



CIVITAS ENSEMBLE

JIN YIN

CEDILLE

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ZHOU LONG

Five Elements** (23:24)

with Yihan Chen, pipa; Cynthia Yeh, percussion
Emma Gerstein, flute and piccolo

- 1 Metal (11:03)
- 2 Wood (3:03)
- 3 Water (4:19)
- 4 Fire (3:11)
- 5 Earth (1:39)

CHEN YI

6 Night Thoughts** (8:37)

LU PEI

7 Scenes Through Window* (16:03)

with Emma Gerstein, flute

VIVIAN FUNG

8 Bird Song* (9:41)

YAO CHEN

Emanations of Tara* (19:03)

with Yihan Chen, pipa

- 9 Intro: gloomy, brooding (2:01)
- 10 Green Tara: expansive, saturated (4:21)
- 11 Golden Tara: glimmering (3:07)
- 12 Blue Tara: mysterious, deepened emotion (2:39)
- 13 Red Tara: extremely undertoned but with burning sensation inside (2:47)
- 14 White Tara: timelessly, transparently (2:55)
- 15 Ending: extremely quiet (1:10)

TT: 77:19

*World Premiere Recording

**World Premiere Recording of this arrangement made specially for the Civitas Ensemble

*This album is made possible by the generous support of Jia Zhao and Hongyi Chen
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PROGRAM NOTES

FIVE ELEMENTS by Zhou Long

The Five Elements (called “wu xing” in Chinese) are metal, wood, water, fire, and earth, held by the ancients to compose the physical universe and later used in traditional Chinese medicine to explain various physiological and pathological phenomena. In my five-movement composition, *Five Elements*, each of these elements is represented in the specific movements.

The Five Elements are also known as The Five Movements (wu yun). They define the various stages of transformation in the recurring natural cycles of seasonal change, growth and decay, shifting climatic conditions, sounds, flavors, emotions, and human physiology. Each energy is associated with the natural element that most closely resembles its function and character, and they take their names from these elements. Like yin and yang, the Five Elemental Energies maintain their internal harmony through a system of mutual checks and balances known as “creative” and “control” cycles. Both of these cycles, which counteract and balance one another, are in constant operation, maintaining the dynamic fields of polar forces required to move and transform energies.

The first movement is *Metal*, which is a refined extract of Earth forged by Fire. The sound of forged iron is echoed by the striking chord on pipa, which creates distance in sonority. Percussion and pipa extend the flowing texture on wind and stringed instruments. These symbolize the image of extraction and refinement.

The second movement is *Wood*. It symbolizes spring, and generates a strong and healthy cycle by water. Percussive rhythm on wooden percussion instruments and pizzicato on strings run through this movement as the creative energy of “spring fever.” It is associated with vigor and youth, growth and development.

The third movement is called *Water*, which is a highly concentrated element containing great potential power awaiting release. It is the element of energy associated with winter. The extensive texture and broad doubling melodies build a cool color tone which stays still.

The fourth movement is *Fire*. Just as spring develops naturally into summer, the aggressive creative energy of Wood matures into the flourishing “full yang” energy of Fire. This movement contains consistent rhythmic drumming with energetic figures played by the ensemble.

The last movement is *Earth*. The music is grounded on a peaceful open space, touched on lightly in a vast tempo, which transforms all elements into a perfect balance.

The version of *Five Elements* for flute/piccolo, clarinet, percussion, pipa, violin, and violoncello was Commissioned by the Chinese Fine Arts Society in 2014 for Forces of Nature, written for and premiered by Civitas Ensemble: *Five Elements* was made possible by a National Endowment for the Arts grant for the Chinese Fine Arts Society's 30th Anniversary Season and dedicated to the memory of its founder, Barbara Tiao.



NIGHT THOUGHTS (2004/2019) by Chen Yi

Co-commissioned by the Virginia Arts Festival, Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, La Jolla SummerFest, and Chamber Music Northwest in Portland, OR, and supported by Meet The Composer's Commissioning/USA program, my trio, *Night Thoughts*, is a lyrical tone poem originally scored for flute, cello, and piano and premiered on April 28, 2004 by Deborah Cross, Keith Robinson, and Andre-Michel Schub at the Virginia Arts Festival.

