ex. 85 and 86). The open fifth creates a unique sound that is often created by plucking the strings of the instrument *Zheng*. In this composition, it creates a deep echo effect.

---

<sup>57</sup> Chen Yi, *Singing in the Mountain*, (King of Prussia, PA: Theodore Presser, 2005). Reprinted with the permission of Theodore Presser Company. All subsequent examples of this musical work are from this source.

Example 85. Bass voice, mm. 4-7

Example 86. Bass voice, mm. 11-13

When the section repeats in m. 17, every melodic note from the first section is now supported by a parallel fourth (Ex. 87), with the exception of the last two notes in measures 31 and 32, which are supported by parallel fifths. This amplifies the harmonious and airy feel of the piece.

Example 87. Repeat of the melody, mm. 17-19

Chen Yi is very specific with the pedal markings in this piece. Long, sustained pedal usage is required to create the airy and echoing feel of one singing in the mountain range. Together with the harmonious intervals of

perfect fourths and fifths, this little piece creates a serene and peaceful mood for everyone that plays and listens to it.

### *Ji-Dong-Nuo*

#### **Overview**

Composed and premiered at the end of year 2005, *Ji-Dong-Nuo* (吉冬诺) is the latest composition written for solo piano by Chen Yi so far. The name of the piece is borrowed from a folk tune of the Yao ethnic group in southwest China, depicting quail singing.<sup>58</sup>

Chen Yi draws pitch material from the folk tune, and uses it as the foundation of this composition.<sup>59</sup> The intervals of perfect fourths and perfect fifths are used abundantly in the piece to help depict the open and harmonious atmosphere. Pentatonic scales and intervals are the basic building blocks for many of the motives. Throughout the piece, one can find imitations of birds singing as well as Chinese instrumental music.

The piece starts with a theme based on the folk tune, and Chen Yi extracts elements from the theme to form motives that further develop the composition. Each section of the piece showcases different motives, but all of the motives can be traced back to the main theme. The piece can be divided into sections according to the presentation of motives.

---

<sup>58</sup> Chen Yi, *Ji-Dong-Nuo*, (King of Prussia, PA: Theodore Presser, 2007), 2.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.



Table 8. Formal structure of *Ji-Dong-Nuo*

|           |                               |  |  |  |  |
|-----------|-------------------------------|--|--|--|--|
| Sections: | A                             | B  | C  | B <sup>1</sup>   | D  |
| Mm:       | 1-17                          | 18-49  | 50-101   | 102-132  | 133-169  |
| Length:   | 17                            | 32   | 52   | 31   | 37   |
| Motive:   | Theme<br>Motive 1<br>Motive 2 | Motive 1<br>Motive 2<br>Motive 3<br>Motive 4<br>Motive 5 | Motive 1<br>Motive 2<br>Motive 3<br>Motive 4<br>Motive 5<br>Motive 6 | Motive 1<br>Motive 2<br>Motive 3<br>Motive 4<br>Motive 5 | Motive 1<br>Motive 2<br>Motive 3<br>Motive 4<br>Motive 5<br>Motive 6<br>Motive 7 |

**A section**

The beautiful theme in the beginning is played by both hands two octaves apart. Chen Yi often uses this arrangement, either one or two octaves apart, in the high register, to portray the beauty and simplicity of Chinese folk tunes. Other compositions by Chen Yi have exhibited a similar texture (Ex. 1, Ex. 48, and Ex. 82).

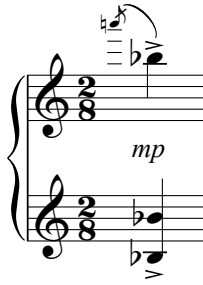
The theme in *Ji-Dong-Nuo* is in two phrases, measures 1 to 7, and measures 8 to 13. Both phrases start with notes from pentatonic scales, and end with notes from a whole-tone scale. The contour of the melody is shaped in a way that the first phrase raises and the second falls, forming a pair of antecedent and consequent phrases. It also contains many grace notes and short trills. Both characteristics imitate vocal singing with pitch bends and vocal embellishment, which are characteristic of the original folk tune (Ex. 88).

Example 88. Melody in *Ji-Dong-Nuo*, mm. 1-13<sup>60</sup>

Besides the theme, the A section also introduces the first two motives used in this piece. The first motive at measure 14 has two elements, one is the grace note, and the other is the accent (Ex. 89). The grace note refers back to the embellishment in the theme. The interval of a major seventh refers back to the beginning and ending of the theme, starting on the note A and ending on an Ab, which is a minor second. This interval is inverted to a major seventh for Motive 1.

---

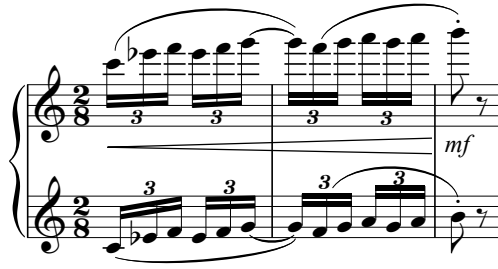
<sup>60</sup> Chen Yi, *Ji-Dong-Nuo*, (King of Prussia, PA: Theodore Presser, 2007). Reprinted with the permission of Theodore Presser Company. All subsequent examples of this musical work are from this source.



Example 89. Motive 1, m. 14

Motive 1 is the most varied motive in this piece because of its conciseness. There will be variations on the position and the number of the grace note, the size of the interval, as well as the length and the number of the accented note. However, they all maintain the abrupt character. One can relate that characteristic to a Chinese percussion instrument.

Immediately following Motive 1, Motive 2 makes its first appearance at measure 15 (Ex. 90). This motive closely resembles the intervallic contour of the antecedent phrase of the theme. The first three notes of this motive contain a minor third plus a major second, while the theme starts with A-D-C-A, which is a perfect fourth, a major second, and a minor third. Motive 2 reverses the last two intervals of the theme, which creates a retrograde. The second half of the motive consists of notes from a whole-tone scale, also in the characteristic of the first phrase of the theme.



