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25 Feb 2023 (SAT)  
8:00pm  
Osage Gallery

THE LISTENING ROOM

10

# LISTENING ROOM #10 - Listen to the Sphinx

25 February 2023 | 8:00pm

PARK Gyeong-hun

*Recollection* for solo sheng

Joyce Wai-chung TANG

*Remembrance of the Stonewall Trees* for solo sheng

CHAN Hing-yan

*Listen to the Sphinx* for sheng, sanxian & percussion (world premiere)

II. 對鏡仕女 Lady with a Mirror (1940-43)

I. 摸索 Groping in the Dark (1920s)

Toshio HOSOKAWA

*Sakura for Otto Tomek* for solo shō

Toshi ICHIYANAGI

*Transfiguration of the Moon* for shō & violin

Maki ISHII

*Music for Shō and Cello* for shō & cello

CHAN Hing-yan

*Listen to the Sphinx* for sheng, sanxian & percussion (world premiere)

III. 秋鷺圖 Autumn Herons (1960)

IV. 鬧天宮 Havoc in the Celestial Palace (1940s)

Loo Sze-wang, sheng, shō

Patrick Yim, violin

Pun Chak-yin, cello<sup>^</sup>

Chan Hei-tung, sanxian\*

Samuel Chan, percussion\*

<sup>^</sup> Associate musician

\* Guest musician

## Overview

Our signature recital series The Listening Room, in partnership with Sigma Projects, is returning in February! To kick off 2023, we invited our member Loo Sze-wang, who is arguably one of the best *sheng* players in the world, to work with our leading musicians to curate a progressive and thought-provoking programme. The recital features music by prominent composers from East Asia, including a world premiere by leading composer Chan Hing-yan, who is a longtime collaborator of the virtuoso.

## Curatorial Statement by Loo Sze-wang

回想過去，都在尋覓。牆樹的根，曾被砍卻重生，茂盛雖不再，但體態依然，令我憶起美的體會和追求。從鏡中看自己，像在聆聽自己的每一音，每一韻。摸索，成了漫長的人生路。

瀛音為據，毋庸置疑。東方多以月亮為題，東瀛卻譜出當代神韻。月之變容，既神秘又吸引；笙與提琴，既突破又不失傳統。

林風眠先生的中西融匯，謙遜的態度成就傳世之作。秋鷺圖的淡然與鬧天宮的濃烈，兼收並蓄，藝術家之典範，無出其右。林風眠，原名林鳳鳴。鳳鳴自古為笙之音韻，或許與笙，早已有著不解之緣。

Recalling the past—we are searching for what we have missed. The roots of stonewall trees once axed, grow back. The trees no longer flourish, yet are in good shape. This scenery is reminiscent of my creative heuristics and artistic pursuits. Looking at myself in the mirror resembles listening to every sound and rhyme introspectively. Searching has become a lifelong process.

Undoubtedly, this programme is curated based on the sounds from the Nipponese world. In the Orient, the Moon has long been the source of inspiration to artists, but only Japanese composers could sublimate the idea and reveal its contemporary charm in music. The transfiguration of the moon is both enigmatic and evocative; the unusual combination of *sheng* and violin is a breakthrough in music while respecting the tradition.

Striving to experiment with the essence of Chinese and Western styles, painter Lin Feng-mian's masterpieces are highly regarded in the art world. The indifference in *Autumn Herons* and the intensity in *Havoc in Celestial Palace* are eclectic. "An Artist Prepares," as one may put it, would have been a treatise authored and dedicated to the Chinese artists by Lin. Lin Feng-mian was originally known as Lin Feng-ming. Feng-ming, literally "the cry of phoenix," has been the rhyme of *sheng* down the ages. Perhaps Lin had an indissoluble bond with the *sheng*.

