

GRADUATE COMPOSITION RECITAL
A BRIEF ANALYSIS

An Abstract of Thesis
Submitted
In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Music

Xingzimin Pan
University of Northern Iowa
August 2013

This Study by: Xingzimin Pan

Entitled: Graduate Composition Recital: A Brief Analysis

has been approved as meeting the thesis requirement for the
Degree of Master of Music in Composition/Theory

Date

Dr. Jonathan Schwabe, Chair, Thesis Committee

Date

Dr. Alan Schmitz, Thesis Committee Member

Date

Dr. Rebecca Burkhardt, Thesis Committee Member

Date

Dr. Michael J. Licari, Dean, Graduate College

This Recital Performance by: Xingzimin Pan

Entitled: Graduate Composition Recital

Date of Recital: Wednesday, March 27, 2013, 6pm, Graham Hall

has been approved as meeting the thesis requirement for the

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ABSTRACT

Introduction

My graduate recital was performed on Wednesday, March 27, 2013, in Graham Hall, Russell Hall. Seven pieces which included a diversity of instrumentation, style and compositional approach were performed: *Memories* (for piano solo), performed by Serena Hou and Elena Lyalina; *Three Sarcastic Songs* (a three-movement piece for soprano, violin, viola, clarinet and bass clarinet), performed by Samantha Kantak (soprano), Elizabeth Andersen (violin), Andrea Alert (viola), Emma Petersen (clarinet) and Madeline Young (bass clarinet); *Kaidan* (for flute and piano), performed by Rocio Lima Guaman (flute) and Xingzimin Pan (piano); and *Trio* (for flute, alto saxophone and piano), performed by Rocio Lima Guaman (flute), Gabriel Scheid (alto saxophone) and Jiamin Liao (piano).

Memories

Memories is a series of piano solo works that have been composed over a long period of time, and more will be composed in the future. In this series of pieces, most bear a distinct minimalist influence, especially Philip Glass's compositional techniques.

Harmonic Patterns

- Tone Center

This music may be better said to have a *tone center* rather than a tonal center. Like Philip Glass's music, harmonically, it is tonal, but not always functional. Also, the

harmonic structures in these piano pieces are not always based on triads, but in many cases, on single notes. Therefore, it is better to say that these pieces are more likely built on tones, rather than functional tonalities in a more traditional way.

In *A Faint Memory*, the tone center is D, and one voice among four sustains this pitch (Ex. 1). In *Memory No. 2*, the chord shifts between D minor and D major triads, but the pitch D is always the most important pitch, the tone center (Ex. 2).

Ex. 1: *A Faint Memory*, mm. 62-73



Ex. 2: *Memory No. 2*, mm. 1-4



Allegro ♩ = 115

mf

con. 

- Linear Micro-progression

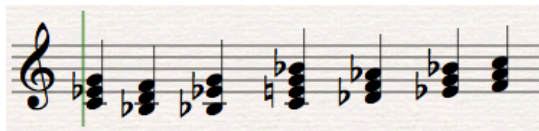
In a linear micro-progression, harmonic change occurs as a result of slight linear motion. The examples below demonstrate how chord members of a harmonic reduction move by small intervals producing a subtle and gradual sense of progression. In *A Faint Memory* (Ex.3), the chord sequence contains mostly triads and added-tone chords, unrelated in functional terms, but retaining the common tone D, which provides tonal gravity.

Ex. 3: the chordal structure of mm. 7-32 from *A Faint Memory*



The chordal structure of mm. 9-16 from *An Irrepressible Memory* (Ex. 4) is the most important harmonic progression in the piece. It appears in every section without significant structural change.

Ex. 4: chordal structure of mm. 9-16 from *An Irrepressible Memory*



The chordal structure of mm. 20-28 from *Memory No. 2*, linear micro-progression starts from a D minor triad.

