

## **Chou Wen-chung: *Eternal Pine***

As composer, writer, and conservationist, Chou Wen-chung's contribution to modernist music and the advancement of East Asian culture in the United States remains unparalleled. Born in Yantai, China in 1923, Chou initially came to the United States at the age of 23 to study architecture at Yale University. He soon took up composition with Nicholas Slonimsky at the New England Conservatory and pursued graduate studies in composition at Columbia University. By 1949, he became a pupil and friend of Edgard Varèse and later served as his literary executor. Appointed the first Fritz Reiner Professor of Composition at Columbia University in 1984, Chou founded and directed the Center for U.S.-China Arts Exchange, whose initiatives included a two-decade conservation of indigenous cultural heritages in Yunnan. Following the Cultural Revolution, Chou's generosity enabled several generations of Chinese composers (e.g., Tan Dun, Zhou Long, Chen Yi) to study composition and launch their careers in the West.

In his previous compositions, Chou has demonstrated mastery in transplanting the poetic imagery and aesthetic principles that underlie traditional Chinese art and calligraphy onto a Western musical "canvas." The extended timbral effects in *The Willows Are New* (1957) for solo piano evoke the serene beauty of *guzhin* (the ancient Chinese zither). *Yü Kò* (1965) for violin, wind instruments, piano, and percussion, transforms and expands on a melody taken from Mao Min Zhong's composition from the Song Dynasty. Beginning with *Metaphors* (1961), Chou also developed a modal system for organizing pitch (and later rhythmic) structures derived from the *I-Ching* (*Yijing* or the *Book of Changes*), wherein the *yin* symbolizes all that is passive or feminine in the universe, the *yang* all that is active and masculine, and these two forces consistently mutate into each other. This modal system has been applied to works starting with *Pien* (1966) and developed into combinatorial hexachords (forming a twelve-tone aggregate) in *Windswept Peaks* and the *Cello Concerto* (1992). In the enigmatic late works for string quartet (*Clouds*, 1996; *Streams*, 2003), the classical Chinese concept of perpetual transformation guides the process of thematic transformation, while the intricacy of counterpoint harkens back to J.S. Bach. In the Brentano String Quartet's performance of the late string quartets, the physical gestures and movements of the players correlate with the vivid brushstrokes of Chou's calligraphy for wind, streams, and clouds that inspired these works.

The series of works featured on this album ushers in a new orientation for Chou because it marks his first direct engagement with traditional East Asian musical ensembles. The genesis of *Eternal Pine* came about in part by his longstanding friendship and scholarly exchange with the eminent Korean musicologist Lee Hyeku. Owing to the persistence of a *gayageum* master, Yi Ji-young, Chou first composed *Eternal Pine I* for Korean ensemble in 2008. The other versions soon followed: one for a Western musical ensemble in 2009, the duo version for Korean instruments in 2010, and the last for Chinese *Sizhu* ensemble in 2012. In preparation for the Korean version, Chou studied the range and tuning of indigenous instruments and adapted his modal system to optimize their expressive capabilities. Although the form and instrumental roles are retained across the different versions of the work, the listener will be struck by the heterogeneity in the tuning and timbres of the indigenous Korean instruments: for example, the piercing sound of the *piri* (reed instrument), the harmonious vibrations of the *saenghwang* (mouth organ), and the microtonal fluctuations caused by pitch-bending and other types of articulations of the *gayageum* (zither) impart tone qualities distinctive from those of the Western instruments based on equal-tempered tuning. The expression resides in the timbre of each instrument, where the noise to pitch ratio is

much greater than its Western counterpart.

*Eternal Pine* refers to the beauty and strength of pine as a symbol for longevity and eternity in East Asian cultures. This imagery is foreshadowed in his earlier work *Windswept Peaks* (1990), where Chou refers to the gnarly pine trees on mountain peaks, swept by the wind for hundreds of years. In such a context, the pine trees also symbolize the spirit of *wenren*—the indefatigable spirit of literati who have survived all sorts of persecutions throughout Chinese history. In his youth, Chou also narrowly escaped from Japanese persecution, a pivotal turning point that enabled him to claim a new life and cultural identity in the United States. Although Chou’s philosophical position is based in Confucianism, the symbolism of pine also connotes the Buddhist’s notion of mutual causality or co-emergence (*pratitya samutpada* in Sanskrit)—the idea that all things exist only in relationship to others.