## Programme Notes

### **PARK Gyeong-hun: *Recollection*** | Notes by the composer

This is one of the études for the *saenghwang* included in *Yul* (율, 律), composed by South Korean Park Gyeong-hun. The diverse harmony of the *saenghwang* in *Recollection* creates lonely and melancholy feelings, which evoke emotions of recollection. Despite being an étude, this piece is excellent for being performed in a concert setting. (Translated by Hong Kong New Music Ensemble)

### **Joyce Wai-chung TANG: *Remembrance of the Stonewall Trees*** | Notes by the composer

During a rainstorm in July 2015, an old, 20-metre tall banyan tree grown on the stonewall collapsed on Bonham Road in Hong Kong. The government, ignoring the opinions from tree experts and without public consultation, axed four other neighbouring old stonewall trees in haste, resulting in only the roots remaining.

These banyan trees grown on the masonry, with the crisscrossing roots gripping the wall, were heritage in Hong Kong for over a century. These trees were part of the composer's nostalgic memory of numerous journeys along that road.

*Remembrance of the Stonewall Trees* is a piece expressing the memory, and the anger for the loss, of these beautiful banyan. This piece was commissioned by, and dedicated to, *sheng* performer Loo Sze-wang, and was written specially for his performance at the Canberra International Music Festival in May 2017.

### **CHAN Hing-yan: *Listen to the Sphinx*** | Notes by the composer

- I. 摸索 Groping in the Dark (1920s)
- II. 對鏡仕女 Lady with a Mirror (1940-43)
- III. 秋鷺圖 Autumn Herons (1960)
- IV. 鬧天宮 Havoc in the Celestial Palace (1940s)

Each movement of *Listen to the Sphinx* is based on a painting by Lin Feng-mian (1900–1991), widely hailed as a pioneer in both Chinese painting and art education. Lin was among the earliest to make a serious study of European modern art while also humbly confronting traditional Chinese landscape paintings and ceramics. Throughout his long and productive life, Lin's receptive and vibrant artistic temperament was like a lingering curse, which constantly brought him into

conflict with authorities and establishments. Yet Lin's unique insight and steadfast convictions helped him transcend both artistic and political constraints of those repressive years. As early as in his 50s, while looking back at the vicissitudes of his personal history, Lin once remarked, "I am like the Sphinx, seated in the midst of a desert. Great ages come and go, and I remain motionless." Such is the inspiration behind the English title of my four-movement miniature.

**Toshio HOSOKAWA: *Sakura for Otto Tomek* | Notes by Naomi Sato**

"*Sakura*" is a traditional Japanese song about cherry blossoms and the precious delights of spring. *Sakura for Otto Tomek* is a solo for *shō* to celebrate the eightieth birthday of the *Westdeutscher Rundfunk's* former director. Hearing the instrument alone gives a good sense of its qualities, and Hosokawa's almost conventional harmonies and suspensions in this adaptation of the song make this sound like a miniature harmonium heard from afar or from above the clouds. A work filled with slowly evolving complex clusters of harmony, *Sakura's* meditative ambience is shadowed with portentous overtones, creating a rich showcase for the singular and fetching timbres of the *shō*.

**Toshi ICHIYANAGI: *Transfiguration of the Moon* | Notes by the composer**

The modern violin and the *shō*, though evolved from separate heritages, both have a capacity to create flexible, flowing elongated timbres and colors unlike that of, say, a percussive instrument such as the piano. I have scored this work on the standard 5-line staff of Western tradition, but in the meeting of these two gorgeous voices, I have tried to give a sense of transfiguration. One may wonder how this could be composed on standard Western notation, but as the *shō* and violin meet and converse, listening to each other, each is transformed, like the moon out of night clouds.