Ex. 5: the chordal structure of mm. 20-28 from *Memory No. 2*



Rhythmic Patterns

- Constant Use of 8th and 16th Notes

All the pieces in the *Memories* Series are based on 8th, dotted 8th, or 16th notes. This constant use of 8th or 16th notes creates a sense of rhythmic repetition, which is a crucial element in minimalist music.

- Groupings of Three and Four (Hemiola)

In the *Memories* Series, 8th and 16th notes are generally grouped in three and four. In Ex. 6, rhythmic patterns of the bass line are alternated between groups of three and four. In Ex. 2, the constant grouping of three is based on a 4/4 time signature. In Ex. 7, the upper voice is built in groupings of three and four.

Ex. 6: *A Faint Memory*, mm. 44-55



Ex. 7: *Memory No. 4*, mm. 1-11

- Polyrhythm

In addition to the examples of hemiola in the *Memories* Series, other examples of polyrhythm contribute to structural complexity. In Ex. 6, four voices have four different rhythmic patterns: the upper voice is based on the time pattern of 2/8, the second voice is based on 3/8, the third one is based on equally divided 3/8, the bass 3/16 and 2/4. In Ex. 8, an example from *A Fictional Memory*, the second movement from *Memory No. 1-Memory Trilogy*, from mm. 29-35, the upper voice is based on a 4/4 pattern, while in mm. 29-32, the lower voice is based on 3/4; in mm. 33-35, it is based on 3/8; in mm. From mm. 36-40, the upper voice is based on a melodic grouping of three or four notes, and the lower voice is based on a pattern of 3+3+2.

Ex. 8: *A Fictional Memory*, mm. 29-40

The musical score consists of three systems of piano accompaniment. The first system (mm. 29-32) is in 4/4 time, with a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The treble staff contains a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes. The bass staff has a bass clef with a sub-octave sign (8^{va}) and a dynamic marking of *mp*. A bracket labeled *mf* covers measures 30-32, with a 3/4 time signature indicated below it. A dynamic marking of *p* is at the end of the system. The second system (mm. 33-36) has a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The treble staff has a dynamic marking of *mp*. The bass staff has a dynamic marking of *mf* and a sub-octave sign (8^{va}). A bracket labeled *mp* covers measures 34-36, with a 3/8 time signature indicated below it. The third system (mm. 37-40) has a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The treble staff has a dynamic marking of *mp*. The bass staff has a dynamic marking of *mp* and a sub-octave sign (8^{va}). The system is filled with complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets and sextuplets, with various time signatures like 4, 3, and 2 indicated above and below the staves.

Three Sarcastic Songs

This composition consists of three songs, scored for Soprano, Violin, Viola, Bb Clarinet and Bb Bass Clarinet. The songs are settings of texts by Mao Tse-tung, Jiang

Zemin, and Hu Jintao; three Chinese Communist political leaders from different historical periods.

The texts come from quotes used in various contexts including interviews, retorts to reporters and articles. They all reveal characters of silliness, insolence and insincerity. That is the reason why this composition is named *Three Sarcastic Songs*. There are some specific compositional techniques being used to create a sense of sarcasm.

- Carefully Selected Intervals

In this composition, only the M2, M7, m2, m7 and the tritone have been used. In addition, a very limited number of perfect 4ths and 5ths were used in the voice part in order to provide stability and melodic interest.

- Pointillism

Pointillism (in a musical context) is a textural/orchestrational device that emerged in the early 20th century in which entrances are made in seclusion, emphasizing the timbral identity of the instruments. Pointillism is evident in many works by Webern, Stravinsky, Takemitsu and many others.

The combination of dissonant intervals in a pointillistic texture is used to create an unstable feeling, which is intended to reinforce the intense sarcastic character. In *Three Sarcastic Songs*, the overlapping of instruments is avoided intentionally. Ex. 9, 10 and 11 demonstrate uses of pointillism.

Ex. 9: *Three Sarcastic Songs* 1st mvt, mm. 1-6

$\text{♩} = 80$

Soprano

Violin

Viola

Clarinet in B \flat

Bass Clarinet in B \flat

Ex. 10: *Three Sarcastic Songs* 2nd mvt, mm. 24-29

8
24

(small notes ossia)

S. that I have ne-ver been to? Mike Wal-lace is much smar-ter

Vln.