From another perspective, Chou draws on the Chinese concept of *tian di ren* (heaven, earth, and humanity), which deals with different phases of human struggle on earth within the timeless arena of the universe. It expresses for Chou “an individual’s mood, reflected through natural phenomenon, in a manner similar to the lyric songs of the Song Dynasty poet Jiang Kui.” The journey to and from the heavenly and earthly realms is conveyed by the division of the piece into six sections: Prelude, Meditation on Eternity, Ode to the Eternal Pine, Lofty Peaks, Profound Gorge, and Coda. The Prelude establishes the mood of serenity and beauty of the cosmos, while the intervening movements enact the different phases of human struggle for and against nature; the wind and stringed instruments play out the turbulent changes in the cosmos, while the percussion’s pulse grounds the music in the earthly realm. From a dramatic perspective, I have come to identify the recurring five-note melody (Bb–C–Db–A–Ab) as the central motive, whose somber but steadfast presence conjures up not only the image of a pine being molded by cosmological forces, but also embodies the spirit of *wenren* writ large.

*Eternal Pine I* for Korean music ensemble is modeled after the genre of *chong-ak* (“proper” music) in traditional Korean music, which refers to the body of instrumental and vocal chamber music performed privately for and by the aristocracy. For Chou, the “heavenly sound” of this music underlies the symbolism of *Eternal Pine* by connoting “the expression of human emotion inspired and symbolized by natural phenomena but projected with serenity and dignity.” To this end, he expressed the spirit of Korean music by drawing on memory and intuition rather than on preconceived theories. This version features Yi Ji-young at the *gayageum*, a traditional Korean zither-like instrument with twelve or more strings stretched across the soundboard with bridges. The right hand plucks or strums the string, while the left hand introduces various forms of articulation including, but not limited to, bending and vibrating the strings. Chou combines the *gayageum* with traditional instruments used in court music ensembles (*aak*, *tangak*) imported from China (*yayue*) during the twelfth century: *daegum* (transversal flute), *piri* (reed instrument), *saenghwang* (mouth organ), and *changgu* (hour-glass shaped drum). The eighteen strings of the *gayageum* are tuned to a whole-tone scale beginning with Eb<sub>2</sub> and the mouth organ requires seventeen pipes tuned to Eb.

Chou manages to infuse stately elegance and ritualistic qualities through showcasing the distinctive colors of the instruments. The Prelude begins with a stately rhythm introduced by the *changgu* in compound triple meter, punctuated by upward flourishes in the wind instruments. Then the *gayageum* proceeds with an extended solo, conjuring up the cosmological forces of nature, and prepares for the *daegum*’s stately entry. At the culmination of this section, the

saenghwang enters in homophony with the stately pentatonic melody played by the piri; the ethereal sounds of the saenghwang signify “heavenly” music to my ears. This opening section segues into the Meditation on Eternity, where the instruments engage in an antiphonal exchange of the “pine” motive (Bb–C–Db–A–Ab), first introduced in the daegum, then passed from one instrument to the next with subtle variations in contour and transposition. A contemplative gayageum solo intervenes in the Ode to the Eternal Pine. In the Lofty Peaks that follows, an animated rhythm in the changgu is juxtaposed with sustained trills in the daegum in its highest register; the upward arpeggiation in the wind instruments quickly alternates with the descending figurations in the gayageum to illustrate the journey of passing through peaks and valleys. Finally, the Profound Gorges features a series of ascending motives, accompanied by the changgu, which anchors the rhythm to a steady compound duple meter. The gayageum interjects a melismatic cadenza, accompanied by the expressive indication: “senza misura, like water flowing down the rocks.” All the other instruments join with sweeping gestures that conjure up the imagery of wind and rain. The gayageum brings the piece to a close with a contemplative coda in which the “pine” motive is stated one last time. *Eternal Pine I* was commissioned by the Contemporary Music Ensemble of Korea (CMEK) and received its premiere on October 26, 2008.

The second piece on the recording is *Ode to Eternal Pine* for Western musical ensemble, comprised of flute, clarinet, violin, cello, piano, and percussion. Drawing on material from the version for Korean ensemble, Chou aimed for a chromatic expansion of the original modal concepts, while retaining the tempo, meter, and modal characteristics of the Korean version. *Ode to Eternal Pine* begins with a rich introduction that features extended techniques for the piano (plucking and strumming inside the piano) with gongs and sustained tones in the bass clarinet. The alto flute and clarinet answer the piano’s upward arpeggiations with pensive, pentatonic motives. The piano assumes agency in representing the cosmological forces of wind and rain, while the clarinet, flute, and violin engage in an antiphonal exchange of the “pine” motive, transformed in various guises.

