

行者無疆

into the vast world

黃若

Huang Ruo



SYMPHONIC MUSIC OF HUANG RUO 黃若交響樂作品

- 1 SHATTERED STEPS 碎步 (2006) 11:36
for Chinese folk-rock voice and orchestra
Huang Ruo, voice

Liang Zhang, conductor
指揮：張亮

Guang Yang, mezzo-soprano
女中音：楊光

- 2 BECOMING ANOTHER 化變 (2015) 12:10
for orchestra

Shanghai Philharmonic Orchestra
上海愛樂樂團

TWO EXCERPTS FROM THE OPERA "AN AMERICAN SOLDIER" 一個美國士兵 兩首歌劇片段 (2018)

- 3 I: Act One Scene 3 "So That's the Man" 4:30
4 II: Act Two Scene 4 "Lullaby: Sleep now, Little One" 3:47
for mezzo-soprano and orchestra
Mother Chen: Guang Yang, mezzo-soprano

- 5 STILL / MOTION 和 (2009) 13:36
for orchestra

TWO PIECES FOR ORCHESTRA 兩首樂隊篇章 (1998-2000) 15:03

- 6 I: Fanfare 號角 4:22
7 II: Announcement 宣序 10:41

FOLK SONGS FOR ORCHESTRA 交響民謠 (2012-2019) 15:57

- 8 I: Flower Drum Song from Feng Yang 鳳陽花鼓 2:15
9 II: Love Song from Kang Ding 康定情歌 3:53
10 III: Little Blue Flower 蘭花花 5:54
11 IV: The Girl from Da Ban City 達坂城的姑娘 3:55

Total — 76:41

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SHATTERED STEPS

The title *Shattered Steps*, in Chinese 碎步 (Sui Bu), has two meanings: 1) broken steps; 2) small steps in continuous and rapid motion. The starting point of the entire orchestral journey begins with a mixture of these two definitions. The running chain of small steps becomes the energy drive of the piece. The eternal pulse is constantly present wherever and whenever the music travels. The force rotates among the various orchestral instruments. The entire work is also written in an enigmatic way, closely related to the image of a series of broken steps that don't belong to anyone, and have neither starting nor finishing point. Although shattered into many fragments, they are still closely connected with one another. All there is in this image is a frozen moment of ongoing motion. It is also like a puzzle, waiting for all the broken pieces of steps to be matched back to their original form. In the soundscape, only towards the end of the piece, the enigma would be revealed following the presentation of a series of broken musical fragments. The formation of *Shattered Steps* also came from a simple tune I created after my trip to the mountains in the Guizhou Province in South-western China. This tune, improvised and sung with a made-up language in the Chinese folk-rock style, seems timeless and borderless. Later on, I recorded it as two different tracks with my own vocal improvisation. One of them serves as the introduction of this orchestral piece, and

another one draws the work to its conclusion. I sometimes also sing and improvise the vocal part live with the orchestra.

BECOMING ANOTHER

The inspiration of *Becoming Another*, 化變, came from an ancient Chinese saying: “陰陽備物, 化變乃生.” 《十大经·果童》 (Becoming and exchanging of yin and yang to create all things). In *Becoming Another*, during the process of evolving and transformation, the elements of stillness and motion are constantly exchanging with one another. Together they form the circle of life and balance of change. The entire piece is based on, and built on, one breath. The energy of breathing gathers and generates from the lowest and deepest space, and then escalates and zigzags onto a higher level. Eventually, this everlasting breath bursts out, releases, and dissolves into the thin high air.

TWO EXCERPTS FROM THE OPERA “AN AMERICAN SOLDIER”

Through the unbreakable bond between a grieving mother and her beloved son, the opera *An American Soldier* tells Pvt. Danny Chen's life and death story with wide scope, details, nuances, and depth. It poses the timeless yet timely questions about what is the American creed, and what it means to be an American. It felt important at the time when the opera was created to ask who gets to be accepted as an

American, and how our nation draws its strength and power through the diversity of its people. Today this exploration feels even more critical to us. Like my past works, *An American Soldier* is created with the technique of dimensionalism, in which multiple musical layers and elements co-exist in time and space. Dimensionalism not only creates characters in the micro level, but also creates structure in the macro level. *An American Soldier* starts with a court martial showing a heartbroken mother fighting for the justice of her beloved deceased son (Act One Scene 3 “So That’s the Man”), and it ends with a touching lullaby sung as a farewell between the two in a surreal moment (Act Two Scene 4 “Lullaby: Sleep now, Little One”). Above all, the story of Pvt. Danny Chen is also a profoundly human story, which should reach far, resonate deeply, and bear no barriers, boundaries, or limits.

