

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: *MOONLIGHT ON THE PEARL RIVER FOR ORCHESTRA*

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Doctor of Musical Arts, 2022

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Moonlight on the Pearl River (Chinese: 鵝潭月色) is an orchestral work that depicts colorful and various scenes of the Pearl River of Canton (Guangzhou) in southern China. As the mother river of Canton, the Pearl River carries numerous precious memories of the people living there, and multiple celebrations are held on the river throughout the year, including fireworks before the Lunar New Year; dragon boat races in the Dragon Boat Festival during June; thousands of swimmers crossing the river in summer; reflection of the moon in the Mid-Autumn Festival, and more.

The Chinese title 鵝潭月色 specifically describes the moonlight on the “geese pond (Cantonese: Pak Ngo Tam)”, which is the widest section of the Pearl River within the city, and is where the fireworks take place during the Lunar New Year. As a child, I remember I usually had a hearty dinner with my family in the Mid-Autumn Festival. After that, we would have a walk holding lanterns along the Pearl River in the moonlight and enjoy the reflection of the moon on the water surface, as the moon is always the fullest on the Mid-Autumn Day. The Chinese title is a mixture that blends together the specific part of the river where the Lunar New Year is celebrated on (“geese pond”) and the moonlight in the Mid-Autumn Festival. When I grew up and left my hometown, family reunions in these traditional festivals become nearly impossible. Writing this piece gave me a chance to recall the pleasant moments happening in the places where I spent the time in my childhood.

This piece is approximately eleven minutes in a single movement. The instrumentation is piccolo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, English horn (also plays oboe 2), 2 clarinets in B-flat, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trumpets in C, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, crash cymbals and suspended cymbal, snare drum, tenor drum, 5 tom-toms, triangle, wood blocks, glockenspiel, xylophone, marimba, vibraphone, celeste, piano, harp, and strings: violins I, II, violas, cellos, and double basses.

Starting with a slow section, then gradually transitioning to a fast one with ostinatos in the percussion instruments, finally reaching a joyful and even faster section, the overall structure of this symphonic composition consists of three main sections in a slow-fast-faster order. Titled “Moonlight”, the first section (mm.1-65) opens the piece in a poetic manner, describing the reflection of the full moon in the Mid-Autumn Festival. The reflecting image on the river changes from time to time due to the ripples. The musical style I used here is called San Ban, a traditional method that is in a slow tempo with irregular and free meter changes, which can be commonly found in Chinese folk music and operas. Typically, it gives performers the freedom to control meter changes and tempo as improvisations. Instead of freely improvising, I have written specific meter changes. The second section (mm.66-176), called “Fireworks”, represents the fireworks in the Lunar New Year. The ostinato begins in the marimba and piano, then travels between instruments and instrumental groups, providing a colorful assortment of various timbres. “Dragon Boats”, the last section, pictures an intense dragon boat race on May 5th in the lunar calendar every year. The dragon boat theme C-Bb-D-F-G-C-G-Eb-D-F (m.181-182) was borrowed from a traditional Cantonese instrumental piece *Sailongduojin* (dragon boat race). The usage of syncopations, dotted rhythms, and irregular meters helps depicted the competitive environment of the race. A descending and then ascending 16th-note pentatonic pattern can be

seen at the end of each phrase, representing the “tail combining” and “changing beginning and doubling ending” techniques from traditional musical structure. In addition, this pattern also reflects rhyming in literature. Other elements relating to dragon boat races, such as the *accelerando* (mm.249-269), constant drumbeats (m.249), firecracker celebration (mm.270-294) and the triumph (m.301), can be found in this section.

The major feature of the musical language used in this piece is inspired by the scale of the Yee Fan key, a special scale that is rarely used except in Cantonese music. In a typical pentatonic setting, pitches are C-D-E-G-A-C (C pentatonic). Scale degrees 4 and 7 are usually omitted. However, in Yee Fan key, the pitches in the scale are G-B-C-D-F-G with A and E as passing or neighbor tones. These differences make the Yee Fan key sound neither like C pentatonic nor G pentatonic (G-A-B-D-E-G). Moreover, frequently the B is lowered, and F is raised by a quarter tone, making it sound similar to La-Do-Re-Mi-Sol-La in Bb pentatonic. Instead of being omitted in the typical pentatonic scale, the scale degrees 4 and 7 are highly emphasized in the Yee Fan key. In this work the two altered pitches are modified as Bb and F# to adapt to western tuning. The Yee Fan key distinguishes Cantonese music from any other Chinese music. It incorporates the characteristics of C pentatonic (when B and F are natural), G pentatonic (starting on G, when F is raised), Bb pentatonic (when B is lowered), and the western tonality (m2 interval and all seven pitches are used). This piece explores the possibilities of forming different pitch combinations based on the Yee Fan key system.