Percussion is tied to the elemental rhythms of the earth, while the flute, clarinet, and violin express the yearnings and aspirations of the *wenren*; the “pine” motive is stated sequentially with an upward glissando that moves downward by step. The piano exerts its dominance with dramatic flair through arpeggiations and chordal punctuations. In Lofty Peaks, the piccolo enters in the highest register against the agitated rhythm of the bass drum and sustained cello ostinato. The Profound Gorges features the bass clarinet’s descent into the lowest register, followed by the bass drum’s volatile solo. The wind and string instruments exchange the “pine” motive in different guises before segueing into the brilliant coda, marked by staggered arpeggiated entries that reach the highest register. The bass drum brings closure through its loud and mighty statement. From a formal perspective, this version for Western ensemble presents the clearest instance of theme and variation in the sense that the various transformations of the “pine” motive are made audible—at times somber, at times frenetic and pleading. *Ode to Eternal Pine* was commissioned by the New York New Music Ensemble and premiered on April 27, 2009.

The third piece, *Eternal Pine II*, is arranged for gayageum and changgu. The structure of this duo rendition resembles that of the full Korean ensemble for the most part, except for the fact that the gayageum takes center stage in enacting the range of dramatic musical guises, guided by the changgu, which initiates the internal changes in texture and tempo. The “pine” motive undergoes various elaborations in the hands of the gayageum player, who alternates between contrasting modes of articulation (rapid arpeggiation, different types of plucking, pitch bending,

glissando, and so forth) to create dramatic interest. The virtuosic interplay between the gayageum and changgu also recalls the popular traditional genre of *sanjo gayageum* based on improvisation of “scattered” melodies using rapid figurations. This version received its premiere in 2010, featuring Yi Ji-young (gayageum) and Kim Woong-sik (changgu).

The final version, *Eternal Pine III*, was composed for six traditional Chinese instruments or *sizhu* (“silk and bamboo”) ensemble. Chou comments that this arrangement was inspired by the art of *shuimo* (ink-brush painting) and *guzhin* in how “the inner vitality of the work expresses itself through dots and lines, pause and hesitation and *tianbai* (filling in the intervallic space left open in the modal or linear design).” Here, *guzheng*, the 21-string Chinese plucked zither, takes the place of gayageum, and it is accompanied by *dizi* (transversal flute with a buzzing membrane), *guan* (cylindrical double-reed instrument), *pipa* (pear-shaped lute), *sheng* (mouth organ), and *gu* (percussion). Unlike the stately and ceremonial atmosphere of *Eternal Pine I*, the combination of instrumental colors produces a joyous, celebratory mood, alluding to the folk tradition in which these instruments are used to depict themes associated with seasonal changes in Southern China.

The Prelude introduces the distinctive color of each instrument over the robust rhythm established by the gu: the richly vibrating sounds of the guzheng interact with the plucked tremolo sounds of the pipa, followed by the melodious entry of the dizi. The Meditation on Eternity ushers in the “pine” motive first stated by the dizi before it is passed onto other instruments. The guzheng’s rapid arpeggiations up and down suggest the robust forces of nature. The dual conversation between dizi and guzheng continues around the exchange of the “pine” motive. In the Lofty Peaks and Profound Gorges, the earthly pulse of gu returns, over which the dizi, piri, and guzheng develop the “pine” motive in playful guises. The transitional passage in whole-tone creates a wash of sound, leading to the contemplative section called “Water murmuring over the rocks.” Here, the guzheng, dizi, and piri engage in a call-and-response texture. The guan briefly reinstates the homophonic passage anchored to the sheng before the codetta takes us back to the contemplative sound of the “pine” motive, sounded by the dizi, alternating with piri and guzheng.

While grounded for the most part in Eb pentatonic, the shifting tone colors and layering of modes create startling effects, at times contemplative and harmonious, at other times playful and provocative. After composing this version, Chou remarked on how he used a system similar to *Yü Kō* composed half a century ago, in taking a melody generated from his modal system and transforming and expanding it in in this work. This version was commissioned by the Taipei Chinese Orchestra and received its premiere on May 26, 2012.

When asked to sum up the beauty of Chou’s music, Donald Palma, the director of Speculum Musicae, remarked: “there is a real intention behind every single note in the score.” I couldn’t agree more. In his meticulous preparation for composing music, Chou gives attention to minute details to create an artistic experience comparable to seeing “the universe in a grain of sand.” At one moment, an informed listener may hear echoes of Anton Webern in the brevity and contrapuntal mastery of musical lines in Chou’s music; at another moment, s/he may be enthralled by the discovery of an infinite expression in the utterance of one sound.