I got the inspiration for the music from the ancient Chinese poem, *Night Thoughts*, written by the great poet, Li Bai, during the Tang Dynasty (618–907).

*On couch bright moon shone,
Thought frost on ground foamed,
Raised head facing bright moon,
Lowered head dreaming my home.*

(English translation by Chen Yi)

The atmosphere is serene and spatial, and the feeling is full of loneliness and nostalgia. The three instruments sometimes interact in moving-cluster-like groups, sometimes are spread out in a wide spectral range. The sonority is quietly shimmering or ethereal. I adapted the trio for violin, cello, and piano in 2019 for piano trio for my friend Yuan-Qing Yu and her Civitas Ensemble in Chicago. The new version was premiered excellently by Yuan-Qing Yu, Kenneth Olsen, and Winston Choi on July 23, 2019.

The work is dedicated to Ms. Heather Hitchen, President of Meet The Composer, for her hard work and strong support of living composers and new music creation in America.

SCENES THROUGH WINDOW by LU PEI

The inspiration for *Scenes Through Window* came when I was listening to rap music on my car radio while driving in Chicago in 2004. The American Composers Forum had commissioned me to write a piece years before, and I had been searching for inspiration since that time. As I listened to the rap songs, I became intrigued with the idea of combining rap's repetition with Chinese folk music elements. While the impressionistic thematic materials of *Scenes Through Window* may draw parallels to American popular music, the work is, in fact, strongly influenced by folk music from the ethnic minority groups in Southern China. I was inspired, particularly, by the manner in which these groups play and dance with their music during festivals. Once I settled on this theme, the composing process flourished.

The title, *Scenes Through Window*, came from personal experience. Some years ago, I watched and enjoyed the beautiful scenery through a window at my friend's house on a mountaintop in Indiana.

Scenes Through Window was originally composed for erhu, pipa, and piano trio and was premiered in Washington D.C. in 2007. The *Washington Post* described it as "extremely smart, colorful, delectable and kinetic."

Scenes Through Window was underwritten by the American Composers Forum in 2000 with funds provided by the Jerome Foundation. I made this version for flute, clarinet in B, and piano trio in 2016 when I was asked to submit a piece for a European ensemble's concert at Shanghai Contemporary Music Week by the director, Professor Wen.

BIRD SONG FOR VIOLIN AND PIANO by Vivian Fung

Birdsong (2012) stems from a chance encounter with violinist Kristin Lee, who had previously been one of my undergraduate theory students back when I was teaching at the Juilliard School. Attending one of her recitals several years later, I was blown away by her playing, and Kristin and I immediately agreed to form a collaboration. That collaboration initially gave rise to my 2010 Violin Concerto (which garnered a JUNO Award in 2013), and *Birdsong* followed a couple of years later.

The work showcases the virtuosity of both piano and violin, with quick runs, intense rhythmic passages, and exploration of improvisational moments. The title refers to the birdcalls of the opening and closing passages, as well as the general rhapsodic nature of the violin in this piece. The work is dedicated to the memory of Julian Rodescu, who had been Artistic Director of Astral Artists in Philadelphia and Kristin's mentor and advisor, as well as a mentor to me during the writing of my Violin Concerto. The ending, in particular, is a paean to Julian's memory and spirit, a nostalgic tribute to a man who had a positive influence on many musicians.

Birdsong was commissioned by the Delaware Chamber Music Festival through the DeRosa Family Fund. It was premiere on June 22, 2012 in Wilmington, Delaware, with Kristin Lee, violin, and Conor Hanick, piano.



EMANATIONS OF TARA note by Dan Albertson


Written on a commission from the Fromm Music Foundation at Harvard University in 2014, Yao Chen's *Emanations of Tara* dates from a transitional period in the composer's career while reflecting several of his recurring themes.

