

Chen Qian

by

Gary Brattin

Chen Qian's¹ music is imaginative and provocative – a sound world that is luminous and distinctive; sophisticated and accessible; gentle and powerful. – Frank L. Battisti

Wind band repertoire is expanding at a dramatic rate internationally and is now the beneficiary of several new contributions from China, a country that has fully embraced Western art music. In addition to the hundreds of works being generated in the United States, Europe, South America and Japan, emerging Chinese composers from the mainland, throughout Asia and around the world are increasingly drawn to the wind band as a viable compositional idiom. Their efforts have contributed to a stunningly rapid escalation in the composition of new works that collectively represent a mere fragment of the limitless potential for a creative outflow that may soon overwhelm the international band scene.

For many years bands in China were isolated from the rest of the world functioning primarily as traditional military bands although there were a limited number of school bands. The typical music performed was patriotic in nature or was based on regional folk music, arrangements intended for more functional or ceremonial purpose than as concert art music.² Today, however, there is an ever-increasing international interaction with the Chinese band world by the West. China hosts a variety of international band festivals for concert and marching bands, and the travel industry

vigorously promotes institutional concert/travel tours to China. Prominent wind band conductors, composers, and guest instrumentalists from all over the world are now regularly welcomed by China for purposes of performing, presenting master classes and guest conducting military, police, school and conservatory ensembles. The international exchanges have contributed to an increase in wind band participation and concert attendance. As of 2010, all nine major conservatories in China have wind ensembles and Beijing boasts two professional wind ensembles that play subscription concert series in beautiful venues for eager paying audiences.

There has long been a vibrant international presence of Chinese composers, initially schooled in China, who have lived abroad – Bunya Koh, Bright Sheng, Chen Yi, Chung Yiu-Kwong, Tan Dun, Zhou Long, to name a select few – but the majority of their life's work has either been dedicated to traditional Chinese music or Western art-music, the latter consisting primarily of orchestral and chamber music with limited compositional forays into the wind band idiom. That situation is in the process of transformation as compositional interest in the genre has dramatically increased as a direct result of the qualitative and quantitative expansion of the art form in the world's largest country.

Chen Qian's life and career as a composer and ranking officer with China's People's Liberation Army Band has given him a compositional environment that has allowed him to function as something of an archetype of the new Chinese wind band repertoire and his oeuvre mingles East and West in a variety of compelling settings. To learn of his world is to have opportunity to gain insight into a significant creative

dimension of what may ultimately become the largest single-country wind band movement in history.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Chinese composer Chen Qian was born in April of 1962 in Guiyang City, Guizhou Province, and was raised by a family of educators. His father, Chen Pei-Xin, was a composer and music educator, and mother Zhou Cen, a teacher of Chinese history. In 1965, his father introduced him to music and the violin. By 1967, Chen's dream was to become a virtuoso pianist, and he began highly rigorous piano training, gaining exposure to a large number of Western composers' piano works, from the classical period to the modern era. With his father's influence, Chen's first experience with composition came in 1975 when he wrote several short, Bartok-influenced piano pieces based on the folk music of Guizhou.³

He decided to become a composer came at the end of 1980 when he had opportunity to meet and perform his early pieces for two prominent Chinese composers who were visiting Guizhou, Tan Dun and Qu Xiao-Song. They recognized his natural talent, saw great potential in him as a composer, and enthusiastically encouraged him to enter a music conservatory as a composition student.⁴

By 1981, Chen was the top-rated music student from the Southwest region of China and entered the Sichuan Conservatory of Music composition department, where his primary composition teacher was Huang Hu-Wei. In his junior year of college, he began accepting commissions, completing his first symphony and first woodwind quintet. He

also wrote dance music, music for several television shows and his first wind band compositions.⁵

Upon graduation in 1985, Chen entered the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Band of China with recommendations from composer Qu Xiao-Song and conductor Ma Wen. From that moment he began to accumulate important practical experience and received constant encouragement from fellow composer Yan Xiao-Ou, the leader of the six PLA Band composers charged with providing music for diplomatic occasions in addition to composing music for concert band.⁶ Throughout Chen's career many people have given him much-appreciated professional support and friendship including Yan Xiao-Ou, Dou Jian-Bo, Zhang Zhi-Rong, Joseph Chuang and Frank Battisti. In 1997 Chen gave a special concert featuring his *Symphony No. 1 for Band* and *Concerto for Trumpet* in collaboration with conductor Zheng Xiao-Ying. In the same year, the Hong Kong-based Yu Guo Recording Company produced the first CD featuring his compositions for wind band.⁷ Since that time Chen's music for wind band has been frequently performed and recorded by the PLA Band of China as well as several other ensembles in China and the United States.

Chen Qian is in his twenty-seventh year as a Senior Colonel⁸ on the staff of the PLA Band in Beijing. He is also music director and composer for the Jiangxi, Nanchang Band Festival, and is a board member of the China Association of Symphonic Bands and Ensembles (CASBE). In his free time, Chen enjoys travelling to the far reaches of China to listen to folk musicians, and has been to every Chinese province in this pursuit.⁹

COMPOSITIONAL APPROACH

Chen Qian's ultimate musical goals are to create music that reflects his Chinese heritage by fully integrating Chinese harmony, rhythm, ornamentation and traditional performance practices—whether ancient or contemporary—within the conventions of the modern symphonic wind ensemble/concert band, the expressive means to communicate his ideals. Chen remembers what his professors of composition impressed upon him:

