

THE CLARINET MUSIC OF JULIAN YU Volume 2

Old and Yu

Robert Schubert *clarinet*

with Trio Varie

and String Quartet

move



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The clarinet music of Julian Yu, *Volume 2*

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Chinese Folksong Suite (2014) for clarinet and string quartet

- 1** Women on patrol 2'50"
- 2** A patch of willow trees 1'55"
- 3** Flower riddle 1'11"
- 4** Flying the kite 1'27"
- 5** Guest from afar, please stay awhile 1'53"
- 6** Dry boat dance 1'36"

Classical Stories (2014) for clarinet and string quartet

- 7** Prologue – Two Swans under Two Moons 2'57"
- 8** Compound Tragedy 2'15"
- 9** Paganiniana 1'00"
- 10** Phone Call to Mozart 0'41"
- 11** What's for Elise? 2'43"
- 12** Finished Symphony 1'24"
- 13** Why are Butterflies Sad? 1'43"
- 14** Stepping Up Birthday 0'59"
- 15** Harmonic Phrases at an Exhibition 3'21"
- 16** Caterpoint 1'31"
- 17** To Comrade Shostakovich 2'23"
- 18** Epilogue – Two Swans under Two Moons 2'59"



Symphony from the Old World (Dvorak in China) (2014) for clarinet and string quartet

- 19** Allegro molto 3'44"
- 20** Largo 3'41"
- 21** Scherzo – molto vivace 2'07"
- 22** Allegro con fuoco 3'34"

Mozartiana (2008) for clarinet, cello and piano

- 23** Allegretto 2'59"
- 24** Moderato 4'36"
- 25** Andante 6'54"
- 26** Quodlibet – Allegro 5'59"

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The first volume in this series of the clarinet music of Julian Yu, *China Wind*, demonstrated the composer's mastery of the language of 20th century Western art music and hinted at the path of East-West hybridisation that he was beginning to develop. The music was profound and (mostly) serious.

Old and Yu (the implication is of course "Old and New") presents the lighter side of Julian Yu; however the mastery of craft is very much evident and his "hybrid" style is explored in great depth and variety of application. We have the opportunity to

witness a master at play, blissfully exploring and experimenting, weaving an amazing array of musical threads and demonstrating an incredible depth of scholarship and research, all in the name of beauty, fun and love of life.

The album begins with a suite of six Chinese Folksongs arranged for clarinet and string quartet. The rich tradition of Chinese folksong represents the "Old" in the album's title, and this melodic material is woven into the texture of many of the works on the CD. In the folksong suite Julian has given the Chinese melodies a new set of clothes in the form of a quintet of modern, Western

instruments. The original melodies are presented with no modifications, variations, developments or modulations whatsoever so the listener can experience the sheer beauty of the melodies. As we progress through the works on the album this melodic material is treated with astonishing imagination and creativity. In Yu's hands the boundaries between East and West really can dissolve resulting in a whole brimming with a mischievous humour and at the same time a profound understanding of the range and depth of human emotional expression.





Chinese Folksong Suite (2014) for clarinet and string quartet

“Women on patrol” and “A patch of willow trees” are both Shanxi folk songs. After 1949 the name of the latter was later changed to “The land has been returned to its original owners”. Many Chinese folk songs have been sung to different words at different times, and in some cases the melody seems to have little to do with the text. The Hebei folk songs “Flower riddle” and “Flying the kite” are both very well-known. “Flower riddle” takes the form of “question-answer”, which can be heard in the dialogue between the different registers of the clarinet. (“What flower blooms in the spring?” “In spring, the jasmine blossoms.”) “Guest from afar, please stay awhile” is a new folk song notated in the 1950s. It is a mixture of melodies from the Sani tribe of Yunnan province combined

with a traditional “Shepherd’s tune”. The bold, unconstrained, humorous traditional Shaanxi folk song “Dry boat dance” closes this suite in an atmosphere of celebration.

Classical Stories (2014) for clarinet and string quartet

Julian Yu first met the pianist Ke Lin in 2012. They both joined a Chinese cultural school orchestra on its tour to China, and in those concerts Ke Lin performed Julian’s piano pieces *China Rhapsody* and *Impromptu*. Yu was very impressed with his “innate musical understanding, passion, dedication, enthusiasm and virtuosity.” When the pianist requested a set of piano pieces for his young daughter to learn, the composer responded with *Cutetudes* (‘cute’ + ‘études’), a set of twenty classically-related, humorous pieces

for solo piano. It is from this set of pieces that the eleven pieces in this clarinet quintet version are drawn.

Prologue – Two Swans under Two Moons:

Beethoven and Debussy provide the moonlight with swans courtesy of Saint-Saëns and Tchaikovsky.

Compound Tragedy: The Chinese tragic story of the Butterfly Lovers meets its Western counterparts in *Tristan and Isolde* and *Romeo and Juliet*.

Paganiniana: The Chinese folk tune “100 Birds Salute the Phoenix” combines simultaneously with the famous 24th Caprice by Paganini. Julian was surprised to find that they “go perfectly together.”