STILL / MOTION

Still / Motion was commissioned by the Shanghai Spring 2009 International Music Festival. The purpose was to create a contemporary dialog with the Chinese classic “Butterfly Lover” Violin Concerto, which was written fifty years ago and was premiered at that year’s Shanghai Spring International Music Festival. This unique task gives me a rare opportunity to re-think about the path of Chinese music from ancient to present, and how this path will lead into the future... As a result, I liberally took the inspiration and spirit from two ancient genres,

Chinese Opera and Chinese Court Music. Both of these have become a dying tradition in China. *Still* bears its influence from the Tang Dynasty Court Music, also known as 雅樂 *Ya Yue* (Noble Music) in Chinese. It focuses on several static lines embedded in various instrumental sections. *Motion*, which focuses on rhythm, was inspired by the 快步 *Kuai Bu* (Fast Steps) and 緊打 *Jin Da* (intense Beats) rhythm in the Chinese Opera. Each movement also is built on small motivic fragments from two separate Chinese Opera tunes: The *Butterfly Lovers’ Tune* from Zhe-Jiang Province’s Yue Opera, as well as the *Emperor’s Princess-Flower Tune* from Cantonese Opera. The enigmatic way of writing invites the listeners to use their imagination to put the fragmented pieces back together to form the original inspirations. Both movements, although contrasting, focus on the duo-relationship between stillness and motion. The proportional differences in each movement allow the listeners to experience how these two elements interact and play with one another. Although *Still* is written in a quiet and slow character, it generates motion through the shifting of notes in each static line that forms a sound-web. Although *Motion* is like an energetic fast-spinning engine, the rhythmic stasis contains sustained tension and aesthetics from *Still*.

TWO PIECES FOR ORCHESTRA

The most important thing is not where you are, but where you are going... An opening can be

thought of as a step in a new direction; as a motion to another motion. Part of life's beauty is in its wealth of possibilities. In music, as in life, there are many ways to begin. *Two Pieces for Orchestra* offers two different openings for orchestra. *Fanfare* is a wild, chaotic, and dramatic piece, beginning with immediate intensity and shifting relentlessly between the sections of the orchestra. The constantly changing relationship between the horizontal and vertical dimensions creates an interaction between the visual and aural senses. In contrast, *Announcement* is a solemn, dignified, and ceremonious statement, full of passionate emotion. As a mixture and polymerization, it combines various elements and allows them to floatingly resonate one by one. *Announcement* opens with musical fragments from the traditional Chinese folk song *Boatman Song from the Yellow River*. The performers are asked to sing the Chinese words "Ni Xiao De" at the end of the piece, which translates "Do you know?", taken from the first three words of the folk song. This ambiguous final question finds its subject in the preceding musical declaration. Often, a question is its own answer, and an ending is a new beginning.

FOLK SONGS FOR ORCHESTRA

Folk songs reflect the life, culture, and soul of a civilization. I grew up in China and have always had a fondness for Chinese folk songs. China has more than fifty ethnic groups, each

with its own culture, traditions, and folk songs. *Folk Songs for Orchestra* is an ongoing project, in which I plan over the years to compile and set folk tunes from various part of China into Western orchestral form. The goal is not only to preserve and renew the original folk songs, but also to transform, elaborate, and develop them into new original pieces of art that also contain organic personal voice. In other words, they are not arrangements, but are original new compositions based on, and inspired by, folk tunes. I have chosen four of the most well-known Chinese folk songs here. The first one is the "Flower Drum Song from Feng Yang" (鳳陽花鼓). Known for its flower-drum performances, "Fengyang Flower Drum" songs, combining singing and dancing, has been passed down over the centuries. There are various kinds of "Fengyang Flower Drum" songs. The one I adopted is sung and danced by a wife and husband, happily and comically teasing each other about themselves and their life. The second piece is called "Love Song from Kang Ding" (康定情歌). This tune is one of the most popular Chinese folk songs. Its simple melody and vivid rhythm are easy to remember and sing, and its lyrics tell of a timeless theme — love. This song's origin is from the Sichuan province. The third piece, "Little Blue Flower" (蘭花花), is based on a simple, beautiful, and timeless folk song from the northern part of the Shanxi province (陝北). The symphonic version is created as a dialogue and interplay

between a solo violin (performed by the concertmaster or a soloist) and the orchestra. The fourth piece is called “The Girl from Da Ban City” (达坂城的姑娘). It is also known as “Carriage Driver’s Song.” It is from Xinjiang province and is sung by carriage drivers in Turpan. The lively music shows the enthusiastic and colorful characteristics of Uyghur folk song, reflecting its people’s heartfelt admiration for the people and land of Xinjiang, the “hometown of songs and dances.”

-- Huang Ruo
March 3, 2020,
New York City



Composer **Huang Ruo** has been lauded by The New York Times for having “a distinctive style.” His vibrant and inventive musical voice draws equal inspiration from Chinese ancient and folk music, Western avant-garde, experimental, noise, natural and processed sound, rock, and jazz to create a seamless, organic integration using a compositional technique he calls “Dimensionalism.” Huang Ruo’s diverse compositional works span from orchestra, chamber music, opera, theater, and dance, to cross-genre, sound installation, architectural installation, multi-media, experimental improvisation, folk rock, and film. His music has been premiered and performed by the New York Philharmonic, Philadelphia Orchestra, Boston Symphony Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony, Netherlands Radio Philharmonic, National Polish Radio Orchestra, Santa Fe Opera, Washington National Opera, Houston Grand Opera, Opera Theatre of St. Louis, Asko/Schoenberg, Ensemble Modern, London Sinfonietta, and conductors such as Wolfgang Sawallisch, Marin Alsop, Andrew Davis, Michael Tilson Thomas, and James Conlon. His opera *An American Soldier* (with libretto by David Henry Hwang) has recently received its world premiere at the Opera Theatre of St. Louis in June 2018, and was named one of the best classical music events in 2018 by The New York Times. His installation opera *Paradise Interrupted* was premiered at the Spoleto Festival USA in 2015 and was

