

Four Piano Works of Ming-Hsiu Yen

by

Wen-Huei Chang

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Graduate Supervisory Committee:

Caio Pagano, Co-Chair
Amy Holbrook, Co-Chair
Russell Ryan

ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

More and more Taiwanese composers have been internationally recognized nowadays. However, their works have received scarce attention compared to their Western counterparts, even within Taiwan. Ming-Hsiu Yen (b. 1980) is a perfect example of an active composer whose works have been awarded many international prizes and performed worldwide, and yet there are few published studies that promote deeper understanding of her compositional language.

This paper is the explanatory document for a lecture recital presented by the author. Four of Yen's compositions for piano are examined, namely *The Forgotten Corner* (2005), "The Core" and "Frozen March" from *Movements* (2002-2005), and *Fantasy Amour* (2013). These works are discussed from both compositional and performance perspectives. After a brief biography of Yen and an overview of her piano compositions, the four works are given detailed description focusing on their coherence created by specific elements. Performance suggestions for each work are provided as well.

The discussion offers insight into the musical organization of these pieces and Yen's unifying techniques. It is hoped that this information will be beneficial to pianists interested in this composer and the repertoire of contemporary Taiwanese piano music.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Discussions and performances of Taiwanese new compositions are scarce compared to their Western counterparts. Because much background information is published in Mandarin, research is linguistically difficult. Even within Taiwan, local scholarship and performance focus on Western composers rather than championing Taiwanese nationals.

Ming-Hsiu Yen (b. 1980) is an internationally acclaimed composer who is significant in the new, youthful generation of Taiwanese composers. Her works have been released on several platforms and performed worldwide by such prominent ensembles as the Minnesota Orchestra, the National Chinese Orchestra Taiwan (NCO), the PRISM Quartet, and the Korean NONG Project.¹ Yen has also been the recipient of many awards, including the 22nd Yoshiro Irino Memorial Prize of the Asian Composers League and the Heckscher Composition Prize. She has also received several commissions from organizations, including the Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy *Hochschulwettbewerb* (Leipzig), the Hanson Institute for American Music (USA), and the National Symphony Orchestra (Taiwan).² However, there remains a gap in the scholarship of her works, even in Taiwan. More research dedicated to Yen's works would lead to greater promotion and recognition of her music.

¹ Ming-Hsiu Yen, "English Bio," Ming-Hsiu Yen Official Website, accessed Nov 5, 2020, <http://www.minghsiuyen.com/curriculum-vitae>.

² Yen, "Curriculum Vitae," Ming-Hsiu Yen Official Website, accessed Nov 5, 2020, <http://www.minghsiuyen.com/curriculum-vitae>.

This document examines four of Yen's works for piano: *The Forgotten Corner* (2005),³ "The Core" and "Frozen March" from *Movements* (2002-2005),⁴ and *Fantasy Amour* (2013).⁵ Publications that discuss Yen's piano works include two doctoral dissertations: Yun-Hsin Tseng's "*Two Old Postcards from Formosa: Re-imagining Traditional Folk Tunes for the Modern World*"⁶ and "An Annotated Catalogue and Guide to the Piano Solo Repertoire of Contemporary Asian Women Composers from Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan" by Chun (Paige) Li.⁷ Tseng's study primarily examines Yen's treatment of folk melody in *Two Old Postcards from Formosa*, but several supplemental examples from other piano works are provided, including *Fantasy Amour* and *Balafan*. Li's dissertation is a survey of solo piano works by Asian women composers, including those by Yen, and does not discuss any in detail.

The study at hand will introduce the four piano works, then describe them with a focus on unifying techniques. The fugue-like subject in *The Forgotten Corner* emphasizes the interval of the fourth, which is motivically developed throughout the piece. "The Core" and "Frozen March" from *Movements* are built upon gestures created from the chromatic scale. "The Core" features descending chromatic scales in contrapuntal texture, while "Frozen March" is a "study of clusters."⁸ *Fantasy Amour* is based on a folk tune. Its treatment in the piece is briefly mentioned in Tseng's document

³ Yen, *The Forgotten Corner*. Unpublished score in PDF format, 2005. <http://www.minghsiuyen.com/piano-solo-and-duo>.

⁴ Yen, *Movements*. Unpublished score in PDF format, 2002-05. <http://www.minghsiuyen.com/piano-solo-and-duo>.

⁵ Yen, *Fantasy Amour*. Unpublished score in PDF format, 2013. <http://www.minghsiuyen.com/piano-solo-and-duo>.

⁶ Yun-Hsin Tseng, "*Two Old Postcards from Formosa: Re-imagining Traditional Folk Tunes for the Modern World*" (PhD diss., University of Nebraska, 2015).

⁷ Chun (Paige) Li, "An Annotated Catalogue and Guide to the Piano Solo Repertoire of Contemporary Asian Women Composers from Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan" (PhD diss., Florida State University, 2019).

⁸ Yen, Program notes to *Movements*, 2002-05, <http://www.minghsiuyen.com/piano-solo-and-duo>.

during an overview of Yen's use of folk tunes in various works. This study will examine how Yen creates both motivic unity and large overall structure from the tune.

The first chapter gives a brief biography of Yen and an overview of the musical styles in her compositions for piano. The four works are each separately discussed in subsequent chapters, focusing primarily on unity created by specific elements.

Performance suggestions for each work are provided as well. The goal is to offer information beneficial to pianists about the musical coherence and organization of these works.

This document is in support of a lecture-recital in which I focus on the significant observations presented here, with some discussion of technical issues, followed by a complete performance of the four works. The ultimate goal of this study is for it to serve as an accessible reference for pianists interested in Yen's compositions and the repertoire of contemporary Taiwanese piano music.

Biography

Ming-Hsiu Yen was born in 1980 in Taichung, Taiwan. Her earliest exposure to music was in a local Yamaha music school when she was between five and six years old.⁹ She participated in a music program for talented students from elementary school through high school. Her interest in composition developed at a very young age, and she began study in it with Gordon Shi-Wen Chin when she was in the seventh grade. Chin is a famous pianist, composer, and conductor in Taiwan, and he played an influential role in Yen's musical education. At Chin's suggestion, Yen decided to be a double major in piano performance and composition for her bachelor's degree at the Eastman School of Music and master's degree at the University of Michigan. She later completed her doctoral degree in composition at the University of Michigan.¹⁰

While in the United States, Yen grew rapidly as a composer and developed her compositional style. One of her first major successes in composition occurred in 2011, when the orchestral work *Yun* (2006) won the 22nd Yoshiro Irino Memorial Prize of the Asian Composers League. After DMA graduation, in 2010-11 Yen served as an adjunct associate professor and composer-in-residence at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology. Yen is currently an associate professor of composition and theory at the National Taipei University of the Arts in Taiwan.¹¹ Besides remarkable abilities as composer and pianist, Yen is also a lecturer giving pre-concert talks, a music director, a concert curator, and a competition judge.

⁹ Yu-Ting Tseng, "A Newly Commissioned Work for Cello, A Recording and Performance Practice Guide" (DMA diss., Arizona State University, 2016), 40.

¹⁰ Tseng, "*Two Old Postcards from Formosa*," 24-25.

¹¹ Yen, "Curriculum Vitae."

Piano Compositions

According to Yen's official website, she has composed ten works for piano to date. Her first piano composition was *Yuin*, composed in 2002 when she was studying at the Eastman School of Music.¹² However, her first composition for piano was actually finished much earlier, when she was around seven years old.¹³ Yen's piano compositions cover a wide variety of genres, from solo, duet, all the way into concerto. Table 1 lists these compositions in chronological order.

