



(LYRCD 7453)

THE FLOWING WATERS **Guqin Music of Liang Mingye**

YOULAN, LONELY ORCHID

Youlan is the oldest known Qin composition. It was written in a wenzhi pu style of descriptive tablature notation that was preserved in a manuscript scroll dating from 590 A.D. This scroll among other relics was taken from China to Japan by overseas students and scholars sometime during the reign of Empress Dowager Wu Zetian (684-704 A.D.) of the Tang dynasty. The scroll remained dormant for some 1200 years in the Shinkouin Imperial Depository until a verified copy was brought to China in the late 19th century by the Chinese scholar and bibliophile Yang Shoujing (1835-1915).

In 1911 Qin master and scholar Yang Zhongji transcribed Youlan into the modern jianzi pu abbreviated tablature notation and published it in the Qinxue chongshu, a collection of articles and notation on the Qin. Finally in the 1950s the late Guan Pinghu, a Qin disciple of Master Yang, performed and recorded Youlan on China and Hong Kong recording labels, thus enabling a widespread audience to enjoy this historic ca.1,400 year-old repertory.

My current CD performance is based on many years of analyzing each line of the ancient Shinkouin manuscript in consultation with Master Yang Zhongji's modern transcription and with the late Master Cha Fuxi's interpretation of ancient Qin finger techniques. I am deeply indebted to the scholarly works of both these Qin masters, without which a full realization of Youlan would not have been possible.

For the listener of this CD performance it should be noted that my interpretation, unlike other previously recorded editions of Youlan, has adopted the ancient tuning method, namely chunlu pure intonation known as just intonation. The listener may detect the eloquence of the just intonation tuning particularly in the harmonic (overtone) sections. I might mention that most of the later Qin pieces written after the Ming dynasty (1368-1661) commonly used the jianlu, cycle of fifth tuning method.

The programmatic theme of Youlan is based on the anecdote of the scholar Confucius who was disfavored and thereby rejected from all official court positions in spite of his superior wisdom. On his journey home from court, Confucius passed through a valley in the wilderness where he saw an elegant orchid blooming alone among myriad weeds. Confucius is said to have sighed with regret at the waste of this refinement and to have compared his own unappreciated circumstance to that of the lonely orchid. Youlan is said to have derived its emotional tone from this juxtaposition of elegance with lonely dejection.

The word You can be translated as lonely, but also as eloquent or secret. Lan is translated as orchid. These words give depth to the appreciation of this Qin piece. One can hear the dejected loneliness and also the hidden grievances especially at the end of each section. The just intonational harmonic sections provide eloquence and mystery to Youlan. To me, notwithstanding the great antiquity of Youlan, it is musically modern with all possible nuances of sound and subtle micro-tonalities.

In a conversation together with the American composers Lou Harrison and Harry Partch, I recall Harry Partch had remarked after hearing my Youlan performance that if more people had heard such Chinese music as Youlan, they would begin to appreciate his music. (Among his many musical interests, Harry promoted the performance of music and instruments having 43 pitches per octave.)

YUGE, SONGS OF THE FISHERMEN

Yuge is a southern Song dynasty (1127-1278) composition which is allegedly credited to the famous Qin Master Mao Minzhong. It first appeared around 1549 in the Qin handbook Xilutang qintung.

Yuge is a major composition having 18 sections and a string of 32 fishermen's huozi, which are brief, motivic calling melodies arranged in a question and response style. It is believed that these short folk melodies are some nine centuries old and were sung by the fishermen along the Yangtze River gorge in Hubei province. The ending melodic motive in sections 13 and 15 are chordal like and not of the question and answer style of the earlier huozi.

LIUSHUI, FLOWING WATERS

Liushui in its modern edition is one of the most expressive programmatic compositions in the Qin repertory. The middle section of this piece contains sound paintings of different visions of water splashing down a steep mountainside in a cascading waterfall and flowing onwards. Liushui is the ideal sound complement to the traditional waterfall scene in Chinese brush painting.

In the late 19th century Qin Master Xu Qingshan expanded the comparatively conservative 15th century version of Liushui and added some 72 variations of water bubbling, gliding, racing, trickling and other movements to form a multidimensional natural soundscape. The water sounds of Liushui carry the listener down a steep waterfall, floating downstream to join with other waters of a great river and possibly through the turbulent Yangtze River Gorge, enhanced by one's imagination.

In this recorded performance, I have further expanded the water sound patterns to some 89 watery images. My interpretation was empirically inspired after witnessing the breathtaking Huangguoshu, the longest waterfall in China, and also the Sanxia, the three gorges of the the Yangtze River.