Phone Call to Mozart: We are always encouraged to turn our mobile phones off before the concert begins – this is why! Julian also said to me that he is often bothered by phone calls when he's composing and the thought occurred to him, "what if they had mobile phones in Mozart's day?"

What's for Elise? Searching the world of music for a birthday present *for Elise*, but we just can't seem to make up our mind.

Finished Symphony: Julian has engaged the help of Tchaikovsky and Beethoven to bring Franz Schubert's "Unfinished Symphony" to an emphatic conclusion in the best "classical" fashion. Even a damaged vinyl record and a jumpy stylus can't stop the symphony from finishing!

Why are Butterflies Sad? The title is in the music (by Schumann, Grieg and Beethoven), literally!

Stepping Up Birthday: The Chinese folksong called "Stepping Up" provides the quirky rhythmic interest of this makeover of the popular birthday song. Julian told me the true story of a high ranking Chinese official who, having given his speech and wishing to lead the audience in a song, proceeded inadvertently to sing the words and rhythm of one song to the melody of a different song altogether! This mismatch caused much hilarity and provided the idea for this piece.

Harmonic Phrases at an Exhibition: Here we have an exhibition of famous harmonic phrases derived from works by Mussorgsky, Brahms, Dvořák, Debussy, Tchaikovsky, Chopin, Wagner, Mendelssohn, Rachmaninov, Samuel Barber and Scriabin.

Caterpoint: Of course, it has to be the clarinet playing the part of the cat from Prokofiev's famous "Peter and the wolf." But wait, something is different - is that Counterpoint? Yes, in two parts. Julian Yu has written an encyclopaedic opus called *The Young Person's Guide to Composition* in which the nursery tune "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star" is put through almost all of the compositional styles imaginable, including a thorough treatment in all types, or species, of counterpoint. After all that, when faced with the clarinet's characteristic theme, I think he just couldn't help it!

To Comrade Shostakovich: The melody is originally sung by children's choir in Shostakovich's cantata, *Song of the Forest*. This song reminded Julian of a Chinese folk dance and so the pairing was made. He didn't stop there though: throughout the piece, Shostakovich's signature motif (D E flat C B) appears many times; the "Internationale" can be heard; and there is also a quote from Shostakovich's Symphony No 7.

Epilogue – Two Swans under Two Moons: This piece, more than any of the others on the CD, changed almost daily during the period in which the recording was made. No

less than four different versions of the middle section were composed. The musicians would arrive to find new music on the stand for a piece we thought was "in the can". In the end I put it to Julian that we include two of them as bookends for the suite, and he happily agreed.

Symphony from the Old World (Dvořák in China) (2014) for clarinet and string quartet

One Saturday afternoon in 2014 there was a knock on my door. To my surprise, on the doorstep were Julian Yu and his wife Marion. Julian never appears unannounced, so I immediately wondered what was afoot.

Julian: (hopping excitedly from side to side): Robert, are you busy? Do you have a moment to listen to something?

Me: Sure! ... Come in!

Julian: (waving a USB stick in the direction of my computer): Tell me what you think. I've just finished. I think it's very interesting, and it's wonderful how the Chinese melody and Western harmony fit together so beautifully!

I immediately recognised the music, and then suddenly I didn't. It began as the Dvořák "New World" symphony played by a computer-generated string quartet, but then the clarinet entered with a totally unexpected melody. This continued for ten amazing minutes. Julian had condensed the symphony down to its ten "essential" minutes and replaced Dvořák's melody with Chinese folksongs that did indeed fit beautifully with

Dvořák's original harmony.

Me: (with mixed feelings of admiration, bewilderment and amusement): This is amazing! What motivated you to think of this?

Julian: Well, when the average person goes to a concert, what is it that they react to and come away with? Largely, it's the recognition of the familiar. The wonderful experience of hearing well loved music is nourishing and very satisfying and enjoyable. Now, imagine a Chinese person hearing Western music for the first time, as happened to me and so many others when China opened its doors after the Cultural Revolution. I still remember how hard it was at first for me to find anything to relate to in Western art music. Even now that I have studied Western composition, sometimes I can't resist the temptation to mix in some old familiar favourites ... and my Chinese friends enjoy it too! Coincidentally, a Chinese music critic recently asked me if I could produce a piece based on Western music but incorporating Chinese elements. So, the idea for this reworking of a famous Western "Classic" occurred to me. As I worked on the piece it was marvellous how well the two elements, Chinese melody and Western harmony, went together, and I think Chinese listeners will smile to hear melodies they know and love so well in this very unexpected, Western, setting. I do admit I was "forced" to compose one original melody when I couldn't find a traditional one. Only one though, not bad!

It was a very interesting process, the



rehearsing and recording of this piece. Early on the string players would find themselves launching mentally into Dvořák's original melodies while they physically were called upon to play entirely different music. The effect was much hilarity and a new appreciation of the strength of old habits! By the end of the process I am just as moved by Julian's arrangement as the original and this piece has increased my appreciation of the depth and beauty of Chinese music and our shared humanity which underlies our cultural differences. The second movement, a moment of exquisite beauty and emotional depth, is a perfect example of this. This piece is challenging on many levels to both performer and listener, and I believe it is well worth the effort. I thank Julian for the love and skill he has poured into it. It is an emotional and compositional tour de force.