Table 1. List of Piano Compositions to Date

Title	Year	Type
Yuin	2002	Solo
Balafan	2004	Concerto
Movements	2002-2005	Solo
The Forgotten Corner	2005	Solo
Two Old Postcards from Formosa	2007	Solo
Departure	2012-2013	Four hands
Fantasy Amour	2013	Solo
Toy Kaleidoscope	2014	Four hands
In Search of the Lighthouse	2015	Four hands
One, Two, Three	2018	Solo

¹² Yen, "Piano Solo & Duo," Ming-Hsiu Yen Official Website, accessed November 4, 2020. <http://www.minghsiuyen.com/piano-solo-and-duo>.

¹³ Tseng, "A Newly Commissioned Work for Cello," 41.

Yen's compositions were frequently inspired by her Taiwanese origin. For example, the piano concerto *Balafan* uses a tune from the Amis tribe in Taiwan.¹⁴ The piano solo work *Two Old Postcards from Formosa* consists of two movements based on Taiwanese folk songs. The first movement, "Crying Bird," is built from the folk song "A Chu-Chu Crying Bird," which portrays the Taiwanese people's craving for hope during the period of Japanese colonization. Yen uses a minor triad to convey the sorrowful and hopeless mood of people during that time. The second movement, "Plowing Song," is also based on a local tune, which tells about the hard work of farmers in an agricultural society of the old days.¹⁵ As mentioned above, *Fantasy Amour*'s use of the folk tune "Tao Hua Guo Du" (Miss Tao Hua Crossing River) will be examined in Chapter 5.

Classical music education plays a significant role in Yen's compositions. *Toy Kaleidoscope* was written for piano four hands and was transcribed by Yen for orchestra in 2016. It contains four movements, each titled with a toy and each paying homage to a specific composer, namely Sergei Prokofiev, Claude Debussy, Erik Satie, and Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov.¹⁶ The first movement, "Jumping Frog," is characterized by a disjunct melody and dissonant harmony. Rolling arpeggios dominate the second movement, "Fishing Toy." The third movement, "Kite," features melodic repetitions with chordal changes. The last movement, "Remote Control Car," is recognizable for its nearly uninterrupted runs of chromatic sixteenth notes. *One, Two, Three* is based on indeterminacy. The composer provides rhythms, dynamics, articulation markings, and a three-line staff to indicate the position of the notes (lowest, middle, highest), while the

¹⁴ Tseng, "Two Old Postcards from Formosa," 46.

¹⁵ Ibid., 12-13.

¹⁶ Yen, Program notes to *Toy Kaleidoscope*, 2014, <http://www.minghsiuyen.com/piano-solo-and-duo>.

pitches are randomly chosen by the performer or the audience.¹⁷ *Two Old Postcards from Formosa* balances Taiwanese traditional music and compositional techniques inspired by Messiaen, Debussy, Ravel, and Bartók.¹⁸

Some of Yen's works are designed to represent an idea or an image. *Departure* is a piece for piano four hands. Its repetitive pitches and rhythms at the beginning and end portray the stable motion of a train and the continuity of time. According to Yen, the cross-hand playing and exchange of parts represent friends' support in life.¹⁹ Another four-hand piece, *In Search of the Lighthouse*, wonderfully portrays the roaring sea in intense arpeggiated figures.²⁰ Yen describes her compositions as "music with no cultural boundary because all my ideas originate from my life experience and I try to use different ways to express my thoughts."²¹

Another characteristic of Yen's music is the musical coherence created by specific elements. The following chapters will provide an in-depth discussion of Yen's unifying techniques in *The Forgotten Corner*, "The Core" and "Frozen March" from *Movements*, and *Fantasy Amour*.

¹⁷ Li, "An Annotated Catalogue and Guide," 137-138.

¹⁸ Tseng, "*Two Old Postcards from Formosa*," 60.

¹⁹ Yen, Program notes to *Departure*, 2012-13, <http://www.minghsiuyen.com/piano-solo-and-duo>.

²⁰ Yen, Program notes to *In Search of the Lighthouse*, 2015, <http://www.minghsiuyen.com/piano-solo-and-duo>.

²¹ Cathy Hung, "Conversation with Ming-Hsiu Yen at The Intimacy of Creativity," May 19, 2011, <https://interlude.hk/conversation-with-ming-hsiu-yen-at-the-intimacy-of-creativity-by-cathy-hung/>.

CHAPTER 2

THE FORGOTTEN CORNER

The Forgotten Corner was written for a composition concert in 2005 while Ming-Hsiu Yen was studying at the University of Michigan.²² The origin and the meaning of the title are unknown. The length of the piece varies depending on whether or not the performer adds a cadenza at the fermata in m. 39. The recording of Yen's playing includes a two-minute cadenza here, which extends the total length to approximately six minutes forty seconds. However, she indicates an estimated duration of seven minutes thirty seconds, which is substantially longer than her performance.²³ Among all of Yen's piano compositions to date, *The Forgotten Corner* is one of the few contrapuntal works and the only one that gives the impression of a fugue. The subject is characterized by constant sixteenths interrupted only by jazzy syncopations created by ties, providing rhythmic drive and energy. This is a technically demanding work. The fast arpeggios and fourth-based chords require a wide extension of the hand. Also, the subject and its accompanying lines are disjunct and fast, making their combinations difficult to play.

The fugue begins with three voices, but there will be long passages in only two voices, and later, large chords will punctuate the active lines. Overall, the piece consists of three sections loosely in ABA relationship, with a coda. The first section, mm. 1-39, is fugue-like. After an extended exposition (three voices mimicking four with four entries) and some stretto is an episode based entirely on the subject, followed by two returns of the subject and a closing passage. This initial fugal section comes to a pause with the

²² Yen, "Piano Solo & Duo."

²³ Ibid.

fermata in m. 39, and what ensues is the quiet, slower middle section through m. 65. The *fortissimo* return of the subject at m. 66 marks the beginning of the third section. After energetic appearances of the subject and an episode working fragments from it, the third section abruptly comes to a halt on a *fortississimo*, half-note chord at m. 91. The following coda brings the piece to an end with a *grandioso*, partially canonic duet of motives from the subject in slow motion. Table 2 offers a view of the structure of *The Forgotten Corner*.

Table 2. The Structure of *The Forgotten Corner*

Section	Subdivision	Measures
First Section	Extended Exposition	1-13
	Stretto	14-19
	Episode	20-26
	Subject Re-entries	27-33
	Closing/Transition	33-39
Middle Section, <i>Cantabile</i>		40-65
Third Section	Subject Re-entries	66-74
	Episode	75-80
	Subject, fragmented	81-82
	Closing	83-91
Coda		92-103

As shown in Example 1, the subject that opens the fugue extends over three measures in middle register. Consisting primarily of wide leaps, it rapidly traverses a

range of over two octaves. The head motive emphasizes the interval of the fourth, which is motivically developed throughout the piece.

The answer begins at the fourth below with a countersubject that reiterates the fourths up from the head motive. The register then expands upward with the third entry of the subject. After the subject has been presented in three different registers, the answer is repeated in the alto, making an extended exposition. The countersubject is divided between the top and bottom voices with the entry of the answer, as shown in Example 1. The countersubject will not re-appear in this form, although the accompanying lines in the remainder of the fugue are related to it by their rhythm and fourth leaps.

Example 1. Yen, *The Forgotten Corner*, mm. 1-13.²⁴

Expo.

The musical score is presented in three systems. The first system shows the subject (S) in the treble clef, marked *f*. The second system shows the piano accompaniment, with the answer (A) in the bass clef, marked *f*. The third system shows the piano accompaniment continuing, with the subject (S) in the treble clef, marked *mf*. Dynamics include *dim.*, *mp*, and *mf*.

²⁴ Yen, *The Forgotten Corner*, 1-2.

The exposition reaches its culmination in mm. 14-19, where the subject is twice presented in two-voice stretto. The following episode is based on the subject (Example 2). The lines consist of sixteenths and eighths rather than solid sixteenths, thus slowing down the momentum of the strettos. In mm. 22-23, the rhythm slows further as the rising fourths of the head motive stand out in *staccatissimo* eighths. The sixteenth-note motion returns and the pace and energy ramp back up to prepare a climactic re-entry of the subject.

