

## Tributes to Chou Wen-chung

I met Chou Wen-chung in 1979 when I joined the Columbia music faculty as a junior professor. At first he seemed formal and bureaucratically distant, but on closer acquaintance I found a warm and supportive personality, a collegial friend with whom to share common interests and values over the next 40 years. In private he had an infectious laugh and told colorful stories with gusto. From Varèse he learned an uncompromising commitment to high artistic standards. He despised superficiality in any form, be it in flashy instrumental writing or, more broadly, in shallow cultural appropriation. He urged his students to study and build on the Classical foundations of their culture. He was a deeply honorable man who enriched the lives of all who knew him.

Fred Lerdahl, Fritz Reiner Professor of Music Emeritus, Columbia University

In the late 1970s, Professor Chou Wen-chung was among the first overseas composers to visit the Central Conservatory in Beijing and made deep impression to a group of young composers. His music immediately attracted me, such as his *Yu Ko* and other orchestral works. His aesthetic concept is based on the philosophy of these old time intellectuals who played the qin, and on the ancient poetry of China. I have composed *Song of the Ch'in* for string quartet and *Su* for flute and qin (ch'in) before I came to study overseas, both of which have been very strongly influenced by Prof. Chou's introduction of Chinese scholar music. In 1985, I became the first composition student from Beijing admitted to Columbia University in New York City to study with Prof. Chou. I received my Doctoral of Musical Arts degree in 1993, and awarded a Pulitzer Prize with my first opera *Madam White Snake* in 2011.

I had a cultural shock when I first arrived New York, and I encountered many ideas that were new to me. For two years, from 1985 until 1987, I didn't compose anything. Then in 1987, I started to compose again, with *Wu Ji* for piano and electronic music, and a mixed quintet, *Dhyana* for flute, clarinet, violin, cello, and piano. The score of *Dhyana* is dedicated to Prof. Chou later, since he has given me so much inspiration and input when I composed the piece, from concept to philosophy, to texture and structure as well. I think the most important aspect of my work with Prof. Chou involved his theories of composition and creation. Prof. Chou's educational philosophy is culturally oriented. Today people can accept a wider range of styles, but that's not the issue. You must believe in your artistic vision, then your compositions can stand out. Prof. Chou Wen-chung's vision and effort have established the international status of our generation of Chinese composers.

Zhou Long, Bonfils Distinguished Research Professor of Composition, University of Missouri-Kansas City Conservatory of Music

We still don't want to believe that Prof. Chou has passed away yesterday. Tears were not enough to express our profound sadness and grieve on this tremendous loss. Our heavy heart brought us back to countless memories with his vivid voice and energetic gestures. He is a music giant who brought us to and taught us at Columbia University, and mentored us in our creative life for decades. He has made huge contribution and impact to the music of our time, yet he is also a father-like gentleman who guided us through our life in the States. He will be missed by all of us tremendously, and his legacy will live with us forever.

Remembering when I studied composition at the Central Conservatory in Beijing in the early 80's, once in a lecture given at the library, to introduce newly imported music recordings, I have surprisingly heard the recording of Prof. Chou Wen-chung's Soliloquy of a Bhiksuni for trumpet and wind ensemble. I was deeply impressed by the Chinese spirits hidden behind the

striking sonority. This is the first time I heard the Chinese composer's name — Chou Wen-chung! I was excitedly trying to learn more about him from reading the introduction printed on the record cover. I was also lucky enough to have attended his lecture when visited the Central Conservatory and knew that he taught at Columbia University. It's my privilege to have the opportunity to study with him at Columbia in 1986 after I earned my Bachelor's and Master's degrees in composition in Beijing. Prof. Chou became our great mentor with close relationship throughout the years since.

The most important impact of Prof. Chou's influence on me was not only to use basic composition technique to compose, but the in-depth study in Chinese and Western cultures, which would give inspiration to get creative concept and methods in controlling and developing music elements. The outcome would be unique, in your own language. Our artistic creation should belong to all human beings, to our culture and society. My pipa solo *The Points* and the mixed quartet *Qi* were among the pieces written directly under his influence. When I was a DMA student at Columbia, Prof. Chou recommended me to become a part of ISCM's film production *Sound and Silence*, which introduced my new chamber works to international audiences through European TV networks in 1989. During the past 3 decades, Prof. Chou has attended almost all concerts with my new works premiered in New York City, including my *Si Ji* premiered by the Cleveland Orchestra which was selected as one of the Pulitzer Prize Finalists in 2006. During the time I studied at Columbia University, I have also worked as administrative assistant at his Center for US-China Arts Exchange for 3 years, and closely witnessed his hard work with huge contribution to the US-China music education and arts exchange. He has enthusiastically supported many young artists around the world. Prof. Chou Wen-chung is my role model who has been encouraging me to keep working harder in music creation and teaching for our society.

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Chen Yi, Chou Wen-chung,  
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