—Yayoi Uno Everett

*Yayoi Uno Everett is Professor of Music at University of Illinois at Chicago and specializes in the analysis of postwar art music through the perspectives of literary criticism, semiotics, cultural studies, and East Asian aesthetics.*

**Chou Wen-chung**'s earliest work, *Landscapes* (1949), is often cited as the first composition that is independent of either Western or Eastern musical grammar. Since then he has developed a theory on variable (*pian*) modes influenced by both Asian and European aesthetics and music theories.

Born in China in 1923, Chou came to the United States in 1946. He studied with Nicholas Slonimsky at the New England Conservatory of Music, and later moved to New York City (1949) where he met Edgard Varèse, who became his teacher and mentor. In the early 1950s, he did graduate work at Columbia University under Otto Luening, and studied with Bohuslav Martinu and musicologist Paul Henry Lang. This began a long career (1964–1991) at Columbia where he developed an internationally renowned composition program and, for thirteen years, was in charge of academic affairs for all the creative arts. As the first Fritz Reiner Professor of Musical Composition, he established the Fritz Reiner Center for Contemporary Music (1984). In 1978, Chou founded the Center for United States–China Arts Exchange, which has collaborated with specialists and institutions from East/Southeast Asia on projects such as the Pacific Music Festival in Sapporo, Japan (1990); an arts education program in China spanning fifteen years; and an ongoing project, begun in 1990, for cultural conservation and development in Yunnan, one of the most culturally diverse regions in the world. Throughout his career, Chou has served in some of the principal organizations responsible for promoting American composers and contemporary music, such as Composers Recording Inc. (CRI).

Chou is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, an honorary member of the International Society for Contemporary Music and Asian Composers League, and recipient of the Officier des Arts et Lettres.  
[www.chouwenchung.org](http://www.chouwenchung.org)

Music Director Richard Pittman founded **Boston Musica Viva** in 1969 as the first professional ensemble in Boston devoted to contemporary music, and it is the oldest new-music ensemble of its kind in the United States. BMV is dedicated to presenting the ever-evolving music of our time, performed by musicians who play with virtuosic precision and passionate involvement. Its mission is to broaden experience, knowledge, and enjoyment of every style of new music by embracing the full range of today's compositional activity and giving voice to music that might otherwise not be heard. BMV is proud to have been an early champion of composers including Ellen Taaffe Zwilich, John Harbison, Joseph Schwantner and Steven Stucky, each of whom later went on to win the Pulitzer Prize. BMV has performed more than 600 works by over 250 composers (including over 150 written for BMV) and over 175 world premieres. For further information visit [www.BMV.org](http://www.BMV.org).

The **Contemporary Music Ensemble Korea (CMEK)** was founded in 1998 by Yi Ji-young, the prominent gayageum player, with the aim of encouraging the creation of new music for Korea, and promoting it throughout the world as part of a universal musical language. CMEK is a chamber group consisting of musicians expert in traditional Korean and classical Western instruments. Five members play traditional Korean instruments: *gayageum*, a 12-stringed zither; *daegum*, a large transverse flute; *saenghwang*, a mouth organ; *piri*, a cylindrical oboe; and traditional percussion. Four more musicians play the cello, clarinet, guitar, and Western percussion. They perform mainly newly composed pieces that employ instruments and musical idioms of the two cultures. CMEK is known as one of the most innovative ensembles in the world, in the forefront of new music creation in Korea and abroad.

**Yi Ji-young** is Korea's leading gayageum player and renowned for her mastery of a style of Korean folk music, *gayageum sanjo*. Her musical spectrum ranges from the traditional to avant-garde and colleagues and critics alike consider her the most talented gayageum artist of our time. She has performed in the United States, Europe, and Asia, and recorded more than 40 albums. Ms. Yi is a professor at Seoul National University, successor of Important Intangible National Cultural Asset No. 23 (*Gayageum Sanjo* and *Byungchang*), and member of ChongnongAkhoe, the foremost traditional court music ensemble in Korea.

**Kim Woong-sik** is a versatile percussionist, expert in numerous styles, and both a sought-after *sanjo* accompanist and performer of new works by Korean and Western composers. As a member of CMEK since 2003 and PURI, the renowned creative world-music group, since 1995, he has performed in North America, Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. He has also appeared numerous times with the Korean Broadcasting System Traditional Orchestra, and frequently appears in various TV and radio concert broadcasts. Mr. Kim currently teaches at Danguk University.

