

Research Report

THE AESTHETIC AND TECHNICAL ISSUES OF THE VIOLIN AND ELECTROACOUSTIC MUSIC “SONG OF THE WANDERERS”

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ABSTRACT

This paper introduces Chih-Fang Huang’s multicultural composition “Song of the Wanderers” for violin solo and electroacoustic music composition, which is inspired by the German-born Swiss poet Hermann Hesse’s articles and spiritual journey. This piece was written for the people who are desired to pursuit the spiritual life, and depicts the wandering life of the mankind soul. This piece has been selected in The 24th Asian Composers League (ACL) Conference and Festival, Israel, and then performed in many festivals all around the world. The violin solo techniques include both the extended sonority and the Chinese traditional ornament articulations, while the electroacoustic samples involve many materials from the natural and environmental sounds. Some of the tiny sounds were amplified, and/or transformed, to be suitable for the entire music idea. Eventually this piece combines ancient Chinese convention and thinking, Western sound timbre and techniques, and world music into a very special sound image. Unlike the most advanced contemporary music pursuing lots of complicated sonority, this piece eventually presents a music idea to listen to our inner voice with peace.

1. INTRODUCTION

“Song of the Wanderers” for violin solo and electroacoustic music was composed in 2004, and selected for the ACL (Asian Composers League) Israel 2004 Festival. The composition idea was inspired by Hermann Hesse’s literature works “Songs of the wanderers” (Nietzsche, 2010).

This piece depicts the spiritual pursuit of the human being, using the environmental sound samples with proper transforms, and the multicultural materials, to be integrated with the violin solo part. The violin solo includes the western contemporary extended techniques, Chinese Erhu performing techniques, and Indian traditional music elements. Although many sound samples in this pieces were deeply transformed with many electroacoustic methods (Huang, 2008 and Smalley, 1997), the spectrogram analysis is more important to make the sound transformations easily with accuracy (Misra etc., 2007, and Risset, 1999).

Some sound samples are derived from the traditional multicultural instruments, local drama, and the “chants” by the composer. This piece has been performed in Taiwan, Israel, Germany, USA, and Japan, etc.

2. AESTHETIC THINKING OF COMPOSITION

“Song of the Wanderers” basically exposes the possibility of the migration of multicultural elements, including the sound samples and violin performing articulations related to (1) Chinese and Taiwanese; (2) Indian and Middle East; and (3) Western and Modernistic, as shown in Figure 1. This piece begins with an introductory electroacoustic sound with baby crying, and then the violin solo imitates the traditional Indian chant. All of the development and elaboration implies the wandering life of a man, and the piece ends with the transformed sea shell drone and the temple bell sounds, to perform with a quiet violin solo long tone to express the end of the whole life pursuing into the truth of the world.



Figure 1. Aesthetic Thinking Basis of Multicultural Style for Jeff (Chih-Fang) Huang’s “Song of the Wanderers”

3. STRUCTURE ANALYSIS

Chih-Fang Huang’s “Song of the Wanderers” can be divided into several sections, including Section 1: Introduction and Main Theme, Section 2: Transition, Section 2: Transition, Section 3: Birth and Growth, Section 4: Hesitating and Questioning, Section 5: Wandering, Section 6: Struggling, and Section 7: Coda – Return to Silence. The music expressions and images, and sound samples of the piece is also depicted, as shown in Table 1.

Taiwanese Nanguan (南管) is a kind of traditional local drama, as shown in Fig. 2.

According to the above mentioned structural analysis,

	Music Expressions & Images	Sound Samples
Section 1: Introduction and Main Theme 0'' – 49''	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traditional Indian Image • Beginning of the life • Hesitated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baby Crying • Temple Bells • Natural Environmental (Creek, Bird, etc.) Sound
Section 2: Transition 49'' – 1'27''	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traditional Middle East Image • More Rhythmic Patterns • Dissonant Articulations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water • Temple Bells • Baby Sound (Heavily Transformed)
Section 3: Birth and Growth 1'27'' – 2'49''	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traditional Chinese Image • Erhu Imitated Violin Solo Articulation • Violin Glissando 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water Sound (Heavily Transformed) • Temple Bells • Natural Environmental (Creek) Sound
Section 4: Hesitating and Questioning 2'49'' – 3'58''	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drama-like Question and Answer • Gradually Increasing Tension • More Violin Dissonant Solo 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chinese and Taiwanese Local Drama Sound • Natural Environmental (Waterfalls) Sound • Japanese Biwa Sound • Gong Sound Sample
Section 5: Wandering 3'58'' – 5'15''	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Erhu-like Violin Articulation • Violin Downward Scale • Tension Released 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Natural Environmental (Bird, Sea Waves, etc.) Sound • Recorded Sound Samples (Human "Ah", Brushing Teeth...) • Taiwanese Nanguan (南管) Local Drama Sound
Section 6: Struggling 5'15'' – 6'27''	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fast Violin Spiccato • Major/Minor Modes Juxtaposed • High Tension Climax 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Natural Environmental (Bug, Creek, Wind, etc.) Heavily Transformed Sound • Heavily Transformed Taiwanese Nanguan Tuva People Overtone Chants
Section 7: Coda – Return to Silence 6'27'' – 7'25''	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traditional Indian Image • Violin Solo in Traditional Indian and Middle East Style • Tension Released 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Temple Bells with Beating • Amplified Sea Shell Drone



Figure 2. Taiwanese Nanguan (Courtesy of Taipei National University of Arts, TNUA School of Music Department of Traditional Music: http://trd-music.tnua.edu.tw/ch/intro/c_files/BIGb2.jpg)

the narrative-style composition shows a clear multitrack view, as shown in Fig. 3.