Example 90. Motive 2, mm. 15-17

While others vary and transform, Motive 2 stays true to its form throughout the entire composition. Many of them are used to set up the subsequent section. The only modification of this motive is at the very end at measure 166, where Chen Yi combines the rhythmic pattern of Motive 2 with notes from the theme.

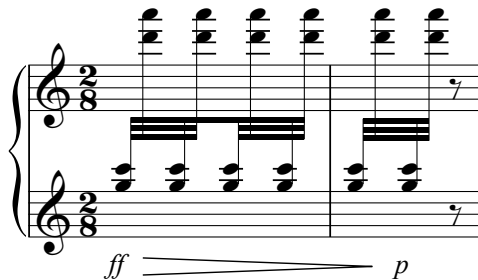
### **B section**

The B section introduces two new motives right away at measures 18 and 22; Motive 3, a five-note gliding gesture (Ex. 91); and Motive 4, a toccata-like idea (Ex. 92). Motive 3 is loosely based on pentatonic scales, like the opening theme. It consists of quintuplets in falling motion, imitating the Chinese instrument *Zheng*. When played on *Zheng*, it creates a glissando effect, and the same sound should be attempted to match when playing Motive 3 on the piano. The range of Motive 3 can also be traced back to the theme and the first motive. This motive ranges from A down to A# (Gb), which enharmonically is a major seventh. Chen Yi continues to utilize the intervals of a major second, a minor third, and a perfect fourth to construct the motives. The thirty-second notes from this motive reflect those intervals.



Example 91. Motive 3, m. 18

On first glance Motive 4 looks very percussive and static, but it is actually much more flexible and wavy. Its flexibility comes from the drastic and exaggerating dynamic changes. Rising and falling rapidly in sound, Motive 4 truly imitates a bird singing. The intervals of a perfect fourth and fifth are used predominantly in this motive, which can be traced back to the opening interval of the theme.



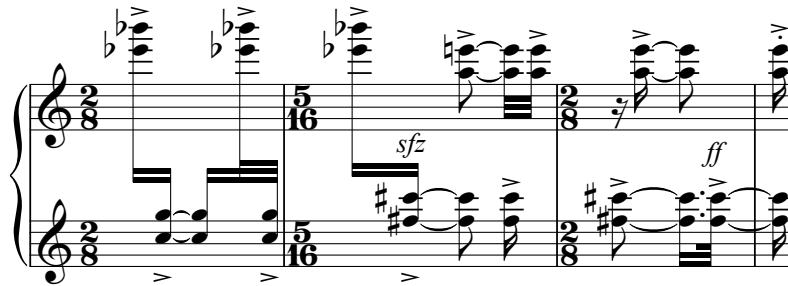
Example 92. Motive 4, m. 22-23

Motives 1, 3, and 4 interweave amongst each other in the B section. Motive 4, being the dominant one, appears in numerous lengths and groupings. Motive 3 presents itself in several locations, including an inversion in measure 27 (Ex. 93). Variations of Motive 1 playfully sneak in between other motives, adding an element of surprise.



Example 93. Inversion of Motive 2, mm. 27-28

Motive 5 is introduced toward the end of the B section at measure 43 (Ex. 94). It is in a similar structure as Motive 4, with open fifths and alternating voices in both hands. The defining character of this motive is its unique rhythmic pattern. The thirty-second notes against uneven meter create an illusion of grace note texture. Because of its accents and *sforzando*, this motive is also reminiscent of the first motive.



Example 94. Motive 5, mm. 43-46

### C section

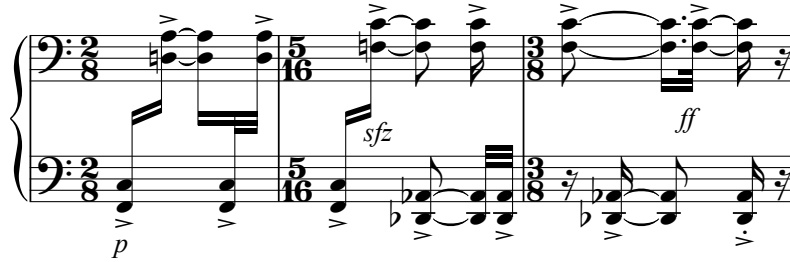
The bird-singing character of Motive 4 continues to dominate in the C section. At the same time, other motives become much more developed. They begin to transform and fuse with each other into more linear passages (Ex. 95).

Example 95. Fusion of Motives 1, 3, and 4, mm. 62-67. M=Motive

Several previously defined motives become varied in this section. The first transformation is Motive 3, which appears first in measure 80. Besides being inverted, it also has been expanded from a quintuplet to a sextuplet, with much wider intervals. The original version consists of mostly seconds and thirds. Now, the variation has almost all perfect fourths with the exception of one note outside of the pattern (Ex. 96).

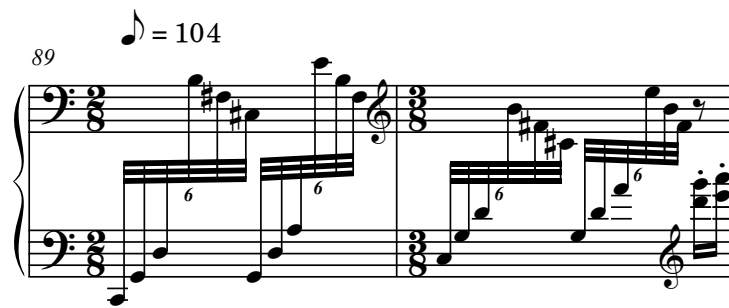
Example 96. Variation of Motive 3, m. 80

Motive 5 also varies in this section. It first presents itself several times in the original form in measures 50, 68, and 75, and then it becomes inverted in measures 86 and 94 (Ex. 97).