Vla.

Cl.

B. Cl.

Ex. 11: *Three Sarcastic Songs* 3rd mvt, mm. 1-6

♩ = 72

Soprano

Violin

Viola

Clarinet in B \flat

Bass Clarinet in B \flat

- Word Painting

Three Sarcastic Songs utilizes word painting at appropriate places, as shown below:

for the first three iterations of the word “advocate” a major triad is used in the accompaniment. The final time that advocate is used, a secundal sonority evokes a sense of insincerity.

We advocate his cause,
 Advocate the triumph of Socialism,
 Advocate the direction that he provides
 To the whole of mankind,
 And advocate our brotherly friend.

Music for the first three “advocates” is quite intense, and exciting, and accompanied by major triads. However, for the last “advocate,” (referring to the friendship between China and the Soviet Union) suddenly turns to a slow and dark atmosphere in a lower register (Ex. 12). This reflects the shift of mood in the middle of the 20th century; although China and the Soviet Union were both Socialist countries, they did not have a good relationship with each other, because both countries thought they should be the absolute leader of the Socialist world. Therefore, in private, these two countries were fierce competitors; the outward sentiment of “brotherly friend” did not really exist.

Ex. 12: *Three Sarcastic Songs* 1st mvt, mm. 30-33



30 $\text{♩} = 60$
mp
 3 3
 and ad-vo-cate our bro-ther-ly friend.

In the 2nd movement “Too simple, sometimes naïve,” dynamics, articulations, and an upper register are used to highlight the pretentious and insolent personality of Jiang Zemin, former president of China. (Ex. 13).

Ex. 13-1, *Three Sarcastic Songs* 2nd mvt, mm. 1-2, and mm. 16-17



f
 3
 Let me tell you,

Ex. 13-2, *Three Sarcastic Songs* 2nd mvt, mm. 11-12

you are too young.

Ex. 13-3, *Three Sarcastic Songs* 2nd mvt, mm. 20-25

Is there a - ny wes-tern coun-try that I have ne-ver been to?

In the 3rd movement, in order to show the torpid and introverted personality of Hu Jintao, the former president of China, almost all the texts are written in a slow and relatively quiet fashion, except one sentence: “I had no intention of being the president.” When the vocal performer comes to “the president,” the music suddenly achieves a high level of loudness and dissonance. It symbolizes that even though Hu claims that he is not ambitious for political power, he could hide his true thoughts (Ex. 14).

Ex. 14: *Three Sarcastic Songs* 3rd mvt, mm. 17-20

I had no in - ten-tion of be - ing the pre-si-dent.

Kaidan

Kaidan is a piece written for flute and piano. The title is originally a Japanese word “怪談,” which basically means “ghost story” or “horror story.” This composition employs various extended techniques for both instruments and utilizes extensive contemporary notation.

- Extended Techniques for Flute

The flute is commonly used in contemporary music, and extended techniques for flute are relatively more advanced than for many other instruments. In this composition, the extended techniques for flute include:

- i) Air sound

There are generally two types of air sound produced: absolute air sound without pitch content (Ex. 15-1), and air sound with some specified degree of pitch content (Ex. 15-2).

Ex. 15-1: *Kaidan*, p.1

Flute

air sound 8" 3" air sound 8"

ppp *f* *ppp* *ppp* *f* *ppp*

Ex. 15-2: *Kaidan*, p. 3

$\text{♩} = 60$
harmonics
1/2 pitch tone, 1/2 air sound

3" 3"

p *f* *p* *gliss.* *f* *p*

ii) Singing while playing

There are also two types of this technique: the singing pitch and playing pitch are different (Ex.16-1), or the same (Ex. 16-2).