Since its establishment in 1979 as the first professional Chinese orchestra in Taiwan, the **Taipei Chinese Orchestra (TCO)** has evolved into a world-renowned organization committed to developing and presenting traditional Chinese music at its highest level. Under the leadership of former General Director Chung Yiu-Kwong, it has gained a reputation for innovative and adventurous programming that has broadened the definition of traditional Chinese music. Collaborations with international artists have resulted in award-winning recordings released by Swedish BIS Records—*Whirling Dance*, featuring flautist Sharon Bezaly, and *Ecstatic Drumbeat* with Evelyn Glennie. TCO and its current General Director, Cheng Li-Pi, hope to continue its tradition of excellence in nurturing promising traditional Chinese musicians through its education programs, and promoting outstanding Chinese music worldwide in its role as “cultural ambassador” for Taipei.

#### SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

*Cursive, Landscapes, Pien, The Willows Are New, Yü Ko*. New World Records/CRI NWCR 691.

*Echoes from the Gorge: Music of Chou Wen-chung*. Albany Records 155.

*String Quartet No. 1 “Clouds”, String Quartet No. 2 “Streams”, Twilight Colors*. Mode Records 235.

*Suite for Harp and Wind Quintet*. Included on *From Behind the Unreasoning Mask*. New World Records 80237-2.

#### Production Credits:

*Eternal Pine I*

Producer/Engineer: Byung-keuk Kim

Editing: Byung-keuk Kim

Recorded June 6, 2012 in Seoul, South Korea.

*Eternal Pine II*

Producer: Micky Yang

Engineer: Li-wei Chen

Mixing & mastering: Hsin-Hwa Tai, Roger Hsu & Micky Yang

Recorded May 26, 2012 in Zhongshan Hall, Taipei, Taiwan.

*Eternal Pine III*

Producer: Micky Yang

Engineer: Li-wei Chen

Mixing & mastering: Hsin-Hwa Tai, Roger Hsu & Micky Yang

Recorded May 26, 2012 in Zhongshan Hall, Taipei, Taiwan.

*Ode to Eternal Pine*

Producer/Engineer: Antonio Oliart

Editing: Antonio Oliart

Recorded November 19, 2012 in Fraser Performance Studio, WGBH, Boston.

All works published by C.F. Peters Corp.

Executive Producer: Lei Liang

Additional editing and mastering: Josef Kucera

Digital mastering: Paul Zinman, SoundByte Productions Inc., NYC

Cover art: Chou Wen-chung

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I am grateful to Yi Ji-young of CMEK who commissioned the original Korean ensemble version and then convinced me to do a version for gayageum with changgu accompaniment; Jayne Rosenfeld of New York New Music Ensemble for persuading me to do a version for modern instruments, which I had never thought of doing; and Dr. Chung Yiu-Kwong and Ms. Chen Hsiao-ping of the Taipei Chinese Orchestra for commissioning the Chinese ensemble version (*Eternal Pine III*). I would also like to thank Prof. Shyhji Pan, Dr. Janet Jie-ru Chen and Dr. Koji Nakano of Asian Young Musicians' Connection for arranging the commission and premiere of *Eternal Pine III* in Taiwan. Most of all, I want to thank Prof. Lei Liang for bringing this recording to fruition.

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Francis Goelet (1926–1998), *In Memoriam*

New World Records, 20 Jay Street, Suite 1001, Brooklyn, NY 11201

Tel (212) 290-1680 Fax (646) 224-9638

E-mail: [info@newworldrecords.org](mailto:info@newworldrecords.org)

CHOU WEN-CHUNG (b. 1923)

*ETERNAL PINE*

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1. *Eternal Pine I* (2008) 20:11

Contemporary Music Ensemble Korea (CMEK): Yi Ji-young, gayageum; Kim Woong-sik, changgu, percussion; Kim Joeng-seung, daegum; Lee Hyang-hee, saenghwang; Park Chi-wan, piri

2. *Ode to Eternal Pine* (2009) 14:32

Boston Musica Viva: Ann Bobo, flute; William Kirkley, clarinet; Geoffrey Burleson, piano; Bayla Keyes, violin; Jan Müller-Szeraws, cello; Robert Schulz, percussion; Richard Pittman, conductor

3. *Eternal Pine II* (2010) 15:47

Yi Ji-young, gayageum; Kim Woong-sik, changgu

4. *Eternal Pine III* "Sizhu Eternal Pine" (2012) 15:10

Taipei Chinese Orchestra: Lai Yi-Chun, di; Lin En-Hsu, guan; Kuo Hsiu-Jung, sheng; Cheng Wen-Hsin, pipa; Liu Hong-Yu, guzheng; Hsieh Tsung-Hsin, percussion; Chen Ying-Chun, percussion, Chang Yin-fang, conductor

TT: 65:55

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