

Bright Sheng is respected as one of the foremost composers of our time, whose stage, orchestral, chamber and vocal works are performed regularly throughout North America, Europe and Asia. Sheng's music is noted for its lyrical and limpid melodies, a Shostakovich sense of breath in music phrases, a Bartokian sense of rhythmic propulsion, and dramatic and theatrical gestures. Many of Sheng's works has strong Chinese and Asian influences, a result of his diligent study of Asian musical cultures for over three decades. He was proclaimed by the MacArthur Foundation in 2001 as "an innovative composer who merges diverse musical customs in works that transcend conventional aesthetic boundaries." The Foundation predicts that "Bright Sheng will continue to be an important leader in exploring and bridging musical traditions."

Born in December, 1955, in Shanghai, Sheng began studying the piano with his mother at age four. During China's infamous Cultural Revolution, at fifteen he was sent to Qinghai—a Chinese province bordering Tibet—where for seven years he performed as a pianist and percussionist in the provincial music and dance theater, 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, CUNY, 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. During that period, in 1985, as a student at Tanglewood Music Center he met Leonard Bernstein who later became his mentor. Sheng studied composition and conducting with Bernstein privately until Bernstein's passing in 1990.

During his student years, Sheng's talent already emerged of its own accord, receiving many 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 the 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 to create a new work honoring the visiting Chinese Premiere Zhu, Rongji. The resulting *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 is well known for their dramatic style and historical signification. Two of his major orchestral works *H'un: In Memoriam 1966-76* (1988) and *Naking! Nanking!*—a Threnody for Pipa and Orchestra (2000), and his opera *Madam Mao* (2003) were indeed 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.

Within the first week of 2000, in Hamburg, *Naking! Nanking!* was commissioned and premiered by Christoph Eschenbach and the Northern German Radio Symphony, as well as *Red Silk Dance*, a capriccio for piano and orchestra, commissioned and premiered by the Boston Symphony with soloist Emanuel Ax and conductor Robert Spano. In 2001 *Red Silk Dance* had its New York premiere by the New York Philharmonic. All at the same time with Sheng's many other important orchestra works frequently performed world wide, including *Tibetan Swing* (2002), *Flute Moon* (1999), *Spring Dreams* (1998), *Postcards* (1997), and *China Dreams* (1995).

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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 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. (To experience the trip with Bright Sheng, please visit www.brightsheng.com)

In 2004 Sheng enjoyed a successful premiere of *Phoenix*, commissioned by the Seattle Symphony for its centennial celebration tour to Carnegie Hall with soprano Jane Eaglen and Gerard Schwarz conducting. The work was based on Hans Christian Andersen's poem/prose with the same title and co-commissioned by the Danish National Radio Symphony for Andersen's bicentennial birthday. The following year *Phoenix* had its Danish premiere in Copenhagen and the orchestra took it on its Asian tour in Beijing, Shanghai and Hong Kong. In 2007 *Phoenix* was conducted by Charles Dutoit with the Philadelphia Orchestra at the Saratoga Spring.

In 2007, at the request of a commission by the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, Sheng's alma mater, Sheng wrote *Shanghai Overture* in celebration of the eightieth year of its founding. He also was among the composers chosen by the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games Committee to composer music for the opening ceremony.

Enjoying being one of the highly successful orchestral composers, Sheng has also demonstrated his gift in the theater. From 1989 to 1992 Sheng served as the Composer-in-Residence at the Lyric Opera of Chicago. The experience 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 *Madam Mao*. A two-act opera, *Madam Mao*, 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 stage director Colin Graham, the work garnered worldwide acclaim. Said The New York Times, "*Sheng's [style] is an exquisite blend of the musical East and West... the orchestra writing is brilliant*" Michael Kennedy of the Telegraph (London) called it "...*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 in Portland, OR.), with a libretto by the noted playwright David Henry Hwang, received a visually stunning production staged by Ong Keng Sen, the world renowned Singaporean director. The production was co-commissioned with the Prince Music Theater in Philadelphia and premiered by the Spoleto festival, USA, in 2000. *The Silver River* has been performed subsequently in Philadelphia, in Singapore by Theaters Works, and it was a highlight of the Lincoln Center Festival in 2002. It was presented by the University Music Society at University of Michigan in 2007.