Ex. 16-1: *Kaidan*, p. 6



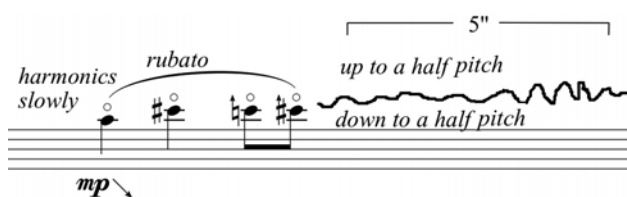
Ex. 16-2: *Kaidan*, p. 4



iii) Quarter tone

This piece utilizes quarter tones in three ways: applied to a sustained pitch, (Ex. 17-1), quarter tone trill (Ex. 17-2), and glissando (ex. 17-1).

Ex. 17-1: *Kaidan*, p. 9



Ex. 17-2: *Kaidan*, p. 6



iv) Other extended techniques

This work also includes other commonly-used extended techniques, such as jet whistle (unpitched blowing through the flute (Ex.18-1), key click (Ex.18-2), flutter-tongue

(Ex.18-3) and multiphonics (Ex.18-4). Note that “X” notation for noteheads is used to designate both jet whistle and key clicks techniques.

Ex. 18-1, *Kaidan*, p. 2 (treble clef)



Ex. 18-2, *Kaidan*, p. 2



Ex. 18-3, *Kaidan*, p. 6



Ex. 18-4, *Kaidan*, p. 2



- Extended Techniques for Piano

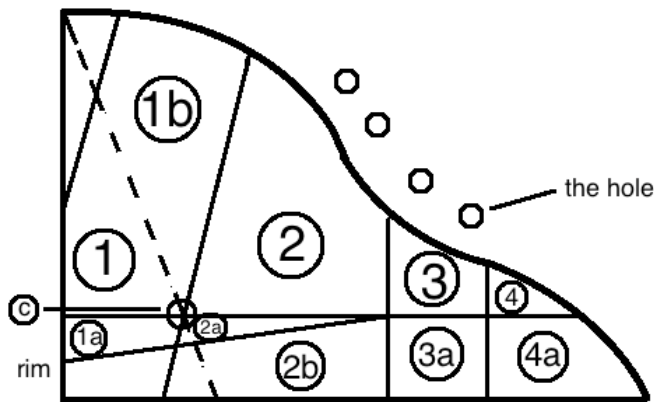
In this piece, almost all of the extended techniques for piano involve playing inside the piano. Ex. 19 shows a graphic layout of the piano soundboard. The circled numbers used in the score indicate which region of the piano is to be used.

- i) Stroking, striking, scratching and sweeping across the strings

These techniques are not pitch-specific, and are all played with the sustain pedal down, emphasizing the atmospheric effects that are produced. The stroking of the strings can be

done in a crossing motion (Ex. 20-1) or vertically (Ex. 20-2). The striking of the strings can be done with the palm or other materials, such as a folded piece of card board which is used to strike the strings (Ex. 20-3). The scratching of the strings should be done with the fingernails (Ex. 20-4). When sweeping across the strings, different timbres are produced by using different parts of the finger or other materials (in this case, a soft rubber eraser), or by playing in different regions of the inside of the piano.

Ex. 19: the graphics of the inside of the piano



Ex. 20-1: *Kaidan*, p. 1

stroke the strings with tips of fingers, — hands moving in circular motion

Ex. 20-2: *Kaidan*, p. 5

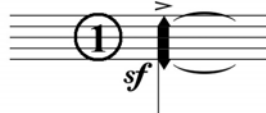
stroke the strings with both hands with open palms in a pulling motion towards the performers body