This work not only represents an important milestone in my career, but also carries my identity and the sweet impressions of my hometown.

MOONLIGHT ON THE PEARL RIVER
FOR ORCHESTRA

by

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Musical Arts (D.M.A.)
2022

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2022

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation was completed under support of many people. It would not have been done without generous help, advice and encouragement from my advisor, Dr. Mark Wilson for more than three years. I have also received the support from Professor Dan Zimmerman, my colleges, and the members of the Department of Theory and Composition at the School of Music of the University of Maryland. Most crucially, I am grateful for the support from my wife Danyang, my daughter Ivy, my mom, my dog Pocky and all my family members.

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Moonlight on the Pearl River for Orchestra

鵝潭月色

Alex Jiheng Bi

Instrumentation

Piccolo

2 Flutes

2 Oboes (Oboe 2 also English Horn)

2 Clarinets in Bb

2 Bassoons

4 Horns in F

3 Trumpets in C

3 Trombones

Tuba

Percussion (Timpani plus 4 percussionists)

Timpani

Bass Drum

Crash Cymbals

Suspended Cymbal

Snare Drum

Tenor Drum

5 Tom-toms

Triangle

Wood Blocks

Glockenspiel

Xylophone

Marimba

Vibraphone

Celeste

Piano

Harp

Violins I

Violins II

Violas

Cellos

Double Basses

19

Fl. 1, 2 *mf* *p*

Ob. 1, 2 *mf* *mf*

C. A. English Horn to Ob. 2

Cl. 1, 2 *mf*

Bsn. 1, 2 *p* *mp*

Hn. *mp* *p*

C Tpt.

Tbn. 1, 2

Tbn. 3

Tba.

Pno.

Hp.

Vln. I *mf* *p* *div.*

Vln. II *mf* *div.* *unis.* *div.* *unis.* *g* *mf*

Vla. *mf* *div.* *unis.* *div.* *mf* *6* *6* *6*

Vc. *mp* *unis.* *mf* *6* *6* *6* *6*

Db. *mp* *arco* *div.* *p*

53

Picc. *mf*

Fl. 1, 2 *p* *mp* *f*

Ob. 1, 2 *mp* *mf*

C. A. *p* *mf* English Horn to Ob. 2

Cl. 1, 2 *p* *mf*

Bsn. 1, 2 *p* *mp*

Hn. *pp* *pp* *mf* *ff*

C Tpt. *con sord. (soft)* *senza sord.* *pp* *f*

Tbn. 1, 2 *f*

Tbn. 3 *f*

Tba. *p* *f*

Timp.

Cym.

Glock. *p* l.v.

Cel.

Pno. *p*

Hp. *l.v.*

Vln. I *p* *div.*

Vln. II *p* *div.*

Vla. *p* *div.*

Vc. *tutti* *p* *div.*

Db. *solo* *p* *tutti* *p*

Fireworks
新歲銀花

D

64

Picc. *f* *f* *f* *f*

Fl. 1, 2 *mf* *f*

Ob. 1, 2 *mf* *f* Ob. 2 to English Horn 1. *mp* *espress.*

C. A.

Cl. 1, 2 *mf* *f*

Bsn. 1, 2 *mf* *f*

Hn. *fp*

C Tpt. *fp*

Tbn. 1, 2 *fp*

Tbn. 3 *fp*

Tba. *fp*

Timp. *f* *f*

Cym. *mf* *f* Crash Cym.

Tom-t. *f*

Glock.

Xyl.

Mar. *f* *p*

Pno. *f* *p*

Vln. I *f* *pp*

Vln. II *f* *pp*

Vla. *f* *pp*

Vc. *f* *pp*

Db. *f* *p*

70

Picc.

Fl. 1, 2

Ob. 1, 2

C. A.

Cl. 1, 2

Bsn. 1, 2

Hn.

C Tpt.

Tbn. 1, 2

Tbn. 3

Tba.

Timp.

Cym.

Tom-t.

Glock.

Xyl.

Mar.

Vib.

Pno.

Hp.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

p

1. tr

mf

f

unis.

78

Picc.

Fl. 1, 2

Ob. 1, 2

C. A.

Cl. 1, 2

Bsn. 1, 2

Hn.

Tbn. 1, 2

Timp.

Cym.

Tom-t.

Tri.

Glock.

Xyl.

Mar.

Vib.

Cel.

Pno.