From 2006-2008 Sheng was appointed as the first Composer-in-Residence for the New York City Ballet, where he collaborated with the noted choreographer Christopher Wheeldon on a new ballet *The Nightingale and the Rose*, one of the two commissioned works by the NYCB. *The Nightingale and the Rose* was well received by the public and the critics alike. In 2011, New York City Ballet will premiere *Just Dance*, a new ballet from Sheng in collaboration with Peter Martins, its Ballet Master in Chief. Sheng's music was admired by other well-known choreographers as well. In 2002, Helgi Tomasson, the Artistic Director of the San Francisco Ballet compiled three of Sheng's extant pieces and 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, the Artistic Director 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. Sheng has worked with the Takasc Quartet, the Emerson Quartet, the Shanghai Quartet, the St. Petersburg String Quartet, the Daedalus Quartet, and many others. Among Sheng's chamber music works that have been enjoying frequent world wide performances are *Four Movements for Piano Trio*, *Tibetan Dance*, *String Quartet #3*, *String Quartet #4*, *Seven Tunes Heard in China*, *The Stream Flows*, and *Concertino for Clarinet and String Quartet* (1994). 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 has collaborated with many distinguished conductors including Leonard Bernstein, Christoph Eschenbach, Kurt Masur, 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, Richard Buckley, Kazuyoshi Akiyama, Xian Zhang, David Loebel, Andre Raphael Smith, Jose-Luis Novo, Jonathan McPhee; and distinguished performers including Yo Yo Ma, Emanuel Ax, Peter Serkin, Yefim Brofman, Evelyn Glennie, Gil Shaham, Lynn Harrell, Truls Mork, Richard Stoltzman, Cho-Liang Lin, Edgar Meyer, Andre Schub, Colin Currie, David Shifrin, Chantal Juliet, Hai Ye Ni, Jane Eaglen, Elisabeth Futral, Joseph Kaiser, Lauren Flanigan, Lisa Saffer. Sheng's music has been programmed by almost every important orchestra in the world.

Sheng's music has been recorded on Sony Classical, BIS, Delos, Koch International, New World, Telarc and Naxos labels. 2009 saw three new discs of Sheng's music released, two on Naxos: *Red Silk Dance* (Sheng as the piano soloist), *Phoenix, Tibetan Swing, H'un* (second recording), and *Spring Dreams, Three Fantasies, Tibetan Dance*, and on Telarc *Never Far Away, The Nightingale and the Rose, Tibetan Love Song and Swing, Shanghai Overture*.

Among the published articles by Bright Sheng, there are *Melodic Migration along the Silk Road-Northwest China* (2002); *The Love Songs of Qinghai* (1995), both published by Asian Art & Culture, Sackler Gallery of the Smithsonian Institution; *Bartok, the Chinese Composer* (1998), published by Freer Gallery of the Smithsonian Institution; *H'un (Lacerations): in Memoriam 1966-1976 for Orchestra* (1995, a self-analysis) by *Perspectives of New Music*; and *Leonard Bernstein: Portrait of the Artist by a Young Man* (1989) by *Ear Magazine of New Music*. Sheng has also undertaken the translations of Brahms' *Ein Deutsches Requiem*, from German to Chinese, in 1996.

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, including La Jolla Chamber Music Summerfest (1993 and 2004), Santa Fe chamber Music Festival (1992, 1993, 1997), Bowdoin International Summer Festival (1994-96, and 2005), and Brevard Music Center (2003-04).

Sheng also maintains an active career as a conductor and concert pianist. 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 Chinese Orchestra, the China National Symphony, among others; and 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. As a frequent artistic director and advisor he has appeared at many of the world's most prestigious music centers and institutions including Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, Kennedy Center, Tanglewood Music Center, among others.

As a pianist, Sheng has performed with the Seattle Symphony Orchestra, the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra, at Tanglewood Music Center, Saratoga Spring, Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, Kennedy Center, Spoleto USA Festival, Eastern Music Festival and many others.

During the 2008-09 season, co-commissioned by four institutions in U.S. and featuring soloist Yolanda Kondonasis, Bright Sheng's harp concerto *Never Far Away* was world premiered by the San Diego Symphony (Jahja Lin conducting), followed by the Dallas Symphony (Leonard Slatkin conducting), the Grand Rapids Symphony (Bright Sheng conducting), and Oberlin Conservatory Orchestra.

This season Bright Sheng was one of the featured composers at the Chinese Festival presented by Carnegie Hall. Sheng's highlights of 2010, include a performance and recording of *Flute Moon* by Copenhagen Philharmonic of Denmark in April. *Phoenix* by the Philadelphia Orchestra in May, a concert premiere of his ballet score *Just Dance* at Eastern Music Festival, conducted by Gerald Schwarz in July, Concerto for Orchestra--*Zodiac Tales* is scheduled to be premiered in November by the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Leonard Slatkin, *Northern Lights* for violoncello and piano will receive a premiere in Europe, a U.S. premiere at La Jolla Chamber Music Society in August by Lynn Harrell, and a New York premiere by Alisa Weilerstein and Inon Barnatan at The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center in November.

Sheng has been teaching composition at the University of Michigan since 1995, where he is the Leonard Bernstein Distinguished University Professor of Music.

Bright Sheng's music is published exclusively by G.Schirmer. For more information at www.brightsheng.com

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