When I graduated, professor Huang Hu-Wei told me, “You have learned and mastered Western music—the basic writing skills and philosophy. Your ideas should be reflected in the formulation of Chinese music.” Professor Gao Wei-Jie admonished, “Attach importance to the history of Western music, composers of different periods of band history, their techniques of composition, and draw on their success to learn and master the characteristic sounds of bands.” I think that after all these years of researching, learning, and expressing my aesthetic artistic taste with Chinese characteristics, a successful direction for the development of a unique integration of Chinese and Western music has been created.¹⁰

Chen's music is diverse, and as the functional responsibility of Chinese military ensembles necessitates the display of a broad spectrum of musical roles, the context of a given piece is of central concern when considering his oeuvre. Function often dictates form, as the PLA ensembles may need strictly patriotic music for an official or diplomatic event while completely different repertoire is required to entertain a national television audience; specific regional folk music might be more appropriate for a local event. In addition, the PLA Band of China is presenting an increasing number of art-music concerts intended to present the world's elite symphonic wind repertoire, frequently featuring guest soloists and conductors from throughout China and abroad. In

recent years, involvement with prominent international wind band figures has led to commissions for Chen, another compositional outlet independent of his military role.

In composing for a wide variety of musical mediums as well as in multiple styles within the symphonic wind ensemble idiom, Chen hopes his music achieves several goals. His primary desire is that his music transcends the borders of nations in a one-world multicultural sense. His second aspiration is that listeners would consider the artistic merits of his music as his unique musical voice. Finally, he requests that audiences be careful not to form opinions based on uninformed characterizations and trite misconceptions of Chinese music, an attitude that will open the way for true appreciation.¹¹

COMPOSITIONAL STYLE

Chen Qian frequently orchestrates the contemporary concert band in a manner that attempts to replicate the timbres of several Chinese instruments—like the *suo-na* (similar to the medieval and Renaissance-era shawm) and the long Tibetan horn—through the utilization of the more brassy qualities of the Western horn and low tessitura trumpets and trombones. Various woodwinds are charged with executing complex melodic lines, quite common in traditional Chinese music, with the bass voices of the woodwind choir frequently exposed in technical display. (Figure 3)

Chen's extensive use of Chinese percussion significantly adds to the musical exoticism and cultural authenticity of his music. Dr. Thomas Verrier, Director of Bands at Vanderbilt University, describes Chen's percussion scoring as equal to the wind parts in sonic contribution, something repeatedly demonstrated throughout the composer's

output.¹² (Figure 5) The instruments utilized primarily come from two of the eight Chinese musical instrument subcategories, Metal and Hide.¹³ From the Metal subcategory, *bo* (cymbals) and *luo* (gongs) in a variety of sizes are employed. From the Hide subcategory, a wide variety of *gu* (drums), are often featured. *Gu* are red-painted thick hard-wood drums in various sizes and shapes with heavy-gauge animal hide stretched over and bolted onto the drum which is meant to be struck with sticks of varying weight and length for a specified timbral result. The six other Chinese instrument subcategories are; Silk (stringed instruments that are plucked, bowed or struck), Bamboo (flutes, oboes, free reed pipes, and single reed pipes), Wood, Stone, Clay, and Gourd.¹⁴

The brass and woodwind sections frequently encounter specialized playing techniques that only a few decades ago would have been primarily found in music for contemporary music ensembles. Clarinetists performing on the mouthpiece only, flutter tonguing, pitch bending, vocalization/singing, extreme tessitura and virtuosic solo parts can be found in various Chen Qian compositions. The full arsenal of 20th Century compositional techniques is most apparent in his wind concerti: *Fissure* (double concerto for trumpet and symphonic ensemble), and *Crazy Man* (concerto for flute, woodwinds, horn and percussion).

Harmonically, Chen often writes from the sonorous, Western-sounding tonal palette as is the case in his arrangement of the Kazakh folk song, *A Lovely Rose*, but his output is also marked by many instances of traditional Chinese-based pentatonic harmony, especially in his recent large-scale programmatic works, *Come, Drink One More Cup of Wine*, and *Ambush! From All Sides*.

Chen's formal structures reflect influences both old and new, but cultural context comes into play especially when comparing his compositional constructs to the predictability found Western baroque, classical and romantic periods. His more ambitious works for symphonic wind ensemble are more through-composed musical forms than symmetrical, predictable, ABA 'educational music'. Dr. Thomas Verrier astutely described the cultural conflict when comparing Chinese compositional phrasing perspective to western musical forms.

Much like Chinese poetry or ink painting, in Chinese music, there is not an inherent hierarchy of micro and macro phrase ideas. What may look on paper like a simple eight-measure pentatonic phrase is likely infused with detailed meaning derived from the succession of smaller phrase ideas, each worthy of distinct emphasis. The key to Chinese phrasing comes from the fact that it is melodic music, not harmonic music. Western music's phrases are so tied to harmonic motion and are often bound by overarching architecture (often symmetrical). Increasingly lengthy melodic lines have become more prevalent as the harmonic possibilities have increased. Chinese phrasing is far more akin to the monody of the Gregorian monks. Not bound by harmonic tension and release, melodic phrasing is not at all constricted and becomes almost uncontrollably free. This freedom, I have found, is quite difficult for Western (and indeed young Chinese) musicians. Within four measures there can be 6, 8, or 10 distinctly expressive ideas!

