

**Bright Sheng** is an innovative composer/performer who merges diverse musical customs in works that transcend conventional aesthetic boundaries, and an important leader in exploring and bridging musical traditions. Respected as one of the foremost composers of our time whose stage, orchestral, chamber and vocal works are regularly performed throughout North America, Europe and Asia, Sheng is noted for the lyrical and melodic limpidity in his works, a Shostakovich sense of breadth in music phrases, a Bartokian rhythmic propulsion, and dramatic gestures. Many of his works has strong Chinese/Asian influences, a result of his diligent study of Asian musical cultures for over three decades.

Sheng's music has been widely commissioned and performed by many of the world's most prestigious institutions, including in North America by the San Francisco Opera, the Lyric Opera of Chicago, Santa Fe Opera, Houston Grand Opera, New York City Opera, New York City Ballet, San Francisco Ballet, the New York Philharmonic, Boston Symphony, Chicago Symphony, the Cleveland Orchestra, the Philadelphia Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Minnesota Orchestra, St. Louis Symphony Orchestra National Symphony Orchestra, Detroit Symphony Orchestra, Houston Symphony Orchestra, Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, Dallas Symphony Orchestra, Seattle Symphony Orchestra, Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, San Diego Symphony Orchestra, Toronto Symphony Orchestra, Vancouver Symphony Orchestra; in Europe by the Orchestra de Paris, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Orchestra Sinfonica dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia, BBC Symphony Orchestra, G.B., London Sinfonietta, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, Hamburg Radio Symphony (NDR), Frankfurt Radio Symphony, Dusseldorf Symphony Orchestra, Duisburg Philharmonic, Dortmund Philharmonic Orchestra, Branderburg Stage Opera Orchestra (Cottbus), St. Petersburg Philharmonic, National Symphony of Russia, Warsaw Symphony, Danish National Radio Symphony, Copenhagen Philharmonic, Bern Symphony Orchestra, Finnish Radio Symphony, Turku Symphony Orchestra, Luxembourg Philharmonic Orchestra, National Symphony of Spain, Orquesta Sinfonica de Bilbao, Gulbenkian Orchestra of Portugal, Slovenian Radio & TV Symphony, Orchestra of National Opera of Greece, Munich Chamber Orchestra, Paris Chamber Orchestra; and in Asia by New Zealand Symphony Orchestra, Sidney Symphony Orchestra, Alliance of Asian Pacific Region Orchestra, Tokyo Philharmonic Orchestra, Tokyo Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra, Singapore Symphony Orchestra, Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra, Seoul Philharmonic, Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra, Shanghai Symphony Orchestra, China National Symphony, National Symphony Orchestra of Taiwan, Macao Symphony Orchestra, Shanghai Philharmonic, National Center for the Performing Arts in Beijing, Macao Chinese Orchestra, China National Orchestra of Traditional Chinese Instruments, Thailand Philharmonic Orchestra, Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra, Taipei City Chinese Orchestra, Hangzhou Philharmonic, Suzhou Philharmonic, Guizhou Philharmonic, Zhejiang Philharmonic, among others.

Sheng has collaborated with many distinguished musicians including Leonard Bernstein, Christoph Eschenbach, Kurt Masur, Jaap von Zweden, Michael Tilson Thomas, Leonard Slatkin, Charles Dutoit, Gerald Schwarz, David Zinman, Neeme Järvi, David Robertson, Hugh Wolff, Robert Spano, Marin Alsop, Bramwell Tovey, Eiji Oue, Jahja Lin, John Fiore, Jeffery Kahane, Shui Lan, Thomas Dasgaard, En Shao, Samuel Wong, Sakari Oramo, Muhai Tang, Maxim Valdes, Arthur Fagen, Carl St. Clair, George Manahan, Richard Buckley, Kazuyoshi Akiyama, Xian Zhang, Yo Yo Ma, Emanuel Ax, Peter Serkin, Yefim Brofman, Gil Shaham, Lynn Harrell, Alisa Weilerstein, Richard Stoltzman, David Shifrin, Cho-Liang Lin, Edgar Meyer, Evelyn Glennie, Colin Currie, among others.

Born on December 6, 1955 in Shanghai, Sheng began studying the piano with his mother at age four. During China's infamous Cultural Revolution, at fifteen years of age, he was sent to Qinghai—a province bordering Tibet—where for seven years he performed as a pianist and percussionist in the provincial music and dance theatre, and studied folk music of the region. When China's universities reopened in 1978, he was among the first students admitted to the Shanghai Conservatory of Music where he studied composition from 1978-82. He moved to New York City in 1982 and, at Queens College, he studied composition with George Perle and Hugo Weisgall, Schenkerian analysis with Carl Schachter, and earned his MA in 1984. He earned his DMA in 1993 from Columbia University where he studied composition with Chou Wen-Chung, Jack Beeson and Mario Davidovsky. In 1985, as a student at Tanglewood Music Center, he met Leonard Bernstein who later became his mentor and champion. Sheng studied composition and conducting with Bernstein privately and worked as his assistant until Bernstein's passing in 1990.

