

China Wind

Robert Schubert
plays the clarinet music of
Julian Yu

move

中国风

I have been an admirer of composer Julian Yu's music ever since we met in 1996 at the Melbourne International Festival of the Arts. I have since commissioned a number of works from Yu with the support of the Australia Council. China Wind represents the fruits of our collaboration. Each work owes aspects of its conception to the composer's native China and to the characteristics of the featured wind instrument, the clarinet.

The Melbourne International Festival of the Arts originally commissioned **Atanos** in 1995 for performance by a group of French musicians at one of four concerts entitled *Homage to Louise Hanson Dyer* that did not eventuate. Ensemble I with myself playing clarinet presented the world premiere of the piece on 25 October 1996 at the Great Hall, National Gallery of Victoria as part of the Melbourne International Festival of the Arts.

For the previous decade, I had been living and working in Japan, mainly with Hiroyuki Iwaki's Orchestra Ensemble Kanazawa. During that time, I had been fortunate to work with some of Japan's finest composers, including Takemitsu, Ichiyangi, Ikebe and Yuasa. I recognised in Yu's music the same craftsmanship, sensitivity to timbral nuance and structural proportion that I had found in the best contemporary music of Japan. It came as no surprise to me, then, to learn that Yu had studied in Japan with Joji Yuasa and Shinichiro Ikebe.

Yu has always been fascinated by the organization, discipline and formularisation of Western classical music. These qualities, which also belong to Chinese folk music, can imply limitation, but Yu builds from such foundations with great freedom. The music of *Atanos* is non-programmatic and follows its own inner laws. Yu has adopted the Chinese method of ornamentation, tapping into the inner structure of his

inherited musical tradition rather than superficially borrowing its sounds and scales. To adopt the structures and mental processes of his musical predecessors, rather than their raw material: this is the great lesson Yu learned from his mentors, Joji Yuasa and Shinichiro Ikebe.

Yu originally wrote *Sol Do La Re* as an exercise in counterpoint for string quartet while he was studying in Japan in 1985. While not strictly serialist, the piece is built around a ground bass of twelve tones. The tone row is arranged pentatonically, and is repeated ten times as a ground bass, above which the music gradually unfolds as a work of extraordinary beauty and emotional intensity. In 1996, I urged Yu to write a version for clarinet and string trio. The premiere of this version took place on September 9, 1999 at the Religious Centre, Monash University, Melbourne.

In 1997, I asked Yu to write a new work featuring the clarinet. I premiered **The Lamentation of Micius**, for clarinet and string quartet, on 11 October 1998 at Chapel Off Chapel, Prahran, Melbourne.



Yu had come across some ancient music known as *Micius Laments the Silk* while he was a student at the Central Conservatory of Music, Beijing. Micius, an ancient philosopher, had lamented that pure silk was dyed with different colours, and likened this process to what happens to people when they mix with the world, taking on the "colours" of their environment, and losing their purity and innocence. *Micius Laments the Silk* was written for a kind of zither called the *ch'in*, an instrument played by scholars whose music was considered to be highly spiritual. For the ancient Chinese scholar there were four skills it was imperative to cultivate: chess, calligraphy, painting and playing the *ch'in*. Yu made some early attempts to write his own version of *Micius Laments the Silk*, but these came to nothing until, many years later, I began urging Yu to consider writing a new work. Yu felt that this musical idea was perfectly suited to the clarinet quintet.

While *The Lamentation of Micius* includes no material from the original *ch'in* piece, Yu uses the strings to imitate the sound of the *ch'in*. The piece starts with pizzicato-glissandi, first on the solo cello and then on all of the string instruments. The long notes of the clarinet combine with this pizzicato-glissando effect to create a meditative atmosphere. Gradually, all of the parts become active, introducing a spectrum of emotions including anger, fear, frustration, pity, sadness and hopelessness. The piece ends as it begins, with the meditative sound of the *ch'in* subsiding into silence.