Chen Qian integrates this melodic freedom into the Western ensemble seamlessly. (Figure 1) However, it is a mistake to approach his music as a fusing of the two...his is a Chinese music, and an authentic performance demands an understanding of what that means!¹⁵

OVERVIEW OF SELECTED WORKS FOR BAND

Come, Drink One More Cup of Wine

Instrumentation:

Piccolo / Flute 1-2-3-4 / Oboe 1-2 / English Horn / Bassoon 1-2 / Contrabassoon /
Clarinet in Bb 1-2-3 / Bass Clarinet / Alto Saxophone 1-2 / Tenor Saxophone / Baritone
Saxophone / Trumpet in Bb 1-2-3 / Horn in F 1-2-3-4 / Trombone 1-2 / Bass Trombone /
Euphonium / Tuba / Double Bass / Piano / Harp / Western Percussion: Bells / Cymbals /
Vibraphone / Snare Drum / Chimes / Bass Drum / Chinese Percussion: Ban Gu / Da Luo /
Xiao Bo / Zhong Luo / Xiao Luo / Tang Gu / Da Hong Gu

Performance Time: approximately 12:30

In *Come, Drink One More Cup of Wine*, (Chinese: *Geng Jin Jiu*) Chen Qian captures through vivid orchestration and personal interpretation one of China's most beautiful poems and traditional melodies. Commissioned in 2007 by the Vanderbilt University Blair School of Music, the composition was premiered in October 2007 by the Vanderbilt Wind Symphony, Dr. Thomas Verrier, Conductor.

The source poem *Song Yuan Er Shi An Xi* (*Farewell for a Vice-Ambassador to An-Xi*), was written by Wang Wei (A.D. 701-761), a master Tang Dynasty poet, landscape painter and prominent Shanxi provincial government official.

A morning shower dampens Weicheng's (*a city*) ground

Green willow trees give the inn a freshness

Come, drink one more cup of wine

West of the pass you'll meet old friends no more¹⁶

Farewell for a Vice-Ambassador to An-Xi represents the power of the bond of friendship. When friends are parted knowing that will never meet again, they consecrate their bond symbolically by taking time to share one final cup of wine.

The poem was originally set to music during the Tang Dynasty but the traditional melody most associated with the poem is from the Qing Dynasty, composed by Chang He in 1867. Entitled, *Yang Pass: Yang Guan San Die Three Refrains (Three Refrains)*, the music is a staple of the *guqin* repertoire. (A *guqin* is a seven-stringed member of the zither family.) Reference video performances of this melody from professionals and students on a wide variety of instruments and genres are easily accessible on the Internet. The vast spectrum of personal interpretive inflections displayed underscores the potential for maximum expression.

The poetry of Wang Wei is highly regarded for vivid imagery and profound emotional content often realized in very few words (characters), and the source poem is comprised of four lines each containing seven characters. His word choices contain multiple meanings literally and by contextual inference. Only through a higher knowledge of the Chinese language and conceptual thought can the inner themes begin to reveal significant meaning. Wei's landscape paintings are philosophically similar both in their composition and emotive power¹⁷ and his formidable interdisciplinary skill was inspirational to Chen, fueling his motivation to write this particular work.

Chen provides an extensive program note, in Mandarin Chinese, in the forward materials to the score published in China. An English translation is provided below.

All the material, structure, vocabulary and imagery for “Come, Drink One More Cup of Wine” originate from the essence and application of the poetic structure found in Wei Wang's *Farewell to a Vice-Ambassador to An-Xi*. Instrumental music is used to portray scenes of Chinese landscape painting and interpret the meanings of Chinese poetry. Integrating the laws of ink and brush into calligraphy painting—coupled with a sense of musicality—create the structure, technique, wording and personality of the music.

- I. The laws of ink and brush technique in Chinese landscape painting.
 - a. Thick pens and heavy brushes: In the world of Chinese landscape painting, the technique of thick pens and heavy brushes have aesthetic rules that are important to the creation of an art piece and serve as key points in line structure. *Come, Drink One More Cup of Wine* observes the manifestation of the laws of Chinese brush painting within the configuration of contemporary music. This special feature is a principle that distinguishes itself from conventional forms of western musical pieces. Put simply, it is the manifestation of lines of thought in Chinese art music. More concretely: (1) formal divisions are not traditionally functional—the focus is on the needs of sentimentality. In this type of Chinese dramatic art, sentimental syntax and aesthetic sense can be felt in each tune. (2) Beethoven's fate motif [in *Symphony No. 5*]” and Ah Bing's *The Moon Reflected in Two Ponds* are both

utilized as a method of motivic development motivation and a method of linear design, respectively.¹⁸ (3) From my experience of recording Beijing style drumming, the same line in a score can create 7-8 different variations (in performance).

- b. Shades of space: In the art of painting, shading is a variation in calligraphy technique. Variations in grayscale bring the viewer different visual perspectives that serve to engage imagination. In the semitone changes and performance of grace notes in the score etc., the rhyming positions of the Eastern-style musical lines are formed.

II. Musical imagery

- a. All things return to a peaceful stillness finally. In my view, humanity has in common the ‘still world’, something easily sensed in any religion. In *Come, Drink One More Cup of Wine*, the spaces between the notes are created for the Chinese percussion, emphasizing precisely this world of stillness, a representation of the musings of traditional Chinese aestheticism and humanistic thought that all is one.
- b. All things return to one: the diversity of musical language and style lead to the appeal of the art from different cultures. In the contrast between distinct cultures, we also see commonality. From Bach's invention of the equal temperament to the present day, composers have pushed the skills of composition to the ultimate—I can hardly name the large number of their stylistic methods and complexities. Unfortunately, what we hear with the works of some composers now is

more technical than artistic; I hope people can hear a world of the spirit within with my work. My compositional technique is applied for this sole purpose; writing artistically in a manner that leads to the creation of a descriptive method and musical style that further values the visual and auditory demands. For example: the use of parallel fourths and fifths gives functionality and direction to bland music. The artistic style of Chinese music matches special traits found in Western music. From traditional to contemporary, from eastern to western, nothing is restricted by the traditions of any school of composition or theory; as long as the descriptive style and means of logic match one's inner music, each will have artistic value.¹⁹

Come, Drink One More Cup of Wine is comprised of five non-labeled, through-composed sections that are best described as Introduction, Theme, Dance, Processional, and Conclusion (Theme).