**Maki ISHII: *Music for Shō and Cello* | Notes by the composer**

In Gagaku, the *shō* shrouds the music as a whole in a haze, its sound emitted as if from the heavens in the form of static clusters locked in the upper realms of pitch. The rigid stylistic features of Gagaku have determined the way in which the *shō* is played. But it was during the Heian Period, when Gagaku as it exists today took on a distinctly Japanese identity, that the *shō* was allocated the essential role that it has continued to play for more than a millennium since, namely to provide an *accompaniment* consisting of expressionless, cluster-like chords. It was considered *vulgar* and was indeed taboo for the *shō* to perform in an *expressive* manner. But the *shō* appears to have been a much more *vulgar* instrument before the Heian Period, when the Gagaku repertoire consisted of as yet unassimilated foreign music. This is clear from the *Jussōki*, an early tenth-century treatise on Tōgaku performance technique attributed to Prince Sadayasu (870–924), in which reference is made to ten forms of *expression* including specification of types of attack.

In *Music for Shō and Cello* I have attempted to break free from the coagulated resonance which characterises the use of the *shō* in Gagaku today. I explore how the instrument might have been used before the Heian Period, and combine this attempt to resurrect long defunct techniques with contemporary performance methods. My aim in so doing is to create a new mode of *expression*, one which permits an encounter with that most perfect of Western instruments, the cello.

The *shō* here descends from its hazy pedestal in the heavens into the *vulgar* world, its richly *expressive* voice mingling with the *expressive* cello to reach out into a new world of sound.

## **BIOGRAPHIES**

### **LOO SZE-WANG**

Renowned *sheng* virtuoso Loo Sze-wang has many awards under his belt, and has been active both as a soloist and as a chamber musician. He has collaborated with different performing groups in Asia, Europe, and North and South America, including the Song Company of Australia, St Lawrence String Quartet of Canada, POING of Norway, the Fulcrum Point New Music Project of Chicago, Het Collectif of Brussels, and the Macao Orchestra.

Loo has also premiered several *sheng* concertos, the notable pieces being *Miroir de Macao* by Lam Bun-ching and Chan Hing-yan's *Hark the Phoenix Soaring High* and *'Twas the Thawing Wind*. In 2009, he was Artist-in-Residence at Cornell University in New York. As Artist Associate of the Hong Kong Sinfonietta in 2012, he went on tour with the orchestra to North America. His recent performances include the operas *Heart of Coral* and *Ghost Love* by Chan Hing-yan; the atmospheric music theatre shows *When Petals Fall in Serenity* and *Beyond the Senses* by composer Law Wing-fai; *The Anatomy of the Musician* by Samson Young in Paris, France; and the new concerto *Hark the Phoenix Solitaire Cry* by Chan Hing-yan with the UniMi Orchestra in Milan, Italy, under the baton of Yip Wing-sie in 2016.

Loo is a founding member of the group Chinese Music Virtuosi, which was Ensemble-in-Residence at the Department of Music of the Chinese University of Hong Kong in 2011–12.

### **PATRICK YIM**

Honolulu-born violinist Patrick T.S. Yim has performed on stages around the world, including Carnegie Hall and David Geffen Hall (New York), Seoul Arts Center, Harpa Concert Hall (Reykjavík), Hong Kong City Hall, Severance Hall (Cleveland), Orchestra Hall (Chicago), Teatro alla Scala (Milan), and the Musikverein (Vienna).

A core member of the Hong Kong New Music Ensemble, Yim was Assistant Professor of Music at Hong Kong Baptist University from 2017–2021. He also taught violin and chamber music at Stony Brook University, Cleveland Institute of Music Preparatory Department, Interlochen Summer Arts Camp, Flatirons Chamber Music Festival, Rushmore Music Festival, and the Sulzbach-Rosenberg International Music Festival. He has presented lectures and masterclasses at the Hong Kong Philharmonic, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Royal Academy of Music in Aarhus, University of Rio de Janeiro (Universidade Federal do Estado do Rio de Janeiro), University of Colorado at Boulder, University of Oklahoma, Central Michigan University, Chinese University of Hong Kong, Education University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, and the University of Hawaii at Mānoa. He has served as an external examiner at the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts and has taught masterclasses and workshops in the

United States, Germany, Denmark, Iceland, Brazil, India, Tajikistan, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and mainland China.