LISAONONG, AN IMPROMPTU ON LISAO, ENCOUNTERING SORROW

This is my original 1988 composition based on Lisao, a 4th century poem written by the renowned poet Qu Yuan from the Chu Kingdom of the Warring States period. Qu Yuan is another poet who was banished from the court when he was slandered and his loyalty to the King of Chu was questioned. Qu Yuan felt totally wronged and after writing Lisao he drowned himself in the Milo River. Thereafter, Lisao became known throughout history as a poetic sentiment to express the rejection of a superior gentleman and grievances beyond description.

This composition is in an extemporized style of Qin music based on the Lisao sentiment. The entire piece was improvised during a single recording session in the studio.

DAVID MINGYUE LIANG PROFILE OF THE ARTIST

David Mingyue Liang, a musician in the fullest sense, pursues a career as a composer, ethnomusicologist, and performer of Chinese musical instruments. Liang, who comes from a noted musician family, studied Chinese and Western musical instruments in his native China, followed by musical studies abroad. Liang received his B.A. in composition from the University of Hawaii, and culminated his academic studies with the Ph.D. (with honors in ethnomusicology) from the University of California Los Angeles, where he also studied composition with Roy Harris, Henry Lazarof, and John Vincent. While at UCLA Liang was twice a prize-winning composer in the Atwater Kent contemporary music composition.

COMPOSER'S STATEMENT

I have found that sustaining a career in composing requires an unshakable dedication to some deeply felt beliefs. My creative ideas assume many external forms, but their underlying motive remains consistent. The music I write attempts to preserve the identity of my native cultural heritage and to represent its meaning in the context of today and perhaps tomorrow. In a larger sense, I am concerned about people and our global society. I believe that the sharing and bringing together of musical elements from many diverse cultures into a magically created oneness can affect the way people feel toward one another. The power of music is amazing, beyond words and beyond each individual note. Music has been shown to prevail over intellectual and material differences, and to be able to foster kindred feelings among fellow humankind.

COMPOSITIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

Liang has composed for a variety of media, and for Chinese as well as Western instruments. His early orchestral works, *Floating Clouds*, *Phantasie*, and *Shen-Yu* were commissioned by the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra Association (1971). After the Canadian premiere of *Shen-Yu* (1975) by the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra, the *Vancouver Sun* described the work as a “fascinating experiment in cultural overlap, a subtle and honest attempt at new language.” The *West Side Courier* remarked:

“Although the composer is recognized as one of the world's leading Chinese musical scholars, *Shen-Yu* is not just an academic treatise, but a boldly effective work.” Another full orchestral work, but for Chinese instruments, is the *Music of a Thousand Springs*, which won the prestigious 1987 *Chung Shan Literary and Art Award*. This work and *Zen of Water* is featured in the recording *In C*, a collaboration with composer Terry Riley, which was published by *Celestial Harmonies*.

Liang's earliest venture into a more popular style was the recording Paul Horn's *China* (*Inside Music - Kuckuck*), which featured Horn and Liang as composers and performers. Some of Liang's compositions from this album were later rereleased in *Sketches: A Collection* (*Windham Hill/Lost Lake Arts*, 1986) and in *Nomad* (*Celestial Harmonies*, 1990). Liang's two solo albums, *Dialogue with the Ocean* (1986) and *Dream of the Butterfly* (1987), were released under the Tao label, Hong Kong, and *Tropical Music*. These albums incorporate a diversity of instruments, such as saxophone, Nigerian thumb piano, Mexican ocarina, and Chinese instruments with synthesizer. *Dialogue with the Ocean* received the *Golden Cup Award* in Taiwan for best recording and composition. *Dream of the Butterfly* received Taiwan's 1988 *National Literature and Art Award*.

In collaboration with noted Canadian playwright Ken Mitchell, Liang composed the musical scores for the plays: *The Great Cultural Revolution* (based on Hai Rui's dismissal) (1979), *the Windigo* (1980), an Indian play which toured Europe with the *Green Thumb Players*, and *Gone the Burning Sun*, a play based on the life of Norman Bethune. An extensive epic musical drama in three acts, *Jiu-ge*, was commissioned by the *Council for Cultural Planning and Development*, and premiered in 1993. Liang has also composed music for dramatic and documentary films, including *A Great Wall* (*W & S Productions*) and the *Cities in China Series*, a *Blue Ribbon Award* winner in 1981.

THE TRACKS AND TIMES

- 1) Youlan, Lonely Orchid 12:35
- 2) Yuge, Songs of the Fishermen 17:18
- 3) Liushui, Flowing Waters 10:27
- 4) Lisaonong, An Impromptu on Lisao, Encountering Sorrow 16:22

Total Running time - 56:43

CREDITS

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Painting on cover “Flowing Waters” by David Mingyue Liang, 2003



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