The introduction (ms1-29) features contrasting textures and intensities and provides an excellent preview of the harmonic, rhythmic, and timbral vocabulary of the work. The English horn initiates the activity via two upper register soloistic motives (ms2-4, and ms7-9) that are answered with dramatic tutti statements from the ensemble. Measures 12-15 feature a challenging four-bar accelerando in tutti rhythmic diminution, a common feature of Chinese opera.

The subsequent phrase completely changes character, becoming light and syncopated (ms16-21). Beginning with a short solo from the Chinese *xiao luo*, (small gong), a syncopated ostinato groove unfolds between brass, bassoons, and percussion

which acts in support of a pentatonic melody in the woodwinds. The horn section dominates the phrase with a brassy tutti statement in m21. Subsequently, clarinets, saxophones, and bassoons arrive together on a cadential chord accompanied by a short *xiao bo* (small pair of hand cymbals) solo serving to signify the end of the introduction and the transition to the flute cadenza statement of the original *Yang Pass: Three Refrains* (ms22-29).

In the next section *Yang Pass: Three Refrains* is introduced by unaccompanied solo flute (ms30-43) in a cadenza joined by light woodwinds, string bass, piano, and *bang gu* in m37 (Figure 1). As the original intended instrument of this music is the *gugin* the cadenza presents a challenge to any performer interested in recreating the inflection and ornamentation of the ancient Chinese stringed instrument.

Flute $\text{♩} = 57$

FIGURE 1. *Come, Drink One More Cup of Wine*, mm. 30-43

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Following the flute cadenza, a short contrasting phrase serves as both an extension of the flute solo and a slight transition to new instrument groups who begin to come forward with the thematic material.

The phrases that make up the remainder of the theme section feature several orchestrational combinations: tutti woodwinds (ms50-58); the return of the bass clarinet's contrasting motif (ms59-61); a brass chorale (ms62-65); woodwinds and supporting piano (ms66-69); trumpet soli (ms70-73), the 2nd return of the bass clarinet motif (ms74-79); and a final and decisive tutti treatment of the theme (ms80-83).

Low woodwinds and Chinese percussion are then featured in an exchange that serves as a transition from the restive theme section into the playful dance section (ms89-93). Starting slowly and drawing motivic content from the theme, the music expands as it accelerates while timbral percussive effects ricochet between different voices.

Measure 94, the beginning of the dance section of the work, has a tempo indication (quarter note=116bpm) that allows for the more technical nature of the writing. The ensemble is divided into three main groups: 1) clarinets, saxophones, and low woodwinds, 2) brass and Chinese percussion, 3) piccolo, flute, oboe, English horn, bells and vibraphone. The section is primarily a dialogue between groups 1 and 3, with group 2 assuming an accompanimental role. Group 1 begins the dance with a pentatonic technical passage (ms94-96) that prepares the listener for the dance theme, sounded by group 3 (ms97-100, Figure 2).

Piccolo
 Flute 1 & 2
 Flute 3 & 4
 Oboe 1 & 2
 English Horn
 Bells
 Vibraphone

FIGURE 2. *Come, Drink One More Cup of Wine*, mm. 97-100
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Following a one-measure response given by groups 1 and 2, a restatement of the group 3 theme over a bouncing-octave ostinato is sounded, followed by a more complex group 2 phrase extension (ms101-110). Measures 111-117 are a third statement of the group 3 theme and group 1 ostinato, with added embellishment figures taken from trombones and horns. The conclusion of the dance section allows the instruments of group 1 center stage with an extended soli passage of new material accompanied by piano, Chinese percussion, and eventual support by group 2 at the end of the phrase (ms118-130, Figure 3).

FIGURE 3. *Come, Drink One More Cup of Wine*, mm. 118-130
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After this phrase, the instruments of group 1 take up the ostinato, briefly utilizing that material for an ensuing transition (ms130-135) to the beginning of the processional section. The processional section immediately restates the main theme in a broad forte half-time chorale in low brass/reeds accompanied by a fast-paced ostinato in clarinets, saxophones, string bass, and piano, all supported by battery percussion (ms136-143, Figure 4). Following the initial theme, the energy and excitement continue in epic sequence.

The musical score is for a large ensemble, including woodwinds, brass, strings, and percussion. The key signature is B-flat major (two flats). The tempo is marked 'f' (forte). The score shows a complex texture with multiple layers of sound, including a sustained eight-measure tapestry of sound that momentarily retreats in a four-measure diminuendo before bursting back for five additional measures (ms162-169). The instruments listed on the left are: Bb Cl. 1/A.S. 1, Bb Cl. 2/A.S. 2, Bb Cl. 3/T.S., Bb B. Cl./B.S., Bb Tpt. 1-2-3, Tbn. 1-2-3, Bn/C./Ba/Euph./Tuba, Contrabass, Piano, Tam Tam, Chinese Drum, Cymbals, Snare Drum, and Bass Drum. The score is for measures 136-143.