My next collaboration with Yu resulted in the **Concerto on Chinese Themes for Clarinet and String Orchestra**, commissioned in partnership with conductor Marco van Pagee and the Victorian College of the Arts. The Australian Broadcasting Commission recorded the piece in 2004,

and since then it has been broadcast many times. I first performed the work in concert with Marco van Pagee conducting the strings of the Victorian College of the Arts at The BMW Edge in Federation Square, Melbourne on August 21, 2004. I gave the professional world premiere of the concerto with Jeffrey Crellin conducting the Monash Academy in the Melbourne Recital Centre on September 23, 2011 at a concert honouring Julian Yu as part of the 2011 Chinese International Arts Festival.

The concerto's raw material comes from northern Chinese instrumental music for wind and percussion, a recognized genre often played at weddings and other celebrations. This is exuberant music, full of easily-remembered melodies, strident sounds and striking rhythms. Yu hoped that Australian audiences would find the work unique and exciting, while Chinese listeners would recognize the melodies and feel nostalgia for their homeland.

In seeking a brighter, exuberant sound for this concerto, Yu has written for clarinet in C. This instrument is less commonly heard than the more regularly used clarinets in B flat and A. The clarinet in C is smaller and brighter in tone, and brings a distinctive quality to the outer movements. Although I play the second movement on this recording with the clarinet in B flat, I have played the entire concerto in more recent performances on the clarinet in C.

The concerto broadly follows the traditional classical form and consists of three movements. The first movement starts, unusually, with a lyrical, leisurely and expressive cadenza. The following moderato section introduces a beautiful melody from Shandong Province called *Yi Zhi Hua* (One Flower), famous throughout China as a solo piece for the *suona* (a Chinese double-reed wind instrument). This is followed by an allegro section, then a prestissimo section that brings the first movement to a lively climax.

The second movement is slow, in keeping with classical concerto form. A wistful theme, taken from a *suona* piece from Hebei Province, is played first in the lower register of the clarinet, then moves to the higher registers, after which the cello takes over the theme, while the clarinet plays a counter melody above.

The third movement is based on a famous piece for wind and percussion from Hebei Province called *Tao Jin Ling*. *Tao jin* means to pan for gold or seek a fortune. The atmosphere is exuberant. The two occurrences of a long trill are traditionally played using circular breathing, and are continued until the audience breaks into applause. The original drum and gong interludes can be heard in the percussive string passages at the beginning, middle and end of the movement. The concerto closes with a virtuosic cadenza accompanied by woodblocks in the style of traditional Chinese opera.

Silent And Alone is a setting of three poems by Li Yu (937-978), the last emperor of the Southern Tang Dynasty. Imprisoned after he was overthrown, Li Yu wrote in his diary that he "washed his face with his tears every day", so miserable did he feel. Three poems Li Yu wrote during this time are titled *Since We Parted*, *Silent and Alone* and *Lingering Thoughts*.

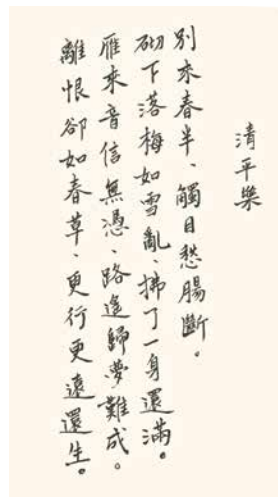
1 Since We Parted

Since we parted, spring is over.

Everything I see is filled with sorrow.

Below the steps plum blossoms whirl in the snowflakes;

No sooner brushed away, than I am buried again.



*The wild geese have brought no news of home.
The roads are long, my dreams are thinning out.
Sickness for home is like the grass in spring;
The farther you travel, the thicker it grows.*

2 Silent and Alone

Silent and alone I climb the west tower.

The moon is like a hook.

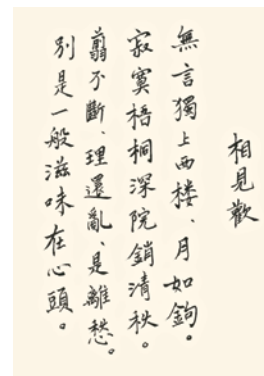
Desolate wu-t'ung tree in the shady courtyard imprison clear autumn.