Example 97. Inversion of Motive 5, mm. 86-88

A new motive is introduced in this section at measure 89, Motive 6 (Ex. 98). Keeping the consistency of the melodic intervals, the left hand portion of Motive 6 consists of perfect fifths and the right hand perfect fourths.



Example 98. Motive 6, mm. 89-90

### B<sup>1</sup> section

Structurally sections B and B<sup>1</sup> are extremely similar. Both thirty-two measures long, they both start with two statements of Motive 3 in sequence, followed a variation of Motive 1. After ten measures, Motive 4 takes over and dominates the rest of the section. Motive 5 and Motive 2 make their statements before the end of both sections.

Chen Yi keeps the material of section B<sup>1</sup> fresh by transposing the motives to different intervals and by varying some motives with subtle



changes. Similar structural transformation can be found in the first and second variations of *Ba Ban*. In *Ji-Dong-Nuo*, while the starting Motive 3 in measure 102 stays true to the original version, the texture changes by the addition of two trills in the left hand. When Motive 4 appears in measure 107, while corresponding closely to measure 22, the right hand notes are reversed from its first appearance, from perfect fifths to perfect fourths.

Subtle changes continue to occur in this section. The inversion of Motive 3 in measure 27 is doubled in the right hand when it appears in measure 111. The group of Motive 4 from measures 29 to 38 stays the same in grouping and in dynamic range when it responds from measures 113 to 122. However, while perfect fifths dominate the B section, perfect fourths are the most prominent interval in B<sup>1</sup>.

The following motives are lowered half a step when they occur in B<sup>1</sup>, Motive 4 in measures 37 to 38 (mm. 121-122) and measures 40 to 41 (mm. 124-125), variation of Motive 1 in measures 39 and 42 (mm. 123 and 126), and finally Motive 5 in measures 43 to 46 (mm. 127-130).

Motive 2 wraps up the B<sup>1</sup> section at measure 131, just as in the original B section at measure 47. This time, the range of the two voices extends to four octaves, the furthest of all the appearances of Motive 2. This sets up for the extreme range of the next section.

## **D section**

The outer ends of the keyboard are explored in this section by the newest motive, Motive 7, at measure 136 (Ex. 99). The bass in the left hand

sounds like drums beating while the right hand birds chirping happily. One can easily imagine this beautiful nature scene when listening to this section.

The musical score shows two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef and begins at measure 136 with a forte (*ff*) dynamic. It contains a sequence of eighth notes with accents, including a triplet in measure 137. The lower staff is in bass clef and contains a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The score is marked with "15<sup>ma</sup>" at the top and "8<sup>vb</sup>" at the bottom, indicating a 15-measure system and an 8-measure system respectively.

Example 99. Motive 7, mm. 136-137

Motive 5 is also presented in this section, first at measure 138. The motive only appears as inversions in this final section. Motives 5 and 7 alternate three times, until the piece reaches the last thirteen measures.

The way the piece ends is very interesting. From measure 157 to the end, there is a reverse order of the appearance of each motive. First, Motive 6 occurs in measure 157, and then a statement that resembles both Motive 5 and Motive 4 appears in measure 164. The piece quickly reminisces the opening theme in a rhythmic pattern of Motive 2. Finally, the piece ends with Motive 3 followed by Motive 1 (Ex. 100).

The image displays a musical score for Example 100, spanning measures 157 to 169. It is divided into five distinct sections:

- Motive 6 (measures 157-160):** Features a complex rhythmic pattern with sixteenth notes and sixteenth rests in both hands. The bass line includes sixteenth-note triplets. Dynamics include *sfz* and *fz*.
- Variation of Motive 5/4 (measures 161-164):** Shows a melodic variation in the right hand with eighth notes and a triplet. The left hand provides harmonic support with chords and eighth notes. Dynamics range from *sfz* to *p*.
- Motive 2/Theme (measures 165-168):** Marked with a tempo of  $\text{♩} = 88$ . It features a prominent eighth-note triplet in the right hand and a corresponding eighth-note triplet in the left hand. Dynamics include *mf*.
- Motive 3 (measure 168):** A short melodic phrase in the right hand.
- Motive 1 (measure 169):** A final chordal statement in the right hand.

Example 100. Presentation of the motives, mm. 157-169

### Conclusion

*Ji-Dong-Nuo* is a true testimony of the vast possibilities in sound the piano is capable of creating. Throughout the piece, one can hear voices singing, birds chirping, drums beating, *Zheng* plucking, and more. With the emphasis on motivic writing, each motive signifies an element and a sound. Chen Yi then transforms and integrates each motive, employing them together to create an interesting spectrum of color and sounds.

## CHAPTER 4

### PERFORMANCE NOTES

#### *Variations on "Awariguli"*

Although published most recently, *Variations on "Awariguli"* is the earliest large-scale solo piano work that Chen Yi wrote. It stays quite close to the original folk voice in terms of melody and harmony, and the whole piece is on a much more tonal platform than her other solo piano compositions written later. The lyrics of the original folk song depict a Uygur young man traveling across the desert to seek for his beautiful love (Fig. 4).

我骑着马儿唱起歌儿走过了伊犁，  
看见了美丽的阿瓦日古丽，  
天涯海角谁又能比上你，  
哎呀美丽的阿瓦日古丽。

I am riding a horse and singing as I go to Yili,<sup>61</sup>  
Saw the beautiful Awariguli,  
All through the earth how could one compare to you,  
Ah, beautiful Awariguli.

勇敢的人儿踏破了天山越过那戈壁，  
看见了美丽的阿瓦日古丽，  
我要寻找的人儿就是你，  
哎呀美丽的阿瓦日古丽。

The brave man climbs over the mountain and walks through the Gobi  
Desert,  
Saw the beautiful Awariguli,  
You are the one I am seeking,  
Ah, beautiful Awariguli.