Ex. 20-3: *Kaidan*, p. 3

(R.H.) a piece of card board, fold into thirds, strike the strings with the edge

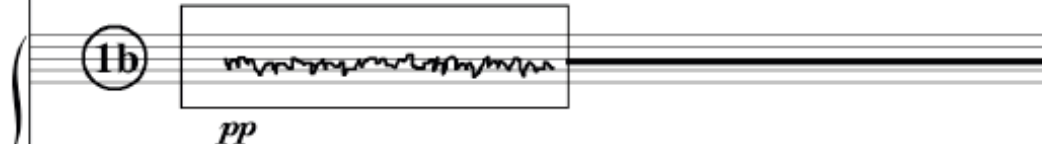


(L.H.) strike the strings using open palm

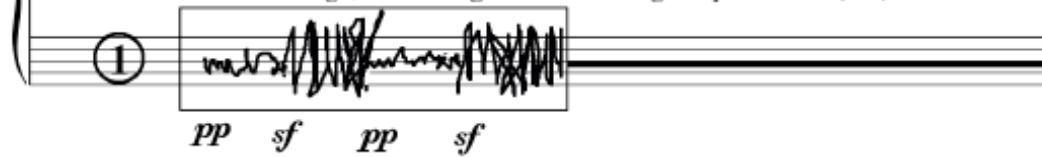


Ex. 20-4: *Kaidan*, p. 5

R.H. scratch the strings, maintaining a constant *pp*

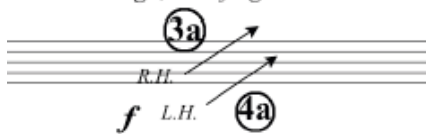


L.H. scratch the strings, increasing and decreasing the pressure rapidly

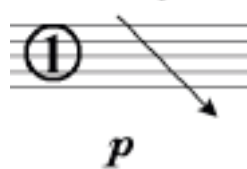


Ex. 20-5: *Kaidan*, p. 2, 10 and 9

sweep across the strings, low to high, with fingernails.



without f.n.



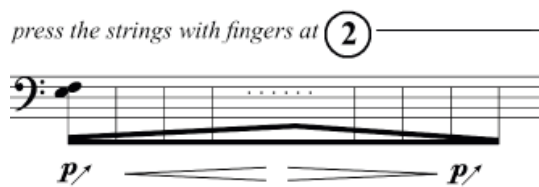
sweep across the strings (using soft eraser)



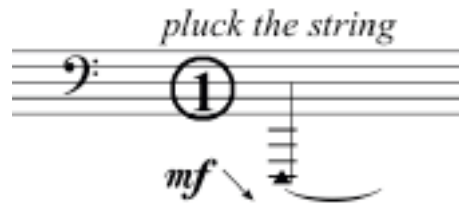
ii) Techniques using specific pitches

There are also approaches that require the pianist to perform indicated pitches. In Ex. 21, the pianist presses the strings while playing the pitches in the keyboard, resulting in a percussive timbre. At other places, the pianist plucks the specified strings (Ex. 22)

Ex. 21: *Kaidan*, p. 1



Ex. 22: *Kaidan*, p. 4



Trio

This composition is for flute, alto saxophone and piano. Compared to the other works previously mentioned, *Trio* is relatively conservative with regard to form and organization of materials.

- Form and Structure

Trio is a single movement composition. The form is somewhere between ternary and sonata-allegro. *Trio* has two motives (Ex. 23), these correspond loosely to the first and second themes in a sonata-allegro template.

Ex. 23-1: *Trio*, m. 1



Ex. 23-2: *Trio*, m. 6



Based on these two motives, the music has been developed in the original version (Ex. 24-1, 24-2), inverted version (Ex. 24-3) and retrograded version (Ex. 24-4).

Ex. 24-1: *Trio*, mm.13-15



Ex. 24-2, mm. 16-17



Ex. 24-3: *Trio*, mm.23

Musical notation for Ex. 24-3, measures 23-24. The score is in 4/4 time. The top staff (treble clef) has a whole rest in measure 23 and a whole note chord in measure 24. The bottom staff (bass clef) has a whole rest in measure 23 and a whole note chord in measure 24. The dynamic marking *mp* is placed below the bottom staff in measure 24.

Ex. 24-4: *Trio*, m.38

Musical notation for Ex. 24-4, measure 38. The score is in 4/4 time. The top staff (treble clef) has a whole note chord. The bottom staff (bass clef) has a whole note chord. The dynamic marking *mf* is placed below the top staff.