After graduating from the University of Chicago, plus a period spent teaching in the USA, Yao Chen returned to China to embark on a dual career as a composer and teacher. Among the first pieces he wrote after his homecoming, *Tara* is for five players but with a duration and subject matter far beyond the constraints of the medium. It was written very much with American performers — specifically, the Civitas Ensemble — in mind.

Since quite early in his career, Yao Chen has written a small but important series of works in which Chinese and western instruments are combined, as well as works for Chinese instruments alone. These pieces, far from concerning themselves with questions of the exotic or notions of purity, are rather catalysts for the exploration of sonority, shared or otherwise, and the existence or coexistence of varied means of sound production.

Tara is another entry in this series, with the pipa taking the role less of a concertante soloist and more of a committed collaborator with the other four players: clarinet doubling bass clarinet and a small prayer bowl, violin, cello, and piano doubling a big prayer bowl. It is a rhapsodic work in which all five instrumentalists form an indissoluble if variable unit, five questing musicians taking themselves, as well as listeners, on a journey into the unknown.





Tara embodies Yao Chen's ongoing preoccupation with spirituality in music and the search for transcendence, both internally and externally. While taking as inspiration the composer's visit to Tibet, and many-colored Thangka paintings and statues of the goddess *Tara* in particular, the piece is not in any way illustrative or narrative. It is, rather, an abstract and extended meditation on just a few of the many qualities of *Tara*, the female bodhisattva of compassion and virtue, she who rescues all living beings from the eternal cycle of life, death, and rebirth known as samsara, and guides her followers toward spiritual enlightenment.

Is knowing this background essential to understanding the music? Yes and no. Yao Chen is not a composer who seeks readymade solutions. This music is rich enough, and flexible enough, to allow the listener to imagine any number of interpretations. This ambiguity is essential to the message and what *Tara* requires above all is a profound level of engagement to make the most of its innumerable plays of light and shadow, its detours and forays into worlds unknown.

Tara is free-flowing and solemn, though at times mercurial, and its predominant mood is one of languor, an awareness of existential time without any sense of urgency or pulse. Far from aimless, it is totally willing to linger and meander, and is best approached with a willingness to be surprised. Even without visual reinforcement, it easily transports listeners somewhere else, somewhere more idealized if less real, but precisely for this lack of reality, stronger and dearer.

BIOS



CIVITAS ENSEMBLE

In 2011, four of Chicago's top musicians — Yuan-Qing Yu (Chicago Symphony Orchestra Assistant Concertmaster), Kenneth Olsen (CSO Assistant Principal Cello), Winston Choi (Head of Piano, Chicago College of Performing Arts), and Lawrie Bloom (CSO Bass Clarinet) — joined forces to found Civitas Ensemble, a chamber music group dedicated to presenting engaging live performances of new and traditional works, inspiring a young generation of classical

musicians, and bringing the healing power of music to those with limited access to live performances.

What makes Civitas unique is its artistic excellence, its cross-disciplinary programming, its daring presentation of both old and new works, its connection with living composers, its international reach, and its robust outreach program. Attesting to its exceptional quality, the ensemble consistently earns rave reviews from the *Chicago Tribune*, *Chicago Classical Review*, and *Chicago on the Aisle*.

The Ensemble's epic *International Connections* project *Alla Zingarese*, funded by the MacArthur and Sage Foundations, received high praise from critics and public alike. The project was a true collaboration between two civic-minded ensembles, Civitas and Prague-based Gipsy Way. By presenting works inspired or composed by Roma musicians, the ensembles celebrated the heritage and music of the Roma people. *Alla Zingarese*, the 2-disc album

featuring joyous sounds of this collaboration was released on Cedille Records in 2018.

A highlight of Civitas's 2018–2019 season came when the ensemble was invited to participate in the two-day symposium, *The Shanghai Jews: Risk and Resilience in a Refugee Community*. Former Secretary of the Treasury Michael Blumenthal gave a vivid account of his life in Shanghai during the war, and Civitas Ensemble presented compositions by Jewish and Chinese composers from the wartime. Civitas also participated in the symposium conference the following day.