灰色的小兔在戈壁滩上跳来跳去，  
你可知道美丽的阿瓦日古丽，

---

<sup>61</sup> Yili is a district in Xinjiang province in China, located in the northern border of Xinjiang.

它的心情和我是一样的，  
哎呀美丽的阿瓦日古丽。

A gray rabbit hopping in the desert,  
Do you know the beautiful Awariguli,  
It feels the same as I feel,  
Ah, beautiful Awariguli.

Figure 4. Lyrics of the folk song “Awariguli”<sup>62</sup>

Knowing the lyrics of the song brings a completely fresh take to interpreting the piece. One should truly indulge the meaning behind the heart-melting lyrics, and the love and longing for the one that he seeks. This is especially evident in the Theme as well as Variations 1, 2, and 5. The melody should be played as vocalized and expressive as possible, with inflections and intonations.

Other characteristics of the Uygur nationality include dance and instrumental music. These elements can be traced in Variations 3, 7, and 8. The third variation has similar characteristics of a famous *erhu* piece, *Sai Ma* (赛马), which depict horses running freely in the open grassland. In this variation, short eighth notes imitate the horses’ hoofs running energetically. The sweeping motion of the sixteenth notes can be seen as wind blowing across the open air. Variation 7 has a relentless persistence that impacts each performer and listener. Octaves jumping up and down in both hands require a tremendous amount of accuracy. Although thick in texture, the clarity of

---

<sup>62</sup> Shi Fu, *Awariguli*, [score online]; available from <http://www.tom163.net/yuepuku/gequyuepu/yueyoushangchuan/200605/5543.html>; Internet; accessed 12 September 2012, original lyrics in Chinese, translated into English by the author.

this dance needs to be carefully observed. Chen Yi specifically writes *Con Rubato* in the beginning of the variation, reminding the performer not to play it too technically and straightforward, but with flare and passion. The following variation, number 8, is much lighter and more playful. Light staccatos dance cheerfully on the piano in one hand while the other sings gently. Could this variation be describing the dancing and singing of the beautiful Uygur girls?

The coda is grand and majestic, just like the province of Xinjiang, where the open field reaches as far as one's eyes could see. The coda expresses so many layers of emotions, including an outcry for love and an admiration for the beauty of nature. At the end, the young man seems to have found his love, and they walk away into the sunset. The coda successfully brings closure, providing great emotional satisfaction.

#### *Duo Ye*

*Duo Ye* seems to always have a special meaning to Chen Yi. One can only imagine how that welcome scene had left such a deep impression in the composer's heart. Throughout the piece, the warm and sincere atmosphere surrounds the music. It is important to know the story behind the piece in order to truly appreciate the meaning of this piece.

In the 1984 edition, Chen Yi wrote underneath the title, "the sincere friends of the Dong minority danced the joyful 'Duo Ye' to welcome their guests from far away Beijing, how could anyone forget this beautiful and

touching experience!"<sup>63</sup> The opening *ad lib.* singing of the song Duo Ye right away invites everyone to the welcome scene. The performer should differentiate the sound of the leader and the sound of the chorus as much as possible. The accents should not be played with force, but with depth. As the piece progresses, the style gradually becomes more and more percussive, and the accents become shorter and lighter.

Although the next section at measure 47 mainly contains tone clusters, there is a distinct melody in the top voice of the clusters, which therefore should be brought out. Voicing of the tone clusters will produce more layers of sound as well as emphasis of the melody.

The B section at measure 71 is quite lyrical and expressive. Written in the style of a Beijing Opera, this section portrays the guests from Beijing. In a Beijing Opera, singers are accompanied by an instrumental group playing interludes and counter melodies, which is imitated here with independent voices in each hand. There is a sense of counterpoint, so each voice should be brought out clearly. Horizontal motion needs to be carefully preserved here.

The left hand introduces an ostinato in measure 73. This should be played as evenly as possible, in spite of the difficulty in the large jumps. Meanwhile, the right hand plays a beautiful melody in the style of a Mountain Song with ample ornamentations. These embellishments should be played as melodically as possible, imitating a vocalist singing.

---

<sup>63</sup> Chen Yi, *Duo Ye*, 1984. Translated into English by the author.

The cadenza section at measure 115 provides quite some challenge in learning. Fast sixteenth notes written in grace note style pour all over the keys. The notes are written quite pianistically, so they fit the hands well, but the uneven grouping of sixteenth notes in two hands should be carefully calculated to ensure clarity and precision. Chen Yi personally notes that the groups with slashes should be played as fast as possible.<sup>64</sup>

The climax at measure 116 is very bombastic and exciting. It portrays the celebration reaching its highest point. The texture extends the sound of the keyboard to its full potential. Large chords and octave bass in *fortissimo* provide quite an impact. The left hand ostinato at measure 120 must be played evenly without excessive emphasis on the accents. The focus should stay with the right hand melody. The climax ends by flying off the keys at the highest register of the piano, interrupting a crescendo, to a dramatic pause. This gesture needs to be exaggerated as much as possible in order to make the arrival of the coda more effective.

The coda starts low and soft at measure 134, setting up for another climb. Layering of the voices in the right hand should be constantly observed, and the top voice should be given the utmost attention throughout the coda. The entire coda is in a percussive style, being determined by the ample amount of accented notes. It gradually reaches its final peak with tone clusters, played at the performer's full strength. The Beijing Opera theme

---

<sup>64</sup> Chen Yi, *Duo Ye*, (King of Prussia, PA: Theodore Presser, 2000), 5.



comes back at the very end, perhaps as gratitude shown by the Beijing guests, and the piece ends with one last cheer of “Duo Ye”.

### *Guessing*

Having grown up in China, I remember the folk song Guessing vividly. When I was learning and recording this piece, many childhood memories came rushing back to me. I remember multiple occasions of my mother singing this song to me. The lyrics of the song depict a children’s guessing game. Written in four stanzas, it first speaks the questions, followed by the answers, and then another set of questions, followed by a new set of answers (Fig. 5). The song not only expresses the childlike simplicity, but also the love and affection among family and friends.