- Interval Content

Trio is better analyzed linearly rather than vertically. Nevertheless, some vertical sonorities occurring in this piece tend to be secundal.

Ex. 25-1: *Trio*, mm. 1-2

Musical notation for Ex. 25-1, measures 1-2. The score is in 4/4 time. The top staff (Flute) and bottom staff (Alto Saxophone) both have a whole note chord in measure 1 and a whole note chord in measure 2. The dynamic marking *f* is placed below each staff in measure 1.

Ex. 25-2: *Trio*, mm. 10-11

Musical notation for Ex. 25-2, measures 10-11. The score is in 4/4 time. The top staff (Piano) has a whole note chord in measure 10 and a whole note chord in measure 11. The bottom staff (Piano) has a whole note chord in measure 10 and a whole note chord in measure 11. The dynamic marking *mf* is placed below the bottom staff in measure 10.

Ex. 25-3: *Trio*, mm. 15-17

Piano score for measures 15-17. The piece is in 2/4 time and has a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The piano part features a melody in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The dynamic range is indicated as *pp* (pianissimo) to *mf* (mezzo-forte). The melody consists of eighth-note patterns in measures 15 and 16, followed by a quarter note in measure 17. The bass line consists of eighth-note patterns in measures 15 and 16, followed by a quarter note in measure 17.

- Texture

There are different combinations and timbral contrasts in this composition, such as flute+sax vs. piano (Ex. 26), sax+piano (Ex. 27), flute+piano (Ex. 28) and unison of three instruments (Ex. 29).

Ex. 26: *Trio*, mm. 1-5

Musical score for measures 1-5, featuring Flute, Alto Saxophone, and Piano. The piece is in 4/4 time and has a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The Flute and Alto Saxophone parts are marked with a dynamic of *f* (forte). The Piano part is also marked with a dynamic of *f*. The Flute and Alto Saxophone parts consist of eighth-note patterns in measures 1 and 2, followed by a quarter note in measure 3. The Piano part consists of eighth-note patterns in measures 1 and 2, followed by a quarter note in measure 3.

Ex. 27: *Trio*, mm. 24-27

24

Fl.

Alto Sax.

Pno.

mp

mf

mp

mf

Ex. 28: *Trio*, mm. 39-41

39

Fl.

Alto Sax.

Pno.

Ex. 29: *Trio*, mm. 24-27

f

f

f

f

- Extended Technique

Extended techniques for piano and flute have also been employed in *Trio*. In the beginning of section B, the pianist strokes, scratches and plucks the strings while the flutist plays into the inside of the piano (with the sustain pedal depressed). The flute must be positioned very close to the piano strings in order to cause them to vibrate, creating a subtle and delicate sustained atmospheric effect (Ex. 30).

Ex. 30: *Trio*, m. 54

(Play very close to the strings, let them vibrate)

The musical score consists of three staves: Flute (Fl.), Alto Saxophone (Alto Sax.), and Piano (Pno.).

- Flute (Fl.):** The staff shows a sustained note with a dynamic range from *fp* (pianissimo) to *f* (forte) to *mp* (mezzo-piano). Above the staff, there is a series of notes with a slur over them, indicating a melodic line.
- Alto Saxophone (Alto Sax.):** The staff shows a sustained note.
- Piano (Pno.):** The staff shows a series of notes with a slur over them. Above the staff, there are instructions: *(WITHOUT fingernail)*, *(Scratch strings)*, and *(Pluck string)*. The dynamic markings are *mf* (mezzo-forte) and *mp* (mezzo-piano).

(Continue to hold the pedal)

Conclusion

There are generally two manners of composition that I employ. One is a purely minimalist approach, the other is a combination of various styles other than minimalism.

As a composer who has had a long-term interest in minimalist music, especially Philip Glass's contributions, I want to remain true to a "pure" minimalist approach because in my perspective, minimalism is able to exist independently due to its abundance of harmonic color, rhythmic patterns, creative structure and form.