Recognized for both its quality performances and ongoing community engagement efforts, Civitas was invited to perform with Yo-Yo Ma at the Chicago Humanities Festival and participate in a panel discussion on the topic of "Artist and Citizenship." Civitas continues to present a series of free concerts in hospitals, senior living communities and schools each year.

Civitas Ensemble is in its ninth year as Ensemble-in-Residence at Valparaiso University's Department of Music, where Ensemble members perform concerts, coach students in the many aspects of music making, and act as role models for these aspiring young musicians.

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www.civitasensemble.org



YIHAN CHEN

A mesmerizing master of the pipa (ancient four-string lute), Chen Yihan was a prize-winner at the 1995 Freedom International Chinese Instrument Competition and the 1989 Art Cup. She has performed at major international festivals in China, USA, France, Portugal, Canada, Japan, and Italy, including Spoleto Festival USA, Lincoln Center Festival, Skaneateles Festival, De Création Musicale de Radio France, Le Festival Avignon, Le Festival Musique en Scène, Encontros Acarte 98 Portugal, La Cité de la Musique, Lotus Festival, and the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra's New Music Festival. She has appeared at Carnegie Hall, the Kennedy Center, Library of Congress, and other major venues. Ms. Chen has collaborated with internationally renowned composers such as Chen Yi, Zhou Long, Chen Qigang, and Bright Sheng. She was the soloist of the Hua Xia Chamber Ensemble (Beijing) and has performed with Music From China in NYC since 1999. After graduating from the China Conservatory of Music with a bachelor's degree

in 1995, Yihan became a faculty member there teaching pipa at its affiliated middle school.

Yihan Chen's recordings include *The Brahmin*, *Three Images Of Laughter* (Hugo), *Time to Listen* (Ellipsis Arts), *Zhou Long: Tales From the Cave*, and *Hua Xia* (Delos).

EMMA GERSTEIN

Emma Gerstein is second flute of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, appointed in 2017 by Music Director Riccardo Muti. Before her full-time appointment, she appeared with the Orchestra as a guest, including during the CSO's Asia 2016 tour with Muti. Prior to joining the CSO, Gerstein served as Principal Flute of the Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra in New Zealand.

Prior to that, Gerstein was a Flute Fellow at the New World Symphony from 2013–2016 and Principal Flute of the Lexington Philharmonic Orchestra in Kentucky in 2012–2013. She has also performed in the flute section of the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra, as guest

principal flute with the Seattle Symphony, and has participated in the Aspen, Spoleto USA, Sarasota, Orford, and Cabrillo festivals.

Gerstein teaches at Roosevelt University and has given master classes at the University of Kentucky, Auckland University, Northwestern University, Indiana University, and The Australian National Academy of Music.

A native of Chicago's Hyde Park neighborhood, Gerstein began her flute studies with Susan Levitin at age eight and was a member of the Chicago Youth Symphony Orchestra. She went on to study at the Manhattan School of Music with Robert Langevin and at Indiana University with Thomas Robertello.

CYNTHIA YEH

Cynthia Yeh joined the Chicago Symphony Orchestra as principal percussionist in June 2007. She previously served as principal percussionist for the San Diego Symphony Orchestra from 2004 to 2007. She is currently

on faculty at DePaul University and the Aspen and Pacific Music Festivals, and has served on the faculties of the National Youth Orchestra-USA and Chosen Vale Percussion Seminar. Ms. Yeh has also served on the jury of Germany's ARD international competition and Montreal's OSM competition.

As an active soloist, Ms. Yeh has performed recitals and concertos throughout the U.S., Canada, Mexico, Colombia, Taiwan, and Japan. She gave the U.S. premiere of Avner Dorman's *Eternal Rhythm* with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in October 2019.

Born in Taipei, Taiwan, Ms. Yeh received her Bachelor of Music performance degree from the University of British Columbia and Master of Music performance degree from Temple University in Philadelphia, where she studied with Alan Abel.

CREDITS

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