Example 2. Yen, *The Forgotten Corner*, mm. 20-26.²⁵

The musical score is presented in three systems. The first system (mm. 20-21) is labeled 'Episode' in red. It shows a melodic subject in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The second system (mm. 22-23) continues the subject and bass line. The third system (mm. 24-26) shows the subject re-entering in a new transposition, marked 'sub. n' and 'fff', with a 'ritenuto' marking above the staff. The bass line continues with fourth leaps.

The subject re-enters at m. 27 with a new transposition, at *fortississimo*, its head motive highlighted by a *ritenuto* (Example 3). The line in the bass that accompanies the subject at first sounds as though it will be in *stretto*, but it becomes free counterpoint consisting predominantly of fourth leaps. The same bass line, transposed, accompanies the subject that begins in m. 30. The vigorous polyphony gradually decays to the closing/transition.

²⁵ Yen, *The Forgotten Corner*, 3-4.

Example 3. Yen, *The Forgotten Corner*, mm. 27-33 (Subject Re-entries).²⁶

The closing passage begins quietly at m. 33, marked by a new stepwise figure alternating with interjections reminiscent of the head motive of the subject (Example 4). This fragmentation breaks off the solid sixteenth-note motion of the fugue, thus slowing down the pace in preparation for the approaching middle section. After a gradual registral descent from m. 35 to m. 37, the rhythm slows further as a rising arpeggio moves in eighth-note triplets with *ritardando* in m. 38. The first section ends *pianississimo* on a fermata in m. 39, as shown in Example 4. Yen performs a cadenza here in the

²⁶ Yen, *The Forgotten Corner*, 4.

recording,²⁷ perhaps improvised, though there is no explicit instruction suggesting that something is to be added.

Example 4. Yen, *The Forgotten Corner*, mm. 33-39.²⁸

The middle section follows, nearly a quarter of the piece, from m. 40 to m. 65, built on materials from the exposition. It is slower and calmer in spirit. The change of tempo and dynamics is a moment of relief after the stir and activity of the first section.

The *cantabile* character is created in part by long, flowing, *legato* lines, but at the same

²⁷ Yen, “Piano Solo & Duo.”

²⁸ Yen, *The Forgotten Corner*, 4-5.

time a sense of lightness is provided by short, slurred figures in the accompaniment (Examples 5 and 8). The saturation of the melodies and harmonies with the interval of the fourth helps to unify this section with the fugue despite the outward contrasts. This long section falls into two parts, each opening with a similar idea. Basically, the first part alternates treble melodies with wide-span arpeggios in fourths. The opening melody returns at m. 53 and marks the beginning of the second part.

As shown in Example 5, the melodies in the opening of the middle section are sprawling and, like the fugue subject, consist largely of fourth leaps.

Example 5. Yen, *The Forgotten Corner*, mm. 40-41 (beginning of middle section).²⁹

The musical score for Example 5 shows measures 40 and 41. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 84. The treble staff begins with a red 'Middle Section' label and a 'mp cantabile' dynamic. The melody consists of wide leaps, primarily fourths. The bass staff provides accompaniment with arpeggiated figures in fourths, marked with a 'p' dynamic. Brackets under the bass staff highlight these arpeggiated patterns.

After five measures, these wide-ranging lines are replaced with a sinuous, stepwise melody that begins in m. 45 (Example 6).

Example 6. Yen, *The Forgotten Corner*, mm. 45-46.³⁰

The musical score for Example 6 shows measures 45 and 46. The treble staff begins with a 'mp' dynamic and features a sinuous, stepwise melody. The bass staff provides accompaniment with arpeggiated figures in fourths, marked with an 'mf' dynamic. Brackets under the bass staff highlight these arpeggiated patterns.

²⁹ Yen, *The Forgotten Corner*, 5.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

From m. 49, there is a gradual descent in register, yet with a *crescendo*, and the first part of the middle section abruptly comes to a halt on a *fortissimo*, dotted-quarter-note chord at m. 51, tied over the bar line (Example 7).

Example 7. Yen, *The Forgotten Corner*, mm. 50-51.³¹



After a one-bar transition, measure 53 is like m. 40 and re-starts the middle section (Example 8). This second version of the middle section has bigger growth. The music continues with descending motion and a gradual *decrescendo* until m. 58. Dropping lower this time, the next, upwardly moving phrase has more space to grow in volume for a powerful peak.

Example 8. Yen, *The Forgotten Corner*, mm. 52-56 (second part of middle section).³²



³¹ Yen, *The Forgotten Corner*, 7.

³² Ibid.

54

mp *mf* *mp*

sim.

As shown in Example 9, the ascending line that starts from m. 59 with a long *crescendo* gradually gains forward momentum as sixteenth-note motion becomes increasingly constant. The intensity is reinforced further in mm. 60-61 by a series of accented chords in lower register through a *fortissimo* climax at m. 62, followed by a stunned silence. The sixteenth-note motion then quickly resumes and brings the middle section to an electrifying end at *fortissimo*, leading directly to an energetic re-entry of the subject.

Example 9. Yen, *The Forgotten Corner*, mm. 59-65.³³

59

mf

61

ff *f* *ff*

sim.

³³ Yen, *The Forgotten Corner*, 8.

After the contrasting middle section, the subject returns, *fortissimo*, in m. 66 (Example 10). Its head motive is highlighted by accents, marking the beginning of the third section. The line in the bass that accompanies the subject at first sounds as though it will be in *stretto*, but it becomes free counterpoint consisting primarily of fourth leaps. The subject appears again in the bass at the end of m. 68 with a sudden dynamic drop to *mezzo forte*. Successive fourth-based chords in the treble beginning at m. 69 are a percussive variant of the head motive of the subject, moving in quarter notes against the sixteenth-note subject. Starting from m. 72, the chords in the treble rise in register with increasing urgency by consistent shortening of note values. The *crescendo* in m. 74 further pushes the music ahead into the episode, as shown in Example 10.

Example 10. Yen, *The Forgotten Corner*, mm. 66-74 (Subject Re-entries).³⁴

³⁴ Yen, *The Forgotten Corner*, 8-9.

The following episode starts at m. 75 with the fourths from the head motive in both directions simultaneously, highlighted by accents (Example 11). The reduction of dynamics and texture in this episode provides a sort of relief from the preceding polyphony and creates rhythmically varied new lines. At first, the treble is accompanied sparsely; then immediately, at m. 78, the treble and its accompaniment are both transposed up a fifth and restated.

Example 11. Yen, *The Forgotten Corner*, mm. 75-80.³⁵

The musical score for Example 11 consists of three systems of piano music. The first system, starting at measure 75, is marked 'Episode' in red and begins with a *ff* dynamic. The second system, starting at measure 77, shows dynamics of *mf*, *f*, *sfz*, and *f*. The third system, starting at measure 79, shows dynamics of *ff*, *mf*, *f*, and *sfz*. The music features complex rhythmic patterns and chromatic movement in both staves.

An abrupt halt occurs with the eighth rest at the end of m. 80, allowing a quick breath before the head of the subject re-enters, doubled four octaves apart, at *fortissimo* (Example 12). The subject is broken up into pieces, interrupted by rests and *sforzando* chords.

Example 12. Yen, *The Forgotten Corner*, mm. 81-82.³⁶

The musical score for Example 12 consists of two systems of piano music. The first system, starting at measure 81, is marked with a red 'S' and begins with a *ff* dynamic. The second system, starting at measure 82, shows dynamics of *sfz*, *sfz*, *f*, *ff*, *sfz*, and *f sfz*. The music features complex rhythmic patterns and chromatic movement in both staves.

³⁵ Yen, *The Forgotten Corner*, 10.

³⁶ Ibid.