Hp.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

mf

mf

mp

mp

mp

p

[Sus Cym] scrape w/ coin l.v.

mp

p

mf

mp

cresc.

mf

f

f

f

unis.

f

div.

mf

mf

D#C#B/EF#G#A

DC#B/EF#GA

86

E

Picc. *f*

Fl. 1, 2 *f*

Ob. 1, 2 *f*

C. A. *mf*

Cl. 1, 2 *f*

Bsn. 1, 2 *mf*

Hn. *mf* *mp*

C Tpt.

Tbn. 1, 2 *mp*

Tbn. 3

Tba.

E

Timp. *f*

B. D.

Cym.

S. D.

Tom-t.

Tri. *mf*

Glock. *f*

Xyl. *f*

Mar. *mf* *mp*

Vib. *f*

Cel. *f*

Pno. *f* *mf* *f* *mp*

Hp. *f* *gliss.* *gliss.* *f*

E

Vln. I *f* *pizz.* *f*

Vln. II *f*

Vla. *f*

Vc. *f* *unis.* *mf* *div.*

Db. *f* *mf*

118

Picc.

Fl. 1, 2

Ob. 1, 2

C. A.

Cl. 1, 2

Bsn. 1, 2

Hn.

C Tpt.

Tbn. 1, 2

Tbn. 3

Tba.

Glock.

Xyl.

Mar.

Vib.

Cel.

Pno.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

mf

mf

p

arco

mf

mf

pizz.

mp

138

Picc.

Fl. 1, 2

Ob. 1, 2

C. A.

Cl. 1, 2

Bsn. 1, 2

Hn.

C Tpt.

Tbn. 1, 2

Tbn. 3

Tba.

Timp.

B. D.

S. D.

Tom-t.

Xyl.

Mar.

Vib.

Pno.

Hp.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

1.

mp

cresc.

p

cresc.

p

cresc.

pp

cresc.

f

pp

cresc.

unis.

p

cresc.

unis.

p

cresc.

unis.

p

cresc.

unis.

p

cresc.

p

cresc.

153

Picc.

Fl. 1, 2

Ob. 1, 2

C. A.

Cl. 1, 2

Bsn. 1, 2

Hn.

C Tpt.

Tbn. 1, 2

Tbn. 3

Tba.

Timp.

Tom-t.

Xyl.

Mar.

Vib.

Pno.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

unis.

unis.

unis.

unis.

187

Picc. *f*

Fl. 1, 2 *f*

Ob. 1, 2 *f*

C. A. *mp*

Cl. 1, 2 *f*

Bsn. 1, 2 *mp*

Hn. *mp* *f*

C Tpt. *f*

Tbn. 1, 2

Tbn. 3 *f*

Tba. *f*

Timp. *mp* *f*

B. D.

Cym.

Tom-t.

W.B. *p* *mp*

Xyl. *f*

Mar. *mp*

Vib. *f*

Pno.

Hp.

Vln. I *f* *unis.* *p* *f*

Vln. II *f* *unis.* *p* *f*

Vla. *f* *p* *f*

Vc. *f* *p* *f*

Db. *pizz.* *p* *arco* *f*

207

M

Picc.

p

Fl. 1, 2

p

mf

Ob. 1, 2

f

C. A.

Cl. 1, 2

p

p

Bsn. 1, 2

mf

mp

f

Hn.

pp

C Tpt.

Tbn. 1, 2

Tbn. 3

Tba.

Timp.

M

Tom-t.

p

Tri.

p

W.B.

p

Glock.

pp

Xyl.

mf

mp

f

Mar.

mf

mp

p

f

Vib.

Cel.

p

Pno.

mf

mp

f

Hp.

mf

mp

f

Vln. I

div.

p

M

mp

unis. pizz.

p

div. arco

f

Vln. II

mp

div.

p

unis. pizz.

p

arco div.

f

Vla. (solo)

Vla.

mf

unis.

mp

mp

unis. pizz.

p

arco

f

Vc.

div.

mf

arco

mp

p

f

Db.

mf

DbCBb/EbFGAb

D

31

3

274

297

Picc. *ff*

Fl. 1, 2 *ff*

Ob. 1, 2 *ff*

Cl. 1, 2 *ff*

Bsn. 1, 2 *ff*

Hn. *mf* *ff*

C Tpt. *ff*

Tbn. 1, 2 *ff*

Tbn. 3 *ff*

Tba. *ff*

Timp. *f*

B. D. *f*

Cym. *f*

S. D.

T. D. *mf*

Tom-t.

Glock. *ff*

Xyl.

Mar.

Vib. *ff*

Cel.

Pno. *ff*

Hp.

Vln. I *ff*

Vln. II *ff*

Vla. *ff*

Vc. *div.* *ff*

Db. *f* *ff*