During his student years, Sheng's talent already emerged, receiving honors in China, as well as three fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, a Charles Ives Scholarship Award from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, and fellowships and awards from the Guggenheim, Jerome, Naumberg, and Rockefeller foundations.

In 1999, at the invitation of President Clinton, Sheng received a special commission from the White House honoring the visiting Chinese Premiere Zhu Rongji. *Three Songs for Pipa and Cello* was premiered by Wu Man and Yo Yo Ma during the state dinner hosted by the Clintons. In 2001, Sheng received the MacArthur Foundation Fellowship and the American Award in Music from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and an ASCAP Achievement Award the following year.

Sheng's works are well known for their dramatic style and historical signification. Two of his major orchestral works *H'un: In Memoriam 1966- 76* (1988) and *Nanking! Nanking!—a Threnody for Pipa and Orchestra* (2000), and his opera *Madame Mao* (2003) were inspired by events in recent Chinese history. *H'un*, commissioned and premiered in 1988 by the New York Chamber Symphony, is Sheng's landmark portrait of the Chinese Culture Revolution. Kurt Masur and the New York Philharmonic performed *H'un* in six cities on their 1993 European tour after giving performances in New York City and in Washington DC. It established Sheng's reputation as a composer. *H'un* was subsequently performed by the Chicago Symphony, the Cleveland Orchestra, the Tokyo Philharmonic and many other major orchestras around the world.

In 2003 Carnegie Hall presented a Sheng portrait concert in its "Making Music" series with the principles from the New York Philharmonic and the Shanghai Quartet. In the same week the New York Philharmonic premiered its commissioned work, *Song and Dance of Tears*—a quadruple concerto for cello, piano, pipa and sheng, featuring soloists Yo-Yo Ma and Emanuel Ax, Wuman and Wutong, conducted by David Zinman. Some of the basic music materials came from Sheng's first Silk Road cultural field research journey embarked in the summer of 2000 (Sheng also served as the artistic advisor for Yo-Yo Ma's Silk Road Project from 1998 to 2003). During the two-month trip, Sheng followed the path of Zhang Qian, the first Chinese traveler in 138 BC, on the Silk Road in northwest China from Changan (old capital of China, now Xian) to Kashgar, collected traditional, folk music and sound samples. In 2008, Bright Sheng continued the Silk Road project, a field research trip traveling through part of the southern route of the Silk Road, including Vietnam and southern China. He also was among the composers chosen by the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games Committee to compose music for the opening ceremony.

While being one of the most highly successful orchestral composers, Sheng has also demonstrated his gifts in the theater. Sheng's experience from his first appointment in the U.S as the Composer-in-Residence at the Lyric Opera of Chicago (1989-1992) helped shape Sheng as an operatic composer. In collaboration with librettist Andrew Porter, Sheng created his first opera *The Song of Majnun* (1992)—a one-act of a Persian 'Romeo and Juliet' story. The opera subsequently received five other productions nationwide and was recorded by the Houston Grand Opera on the Delos label in 1997. Sheng's natural talent in opera was further proven by two other major stage works, *The Silver River* and *Madame Mao*. *Madame Mao*, a two-act opera, commissioned and premiered by the Santa Fe Opera in 2003, portrays Jiang Qing, Chairman Mao's repressed, vengeful wife who was one of the leading architects of the Chinese Cultural Revolution. Set to a libretto by the librettist and stage director Colin Graham, the work garnered worldwide acclaim. The New York Times: "Sheng's [style] is an exquisite blend of the musical East and West. The orchestra writing is brilliant". Telegraph (London) : "...extraordinary music and a riveting evening in the theater." The multi-cultural music theater work *The Silver River* (co-commissioned by the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, The Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival, Chamber Music Northwest), with a libretto by playwright David Henry Hwang, received a visually stunning production staged by Ong Keng Sen, the renowned Singaporean director. The production has been performed frequently and it was a highlight of the Lincoln Center Festival in 2002.