This broken-up return of the subject is followed by a long closing passage starting at m. 83 (Example 13). A sequence of descending fourths in m. 83 brings the music to very low register. The dynamics also drop, marking the start of a gradual process to rebuild energy and intensity. Beginning at m. 84, a sixteenth-note bass ostinato built on the fourths adds a persistent drive that helps to increase momentum in the passage while quartal chords in irregular rhythm add a percussive layer. The chords gradually ascend in register with an increase of smaller note values and a long *crescendo*, creating forward motion toward the coda.

Example 13. Yen, *The Forgotten Corner*, mm. 83-84 (beginning of closing).³⁷

The image shows a musical score for two staves. The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat). Measure 83 is labeled 'Closing' in red. The first staff in measure 83 has a melodic line with descending fourths, starting on a high note and moving down. The second staff in measure 83 has a bass line with a sixteenth-note ostinato. Dynamics are marked as *mf* in the first staff and *f* in the second staff. Measure 84 shows the continuation of the bass ostinato and the introduction of quartal chords in the treble staff. The dynamic is marked as *sub. mp*.

As shown in Example 14, the end of the passage in m. 90 is an elongated, 5/4 measure with *ritardando* and a *crescendo* from *fortissimo* to *fortississimo* in preparation for the climactic coda. Every chord in the treble is accented, and they rise to a widely spread, half-note chord in m. 91 that suddenly halts the momentum.

³⁷ Yen, *The Forgotten Corner*, 11.

Example 14. Yen, *The Forgotten Corner*, mm. 89-91.³⁸

The coda follows in m. 92, still *fortississimo*, but now *Meno mosso*, in a stately rhythm back in 4/4 meter (Example 15). A melody in the treble is doubled in octaves and is derived from the head motive of the subject; a similar melody in the bass serves as counterpoint that is partially canonic. The plodding lines consist mainly of quarter notes, thus naturally slowing down the pace and adding heaviness to this concluding section.

Example 15. Yen, *The Forgotten Corner*, mm. 91-95 (beginning of coda).³⁹

As the end approaches, the melody in the bass quickly ascends more than four octaves, and the pace further slows down with long note values in the treble (Example 16). This ending carries great energy, with accents on every note and a *crescendo* that rises to powerful, *fortissississimo* chords in extremely high register. These chords halt the

³⁸ Yen, *The Forgotten Corner*, 11-12.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.

momentum permanently, and their quartal structure recalls the many fourth leaps in the fugue subject.

Example 16. Yen, *The Forgotten Corner*, mm. 100-103.⁴⁰

The musical score for Example 16, Yen, *The Forgotten Corner*, mm. 100-103, is presented in a piano arrangement. The score is in G major and 2/4 time. It consists of four measures. The first measure (mm. 100-101) features a treble clef with a half note G4, followed by a half note A4, and then a half note B4. The bass clef part starts with a half note G2, followed by a half note A2, and then a half note B2. The second measure (m. 102) continues with the same notes in the treble and bass. The third measure (m. 103) features a treble clef with a half note G4, followed by a half note A4, and then a half note B4. The bass clef part starts with a half note G2, followed by a half note A2, and then a half note B2. The piece concludes with a final chord of G4, B4, D5, and G5 in the treble, and G2, B2, D3, and G3 in the bass. The dynamic marking is *ffff*. The tempo is marked 100. The score is numbered 100, 101, 102, and 103.

The Forgotten Corner explores a variety of textures, tempos, and characters, but the interval of the fourth is the primary element that ties everything together. The piece starts from a wild fugue to a more-relaxed middle section to an abbreviated revival of the fugue to a coda of completely different pace and character. The quartal structure of closing chords is an echo of the fourth leaps in the fugue subject, offering an effective reminder of the pervasive unity of this piece.

⁴⁰ Yen, *The Forgotten Corner*, 12.

CHAPTER 3

THE CORE

Movements is a set of six short pieces for solo piano that Ming-Hsiu Yen wrote between 2002 and 2005, during her master's degree study at the University of Michigan.⁴¹ Yen gives each piece a title, though the origin and the meaning of most of them remain unknown. According to the program notes, this set is the composer's "musical diary."⁴² Each piece experiments with a specific concept and simply exhausts many possibilities of it through the course of the music. The duration of the whole work is about twelve minutes, but each piece can be played individually or in reordered groups.⁴³

"The Core" is the title of the second piece, completed in 2004. It features chromatic scales in contrapuntal texture so complex that it is notated on three staves. This piece is entirely at a slow tempo, marked half note = 40 beats per minute in 3/2 meter. This meter and tempo allow for a slow start and a gradual shortening of rhythmic values to create increasing activity. The "gradually growing" indication at the start suggests that the development of the chromatic scale will be a slow process. The recording on Yen's website lasts approximately two minutes fifty seconds, which is longer than the expected duration of two minutes thirty seconds given in the program notes.⁴⁴

Although the piece is slow, it demands great technical control. The polyphonic section at the start requires each line to be rhythmically independent and precise. Also,

⁴¹ Yen, Program notes to *Movements*.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

loud dynamics change quickly to quiet ones, requiring the use of different touches as well as attention to clearing the sound between dynamic levels.

This thirty-measure piece divides into two sections. The first section, mm. 1-13, features contrapuntally-combined figures made up exclusively of chromatic scales, distributed across a wide range of the keyboard. The section ends with a pause on an F⁷ chord. The descending chromatic line from E⁶ in m. 14 is like the line from E⁴ in the very beginning and makes m. 14 sound like a fresh start. The first part of the second section is based on this chromatic descent in the treble, from E⁶ to E⁵ in m. 20. After that, rising thirds in the treble and descending tritones in the bass take over, with a rise in intensity that connects to the new, *fortissimo* figures starting in m. 24. Despite this change, the tritones on the bottom continue their descent, all the way to E¹/B^{b1} in m. 29; the rising thirds are decorated, but they too continue, nearly to the end.

As shown in Example 17, the first section begins softly with successive entries of three voices in mm. 1-3, then adds a fourth line in m. 5, a fifth in m. 6, and finally a sixth at the very end of m. 6. The bottom line that starts the piece is like a cantus firmus in that it is all in half notes while the other lines are in more-complex rhythms.

Example 17. Yen, *Movements*, “The Core,” mm. 1-7 (beginning of first section).⁴⁵

Steady; gradually growing ♩ = 40
First Section

⁴⁵ Yen, *Movements*, 5.

Musical score for Example 18, measures 5-13. The score is in treble and bass clefs. Measure 5 starts with a dynamic of *mp*. Measure 9 has a dynamic of *mf*. Measure 13 has a dynamic of *p*. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

From m. 5 the dynamic increases to the peak of an intensity curve in m. 9 with a *fortissimo*, accented chord that sustains, pausing the rhythmic motion (Example 18). It is followed by an abrupt drop in dynamic level and a simplification of the texture. The dynamic and textural reductions suddenly release the tension accumulated to this point, thus creating room to increase the energy again later and creating a cadential pause in m. 13 on a *piano* major-seventh chord, followed by a new, chromatically descending line that restarts the piece in m. 14 (Example 18). The second section, like the first, grows from a single highlighted chromatic line starting on E, expanding from five voices in m. 14 to six in m. 17 to seven in m. 20 to eight at the end of m. 20.

Example 18. Yen, *Movements*, “The Core,” mm. 8-15.⁴⁶

Musical score for Example 18, measures 8-15. The score is in treble and bass clefs. Measure 8 starts with a dynamic of *ff*. Measure 9 has a dynamic of *sub. p*. Measure 10 has a dynamic of *pp*. Measure 11 has a dynamic of *pp*. Measure 12 has a dynamic of *pp*. Measure 13 has a dynamic of *pp*. Measure 14 has a dynamic of *sub. p*. Measure 15 has a dynamic of *pp*. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

⁴⁶ Yen, *Movements*, 5-6.