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 小乖乖来小乖乖<br>我们说给你们猜<br>什么长 长上天<br>哪样长长海中间<br>什么长长街前卖嘛<br>哪样长长你跟前   | Little darling, little darling<br>We say a riddle for you to guess<br>What is long, in the sky<br>What is long, in the sea<br>What is long, sold in the street<br>What is long, in front of you                             |
| 小乖乖来小乖乖<br>你们说给我们猜<br>银河长 长上天<br>莲藕长长海中间<br>米线长长街前卖嘛<br>丝线长长我跟前喽来 | Little darling, little darling<br>You say a riddle for us to guess<br>The Milky Way is long, in the sky<br>Lotus root is long, in the sea<br>Rice noodle is long, sold in the street<br>Silk thread is long, in front of me |
| 小乖乖来小乖乖<br>我们说给你们猜<br>什么团 团上天<br>哪样团团海中间<br>什么团团街前卖嘛<br>哪样团团你跟前   | Little darling, little darling<br>We say a riddle for you to guess<br>What is round, in the sky<br>What is round, in the sea<br>What is round, sold in the street<br>What is round, in front of you                         |

|           |                                       |
|-----------|---------------------------------------|
| 小乖乖来小乖乖   | Little darling, little darling        |
| 你们说给我们猜   | You say a riddle for us to guess      |
| 月亮团 团上天   | The moon is round, in the sky         |
| 荷叶团团海中间   | Lotus leaf is round, in the sea       |
| 粑粑团团街前卖嘛  | Rice bun is round, sold in the street |
| 镜子团团我跟前喽来 | Mirror is round, in front of me       |

Figure 5. Lyrics of the folk song “Guessing”<sup>65</sup>

The irregular accents in the opening of Chen Yi’s *Guessing* should be exaggerated to portray the childlike mischievous mood. The dialog between two hands is clearly written to imitate the original song form; therefore it needs to be emphasized. When the melody shifts to the left hand in measure 40, the texture becomes thicker and the range wider. The mood completely changes at this point. With a gesture of grandeur, it creates quite a contrast to the first page.

The overall feel of the first section is quite free spirited, with many shifts in tempo and texture. The wide range changes to a low rumble at measure 65. The challenge here is to play the two-voice canon clearly in the low register; one should approach the keys with crisp and short staccatos and use very little pedal.

The piece never stays in one mood for very long. The low rumble quickly grows into octaves in both hands. The piece swiftly reaches the extreme ends of the piano and produces many percussive chords at measure 97. The large chords switch back and forth between melodic fragments of the

---

<sup>65</sup> Lyrics in Chinese provided by Chen Yi, translated into English by the author.

theme in such a sudden manner. The dynamics switch between *forte* and *piano*, and the textures change from thick to thin. These sudden changes should be executed precisely without any overlapping from one fragment to the other.

The middle section provides the perfect opportunity of creating an imaginative sound on the piano. Light touches and slow finger action will help portray the mysterious and dreamy atmosphere. The marking of *sostenuto* pedal should be carefully observed.

The pace of the composition increases at measure 145, and once again at measure 151. Fingers dance across the keyboard in a toccata manner bursting with energy. Aligning the sustaining pedal with the left hand will help resonate the melodic notes; at the same time, one needs to keep the pedal short to preserve the toccata character.

The little counterpoint in the beginning of the coda at measure 167 creates quite some interesting voices. The entire coda feels very festive. Loud chords resemble that of a Chinese traditional percussion ensemble. The ending especially reminds one of a Chinese New Year's parade. People dress in traditional clothes and play joyful music. Children run up and down the parade laughing. The piece ends with a big bang, like fireworks exploding in the sky.

*Two Chinese bagatelles:*

*Yu Diao and Small Beijing Gong*

*Yu Diao* and *Small Beijing Gong* are both miniature in size, but they both possess just as much character and personality as a full-length composition. The pieces are suitable for early intermediate level students. They can be played together as a set for a recital program, or as individual pieces to fulfill part of a competition requirement. With their unique sounds, changing meters, and switching moods, they are perfect pieces both technically and artistically for introducing young musicians to contemporary music .

*Yu Diao* brings out a childlike humor and innocence; it is quite pleasant for one to play. The opening has a beautiful melody, but at the same time it creates some interesting dissonant sounds with its bitonal voicing. It takes imagination to make the dissonance sound like unique harmony rather than wrong notes. The dissonance is later balanced out by a much more consonant pentatonic B section. Both sections present contrapuntal writing, providing a good opportunity to explore hand coordination and independence. At the end of the B section, the piece goes into an extensive sixteenth-note run with two hands in parallel motion. This requires slow practice to ensure both voices align perfectly. In the closing section, the left hand plays accented drum imitations on weak beats, which could take some practice to coordinate well with the right hand. The piece finishes with a cute bounce on two notes in both hands, which truly puts a smile on the performer's face.

*Small Beijing Gong* has quite an assertive energy. There is no hesitation at all in the rhythmic pursuit throughout the piece. Irregular meter is the feature of this piece, which presents a great opportunity for young musicians to master this art. The piece starts with a left hand ostinato in 7/8 meter, which must be played as steadily as possible. After the ostinato section, the meter changes seven times in the remaining ten measures of the piece. It is enough to keep any musicians on their toes. Playing the left hand melodic line smoothly while keeping track of the meter change could be challenging for young musicians. The piece ends with a written out tremolo in the highest register of the piano, and a loud bang in the low register. The entire piece bursts with energy, and is quite exciting to play.

Both *Yu Diao* and *Small Beijing Gong* have a sense of humor, playfulness, and simplicity, which fits so perfectly as children's pieces. They both derive from deep Chinese roots, but are written in a unique way.