performed at the Lincoln Center Festival in 2016, with future touring planning for Europe and Asia. Another opera, *Dr. Sun Yat-Sen*, was premiered at the Santa Fe Opera in 2014. He served as the first composer-in-residence for Het Concertgebouw Amsterdam, and was the visiting composer for the São Paulo Symphony Orchestra in Brazil. Huang Ruo was born in Hainan Island, China in 1976 - the year the Chinese Cultural Revolution ended. His father, who is also a composer, began teaching him composition and piano when he was six years old. Growing up in the 1980s and 1990s, when China was opening its gate to the Western world, he received both traditional and Western education at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music. As a result of the dramatic cultural and economic changes in China following the Cultural Revolution, his education expanded from Bach, Mozart, Stravinsky, and Lutoslawski, to include the Beatles, rock and roll, heavy metal, and jazz. Huang Ruo was able to absorb all of these newly allowed Western influences equally. After winning the Henry Mancini Award at the 1995 International Film and Music Festival in Switzerland, he moved to the United States to further his education. He earned a Bachelor of Music degree from the Oberlin Conservatory of Music, and Master of Music and Doctor of Musical Arts degrees in composition from the Juilliard School. Huang Ruo is a composition faculty at the Mannes School of Music in NY, and is the artistic director and conductor of

Ensemble FIRE. He was selected as a Young Leader Fellow by the National Committee on United States-China Relations in 2006. Huang Ruo's music is published by Ricordi.

www.huangruo.com

Liang Zhang, *conductor*

Liang Zhang (b.1979) is currently the Deputy Director and Chief Conductor for the Shanghai Philharmonic Orchestra, Vice-Chairman of Shanghai Music Society. In 1998, he got into the Universität für Musik und darstellende Kunst Wien, studying under Uros Lajovic and David Lively. Zhang has conducted the Philadelphia Orchestra, the Czech national Symphony, the Fairfax Symphony, the Macao Orchestra, and the Shanghai Symphony. Among Zhang's collaborators are Peter Lukas Graf, Paul Badura-Skoda, Ryu Goto, Sumi Jo, Wolfgang Schulz, Lynn Harrell, Jerome Rose, Rainer Kuechl, Lang Lang, Stefan Dohr, and Shen Yang. He also worked as the assistant conductor Riccardo Muti's Chinese appearances, and concertized extensively in Germany, Austria, USA, Turkey, Korea, Japan, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. www.maestroliangzhang.com

Guang Yang, *mezzo-soprano*

Mezzo-Soprano Guang Yang was the 1997 winner of the prestigious BBC Singer of the World Competition in Cardiff. Ms. Yang also won the first prize in Plácido Domingo's OPERALIA Competition in 2001. After she

completed a three-year residency at the Lyric Opera of Chicago's Center for American Artists, she performed in both concert hall and opera stage ever since around the world, with opera houses such as the San Francisco Opera, the Lyric Opera of Chicago, the Houston Grand Opera, the Washington National Opera, Deutsche Oper Berlin, the Canadian Opera Company, the Welsh National Opera, the National Center for the Performing Arts in Beijing, and the Bergenz Festival in Austria, just to name a few.

Shanghai Philharmonic Orchestra

The Shanghai Philharmonic Orchestra is a highly professional orchestra developed from the Shanghai Broadcasting Symphony Orchestra. It was formally known as the Shanghai Film Orchestra and Shanghai Broadcasting Orchestra, both of which had made great contributions to the development of Chinese film and broadcasting industry. The Shanghai Philharmonic Orchestra's past collaborators have included Yo-yo Ma, Joe Hisaishi, Max Pommer, Cristian Macelaru, Tamas Vásáry, Boris Berman, Peter Frankl, Oxana Yablonskaya, Chen Hung-Kuan, Alexei Volodin, etc., spanning a number of exciting concerts. The Shanghai Philharmonic Orchestra has attended many international music festivals and activities. In 2005, it went to Singapore, before touring Taiwan in 2006. Its concerts at National Center for the Performing Arts during the Week of the Organ in 2008

also helped it winning extensive recognition. In 2009, the orchestra toured Australia for the Friendly Week of "Queensland-Shanghai". Since 2010, it has given successful concerts in Switzerland, Slovakia, Hungary, Taiwan, Korea, Kazakhstan, Thailand, and Japan. In 2019 it joined The Philadelphia Orchestra to hold the first Chinese New Year's concert at the Kimmel Performing Arts Center in Philadelphia. The Shanghai Philharmonic Orchestra is endeavoring to make itself an all-round and widely influential orchestra, offering further contributions to the development and prosperity of China's symphony field. www.shphilharmonic.com

CREDITS

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