After the chromatic descent from E⁶ to E⁵ in mm. 14-20, the rising thirds in the treble and the descending tritones on the bottom begin to take over in m. 21, slowly moving outward at different rates in a big wedge shape; the pitches of these two layers are marked in Example 19. Individual lines merge into a succession of percussive chords in m. 22 with accents, separated by rests, and the tension swells in an enormous *crescendo* directly into a *fortissimo* climax at m. 24.

Example 19. Yen, *Movements*, “The Core,” mm. 20-23, with pitches of the wedge shape marked.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Yen, *Movements*, 6-7.

As shown in Example 19 above and continued in Example 20, the two bottom lines descend chromatically in parallel tritones, starting with $D\flat^3/G^3$ in m. 21 and ending more than two octaves lower with $E^1/B\flat^1$ in m. 29, in the last chord of the piece. Also marked in Examples 19 and 20, the parallel minor thirds rise chromatically from $C\sharp^5/E^5$ at the end of m. 21 through an octave to $C\sharp^6/E^6$ at the end of m. 28.

As shown in Example 20, tremolos begin to ornament the rising thirds and irregular arpeggio figures are added to ornament the descending tritones, each arpeggio descending to land on a tritone. The tremolo sputters out and disappears in m. 27, and the last descending arpeggios in m. 27 are joined by sustained chords to slow the pace in preparation for the climactic ending. In the next-to last measure, eighth-note arpeggios, every note accented, suddenly zoom outward to a *fortississimo*, sustained sonority at the extremes of the keyboard. This figure epitomizes the wedge shape that has been slowly unfolding since m. 21. When the sound decays, the ending is punctuated by a *sforzando* E/F semitone in the same register in which these pitches began the piece.

Example 20. Yen, *Movements*, “The Core,” mm. 24-30.⁴⁸

24 **A** **Bb Db**

ff

5 **Ab** **D** **C#** **G**

25 **D** **B** **C Eb**

ff

5 **F#** **C** **B** **F**

26 *f* *ff*

3 3 3 5

E **A#** **Eb** **A**

⁴⁸ Yen, *Movements*, 7-8.

The image displays two staves of musical notation. The top staff, labeled '28', shows a piano introduction with chromatic lines in both hands. The right hand has a melodic line with a fermata over a chord, and the left hand has a bass line with a fermata over a chord. Chords are labeled with letters: D (orange), C (blue), and B (blue). The bottom staff, labeled '29', shows a rapid arpeggio in the right hand and a thick chord in the left hand. Dynamics markings include *fff* and *sfz*. Chords are labeled with letters: Bb (blue), m (orange), and d (blue). The piece ends with a *sfz* marking and a fermata over a chord.

In “The Core,” Yen creates rhythmic and textural variety and shaping by ingeniously manipulating the basic idea of slow-moving chromatic lines. She explores diverse colors and effects, including a finely wrought web of contrapuntal lines that transforms into a closing of thick, percussive chords mixed with tremolos and rapid arpeggios. In addition, a gradual rise in dynamics from start to finish helps to create a growing sense of drama and excitement. Yen further strengthens the unity by featuring the prominent pitches of the opening, E and F, at structural moments. The F⁷ chord that ends the first section by sustaining through mm. 13-14 has F and E at its extremes, and so also does the chord before it. As the piece reaches its ending, the *fortississimo* sonority at the end of m. 29 consists exclusively of these two pitches, and the *sforzando* punctuation

on the downbeat of m. 30 recalls them in their original register. It seems that E and F are the central “core” of the piece alluded to in the title.

CHAPTER 4

FROZEN MARCH

Ming-Hsiu Yen composed the third piece of *Movements*, “Frozen March,” in 2004. It is “a study of clusters”⁴⁹ that, like “The Core,” also relies heavily on mannerisms based on chromatic scales. This twenty-six-measure piece is at a slow tempo with a metronome marking of quarter note equals 52 bpm in 4/4 meter. Slowly moving quarter notes during much of the piece reinforce the feeling of a march. The estimated length in the program notes is two minutes. However, Yen’s recording runs to nearly three minutes,⁵⁰ suggesting her endorsement of a tempo slower than what is marked.

“Frozen March” is not very technically challenging. The primary difficulty is encountered in mm. 15-21, where the march-like quarter notes are in contrast to relatively quick figures in complicated rhythms. Overall, the pianist needs to observe that some portions reinforce the quarter-note beat, while others disguise it. In addition, big clusters require wide stretches of the hands, and special attention is needed to maintain rhythmic precision when there are big jumps between registers.

“Frozen March” begins with three layers, but there will be a recitative-like passage for only one voice, and, later, the texture grows so dense that Yen notates on four staves. The piece consists of four sections. The first section, mm. 1-9, based on a quarter-note pulse, abruptly freezes on a *forte* cluster, tied over the bar line. After that is the softer second section, mm. 10-14, featuring a single-line melody without the quarter-note pulse. The return of the quarter-note pulse at the very end of m. 14 signals the beginning

⁴⁹ Yen, Program notes to *Movements*.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

of the third section, ending on a *fortissimo* cluster sustained in m. 21. The final section immediately drops the dynamics and decays to plodding chords beneath a melody in the treble. The piece gradually diminishes to a soft finish with a *piano* cluster, as though the march recedes into the distance.

As shown in Example 21, “Frozen March” starts softly in middle register with quarter-note clusters, gradually growing thicker as pitches are stacked down one below the other in half steps. This figure will return and be a point of identification later. In m. 2, immediately after the growing cluster figure reaches five pitches, figures are added both above and below to create a three-layered sound: a long bass note functioning as a pedal point, the quarter-note cluster figure in the middle, and a wide, leaping figure on the top. The chromatic descent in m. 1, Eb-D-C#-B# (not Bx, a correction noted in footnote 51), continues to Ax (B) in m. 2, then with Bb in the bass and A-G# in the treble. The descending chromatic line begun in the cluster figure thus continues past Ax (B) to Bb-A-G# through the figures added in m. 2, although they are in disparate registers. The quarter-note clusters begin to establish a pulse that is temporarily undermined by the rhythm of m. 2. After the long pause there, the quarter-note figure (and the pulse) begins again in m. 3. This is the “Frozen March” – take a few steps, then freeze. The pattern established in mm. 1-2 repeats in mm. 3-4 before the growing clusters and treble melody are combined starting in m. 5. The third iteration of the quarter-note figure, which begins on the last beat of m. 4, generates a chromatic scale that begins the same as before, Eb down to Ax, but continues downward five more half steps to Ex as the figure grows from a single pitch to a ten-note cluster on the downbeat of m. 7. In m. 7 the chords starting on the second beat consist of white-key clusters in the right hand

overlapping with black-key clusters in the left so that each chord consists of eleven closely-packed pitches – heavy and ponderous. These clusters gradually grow with a *crescendo* but then get stuck at the very end of m. 8 (Example 21). The tied-over *forte* cluster in m. 8 eventually fades into a decreasing sonority. The pianist should begin the recitative in m. 9 at the dynamic of the decaying cluster.

Example 21. Yen, *Movements*, “Frozen March,” mm. 1-8 (first section).⁵¹

The musical score for Example 21, "Frozen March" mm. 1-8, is presented in three systems. The first system (mm. 1-3) begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic and a tempo marking of "Static ♩ = 52". It features piano accompaniment with clusters and triplets. The second system (mm. 4-5) continues the piano accompaniment with clusters and triplets. The third system (mm. 6-8) shows a crescendo (*cresc.*) leading to a forte (*f*) dynamic cluster in m. 8. Annotations include asterisks (*) and double asterisks (**).