### *Ba Ban*

*Ba Ban* has the most modern sound out of all Chen Yi's solo piano compositions. Twelve-tone technique plays a large part in forming this composition. However, it does not break from the Chinese origin; one just needs to dig much deeper to find the true root that lies beneath the notes on the pages. Although the original *Ba Ban* folk tune is masked by dissonances and distant non-melodic notes in Chen Yi's composition, the basic melody is still completely pentatonic. The five-note motive that makes the third thematic material contains pentatonic character, with whole steps and minor

thirds, but it also consists of a half step, which is more dissonant and Western. The idea of bridging Chinese origin and Western composition technique is amplified greatly in this work.

The opening melody is in a Chinese Mountain Song style. Imagination is necessary to portray the spacious and echoing atmosphere. Although not indicated, pedal usage will also help achieve this mood. Irregular leaping patterns appear in both the theme and the slow variations. They are tricky to master with accuracy, and require much slow practice and precise fingering.

The piece veers into a mysterious mood in the first transition at measure 49. Twelve-tone rows paint an abstract texture onto this section. This mysterious mood stays through the transition as well as the two following variations. The rhythm is ambiguous and flexible, and the harmony vague. Overall, it provides a sense of improvisation. Sudden *sforzandos* and accents conclude the unusual leaping passages, which takes away any sense of direction. Melodic fragments are stitched into the improvisatory material. One could imagine coming in and out of a daydream to outer space, where everything is floating in midair. The daydream is brought back to reality by pentatonic fragments many times, but the dream always returns.

This mysterious mood stays from measure 49 to measure 156, which is almost half of the composition. Although it sounds improvisatory and free spirited, a hidden layer of forward motion is embedded deep in the music. Chen Yi writes very specific tempo indication for this section, creating a slow

and steady *accelerando*. The effect is extremely subtle, for the rhythmic structure is very vague.

A change of mood happens in the third variation at measure 157. Suddenly, with a thunder-like rumble in the low bass, the piece becomes much more energetic and stormy. Technically, this section has quite a few challenging areas. The cadenza requires fast and precise finger actions. Meanwhile, the touch needs to be light in order to ensure a soft sound and clear articulation. The octave section before the climax asks for a big impact. The player needs to find balance between force, speed, and accuracy. The phrases are like ocean waves that relentlessly sweep across the piano over and over again. Finally, one last wave takes the piece to the climax.

Chen Yi calls the beginning of the climax at measure 184 “a big burst in the extreme low register.”<sup>66</sup> From that point on, the piece continues with even more energy and excitement. At the first phrase of the climax (m. 184-192), it is important to bring out the notes from the twelve-tone row in the right hand with phrasing and shape.

Both hands dance energetically on the piano in the second part of the climax. The left hand stays in the low register of the piano, while the right hand jumps over the entire range of the instrument. The bombastic style of this music resembles a Chinese percussion ensemble, in which the loud and vigorous sound often portrays a festive and joyful occasion. The contrast in

---

<sup>66</sup> Chen Yi, *Ba Ban*, (King of Prussia, PA: Theodore Presser, 1999), 2.

timbre when the right hand switches between the high and the low register is quite interesting, and should be brought out as much as possible.

The coda brings back the mysterious atmosphere of the first two variations. The texture is extremely thin, and the sound extremely distant. The rhythmic pattern of the original Ba Ban folk tune makes its full appearance at this point. Although Chen Yi writes the music with triplet eighth notes in 2/4 meter, counting by the grouping of the rhythmic pattern (3+2+3, 3+2+3, 4+4, 3+2+3, 3+2+3+2+2, 4+4, 5+3, 4+4) will guarantee more accuracy and steadiness. The piece ends with one last sweep across the piano in *pianississimo*, and disappears in thin air.

#### *Singing in the Mountain*

This piece works well for introducing the wide range of the piano and the creative sound of the pedal to late elementary students. The melody is very open and beautiful. Being in the extreme high end of the register, it is like a person standing on top of a mountain singing into the open air. The bass support is simple, just a few sustained perfect fifths, but it requires a rich and deep tone. The distant relationship between the open fifths creates an interesting modern sound, while the high melody and the low bass provide a beautiful blend of sonorities. In the second section of the piece, the melodies are supported by open fourths and fifths. They not only enrich the sound, but they also are great for small hands to work on supportive hand shape.



Elements of the piece gear toward beginning technique, such as hand shape, arm weight, and deep tone. At the same time, the piece calls for imagination and careful listening of different sounds the instrument can make. It is a perfect blend of technique and artistry for an elementary level piano student.

### *Ji-Dong-Nuo*

The name *Ji-Dong-Nuo* is borrowed from a folk story popular among the Southwest region in China. Chen Yi provides that beautiful folk story in the Theodore Presser Edition of the piece for inspiration:

“According to legend, there was a girl who loved singing. However, she became unhappy after she married, since she had to stop singing under the orders of her father. She became divorced because of her depression. On the way back home, she heard a happy quail singing on the hill, changed her mood, and broke out singing a beautiful song. Her husband was deeply moved and loved her again as before.”<sup>67</sup>

The composition stays true to the cheerful side of the folk story, with birdcalls and bright singing sounds throughout the piece. The melody in the beginning of the piece has a gentle and nurturing character. It starts out in a simple manner, but soon evolves to a wider range and becomes more embellished by grace notes. The melody has a nice mixture of lyrical notes

---

3. <sup>67</sup> Chen Yi, *Ji-Dong-Nuo*, (King of Prussia, PA: Theodore Presser, 2007),

and short staccatos and accented notes, which should be performed precisely.

One of the unique features of this piece is that there are so many short *crescendos* and *diminuendos* that stretch in extreme dynamic range. They are most apparent in Motive 4, first appearing in measure 22. The structure of Motive 4 makes it easy for one to play it percussively and mechanically, but it is imperative to interpret them in a free and flexible manner and observe the extreme dynamic changes. The pedal should be used to help enhance the harmony of the motive.