Cut, not severed,

Disentangled, not unraveled;

The sorrow of parting

Is a strange and unknown flavour in the heart.



3 Lingering Thoughts

One range of mountains,

Two ranges of mountains,

The mountains far, the sky high, the misty water cold.

My deepest thoughts have reddened the maple leaves.

Chrysanthemums blossom.

Chrysanthemums fade,

The wild geese fly high, the traveler has not returned.

The wind and moon hover on the bamboo screen.

(translated by Hsiung Ting)

Yu first composed **Silent and Alone** for tenor and orchestra in 2000, then subsequently created a version for tenor and piano that was first performed in Korea in 2006. At my request, Yu created a version for clarinet and string quartet. The piece has also been performed in a version for soprano and orchestra.

The present incarnation adds the piano (replacing the harp of the orchestral version) to the string quartet, while the clarinet sings the vocal

line. When Yu reworks a composition into another form, the new version is no mere transcription, as each new medium suggests fresh nuances of timbre and expression. During the recording of this version of **Silent and Alone** for this CD, Yu was still experimenting, making changes to each musician's part almost until the final take. According to Yu, "writing such seemingly simple things is the culmination of all my compositional experience, a distillation of all the styles and techniques I have explored in my life".

China Wind demonstrates Julian Yu's remarkable versatility, emotional breadth and mastery of compositional style and technique. It represents a significant addition to the catalogue of masterworks for the clarinet, and I am grateful that I have had the good fortune to know and collaborate with one of Australia's finest composers. I certainly look forward to continuing our personal and artistic friendship for many years to come. I can only reiterate the words of the maestro Leonard Bernstein before he awarded Yu the Koussevitzky Tanglewood Prize for composition in 1988, "Julian, you are a genius!"

Notes: Robert Schubert

Julian Yu

Born in Beijing in 1957, Julian Yu surprised his non-musical family by starting to compose music at the age of 12. In 1973 he left school early to study composition at the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing, and later joined the teaching staff there. In 1980 he was sent to Japan to study at the Tokyo College of Music under Joji Yuasa



and Shin-Ichiro Ikebe. After his return in 1982 he resumed teaching and wrote a lot of music for film, television and radio as a "ghost composer" under other people's names. In 1985 he migrated to Australia. In 1988, he was selected for a Composition Fellowship at Tanglewood, where he studied with Hans Werner Henze and Oliver Knussen, and was awarded the Koussevitzky Tanglewood Composition Prize for that year.

Since then, Yu has won numerous prizes and much recognition for his composition, including an Australia Council Composer Fellowship and grants from the Australia Council and other organisations such as the Ian Potter Foundation. In 1991 and 1994, an international jury unanimously selected his work for the 1st and 2nd triennial Paul Lowin Orchestral Prizes (Australia's richest award for composition). Other prizes include the Zen-On Piano 2000 composition prize, and awards in the 56th Japan Music Concours, the 35th Premio Musicale Citta di Trieste, and the 1987, 1989 and 1990 International New Music Composers' Competition (USA).

Robert Schubert

Robert Schubert graduated from the Victorian College of the Arts in 1982 having studied with Isobel Carter-Stockigt and Phillip Miechel (Principal Clarinet, Melbourne Symphony Orchestra). From 1983 to 1985, he studied clarinet with James Campbell at the Royal Conservatory of Music, Toronto, Canada and with James Morton (Principal Clarinet, National Arts Orchestra of Canada), and with Larry Combs (Principal Clarinet, Chicago Symphony Orchestra).

In 1988 Hiroyuki Iwaki appointed him Principal Clarinet with the Orchestra Ensemble Kanazawa, Japan, a position he held until his return to Australia in 1996. During this period, he also performed as guest clarinet with the NHK Orchestra in Tokyo and guest principal clarinet with the Hiroshima Symphony Orchestra.