Mozartiana (2008) for clarinet, cello and piano

Like many of Julian Yu's works, *Mozartiana* has appeared in many guises. The original version was commissioned by the Ruan Ensemble of the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing. It has now been arranged for many different instrumental combinations, including this one for clarinet, cello and piano. Julian was inspired by the work of composer Alfred Schnittke (1934-1988) who liked to juxtapose old and new musical styles in his works: for example, one of his works is entitled *Moz-Art a la Haydn*. Another strong influence is the *Sinfonia* (1968-69) by Luciano Berio (1925-2003), which uses extensive quotation of other composers' works. In the case of *Mozartiana*, Julian has juxtaposed well-known music of W.A. Mozart and Chinese folk songs, melodic fragments from Peking opera and so on, resulting in an interesting melee of East and West. There are four movements.

Allegretto: "Xi yang yang" ("Joy")
overlapping Mozart's *Piano Sonata in C Major*, K.545.

Moderato: "Feng Yang Flower Drum" with Mozart's serenade *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik*, K.525.

Andante: Yu's original melodic material generated by Mozart's harmony from his Prelude and Fugue, K 394. Unlike the rest of the piece, this movement is serious

and profound. For all its indebtedness to Mozart there is a certain Brahmsian quality, especially in the relationship of clarinet and cello.

Quodlibet – Allegro: The title is a Latin word meaning "what you will".

In music, a quodlibet is a composition in which several well-known melodies are combined for humorous effect, and as such it serves Julian's purposes admirably. Two famous examples of quodlibets are *The Cries of London* by Orlando Gibbons and the finale of J.S. Bach's *Goldberg Variations*. Terms related to quodlibet technique include *fricassée* (French: "hash"), *ensalada* (Spanish: "salad"), and *centone* (Italian: "patchwork"). Here, themes from Mozart's operas, symphonies, concertos and sonatas are tossed into the musical salad along with several Chinese folk tunes.

NOTES: ROBERT SCHUBERT



The string quartet,
Julian Yu and
Robert Schubert

Julian Yu – composer

Born in Beijing in 1957, Julian Yu first composed music at the age of 12. In 1973 he studied composition in Beijing. In 1980 he was sent to Japan to study in Tokyo. He migrated to Australia in 1985 and in 1988 he was selected for a Composition Fellowship at Tanglewood, where he was awarded the Koussevitzky Tanglewood Composition Prize for that year. Yu has won numerous prizes and much recognition for his composition.

Robert Schubert – clarinet

Robert Schubert graduated from the Victorian College of the Arts in 1982, and then studied in Toronto and Chicago. From 1988 to 1996 he was Principal Clarinet with the Orchestra Ensemble Kanazawa, Japan. Active as a chamber musician and soloist, he has performed with the Melbourne Symphony and Orchestra Victoria. Mark Pollard, Julian Yu, Chan Hae Lee, Tetsuya Nishibe and Peter Tahourdin have all composed works for Robert. From 1996 to 2017 he was Lecturer in Woodwind at the Victorian College of the Arts, now the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music,

Melbourne University. He formed *Trio Varie* with cellist Virginia Kable and his wife, pianist Akemi Schubert in 2017.

Lorraine Hook – violin 1

Lorraine Hook has been a member of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra's First Violin Section since 1986. Lorraine enjoys a varied musical life performing, tutoring and teaching.

Deborah Goodall – violin 2

Deborah has been a member of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra's First Violin section since 1988.

Gabrielle Halloran – viola

Gabby took up a position with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra in 1993 and enjoys a busy musical life in Melbourne.

Virginia Kable – cello

Virginia Kable is an established Melbourne-based orchestral and chamber musician. In 2001 she founded the Southbank Players with colleagues from the Melbourne Symphony. In 2017 she joined with clarinettist Robert Schubert and pianist Akemi Schubert to form Trio Varie.

Akemi Schubert – piano

Akemi Schubert was born in Tokyo, Japan. She graduated from the prestigious Musashino Music College in Tokyo and studied further in Chicago. She has appeared regularly in recital and in live broadcast for the ABC and 3MBS. Akemi Schubert is a sought-after teacher, chamber musician and accompanist and is an official accompanist at the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music, Melbourne University.



Robert Schubert – Clarinets (in B flat, A and C)

Lorraine Hook – Violin 1 (tracks 1-22)

Deborah Goodall – Violin 2 (tracks 1-22)

Gabby Halloran – Viola (tracks 1-22)

Virginia Kable – Cello (tracks 1-26)

TRIO VARIE (tracks 23-26)

Robert Schubert – Clarinet (in C and B flat)

Virginia Kable – Cello

Akemi Schubert – Piano

Photos by Yean Leng Lim (except Martin Wright: page 8 and Marion Gray: page 3)

Recorded, edited and mastered at Move Records studio