FIGURE 4. *Come, Drink One More Cup of Wine*, mm. 136-143

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The apex of the work comes from the skillful assemblage of six different motifs that serve to create a sustained eight-measure tapestry of sound that momentarily retreats in a four-measure diminuendo before bursting back for five additional measures (ms162-169) (Figure 5). A short meter-shifting codetta then evolves into a resounding cadential pedal point resolution (ms170-185).

Fl. 1, 2, 3, 4/Picc. *mf*

Oboe 1-2/E.H. *mf*

Bb Cl. 1-2/A.S. 1-2 *f* *mp*

Bb Cl. 3/B. Cl./T.S./S.S. *f* *mp*

Trumpet in Bb-1 *f* *mp*

Trumpet in Bb-2 *f* *mp*

Trumpet in Bb-3 *f* *mp*

F Horn 1-2-3-4 *f* *mp*

Tbn. 1-2-3 *f* *mp*

Ba.C. Ba/Euph./Tuba/Sr.B. *f* *mp*

Piano *f* *mp*

Bang Gu *f* *mp*

Tan Tan *f* *mp*

Tang Gu *f* *mp*

Chinese Drum *f* *mp*

Bells *f* *mp*

Snare Drum *f* *mp*

Bass Drum *f* *mp*

LONG

FIGURE 5. *Come, Drink One More Cup of Wine*, mm. 162-169
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With the excitement and grandeur of the procession now past, the trumpet signals the transition to the final section of the work. Largely a repeat of the initial theme section with codetta, the conclusion begins with an almost-exact restatement of the flute cadenza, the *Yang Pass: Three Refrains* theme. (Figure 6)

Trumpet 1



FIGURE 6. *Come, Drink One More Cup of Wine*, mm. 187-201

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With the exception of a slight shifting of voices in the woodwind orchestration, ms195-201 are a direct repeat of ms37-43. Similarly, ms202-208 mirror ms59-65. In ms209-213 melodic embellishment is used, creating the impression of new material as the previous phrase connects the next thirteen measures (ms214-226), which are directly repeated theme section material. The work concludes with a final forte tutti statement of the chorale theme (ms227-231) with a response from bass clarinet (ms232-233). The flute, trumpet, and bassoon share a unison statement of the last measure of the *Yang Pass: Three Refrains* theme in m234, and the final tutti G minor chord is accompanied by the *bang gu* (small high-pitched drum used in Peking opera), *xiao luo* (small gong) and *xiao bo* (small cymbals) in a series of miniature crashes interrupting a gradual fade and rallentando to the end.

A Lovely Rose

Instrumentation:

Piccolo (1) / Flute 1-2 (3+3) / Oboe 1-2 (2) / Eb Clarinet (2) / Clarinet in Bb 1-2-3 (4-3-3) / Alto Clarinet (2) / Bass Clarinet (1) / Bassoon 1-2 (2) / Contrabassoon (1) / Alto Saxophone 1-2 (2) / Tenor Saxophone (1) / Baritone Saxophone (1) / Bass Saxophone (1) / Cornet in Bb 1-2 (2) / Trumpet in Bb 1-2-3 (2-2-2) / Horn in F 1-2-3-4 (4) / Trombone 1-2-3 (2-2-2) / Baritone T.C. (2) / Euphonium (1) / Tuba (4) / String Bass (4) / Timpani / Bass Drum / Snare Drum / Crash Cymbals / Suspended Cymbals / Symphonic Bass Drum

Performance Time: approximately 4:15

Arranged in 1999, this work is an emotional ballad for symphonic band based on a Kazakh folk song of the same name, from Xinjiang Province in far-western China. *A Lovely Rose* was premiered by the PLA Band, Yu Jian-Fang, conductor, at the Celebration Ceremony of the Return of Macao to China. It was the required selection for the 2005 National Band Competition in Beijing. This folk song fully expresses the expectation, fascination and passion for a better life on behalf of minority people in the western China. By adapting this ballad, the composer realizes, at a profound level, the kind embrace between humans and nature and the love of all life, being enchanted with the sentimentality of nature and the wondrous emotions of life.²⁰

English translation of the lyrics to *A Lovely Rose*

A Lovely Rose

Pretty *Ma-li-ah* (lady's name)

A Lovely Rose

Pretty *Ma-li-ah*

That day, I went hunting in the mountains on a horse

You were singing on the mountain; it was a beautiful sound that reached the sky

I was lost in your song and I fell down a hill

Ah, the sound of your song reached the clouds

Strong and young Kazakh

Handsome *Du-da-er* (man's name)

Strong and young Kazakh

Handsome *Du-da-er*

Tonight, please cross the river and come to my home

Feed your horse and bring your *dongbula* (Kazakh 2-stringed guitar)

When the moon rises, play your instrument

Ah, we lean on each other as we sing under the tree²¹

Although *A Lovely Rose* is an arrangement, Chen utilizes several imaginative compositional concepts to transform the source material from a light homophonic folk tune into a highly expressive polyphonic ballad for symphonic wind band.

The role of the *dongbula*—a spoon-shaped two-stringed instrument incapable of three-or-more-voiced triadic harmony—has been eliminated harmonically and rhythmically, allowing for a certain compositional freedom. The composer has kept the original meter (2/2) although the tempo, half note = 56, makes his lyric intent quite clear.

Reference folk recordings, classical piano and vocal artsong renditions of the source material indicate a more *moderato* tempo than the *larghetto* tempo utilized in this arrangement. Given the exclusion of a vocal part, the creative focus is on the romantic beauty of the musical line.