Except for minimalism, I think the best way to explore my own musical language is to try as many styles and compositional techniques as possible. In my compositions, I have employed pointillism, atonality, polytonality, unconventional harmonic structures such as pentatonicism combined with atonality and polytonality, and extended techniques. Some of these attempts had varying degrees of success. However, I gained much practical experience through these attempts that can guide me to keep composing in a deeper and more mature way.

Upcoming Events

Mar. 27, 2013

Non-degree Student Recital: Jon Snell, piano
7:30 p.m., Bengtson Auditorium, Russell
This event is free and open to the public.

Mar. 28, 2013

Senior Student Recital: Rebecca Payne, viola
6 p.m., Davis Hall, GBPAC
This event is free and open to the public.

Mar. 28, 2013

Senior Student Recital: Amanda Johns, flute
8 p.m., Davis Hall, GBPAC
This event is free and open to the public.

*School of Music Calendar of Events is available online at
www.uni.edu/music. To receive a hardcopy, please call the
School of Music Office – GBPAC #72 - (319) 273-2025.*

In consideration of performers and other members of the audience, please enter of leave a performance at the end of a composition.

Cameras and recording equipment are not permitted. Please turn off all electronic devices, and be sure that all emergency contact cell phones and pagers are set to silent or vibrate.

This event is free to all UNI students, courtesy of the Panther Pass Program.

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Graduate Composition Recital

Xingzimin Pan



Graham Hall, Russell Hall
Wednesday, March 27, 2013 6:00 p.m.

Program

Memory Trilogy (premiere)

- I. A Faint Memory
- II. A Fictional Memory
- III. An Irrepressible Memory

Serena Hou (piano)

Three Sarcastic Songs

- I. "We should not celebrate Stalin's birthday lightly"
- II. "Too simple, sometimes naive"
- III. "I had no intention of being the president"

Samantha Kantak (soprano), Elizabeth Anderson (violin), Andrea Alert (viola), Emma Peterson (clarinet), Madeline Young (bass clarinet), Xingzimin Pan (conductor)

Memory No. 4-Chasing (premiere)

Elena Lyalina (piano)

Kaidan/怪談 (premiere)

Rocio Lima Guaman (flute), Xingzimin Pan (piano)

Memory No. 3-Farewell on a Summer Afternoon

Elena Lyalina (piano)

Trio

Rocio Lima Guaman (flute), Gabriel Scheid (alto saxophone), Jiamin Liao (piano)

Memory No. 2-Water-like Sunshine

Elena Lyalina (piano)

Artist Biography

Xingzimin Pan's music was commissioned and performed in a number of cities in the United States, Germany, Australia, China as well as Hong Kong, the events include IOWA Composers Forum Gala 25th Anniversary Festival (Cedar Rapids, US), Schleswig-Holstein Music Festival (Neumünster, Germany), and "Philharmonic Zhongnan" Concert Series (Wuhan, China). Pan's compositions encompass a wide range of musical genres from solo to orchestral music as well as vocal music. Ensembles that have performed and recorded his works include Northern Iowa Symphony Orchestra, University of Northern Iowa Concert Band, UNI Singers, Sydney Chamber Choir, Wuhan University Symphony Orchestra, Zhongnan University of Economics and Law Wind Symphony, and Renwen Philharmonic Choir. He is also the recipient of the 'Honourable Mention' from 2nd IFCM International Composition Competition, and the winner of University of Northern Iowa Choral Composition Contest (2013), which is a joint effort between the UNI Choirs and the UNI student chapter of the American Choral Director's Association to promote new choral music.

Pan also worked as a conductor before he came to the US. The repertoires he has conducted include movements from Bach's Double Concerto for Violins in D Minor, Beethoven's Symphonies Nos 5 and 7, Brahms's Symphony No. 1, Dvořák's Symphony No. 9, Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto, as well as a diversity of symphonic band's programs.

Pan received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Music from Central China Normal University (2008). He is currently studying for the Master of Music degree in Composition at University of Northern Iowa, where he also works as a graduate teaching assistant.