Active as a chamber musician and soloist, he appeared frequently as soloist with Orchestra Ensemble Kanazawa. He has recorded with the Orchestra Ensemble Kanazawa on Deutsche Gramophone, Victor and Sony labels. In Melbourne Robert has performed with the Melbourne Symphony and Orchestra Victoria, and has appeared in both the Melbourne International Festival and in live broadcast for the ABC.

Mark Pollard, Julian Yu, Chan Hae Lee, Tetsuya Nishibe and Peter Tahourdin have all composed works for Robert, many of which have been recorded and broadcast by ABC Classic FM.

Since 1996 he has held the position of Lecturer in Woodwind at the Victorian College of the Arts, now the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music, Melbourne University.



My musical links with Asia began when I joined Orchestra Ensemble Kanazawa in Japan in 1988. I would here like to express my gratitude to the late maestro Hiroyuki Iwaki, and the members of Orchestra Ensemble Kanazawa as it is through them that I came to appreciate the contemporary music of Asia and Japan in particular.

ROBERT SCHUBERT

I was extremely fortunate when Robert Schubert and his pianist wife Akemi, both consummate musicians, moved to Melbourne in 1996 and struck up a lasting friendship with me and my wife, Marion. I would like to express my gratitude to Robert for bringing this CD to life, as well as his impeccable musicianship and technique, his Asian soul which so readily understands the nuances of my music, his vision and enthusiasm, his unwavering faith in me as a composer, his apt sense of humour, and continuing encouragement and friendship. I hope you will enjoy the pieces on this CD, which are the result of all of the above.

JULIAN YU

Atanos, Sol Do La Re, and Lamentation of Micius were produced by Robert Schubert and recorded by Robin Grey in the Monash University School of Music Auditorium in 2000

Concerto on Chinese Themes was produced by Lydia Warren and recorded by Peter Taplin in the Iwaki Auditorium, Southbank, Melbourne (Australian Broadcasting Corporation) in 2004

Silent and Alone was recorded by Vaughan McAlley and Martin Wright in Move Records studio in 2012

Photographs taken by Julian Yu - pages 1, 2, 4, 5 (right)
Marion Gray - page 5 (left)
Kam Vurlow - page 6
Kevin Rafferty - page 7



MOVE RECORDS STUDIO 29 AUGUST 2012

Robert Schubert: *clarinet*
Derek Jones: *flute & piccolo* [Atanos]
Isin Cakmakcioglu: *violin 1* [Atanos, Sol Do La Re, The Lamentation of Micius]
Lorraine Hook: *violin 1* [Silent and Alone]
Deborah Goodall: *violin 2* [Atanos, The Lamentation of Micius, Silent and Alone]
Danielle Arcaro: *viola* [Atanos, Sol Do La Re, The Lamentation of Micius]
Gabby Halloran: *viola* [Silent and Alone]
Rachel Atkinson: *cello* [Atanos, Sol Do La Re, The Lamentation of Micius]
Virginia Kable: *cello* [Silent and Alone]
Akemi Schubert: *piano* [Silent and Alone]
Marco Van Pagg: *conductor* [Concerto on Chinese Themes]
Victorian College of the Arts Strings [Concerto on Chinese Themes]

The recordings of *Atanos, Sol Do La Re, and Lamentation of Micius* were assisted by the Australia Council
The compositions of *Lamentation of Micius* and *Concerto on Chinese Themes* were assisted by Australia Council



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Concerto on Chinese Themes for Clarinet and Strings

- 1** Moderato 10'52"
- 2** Lento 3'40"
- 3** Vivace 5'35"

4 The Lamentation of Micius for Clarinet Quintet 9'50"

5 Atanos for Flute, Clarinet and String Trio 15'10"

6 Sol Do La Re for Clarinet and String Trio 5'27"

Silent and Alone for Clarinet, Piano and String Quartet

- 7** Since We Parted 3'30"
- 8** Silent and Alone 3'12"
- 9** Lingering Thoughts 3'52"