FIGURE 7. *A Lovely Rose* – Traditional Kazakh Folk Tune
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The complete folk song theme is 26 measures in length and would ordinarily be performed in its entirety by a solo singer or a singer/*dongbula* duo (Figure 7). However, in Chen's setting the full resources of the ensemble are engaged in a four-phrase dialogue. In ms9-13, clarinet 3, alto clarinet and alto saxophone take up an original call-and-

response countermelody in support of the folk tune. Horns join the previous melodic voices in ms14-18. From m19-26 a larger cohort embraces the folk tune: piccolo, flute 1-2, oboe 1-2, Eb clarinet, clarinet 1-2, cornet 1-2, and trumpet 1, create natural musical peaks given the alterations in voicing and tessitura. In m27 Chen again outlines the phrasal contour by initially assigning melody only to the flutes and clarinets 1/2, adding oboes, Eb clarinet, and cornets back in at m29, and lastly, trumpet 1 on the melody in m32 as the full ensemble adds texture to the end of the phrase. In m35, flute, oboe, Eb clarinet, clarinet 1/2, and cornets initiate a modulation into the key of F major and the development section of the work.

The development section begins with a seamless continuation of the call-and-response character of the previous section. The music gains rhythmic momentum with the addition of occasional quarter note triplets from ms36-43, and eighth note-quarter combination motifs propel a thematic fragment in sequence from ms44-49. The musical landscape calms via a *ritardando* employed from ms50-52 that ultimately cadences and modulates into the final home key of B-flat.

The return of the main theme (m54) is now a fifth higher (Bb) than the beginning naturally creating more brilliance, as nine different instrument parts carry the principal theme. Motion is established at the beginning of this phrase through moving quarter note triplets in the low woodwinds and baritone/euphonium. Percussion are noticeably absent until m63, giving the listener opportunity to sense the tautness of the growing intensity. Measures 65 and 68 are magnificent musical peaks, supported by crescendo rolls in timpani, snare drum and suspended cymbal, leading to accented impacts by bass drum, crash cymbals and symphonic bass drum.

The theme continues in full orchestration with a slight diminuendo (m71), then at mezzo-piano (m72). Percussion tacet until m81, the final measure of the first ending, where timpani and snare drum enter with a roll and crescendo as the ensemble repeats back to the build and impact of m64 in seamless transition. At the conclusion of the second statement of this phrase (leading to the second ending in m82), a rhythmic metamorphosis of the final four measures of the main theme leads the work to conclusion.

The composer takes certain liberties with the standardized orchestration for wind band in *A Lovely Rose*. An extended woodwind section is employed which features two E-flat clarinets, alto clarinets, and bass saxophone. Additionally, there are separate parts for baritone horn and euphonium, each instrument distinct in terms of role and musical content, and both are notated in treble clef. The horn parts are primarily unison but when harmonized are scored in the order of 1-2-3-4, rather than in typical interlocking fashion, 1-3/2-4. This orchestration however should be embraced as a culturally illuminating timbre similar to that of authentic Kazakh folk music without using actual instruments and authentic vocal performance practice. Unless this context is taken into consideration, Western conductors and ensembles may be naïve in reverting back to conventional ensemble timbre, making an international folk song sound like every other western ballad.

CONDUCTING AND REHEARSAL APPROACH

In order to proceed from Chen's philosophy and hopes regarding the appreciation of his music (see compositional approach section) to a practical plan for successful rehearsals and performances, conductors of his music must gain a certain degree of exposure to other Chinese music genres while continuing to broaden their awareness of

Chen's complete output for concert band. Additionally, some familiarity with the traditional forms of Chinese music, its numeric-based notation system and approaches to rhythm and improvisation, will also illuminate the process. In Chinese Peking opera for example, ensemble interaction is frequently improvised in response to the stage performer's movements, a tradition passed down through the generations.

As mentioned in the discussion of *Come, Drink One More Cup of Wine*, bar lines can obstruct the freestyle interaction of what would naturally occur in a Chinese ensemble. Further, in addition to the detailed Western notation that Chen provides the conductor and ensemble, conductors must gain some reasonable familiarity with Chinese music styles and ornamentation techniques in addition to seeking out pedagogical information regarding Chinese percussion instruments.

ADDITIONAL WORKS FOR WIND BAND

Based on a famous traditional Chinese theme and originally performed as a classical solo work for the *pipa* (a strummed four-stringed wooden instrument held in the lap with the fretboard held upright), *Ambush! Return With Honor* was commissioned and premiered in 2009 by the University of St. Thomas Symphonic Wind Ensemble, St. Paul, Minnesota, Dr. Matthew J. George, Conductor. Programmatically, *Ambush* describes the glorious victory of Liu Bang over Xiang Yu in 202 B.C. There is no information about the composer of the original *Ambush*, but some scholars believe that the melody may have originated during the Tang Dynasty (618-917AD).²²

Chen's 2007 flute concerto *Crazy Man* is an astonishing virtuoso-level work requiring a chamber ensemble instrumentation: piccolo, flute (2), oboe (2), English horn,

bassoon (2), Eb clarinet, Bb clarinet (3), bass clarinet, alto saxophone (2), tenor saxophone, baritone saxophone, horn in F (2), contrabass, piano, and Chinese percussion (5). The work is based upon the writings of two martyrs caught in the struggle of the Chinese communists against the Chinese nationalist government; Ye Ting's *The Song of Imprisonment*, and Chen Ran's *My Confession*. The four movement titles, Manifesto, Freedom, Doghole, Flare, reflect the programmatic nature of the composition.

LIST OF WORKS

With *Come, Drink One More Cup of Wine*, now published in the U.S.A. by Kjos, parties interested in obtaining other works, discussing his music, or commissioning new music by Chen Qian may contact him directly by email at: cq-band@vip.sina.com.