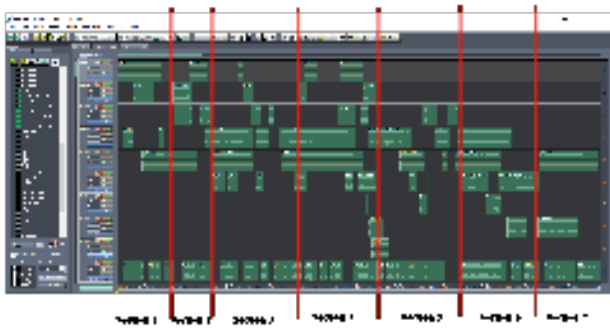


Figure 3. “Song of the Wanderers” Audio Multitrack View

4. PERFORMANCE RECORD

This piece has been performed in many music festival / countries, as shown in Table 2.

5. SOME TECHNICAL ISSUES

Some technical points from Chih-Fang Huang’s “Song of the Wanderers” can be discussed into the follows:

(1)Violin Solo to Imitate Chinese Instrument Articulations. For instance, some violin solo parts mimic Chinese Erhu, as shown in Fig. 4, while some solo parts imitate Chinese pipa as shown in Fig. 5.

(2)Violin Solo to Imitate Indian Instrument Articulations. For instance, some violin solo parts mimics Indian harmonium, as shown in Fig. 6.

Therefore the violinist needs to consider not only the accurate articulation marked by the score, but also to learn the traditional non-western instrument articulations and conventions.

Country	Date	Festival / Venue	Performer
Israel	2004 October	ACL-Israel	
Taiwan	2006 March	WOCMAT-Taipei	Pu Feng
Taiwan	2006 August	Hsinchu and Taipei National Concert Hall	
China	2008 October	Beijing Musica-coustica	Rui Yang
USA	2010 January	UNT-CEMI	Emily Cole
Germany	2011 July	Cologne - Alte Feuerwache	Bichao Chen
Taiwan	2011 August	Electracoustic . Dance Concert: Taipei, Hsinchu, and Kaohsiung	
China	2013 October	Taiwan Strait Technological Music Festival - Xiamen	Jing Yang
Japan	2016 October	JSSA / ACMP Festival - Tokyo	Mari Kimura



Figure 4. Erhu Articulation Imitated by Violin

Some transformed sampled sounds are used to mimic the traditional oriental instruments too. For example, the electracoustic sound between 0’52” and 1’04” are looped to imitate Indonesian Gamelan, while the violin solo performing a gesture in a contemporary western style to make a huge multicultural contrast, as shown in Fig. 7.

This piece has been successfully performed in various venues / festivals / countries, with different violinists’ interpretation. Fig. 8 shows the live performance by Taiwanese-German violinist Pichao Chen in 2011, Cologne, Germany.

6. CONCLUSION

This piece is composed based on the multicultural thinking, with various sound timbres varying, traditional Chinese / Indian and Western contemporary violin articulations. It not only creates the new sonority, but also extends and hybrids various traditional and cultural music ideas into a special time and space. Furthermore it discusses the possibility to represent and reflect man’s spiritual life pursuit into an oriental philosophical thinking, rather than the Western sonority development. The narrative music development would guide the listener’s into an imaginary space to realize the music idea into an eternal realm.



Figure 5. Pipa Articulation Imitated by Violin

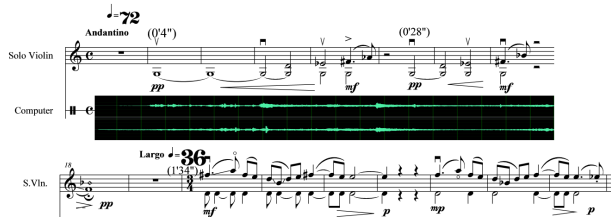


Figure 6. India Harmonium Articulation Imitated by Violin

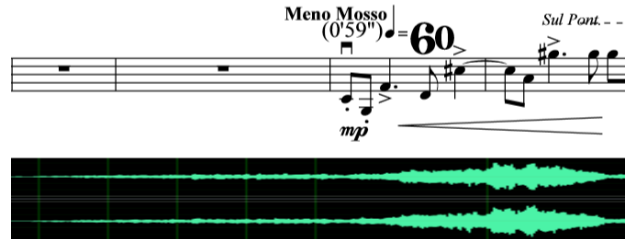


Figure 7. Indonesian Gamelan Instruments Imitated by Electroacoustic Sound

7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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8. REFERENCES

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Figure 8. “Song of the Wanderers” Performed in Cologne, Germany, 2011.