The second section, mm. 10-14, is built on materials from the first section (Example 22). The treble figure of m. 2 is expanded into a recitative-like melody that is

⁵¹ Yen, *Movements*, 9, the note Bx (*) in m. 1 (and again in mm. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7) should be B#.

high in the treble and delicate, with wide leaps and acciaccaturas. Unpredictable changes of rhythm completely obscure the underlying 4/4 meter. The melody of this recitative recalls the first section by being an elaborated and disguised chromatic descent, from D at the start to the G# in m. 11. Then the cluster is re-introduced. The recitative begins to be punctuated by clusters and dyads that recall the chords of the first section. The recitative melody overall descends and continues to be constructed of downward chromatic figures. Toward the bottom of the descent, pinprick dyads from the very end of m. 13 into m. 14 recall the growing-cluster figure from the opening of the piece. Here, however, the chromatic descent builds up aggressively to a *forte* halt in m. 14 on an accented, major-seventh dyad in low register.

Example 22. Yen, *Movements*, “Frozen March,” mm. 9-12 (beginning of second section).⁵²

The musical score for Example 22 consists of two systems of piano music. The first system covers measures 9 to 11. Measure 9 begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a dynamic marking of *mp*. The melody starts on a whole note D5, followed by a series of eighth notes: E5, F#5, G5, A5, B5, C6, D6, E6, F#6, G6, A6, B6, C7, D7. There are several ornaments (acciaccaturas) above the notes. Trills are marked with '3' and '3'. A dotted line above the staff indicates a *glissando* effect. The second system covers measures 12 to 14. Measure 12 starts with a treble clef, a key signature of one flat (Bb), and a dynamic marking of *f*. The melody continues with a trill marked '3', followed by a series of notes: C7, B6, A6, G6, F#6, E6, D6, C6, B5, A5, G5, F#5, E5, D5. A *glissando* is indicated above the staff. A quintuplet marked '5' is shown above the notes C6, B5, A5, G5, F#5. Measure 13 features a trill marked '3' and a dynamic marking of *mf*. Measure 14 ends with a trill marked '3' and a dynamic marking of *f*. The bass line in both systems is mostly silent, with some notes in measure 14.

⁵² Yen, *Movements*, 10.

The musical score consists of five staves. The top staff (treble clef) begins in measure 16 with a sixteenth-note run, marked with a '6' and 'cresc.'. The second staff (treble clef) contains chords, also marked 'cresc.'. The third staff (bass clef) contains chords, marked 'cresc.'. The fourth staff (bass clef) contains a melodic line with a 'cresc.' marking. The fifth staff (bass clef) contains a melodic line with a 'cresc.' marking. The score transitions to a fortissimo ('f') dynamic in measure 17. The texture becomes denser with clusters and repeated notes, culminating in a 'fortissimo' climax at the end of measure 21.

There is an exchange in m. 17, where the treble takes over the percussive quarter notes and the tenor the active melody. The repeated quarter notes in the treble continue the unrelenting pulse, until the climax in mm. 20-21. The quarter-note chords in the top layer now contain a rising chromatic line while the tenor melody becomes more sprawling and active and the percussive bass chords become bigger and more frequent. At the end of m. 20 the *fortissimo* climax is finally reached, and the quarter-note pulse is erased by *fortissimo* clusters in treble and bass, repeated in irregular rhythm (Example 24). After these heavy clusters are pounded back and forth between registers, the motion suddenly freezes at the end of m. 21.

Example 24. Yen, *Movements*, “Frozen March,” mm. 20-21.⁵⁴

The image shows a musical score for piano, measures 20 and 21. The score is written in a grand staff with four staves. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat). Measure 20 features a complex texture with clusters in the upper register and a rhythmic pattern in the lower register. Measure 21 continues this texture, with a prominent triplet in the upper register and a dynamic marking of *ff* (fortissimo). The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and dynamic markings.

As shown in Example 25, the closing section, mm. 22-26, soon decays to two layers – the cluster-chord figure and repeated Gs in the treble. As at the end of the first section, the clusters continue their growth downward, although the quarter-note pulse begins to be gently disrupted by ties and triplet rhythms, and the dynamic remains soft. The ascending leap of a major seventh in m. 23 echoes that of m. 2, one half-step lower. With the quiet repetition of Ab and G in the treble, the passage takes on a hypnotic effect, and the high, quiet cluster at the end is a new, restful treatment of a dissonant sonority. The notation of this tied cluster indicates that the G in the melody should be sustained longer than the chord, thus ending the piece as it began, on a single pitch.

⁵⁴ Yen, *Movements*, 12.

Example 25. Yen, *Movements*, “Frozen March,” mm. 22-26 (final section).⁵⁵

The image displays a musical score for the final section of "Frozen March" from Yen's *Movements*, spanning measures 22 to 26. The score is written for piano and consists of three systems. The first system (measures 22-23) features a melody in the right hand with a mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic, characterized by quarter notes and triplets. The left hand provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords and triplets. The second system (measures 24-26) begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The right hand has a melodic line with a fermata over the final note, while the left hand continues with complex chordal textures. A specific note in measure 26 is marked with an asterisk (*).

“Frozen March” is based on chromatic scales, a component of the growing-cluster figure used in much of the piece. The steady quarter notes give a march-like quality, but at the same time a dragging effect is created by the slow tempo and the ponderous chords. The chromatic descent that begins the piece returns to start each of the other three sections, though each chromatic line has different starting pitch, character, and continuation. The very gesture of returning to this material with every new section suggests an ongoing thread that is disguised by variation and development. Yen

⁵⁵ Yen, *Movements*, 13, the note Cbb (*) in m. 26 ought to be Cb.

successfully sustains a strong sense of continuity that binds all four contrasting sections into a unified whole.

CHAPTER 5

FANTASY AMOUR

Ming-Hsiu Yen wrote *Fantasy Amour* in 2013 on commission for the Annual Youth Music Competition of the Chinese Music Teachers' Association of Northern California. The piece is based on a popular Taiwanese folk song, "Tao Hua Guo Du," and takes its title from this song, which depicts a couple playing a singing game. The lightheartedness of the tune is reflected in *Fantasy Amour* by its energetic, jocular character. The elements of fantasy and imagination inspired by the song are conveyed through numerous surprises and rapid changes of figuration, articulation, rhythm, register, and dynamics. These changes are so abrupt that the music sounds fragmented, made up of dizzying discontinuities. The "Con brio" indication and the metronome marking of a quarter note equals 112-120 bpm hint at the vigor of this piece. The performance takes roughly five minutes, according to the composer's program notes.⁵⁶ Although it was composed for young pianists, there are many technical challenges making the work suited for concert performance, such as its large leaps in fast tempo and its rapid figurations, often at soft dynamics. In addition, each tempo change is played without any break, so there are no pauses and only short moments during which to catch one's breath.

The title of the folk tune, "Tao Hua Guo Du," approximately means Peach Blossom (Tao Hua) and river crossing (Guo Du). In the original song, a beautiful girl named Peach Blossom plays a game with an older ferryman for free passage across the river. The amusement of the song is the interplay between the two as they exchange

⁵⁶ Yen, Program notes to *Fantasy Amour*.

songs for each month of the year. The girl cunningly wins, avoids marrying the ferryman, and gains free passage. The delicacy indicated by “Peach Blossom” is in contrast to the gruffness of the “ferryman,” and these two contrasting characters interweave throughout *Fantasy Amour*. Yen uses the opening of the tune as a source of thematic material (Example 26), and the prominent fourth leaps in the tune are recalled by the nearly constant emphasis on the interval of the fourth, both melodically and harmonically.

Example 26. The opening measures of “Tao Hua Guo Du.”⁵⁷



Structurally, *Fantasy Amour* is loosely in ABA form. The first section, mm. 1-93, centers on two full presentations of the folk song. A return of the sixteenth-note figures from the opening (m. 88) closes the section. A slower, expressive middle section follows in mm. 94-127. After that, the third section begins with a return of the sixteenths and the folk tune, then closing is marked by a long pedal G that sounds through the last fourteen measures. At m. 171 the familiar sixteenth-note figures appear over this pedal. The piece finally comes to a powerful close on G, which is presented as a tonal center in the closing.