Symphonic Ensemble / Band

2009 – *Ambush, Return with Honor* / Symphonic Poem for Symphonic Ensemble

Commissioned and premiered by the University of St. Thomas Symphonic Wind Ensemble, St. Paul, Minnesota, Dr. Matthew J. George, Conductor

2008 – *Flower-like* / for Symphonic Band

Composed for a student band in Hong Kong, Tsai Guo-Tian, Conductor

2007 – *Come, Drink One More Cup of Wine* / Symphonic Poem for Symphonic Ensemble

Commissioned in 2007 by the Vanderbilt University Blair School of Music

Premiered in October 2007 by the Vanderbilt Wind Symphony, Nashville,
Tennessee, Dr. Thomas Verrier, Conductor.

Published by Kjos / WB420, UPC#: 048027029756

2007 – *Red Detachment of Women* / for Symphonic Ensemble

Premiered in October 2007 by the Ning-Xia Women's Band, Zhang Zhi-Rong,
Conductor

2006 – *A Merry Sun Is Rising* / for Symphonic Ensemble

Commissioned by the 1st Beijing Band Festival, premiered in the Beijing Concert
Hall, Li Fang-Fang, Conductor

2006 – *Local Accent* / Chinese Suite 1 for Symphonic Ensemble

Premiered in April 2007 by the Beijing No. 166 Middle School Golden Sail Band,
Zhang Hai-Feng, Conductor

2006 – *Anonymous Hero* / for Band

Written and Premiered in 2007 for the China Collegiate Athletic Games, Zhang
Zhi-Rong, Conductor

2006 – *An Inscription on a Tablet* / Symphony No. 4 for Symphonic Ensemble

This music has not been premiered.

2004 – *Yeeh-Tang Dance* / for Symphonic Ensemble

Commissioned by the Beijing 166 Middle School Golden Sail Band, premiered in the Beijing Concert Hall, Cheng Yi-Ming, Conductor

2002 – *Kabaye* / for Trumpet and Symphonic Ensemble

Premiered at the 7th All-Military New Music Conference, Wang Qiang, Trumpet, Zhang Zhi-Rong, Conductor

2001 – *Overture – Get Hot* / Symphonic Overture for Symphonic Ensemble

Written and premiered in 2002 for the Chinese New Year Television Special Party, Zhang Hai-Feng, Conductor

2001 – *Basiguriuliu* / for Trombone or Euphonium and Ensemble

Trombone version premiered and recorded in 2002. The euphonium version has not been premiered.

2000 – *Lead Me* / for Symphonic Ensemble

This music has not been premiered.

1999 – *A Lovely Rose* / for Symphonic Ensemble

Premiered for the Celebration Ceremony of the return of Macao to China, Yu Jian-Fang, Conductor

1998 – *Snow Lotus* / Symphony No.2 for Symphonic Ensemble

Inspired by Frank Battisti, Premiered at the 7th All-Military New Music Conference, Zhang Zhi-rong, conductor

1997 – *Exploits* / Symphonic Overture for Symphonic Ensemble

Premiered by the Combined Forces Military Band of China in the Beijing Concert Hall, Zheng Xiao-Ying, conductor

1997 – *Fissure* / Double Concerto for Trumpet and Symphonic Ensemble

Premiered by the Combined Forces Military Band of China in the Beijing Concert Hall, Zhang Hun, Trumpet, Zheng Xiao-Ying, Conductor

1997 – *Life* / Symphony No.1 for Symphonic Ensemble

Premiered by the Combined Forces Military Band of China in the Beijing Concert Hall, Zheng Xiao-Ying, Conductor

1992 – *Reba* / Symphonic Poem for Symphonic Ensemble

Premiered at the All-Military New Music Conference, Li Mei-Zhu, Conductor

1992 – *Rising Our Sun* for Soprano, Tenor and Ensemble

Premiered at the 6th All-Military New Music Conference, Han Zhi-Ping, Soprano, Yang Hong-Ji, Tenor, Lv Shu-Zhong, Conductor

1990 – *Welcome, Friends from Far Away* for Wind Band

Premiered at the 11th Asian Games Opening Ceremony, Beijing, China, Lv Shu-Zhong, Conductor

1987 – *Wen-Hou* / “My Greeting” for Tenor Saxophone and Ensemble

Premiered at the 5th All-Military Music Conference, Du Ying-Jiao, Tenor Saxophone, Ma Wen, Conductor

Orchestra

2007 – *Kabaye* (orchestral version)

Premiered in the Xiamen Symphony Concert Hall, Wang Qiang, Trumpet, Zheng Xiao-Ying, Conductor

1989 – *Violin Concerto “Ruo De Zhong”*

This music has not been premiered.

1985 – *Symphony No. 1*

Premiered in 1997, on a special concert of the Music of Chen Qian in the Beijing Concert Hall.

Brass Band

2005 – *Competition* / for Brass Band

Premiered at the All-Military New Music Conference, Zhang Zhi-Rong,
Conductor

Chamber Winds

2007 – *Crazy Man* / Concerto for Flute, Woodwinds, Horn and Percussion

Premiered at the All-Military New Music Conference, Chang Hai-Feng,
Conductor

2004 – *Dreamscape* / Symphony No. 3 for Woodwinds and Percussion

This music has not been premiered.

2001 – *Folk Songs* / for Saxophone Quintet

This music has not been premiered.