From 2006-2008 Sheng was appointed as the first Composer-in- Residence for the New York City Ballet, where he collaborated with choreographer Christopher Wheeldon on a new ballet *The Nightingale and the Rose*. Sheng's music was admired by other choreographers as well. Helgi Tomasson of San Francisco Ballet, using Sheng's extant works, premiered a new ballet entitled *Chi-Lin* in San Francisco in February, 2002, with subsequent touring performances in New York City and the Kennedy Center. Jean-Pierre Bonnefoux, at the North Carolina Dance Theater, choreographed Sheng's Four Movements for

Piano Trio in 1996 entitled *Zoomin*. In 2006, as part of the NYCB's Diamond Project, Bonnefoux again choreographed two orchestra works of Sheng, *Flute Moon* and *Two Poems from Sung Dynasty* and premiered at the New York City Ballet entitled *Two Birds with the Wings of One*.

Sheng is also one of the most favored living chamber music composers. He has worked with the Takas Quartet, the Emerson Quartet, the Shanghai Quartet, the St. Petersburg String Quartet, the Daedalus Quartet, the Jake Quartet, and many others. In 2007, Sheng's String Quartet #5 was commissioned and premiered by the Emerson Quartet. It soon became a highlight of the quartet's concerts in U.S. and Europe.

Sheng's music has been recorded on Sony Classical, Decca/London Records, Naxos, Telarc, BIS, Delos, Koch International, New World, and several other labels. He has nine discs of exclusive his music on Telarc, Naxos, BIS, Delos and New World Records.

Fall of 2016 marked a new page in Sheng's career. On September 10, The San Francisco Opera premiered his much anticipated new opera *Dream of the Red Chamber*, an 150-minute opera in two acts, with overwhelming public and critical acclaim. Within weeks of the premiere, tickets were sold out for the full run and, within the first week, a two-minute online clip of the opera by China Daily received four million hits worldwide. The opera, with Sheng as both the composer and co-librettist, brought together a "dream team" of collaborating artists: David Henry Hwang, co-librettist; Stan Lai, stage director; and Tim Yip, art designer. During the same month, the San Francisco Symphony, led by Michael Tilson Thomas, premiered his *Dream of the Red Chamber Overture*, specially written for the symphony's Asian tour of China, Japan and Korea in November of 2016. *Dream of the Red Chamber* has since received its Asia premiere at the Hong Kong Arts Festival in March 2017 to great acclaim and subsequently toured throughout China in Beijing, Changsha, and Wuhan in performances conducted by Sheng, with all sold-out box offices.

Among the published articles by Bright Sheng, there are *Melodic Migration along the Silk Road-Northwest China*; *The Love Songs of Qinghai, Bartok, the Chinese Composer*, published by Freer Gallery of the Smithsonian Institution; *H'un (Lacerations): in Memoriam 1966-1976 for Orchestra*, a self-analysis, by Perspectives of New Music; and *Leonard Bernstein: Portrait of the Artist by a Young Man* by Ear Magazine of New Music. Most recently he has written an article on creating opera *Dream of the Red Chamber*, published by Cao Xueqin Study, one of the most prestigious Redology journals in China. Sheng has also undertaken the translations of Brahms' *Ein Deutsches Requiem* from German to Chinese.

In addition to the Lyric Opera of Chicago and New York City Ballet, Sheng has served as composer-in-residences to the Seattle Symphony Orchestra (1992-95 and 2000-01) the Tanglewood Music Center (2001, where he also taught from 2001 through 2006), the Washington Performing Arts Society (2001-02), the Mannes College of Music (2002- 03), the Atlantic Center for the Arts (2002). Sheng also participated the numerals summer festivals as their composer-in-residence.

Committed as both a performer and a composer, Sheng maintains an active performing career as a conductor and concert pianist, as he believes performance and composition as a whole musicianship. As a guest conductor, he has appeared with some of the world's most important orchestras such as the San Francisco Symphony, The Detroit Symphony, The Seattle Symphony, the New York Chamber Symphony, The St. Petersburg Philharmonic, The Dortmund Philharmonic, the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra, the Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra, the China National Symphony, the Shanghai Symphony, among others. His conducting repertoire includes works by Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms, Berlioz, Mahler, Debussy, Ravel, Stravinsky, Bartok, Shostakovich, Prokofiev, as well as Aaron Copland and John Adams.

To further his belief that music is a living, breathing art form that should never be set in stone, in 2011, he founded and served as the Artistic Director of the *Intimacy of Creativity—The Bright Sheng Partnership: Composers Meet Performers in Hong Kong*, an annual two week music festival with new approach to creativity presented by The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology. To celebrate its fifth anniversary in 2016, the festival collaborated with the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra and Hong Kong Arts Festival, released a Five-Year Retrospective concert and a two-disc release on the Naxos Naxos Records label.

Sheng has been teaching composition at the University of Michigan since 1995, where he is the Leonard Bernstein Distinguished University Professor of Music. He is also IAS Helmut and Anna Pao Sohmen Professor-at-Large at The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, which he directs the Intimacy of Creativity festival, HKUST Music Alive! concert series, and other arts related activities.