As shown in Example 27, the *fortissimo* first section immediately introduces fragments of the folk tune in sixteenth-note figures that quickly traverse over four

⁵⁷ “Tao Hua Guo Du,” transcribed by Yaoxing Chen, 1, <https://www.tintinpiano.com/sheetmusic/74754?wm=desktop&lang=en>.

octaves, until a breath mark at the very end of m. 6. This mark also allows time for the left hand to make a big jump from the high register of m. 6 to the extremely low A⁰ in m. 7.

Example 27. Yen, *Fantasy Amour*, mm. 1-2 (beginning of first section).⁵⁸



The meter changes to 3/8 in mm. 7-10, where a figure of duple sixteenths followed by an eighth note repeats in a downward sequence with pounded low A that might evoke the ferryman's rough manner (Example 28). Another change of meter in m. 11 initiates a new figure, now faster, with triple rather than duple sixteenths. Its rapid return to the high register might suggest that it is the girl's response. Later the bass takes over this figure at m. 15 and begins to slow down with a *ritardando* in m. 17. In m. 18, the treble melody rises to a widely-spread quartal chord built on D (downbeat of Example 29) in preparation for the entrance of the folk tune, which is transposed to begin on D.

Example 28. Yen, *Fantasy Amour*, mm. 7-16.⁵⁹



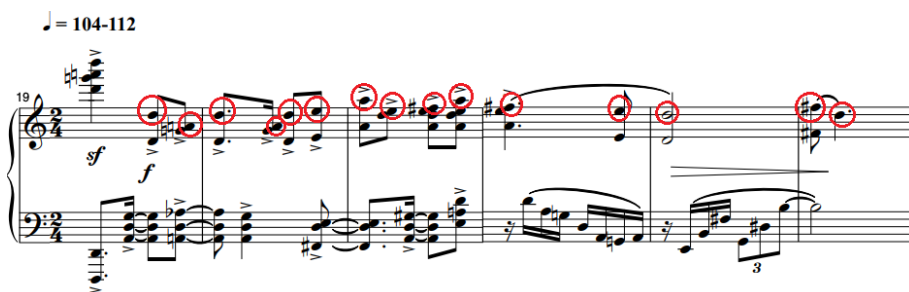
⁵⁸ Yen, *Fantasy Amour* (Unpublished score in PDF format, 2013), 1.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

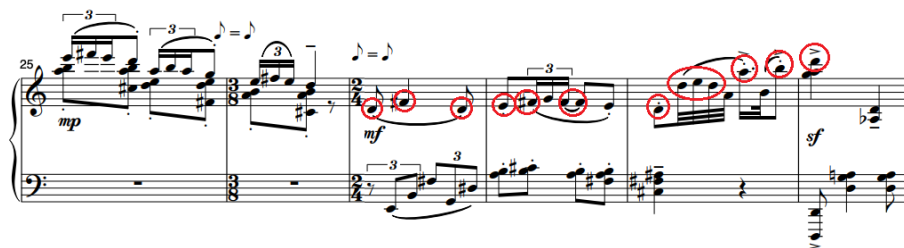


As shown in Example 29, the folk tune, marked *forte*, is nearly intact in the treble, but accompanied by figurations that change quickly. The new tempo indication slows the tune down, which highlights this passage and makes it sound thematic after an introduction. The melody in the treble is doubled in octaves and accompanied at first by accented, syncopated chords in the bass that might mimic the heavy footsteps of the ferryman. The character suddenly changes from ponderous to lyrical with *legato* lines and a *diminuendo* in mm. 22-24. Immediately in mm. 25-26 a new figure with sixteenth-note triplets in a suddenly higher register appears, possibly suggesting a quick response from the girl. This figure interrupts the melody of the folk tune, which resumes in m. 27. The tune here corresponds to the third measure of the original song. It begins low and *legato*, then quickly soars up to finish on the D⁶ in m. 30. Thus Yen has expanded the upward ending of the original, D-E-G as shown in Example 26 above, into a dramatic rise.

Example 29. Yen, *Fantasy Amour*, mm. 19-30, with pitches of the folk tune circled.⁶⁰

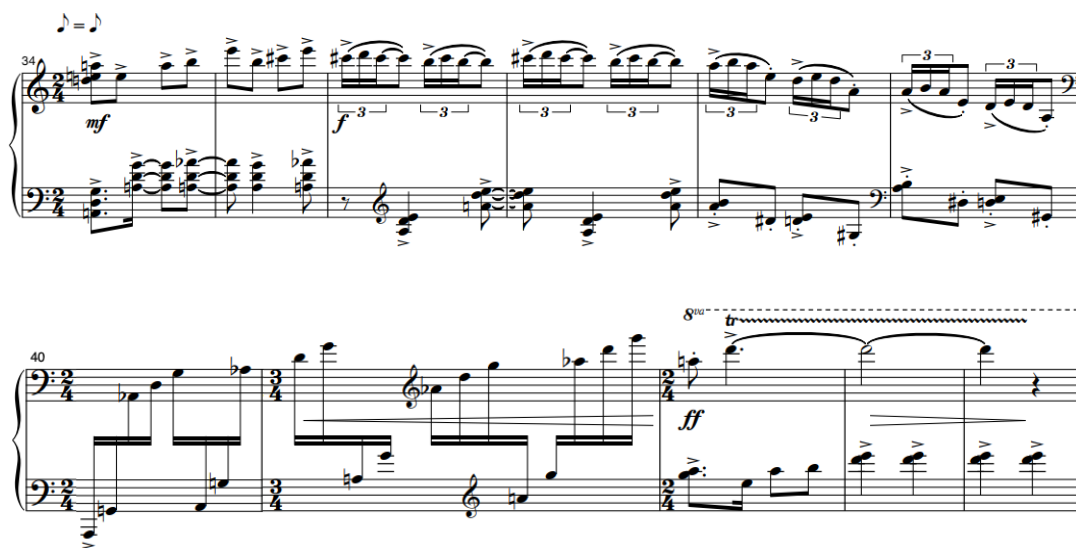


⁶⁰ Yen, *Fantasy Amour*, 2.



What follows this presentation of the folk tune is a developmental passage, mm. 31-55, that mixes together fragments of the tune, especially its distinctive head motive, with many of the quickly-changing figures that were introduced earlier. The head motive appears in mm. 34-35, transposed to start on A and heavily accented. As shown in Example 30, the figure with sixteenth-note triplets that follows is the first in a succession of ideas that descends to the bottom of the keyboard and rises again in a brilliant swoop. In m. 43 the pace begins to slow down with longer note values (quarter notes) and the volume diminishes, preparing for a change of character.

Example 30. Yen, *Fantasy Amour*, mm. 34-44.⁶¹



⁶¹ Yen, *Fantasy Amour*, 3.

In mm. 45-55, the head motive of the tune, still on A, is expanded into a new, *legato* melody over an accompaniment of flowing sixteenths (Example 31). This passage turns from A major into A minor, thus adding to the tune's changing tonal contexts.

Example 31. Yen, *Fantasy Amour*, mm. 45-49.⁶²



The respite of the *legato* variation is broken in m. 56 by a *forte* return of the complete tune, now transposed to E. This setting of the tune is similar to the one on D in mm. 19-30. Example 32 shows the first part of this passage, in which the tune is again in the treble with shifting accompaniment figures below. As before, the tune is interrupted with a two-measure interjection (mm. 62-63). When it resumes, the variation finishes again with an elaborate rise, in this case to E⁶.

Example 32. Yen, *Fantasy Amour*, mm. 56-60, with pitches of the tune circled.⁶³



What follows this variation of the tune is another developmental passage, mm. 68-87, which resembles the one following the presentation of the complete tune on D. As before, it passes through an array of different figurations, landing on another *legato*

⁶² Yen, *Fantasy Amour*, 3.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 4.

melody derived from the tune in mm. 74-79, this one presenting the head motive on G and then on Db. A sudden registral drop in m. 80 initiates a build-up process toward a conclusion (Example 33). The head motive is transposed upward through this passage, interrupted by another interjection in mm. 82-83. The ascent accelerates with an insistent trill in mm. 84-87, leading to a climactic return of the sixteenth-note figure from the opening of the piece.