Jazz ‘Big Band’

2003 – *Water of the Long Days of Autumn* / for Soprano and Big Band

Premiered in the Beijing University Concert Hall, Guo Chun-Mei, Vocal, Zhang
Zhi-Rong, Conductor

2002 – *Arba’s Girl* / for Big Band

Premiered in 2003 in the Beijing Concert Hall.

Marching Band

1995 – *Modern Time* / for Marching Band

This music has not been premiered.

Discography

Cheung, Joseph Kwok Ming, conductor. (2007) “East Meets West.” The Vanderbilt Wind Symphony. “*Snow Lotus*” Nashville, Tennessee, Vanderbilt University. Recording available online at: http://www.vanderbiltwindsymphony.com/2007-08_CD.html

George, Matthew, conductor. (2010) “2010 Midwest Clinic: Grand Symphonic Winds.” Grand Symphonic Winds. “*Ambush, From All Sides*” Chicago, Illinois, 9173-MCD, Mark Custom Recordings.

George, Matthew, conductor. (2010) “From All Sides.” University of St. Thomas Symphonic Wind Ensemble. “*Ambush, From All Sides*” St. Paul, Minnesota, innova 765, innova Recordings.

Li, Meizhu, conductor. (2001) “Wind from China: A Selected Chinese Brass and Wind Music.” Symphonic Band of Beijing Children’s Palace. “*A Lovely Rose*” Beijing, China, ISRC CN-A88-00-305-00/A.J8, New China Recording Company.

Verrier, Thomas E., conductor. (2007) “East Meets West.” The Vanderbilt Wind Symphony. “*Come, Drink One More Cup of Wine*” Nashville, Tennessee, Vanderbilt University. Recording available online at: http://www.vanderbiltwindsymphony.com/2007-08_CD.html

Yu, Hai, conductor. (2008, 2009) “Selected Music Conducted by YU Hai.” People’s Liberation Army Band of China. “*Return with Honor – Symphonic Poem*” Beijing, China, ISRC CN-A12-09-310-00/A.J6, China Recording Company.

Zhang, Haifeng, conductor. (2008, 2009) “Selected Music Conducted by ZHANG Haifeng.” People’s Liberation Army Band of China. “*Crazy Man – for Flute and Woodwind Ensemble*” Beijing, China, ISRC CN-A12-09-310-00/A.J6, China Recording Company.

Zhang, Zhirong, director. (2002) “Arba’s Girls.” Golden Bugle Jazz Band. “*Arba’s Girls, Waters in Autumn Remain the Same, Beautiful Land, A Song of Dream, A Married Woman Going Back to Her Parents Home, The Melody of Dragon Boat, A Little, Emergence of the Sun Brings Happiness*” Beijing, China, PCD-6368, Pacific Audio & Video Co.

Zhang, Zhirong, conductor. (2002) “Unknown Heroes.” The Military Band of P.L.A. of China. “*Snow Lotus, Kabaye, Arba’s Girls, Basiguriolio, A Lovely Rose, Reba, Heroes of the Times, Unknown Heroes*” Guang Zhou, China, PCD-6372, Pacific Audio & Video Co.

Zheng, Xiao-Ying, conductor. (1999) “Fissure: Symphonic Works for Band by Chen Qian.” The Military Band of P.L.A. of China. “*Fissure, Exploits, Symphony No. 1*” Hong Kong, HRP7183-2, Hugo Productions (HK) Ltd.

DVD Video

Yu, Hai, conductor. (2008) “Guanyuejingdian II.” The Military Band of P.L.A. of

China. “*A Lovely Rose*” Guang Zhou, China, ISRC CN F21 05-383-00/V.J6

New Century Recording Company

Zhang, Zhirong, conductor. (2008) “Guanyuejingdian I.” The Military Band of P.L.A. of

China. “*Reba, Kabaye*” Guang Zhou, China, ISRC CN F21 05-383-00/V.J6

New Century Recording Company

End Notes

1. All Chinese names in this chapter are written in the traditional Chinese manner—surname listed first and given names following the surname.
2. Chen, Qian, personal E-mail, 10 February 2010.
3. Chen, Qian, personal E-mail, 24 September 2009.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Chen, Qian, personal Email, 6 July 2011.
7. Chen, Qian, personal E-mail, 24 September 2009.
8. Senior Colonel in China is equivalent to the rank of Brigadier General in the United States
9. Chen, Qian, personal Email, 6 July 2011.
10. Chen, Qian, personal E-mail, 24 September 2009.
11. Ibid.
12. Verrier, Thomas. Personal E-mail, 27 May 2010.
13. Lee, Yuan-Yuan and Shen, Sinyan. *Chinese Musical Instruments (Chinese Music Monograph Series)*. 1999. Chinese Music Society of North America Press.

14. Ibid.
15. Verrier, Thomas. Personal E-mail, 27 May 2010.
16. Chen, Qian. *Come, Drink One More Cup of Wine*. 2007. Composer's Score.
17. Ibid.
18. Ah-Bing is the nickname of the famous blind Chinese street musician who lived a very difficult life. He played multiple instruments very well, composed his own music for them, and was fortunate enough to record most of his music in 1950. Eventually, he was asked to teach at the Central Conservatory of Music, but could not accept the position due to his failing health.
19. Chen, Qian. *Come, Drink One More Cup of Wine*. 2007. Composer's score.
20. Chen, Qian. *A Lovely Rose*. 1999. English translation of composer's score.
21. Brattin, Gary. English translation of *A Lovely Rose*.
22. Liu, Fang. Program notes on *The Ambush from All Sides*,
<http://youtu.be/JtrthXXmKgA> accessed May 8, 2011.