Yim is Assistant Professor of Violin in the Department of Music at the University of Notre Dame.

### **PUN CHAK-YIN**

A keen chamber musician, Pun Chak-yin has performed at St. John's Smith Square, Concert of Finland 100 & Hong Kong 20th Return Anniversary, and The 19th China Shanghai International Arts Festival.

Pun studied at the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts and Royal Academy of Music under the tutelage of Ms. Karey Kwok-chee Ho and Prof. David Strange. His studies were supported by numerous local and overseas scholarships. He is currently Associate Musician with the Hong Kong New Music Ensemble and faculty at the Junior Music Programme of HKAPA.

### **CHAN HEI-TUNG**

Stella Chan graduated from The University of Hong Kong where she was conferred a Bachelor of Arts and a Master of Philosophy in Musicology. Her master's thesis "Becoming a Tradition: Re-inventing the *Sanxian*" investigates how the identity and performativity of the *sanxian* is constantly (re)-invented through concert touring.

### **SAMUEL CHAN**

The First Prize winner of the 2015 Percussive Arts Society International Solo Percussion Competition, Samuel Chan's diverse performing experiences have taken him to celebrated concert halls on multiple continents. Samuel's past highlights include appearances as soloist with the Houston Symphony and Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra. He has performed with ensembles such as the Malaysian and Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestras, Hong Kong Sinfonietta, and in summers at the Lucerne, Verbier, Tanglewood, and Pacific Music Festivals. An avid chamber musician and a member of The Up:Strike Project, he was invited to perform on tour throughout Europe as Co-Principal with the World Percussion Group, and has collaborated with such acclaimed artists as Lawrence Lesser, Angelo Yu, Orli Shaham, and Aiyun Huang. He has also premiered works by Esa-Pekka Salonen, George Lewis, and Tan Dun.



Established in 2010, **SIGMA** is an extension of Osage Group's activities. The name comes from the Greek letter,  $\Sigma$ . Just as the symbol is used in mathematics to indicate the sum of all operations, Sigma is a project based in addition and continually provides supplementary programs and services to the Osage Group. Sigma is an experimental platform, allowing it to expand and include artistic and cultural ideas and projects that fall outside the purview of Osage Gallery and Osage Art Foundation.

**THE LISTENING ROOM** presented six editions in 2009-2010 at Osage Soho, bringing together local and international adventurous music makers from the worlds of contemporary classical, jazz, sound art, electronic music and more. Ten years later in the midst of a global pandemic, the needs of the local music scene have changed. **THE LISTENING ROOM** in its 2020s edition aims to be a nurturing outpost for progressive and thought-provoking sonic experiences, presenting a deeper dialogue between audiences and practitioners in an environment that encourages the exploration of a wide range of rarely-heard (mostly) acoustic contemporary classical music.

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**HONGKONG  
NEW MUSIC  
ENSEMBLE**  
香港創樂團

Founded in 2008 by William Lane, the **HONG KONG NEW MUSIC ENSEMBLE** (HKNME) is Asia's leading new music group, dedicated to presenting contemporary music to the highest possible standard. The Ensemble has led numerous world and regional premieres of important contemporary works — a number of which commissioned by the HKNME — at prestigious music festivals and venues around the world, including the Hong Kong Arts Festival, New Vision Arts Festival (HK), Tongyeong International Music Festival / ISCM (South Korea), ECHOFLUXX Festival of New Media (Czech Republic), CYCLE Music and Art Festival (Iceland), Shanghai New Music Week (CN), Beijing Music Festival (CN), Hong Kong Week (TW), MONA FOMA (Australia), Hong Kong Music Series (London), Angel Orensanz Center (New York City), and Wilsey Center for Opera (San Francisco). The HKNME has been annually funded by the Hong Kong Arts Development Council since 2012.

[www.hongkongnewmusic.org](http://www.hongkongnewmusic.org)