Example 33. Yen, *Fantasy Amour*, mm. 80-88.⁶⁴

The sixteenths, which were introductory before, serve here as a preface to the next section; at the same time, their recall rounds off the first, big section. After an unstoppable torrent of sixteenth notes, the pace slows down with longer note values (eighth notes) and a *ritardando* in m. 93, preparing for the entrance of the middle section.

The middle section follows, from m. 94 to m. 126, still based on the folk tune, but with a new character. It is marked *Andante* and *expressivo*, affording a relief after the energetic first section. The *expressivo* character is created in part by *legato* lines, but at

⁶⁴ Yen, *Fantasy Amour*, 5-6.

the same time quick-changing figures continue to provide a lively atmosphere. The pervasive use of fourths, particularly in the melody, helps to unify this section with the others despite the outward contrasts. This section consists of two parts, each opening with a similar idea.

As shown in Example 34, the middle section begins with an ascending arpeggiated figure in the bass, and the head motive of the tune emerges in disguised form in the treble. The long interplay of two voices, treble and bass, suggests a conversation between the girl and the ferryman. The rising arpeggiated figure is particularly prominent as it recurs in the bass throughout the section. The bass figure repeats with increasingly smaller values in mm. 94-97, providing a forward motion toward a series of hurried trills in suddenly high register at m. 98. The repeated whole step A to G here recalls the many whole steps in the original tune.

Example 34. Yen, *Fantasy Amour*, mm. 93-100, with pitches of the head motive circled.⁶⁵

The musical score for Example 34 consists of two systems of piano music. The first system covers measures 93 to 97, and the second system covers measures 98 to 100. The tempo is marked 'Andante; espressivo' with a quarter note equal to 72-76 beats per minute. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The time signature is 3/4. The score includes a 'Middle Section' label in red. Red circles highlight specific notes in both the treble and bass staves, which are identified as pitches of the head motive. The score contains various musical notations including triplets, trills, and a 'con ped.' marking.

⁶⁵ Yen, *Fantasy Amour*, 6-7.

A *legato* melody in mm. 101-104 lingers on the whole step between D and E before the lull is broken by a trill and a rapid descent to another appearance of the head motive, this one on G at m. 107 (circled in Example 35). It appears with a suddenly slower pace with longer notes and then quickly rises to extremely high register. The playful trills in mm. 109-110 and the rapid upward flourish in m. 112 continue the acceleration that culminates with the quiet but busy sixteenths in mm. 113-115, the end of the first part.

Example 35. Yen, *Fantasy Amour*, mm. 106-115.⁶⁶

Measures 116-117 are like mm. 94-95 and restart the middle section (Example 36). The rising bass figure that marks the restart becomes more dramatic by quickly dropping the volume from *fortissimo* to *mezzo forte*. As before, the head motive of the tune appears in the treble; however, now, the falling fourth is preceded by a rising one. After this variation of the head motive, the repeating trills and alternating figures (notably the whole-step alternation between pp E and F#) with a *crescendo* and *accelerando* could epitomize the girl's building excitement. The motion abruptly stops on a quarter rest with

⁶⁶ Yen, *Fantasy Amour*, 7-8.

a fermata in m. 122. The reduction of dynamic and tempo at m. 123 is the start of a build-up to the third section. After a descending sequence, fragments of the folk tune appear at a suddenly faster pace with sixteenth notes climbing into higher register in mm. 125-126. The pace begins to slow down with a *ritardando* in m. 126, in anticipation of the return of the opening of the piece.

Example 36. Yen, *Fantasy Amour*, mm. 116-126 (second part of middle section).⁶⁷

The final section opens with a return of the twenty-measure, sixteenth-note introduction, followed by the presentation of the complete folk tune as before, but slightly shortened by the omission of the interjection that was in mm. 25-26. The

⁶⁷ Yen, *Fantasy Amour*, 8-9.

following passage, mm. 154-165, pushes toward an exultant closing. At first the fourth down is echoed, then the head motive, heavily accented, repeats in an ascending sequence and grows with a long *crescendo* supported by weighty syncopated chords in the bass (Example 37). The process is interrupted with a sudden drop in dynamic and register at m. 163, and the bass and treble begin to move outward to the widely-spaced chord on G that initiates a long closing pedal point (downbeat of Example 38).

Example 37. Yen, *Fantasy Amour*, mm. 157-165.⁶⁸

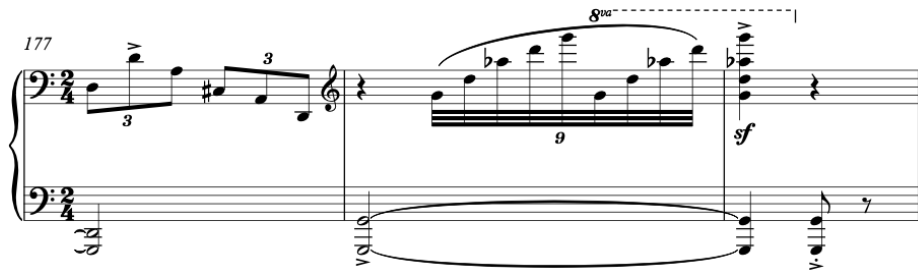
With this quartal chord at m. 166, the bass joins with a constant tremolo on G (Example 38). It is the start of the closing. The long pedal G will sustain through the last fourteen measures. The quartal chord is followed by an ascending sequence of the head motive beginning at suddenly low register. At the same time, the bass tremolo adds a restless propulsion with a *crescendo* building to an inexorable climax. The quarter-note triplet in m. 170 suddenly pulls back the forward motion, and the climax at m. 171 is marked by a return of the sixteenth notes from the opening, now serving to end the piece.

⁶⁸ Yen, *Fantasy Amour*, 11.

After an endless run of sixteenth notes spanning over three octaves, the pace briefly slows in m. 177, followed by a thirty-second-note arpeggio that dashes up three octaves to a *sforzando* chord in extremely high register as the girl finally wins the game. A short, staccato G octave punctuates the end of the piece. The G tonal center of this closing is foreshadowed by the folk tune on G in the first seven sixteenth notes of the opening.

Example 38. Yen, *Fantasy Amour*, mm. 166-179.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Yen, *Fantasy Amour*, 11-12.



The rapid changes throughout *Fantasy Amour* are so sudden and pervasive that the result seems constantly interrupted and fragmented despite the continuous rhythmic drive. The appearances of the pentatonic folk tune stand out in the fully chromatic environment and are moments of recognition for the listener. The portions between them are unified by appearances of the distinctive opening of the tune, almost like a fugue subject. The interval of the fourth from this head motive is an important element of identification, though Yen also develops the whole steps from the latter part of the tune. Yen further strengthens the unity by bringing back the sixteenth-note figures of the opening at structural points. The first section begins and ends with this figure, and so also does the third. At the same time, the reuse of the figures of the opening at the very end gives the piece a convincing conclusion. Relating to the story of the song, this piece shows Yen's capacity to musically portray the couple singing in their game with great color and variety, which perfectly interprets the meaning of the title, *Fantasy Amour*.

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APPENDIX A
PERMISSION AGREEMENT FOR USING EXCERPTS FROM MING-HSIU YEN'S
PIANO WORKS

I, Ming-Hsiu Yen (Composer), who composed and own the copyrights to

the works entitled:

The Forgotten Corner

Movements

Fantasy Amour

agree to allow Wen-Huei Chang to use excerpts from the above mentioned works in

her research document, "Four Piano Works of Ming-Hsiu Yen."

Ming-Hsiu Yen
Print Name

May 15, 2009
Date

Ming-Hsiu Yen
Signature