The piece also provides ample opportunities to imitate Chinese traditional instruments. There are subtle ones throughout the piece, but the most significant one first appears in measures 89 to 93, at the introduction of Motive 6. The texture of this motive closely resembles a common gliding passage played on the *Zheng* instrument. To imitate the sound of this plucked instrument on the piano, one should project the notes as crisply as possible, while using short pedals to produce similar amount of resonance as on the traditional instruments.

Another form of birdcall appears toward the end of the piece, at measure 136. Both hands stretch to the extreme ends of the piano with accented staccato notes. The balance in the voices calls for attention at this moment. While marked *fortissimo* in both hands, the right hand needs more emphasis in order to project the high notes, and the left hand should be

played with control to avoid overpowering the right hand. Accents in both hands need to be sharp and assertive.

The piece winds down at the very end. First it slightly reflects the opening melody, and then a short glide of the *Zheng* makes one more appearance. The piece finishes with a couple light bounces, like a little bird taking off and flying away.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

These seven solo piano works written by Chen Yi so far represent a journey through her musical and personal life, from her early days at the Beijing Conservatory, to her current role as an active and established composer. The vast range of diversity of these compositions is truly remarkable. Each piece has its own unique expression; at the same time, they all possess the same rich foundation of Chinese music.

Chen Yi's passion for Chinese opera carries through many of her compositions. She also expresses the emotion of the folk songs through her own music. She especially treasures the intervals of a major second and a minor third, deriving from the pentatonic scale. Chinese percussive ensembles, as well as their sophisticated rhythmic principle, have major influence on Chen Yi's music as well.

Meanwhile, twelve-tone technique, bitonal harmony, and polyphony are just a few of the Western music idioms that influence Chen Yi's writing style. To be able to merge both worlds into one harmonious one, and produce that into one's special expression, is why Chen Yi's works have been so successful all around the world.

By producing a recording of Chen Yi's complete piano solo works and writing an analysis of each piece, I have explored the deep roots of Chen Yi's inspiration, and discovered the foundation of her unique musical language. My interpretation of Chen Yi's music is done with the intention of showcasing

the Chinese traditional music foundation in the modern Western musical language.

In closing, a quote from Chen Yi:

“I believe that language can be translated into music. Since I speak naturally in my mother tongue, in my music there is Chinese blood, Chinese philosophy and customs. However, music is a universal language. Although I have studied Western music extensively and deeply since my childhood, and I write for all available instruments and voices, I think that my musical language is a unique combination and a natural hybrid of all influences from my background.”<sup>68</sup>

---

<sup>68</sup> John de Clef Pineiro, “An Interview with Chen Yi,” *New Music Connoisseur*, 2001, [journal on-line]; available from [http://www.newmusicon.org/v9n4/v94chen\\_yi.htm](http://www.newmusicon.org/v9n4/v94chen_yi.htm); Internet; accessed 30 August 2011.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Barkin, Elaine. "The New Music of Chen Yi." *Journal of Music in China* (October 1999): 147-150.
- Billock, Rebecca Lynn. "Selected intermediate piano pieces by seven women of the twentieth century: Marion Bauer, Germaine Tailleferre, Ruth Crawford Seeger, Sofia Gubaidulina, Emma Lou Diemer, Chen Yi, and Karen Tanaka." DMA dissertation, University of Washington, 2003.
- Borger, Irene. "Chen Yi Interview." In *The Force of Curiosity*. Santa Monica Ca: CalArts/Alpert award in the arts, 1999, 278-298.
- Chen, Yi. Bio Page. Theodore Presser. Date Accessed: 2012/7/10.  
<http://www.presser.com/composers/info.cfm?name=chenyi>
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Tradition and Creation." *Current Musicology* (Fall-Winter 1999): 59-72.
- "Composer Chen Yi Highlights." *Journal of Music in China* (October 1999): 116-120.
- Daines, Matthew. "Finding Her Way to the Top of Two Worlds." *The New York Times*, 9 June 1996, 32.
- Du, Yaxiong. "The Beauty of the Baban Form, a study in Aesthetics." *Journal of Music in China*. (October 1999): 95-100.
- Jing, Jiang. "The Influence of Traditional Chinese Music on Professional Instrumental Composition." *Asian Music*. 22, no. 2 (Spring/Summer 1991): 83-96.
- Lee, Wendy Wan-ki. "Chinese Musical Influences, Western Structural Techniques: The Compositional Design of Chen Yi's Duo Ye." iSCI. Society of Composers, Inc. Fall 2009. Date Accessed: 2001/9/7.  
[http://www.societyofcomposers.org/publications/isci/vol1\\_1/](http://www.societyofcomposers.org/publications/isci/vol1_1/)
- Lei, Vai-Meng. "Three pieces by contemporary Chinese composers: Lam Bun-Ching, Chen Yi and Zhou Long." DMA Dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1990.
- Li, Songwen. "East Meets West: Nationalistic Elements in Selected Piano Solo Works of Chen Yi." DMA Dissertation, University of North Texas, 2001.

- Li, Xiaole. "Chen Yi's Piano Music: Chinese Aesthetics and Western Models." Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Hawai'i, 2003
- Lin, Amy. *Amy Lin interprets contemporary piano works*. Karlsruhe: ABW Classics, 2004. Compact Disc.
- Mahamuti, Gulimina. *Xinjiang: Piano Music From Western China*. 2012. AAC Audio File.
- Mangan, Timothy. "A Musical Odyssey; China's Cultural Revolution Forever Changed the Life—and Work—of Composer Chen Yi." *The Orange County Register*. 29 February 2004. Date Accessed: 2011/9/13. [www.lexisnexis.com/hottopics/lnacademic](http://www.lexisnexis.com/hottopics/lnacademic)
- Pan, YongHua. "An Exploration of Duo Ye: The Folk Song and Dance of the Dong Ethnic Group." *Chinese Music* 4 (2002): 35-36.
- Pineiro, John de Clef. "An Interview with Chen Yi." *New Music Connoisseur*. 2001. Date Accessed: 2011/8/30. [http://www.newmusicon.org/v9n4/v94chen\\_yi.htm](http://www.newmusicon.org/v9n4/v94chen_yi.htm)
- Qiao, Jianzhong. *Chinese Music*. Beijing: Culture and Art Publishing House, 1999.
- Rao, Nancy Yunwha. "Hearing Pentatonicism Through Serialism: Integrating Different Traditions in Chinese Contemporary Music." *Perspective of New Music*. 40, no. 2 (Summer 2002): 190-231.
- Shen, Chia-Ching. "The Asian Inspiration: Chinese Influences in the Solo Piano Music of Chen Yi." DMA Treatise, Florida State University, 2011.
- Shi, Fu. *Awariguli*. Date Accessed: 2012/9/12. <http://www.tom163.net/yuepuku/gequyuepu/yueyoushangchuan/200605/5543.html>
- Stryker, Mark. "Composers Zhou Long and Chen Yi merge Chinese and Western influences." *Detroit Free Press*. 6 June 2011. Date Accessed: 2011/9/13. [www.lexisnexis.com/hottopics/lnacademic](http://www.lexisnexis.com/hottopics/lnacademic)
- Tang, Jianping. "Tradition is Alive." *Journal of Music in China*. (Oct. 1999): 133.
- Thrasher, Alan R. "Structural Continuity in Chinese Sizhu: The Baban Model." *Asian Music*, 20, No. 2 (Spring/Summer 1989): 67-106.

- Wei, Lin. "'Tradition' Embodied in 'Modern Thoughts': A Brief Analysis of Chen Yi's Piano Work Duo Ye." *Piano Artistry* 10 (2005): 33-35.
- Williams, Heidi Louise. *Drive American*. Albany, NY: Albany Records, 2009. Compact Disc.
- Xue, Jinyan. "Baban, a Long-Standing Form in Chinese Traditional Music." *Journal of Music in China*, (October 1999): 77-94.
- Zhang, Boyu. "Shi-Fan-Luo-Gu: Drum Music in Beijing, Tianjin and the Qing Dynasty's court." *Musicology in China* 3 (2001): 68-85.
- Zhou, Jinmin. "New Wave Music in China." Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Maryland Baltimore County, 1993.



APPENDIX A

A RECORDING OF THE COMPLETE SOLO PIANO WORKS OF CHEN YI,

RECORDED BY QING NADIA FEEKEN, PIANO

*Variations on "Awariguli"*

*Duo Ye*

*Guessing*

*Two Chinese bagatelles*

*Ba Ban*

*Singing in the mountain*

*Ji-Dong-Nuo*

Qing Nadia Feeken, Piano

APPENDIX B

COPYRIGHT PERMISSION LETTER FROM THEODORE PRESSER COMPANY

## CARL FISCHER, LLC.

65 Bleecker Street  
New York, NY 10012

November 28, 2012

Qing Nadia Feeken  
1231 E San Angelo Ave  
Gilbert, AZ 85234

Carl Fischer, LLC, on behalf of Theodore Presser Company (the 'Owner'), hereby grants Qing Nadia Feeken (the 'Licensee') non-exclusive permission to include the copyrighted musical excerpts by Chen Yi listed in the attached Schedule A (the 'Musical Works') in dissertation for Arizona State University titled "The Complete Solo Piano Works of Chen Yi: A Recording, Analysis and Interpretation" (the "Dissertation"). Dissertation is to be published by UMI Dissertations Publishing in Proquest, as per the following terms:

Term: Three (3) years\*

Media: Dissertation is to be made accessible through Proquest only

Fee: Two Hundred and Fifty Dollars (\$250.00)

\* **Note:** This permission is for a terms of three (3) years only and expires on November 28, 2015. In the event that additional permission is required, please request the necessary permission at the time and your request will be reviewed accordingly.

The copyright notices, as they appear in the published work, shall appear in the Dissertation along with an indication that it was included with permission.

Payment is due within thirty (30) days from the date of this license (November 28, 2012). Upon our receipt of both the signed agreement and accompanying fee, this permission will become effective.

Carl Fischer, LLC  
o/b/o Theodore Presser Company

Qing Nadia Feeken

---

Subin Lim  
Coordinator, Licensing & Copyright

Schedule A

| Work Title              | Composer/Arranger | Catalog Number | Excerpt  |
|-------------------------|-------------------|----------------|--|
| Variations on Awariguli | Chen Yi           | 110-41790      | mm. 1-25, 39-42, 55-59, 95-96, 110-124, 139-148, 170-174, 209-211, 222-228, 278                                      |
| Duo Ye                  | Chen Yi           | 416-41153      | mm. 1-14, 32-37, 48-51, 71-73, 75-78, 89-101, 115-119, 142-168, 176-178  |
| Guessing                | Chen Yi           | 110-40727      | mm. 1-22, 30-45, 57-60, 67-73, 83-95, 97-100, 114-124, 127-128, 138-141, 144-146, 151-154, 163-167, 170-173, 187-193 |
| Yu Diao                 | Chen Yi           | 110-407262     | mm. 1-2, 6-8, 14-18, 24-27   |
| Small Beijing Gong      | Chen Yi           | 110-407261     | mm.1, 3-6, 7-9, 13-16, 19-20   |
| Ba Ban                  | Chen Yi           | 110-41760      | mm. 1-29, 45-48, 61-70, 81-85, 112-114, 154-164, 175-179, 193-257  |
| Singing in the Mountain | Chen Yi           | 110-41763      | mm. 1-19   |
| Ji-Dong-Nuo             | Chen Yi           | 110-41767      | mm. 1-18, 22-23, 27-28, 43-46, 62-67, 80, 86-90, 136-137, 157-169  |