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The Reflection of Oriental Elements in the Art of Piano Performance: the Aesthetics of Lei Liang's "Garden Eight"

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Master's Thesis

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SANTRAUKA

Fortepijono atlikimas vystėsi šimtus metų, todėl tradicine Vakarų estetika besiremiantys atlikėjai, interpretuodami akademinį repertuarą, daugumoje atvejų laikosi šia estetika paremto požiūrio ir tradicijų. Ar šis požiūris turėtų/galėtų kisti? Šiame magistro mokslo darbe analizuojama kinų kilmės amerikiečių kompozitoriaus Lei Liango kompozicinė estetika ir rytietiški elementai jo fortepijoniniame kūrinyje "Sodų aštuonetas". Siekdama atskleisti įvairias kompozicijos interpretavimo galimybes, šio mokslo darbo autorė pateikia interviu su pianistu Ricardo Descalzo ir kompozicijos autoriumi Lei Liangu, kurie išryškino naują minėtos kompozicijos interpretacijos perspektyvą, atskleidžiant rytietiškų elementų svarbos ir unikalios jų raiškos galimybę.

CONTENT

INTRODUCTION

The importance of the topic. After hundreds of years of development and evolution, the ever-improving piano performance techniques and mature performance forms have led the art of piano performance to a bottleneck similar to sports. But unlike sports, the goal of piano performance is not to be higher, faster, and stronger, but to express the message to the audience more efficiently and accurately. Therefore, what can be done to break through the shackles that exist nowadays?

The exploration of musical diversity is one of the answers. The collision of oriental elements with western classical music is not a brand-new topic; for example, China and the West: Music, Representation, and Reception (Yang, Saffle, 2017) presented the collision on a macro level between oriental and western music from several aspects: cultural, economic, and society, etc. But what, why, and how the oriental elements can bring some positive impact to the art of piano performance has not yet been fully researched.

Oriental elements, according to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, means one of the factors determining the outcome of a process coming from Asia, especially Eastern Asia. One of the most popular definitions of "Oriental" between the 19th and 20th centuries is that Orientalism has a threefold meaning: an academic tradition or field; A worldview, representation and "a style of thought based on an ontological and epistemological distinction between the 'East' and (most of the time) the 'West';"(Said, 1978, p. 10) However, this definition was a more sociological and political discussion of the existence of the East under Western centrism. Based on Said's definition of Orientalism, in the field of music, the book Microgroove: Forays into Other Music (Corbett, 2015), discussed the process from the initial definition of Oriental music under a Western centrism context to the later development of diversity that led more Eastern composers to use Oriental elements in their compositions and emerge in Western society.

The oriental elements cover a wide range. To clarify the range of oriental elements in this paper, we have restricted the oriental elements to elements from East Asia (China, Japan, Korea, Mongolia) and India that can be involved in the arts, such as religion, language, customs, architecture, philosophy, music, fine art, etc.

"Garden Eight" is a highly representative work with oriental elements composed by the American Chinese composer Lei Liang in his early compositions. It has only been analyzed by Chenxi Zhao from the Postgraduate Department of the Shanghai Conservatory of Music in her article "An Analysis of 'Numerology', 'Qin Rhythm', and 'Pictorial Meaning' in Lei Liang's 'Garden Eight'"(Journal of Xinghai Conservatory of Music, 2016) from a compositional perspective to research Lei Liang's creative thinking and the influence of "Garden Eight" on his subsequent compositions, but no research has been done on the influence of "Garden Eight" on the art of piano performance. This thesis aims to analyze the oriental elements contained in "Garden Eight" in terms of aesthetics, musicology, and musical performance, and to investigate how the oriental elements have positively influenced the art of piano performance.

Research object: The Reflection of Oriental Elements in the Piano Composition of Lei Liang's "Garden Eight".

Research aim: Through the composition "Garden Eight" to research when the performer is capable of interpreting compositions with oriental elements, giving the performer a wider choice of repertoire and more different perspectives of interpretation.

Research hypothesis: Pianists are given a wider selection of repertoire and will have a new perspective for interpretation through the understanding of oriental elements.

Research objectives:

1. To review Lei Liang's background and the musical aesthetics in his compositions.
2. Analyze the oriental elements from "Garden Eight".
3. Explain the shackles faced by the arts of piano performance nowadays.
4. Through the interviews with the Pianist who has played "Garden Eight" and the composer, to evaluate the influence of oriental elements on the art of piano performance.

Research methods.

- historical descriptive
- analysis of/and methodological and scientific literature
- analysis of sources and documents
- interviews

Literature and sources. The thesis contains articles, magazines, journals, music encyclopedias, music history textbooks, scores, and other web resources. The information is mainly provided by articles (Jia 2019, Meng 2016, Zhao 2016, Liang 2012, etc.), books (Ban 2020, Fung 1948, etc.), and scores by researchers and composers. All literature used in this thesis is provided in the bibliography.

Work structure. The work consists of an introduction, three sections, conclusions, a list of works cited, and two appendices, in a total of 31 pages (40 pages with appendices).

1. LEI LIANG: AN ORIENTAL COMPOSER IN A WESTERN COUNTRY

The inconvenience of transport, and the differences in linguistics and culture, kept Western composers fantasizing about Oriental music. Puccini received a music box from China brought by Baron Fassini Camossi, a former Italian diplomat in China, which gave birth to the "Jasmine flower" from Turandot (Sheppard, 2015, p. 43); Debussy heard Javanese gamelan music for the first time at the Paris World Exposition in 1889 and based on his imagination of the East Estampes L.100 was born. Unlike the imaginations of Western composers, it was only the arrival of Wen-Chung Chou[1] that brought the melodies and rhythms of true Oriental music into the Western world, and the composer who, in Chou's words, "knows his enemy and knows himself (Ban, 2017, p. 5)," was Lei Liang.

1.1 Lei Liang and his earlier compositions

Lei Liang, the winner of the 2020 Grawemeyer Award for Composition, Chinese-American composer.

Lei Liang was born in Tianjin in 1972 to an artistically inclined family. His father, Maochun Liang, is a musicologist and professor at the Central Conservatory of Music in China, where he focuses on the history of contemporary Chinese music. His mother, Liangyu Cai, is also a musicologist and worked at the Chinese National Academy of Arts, where her main field of research was the history of Western music and American music. “If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles”, and “The composers we need must have a foundation and vision about both Chinese and Western, ancient and modern.” Wen-Chung Chou said. Liang was exposed to the music of both East and West since he was young (Ban, 2017, p. 5). We cannot deny that such an upbringing helped him greatly in his later compositions. He was a student of Pianist Guangren Zhou for five years until 1988. 1988, at fifteen years old, Liang became a student in the composition department of the Central Conservatory of Music Affiliated Secondary School (Liang, 2018).

Liang went to the United States at the age of seventeen, graduated from the New

[1] Wen-chung Chou (28 July 1923 – 25 October 2019) was a Chinese American composer of contemporary classical music. He was a professor at the Columbia University.

England Conservatory of Music with a Bachelor's and Master's degree, and then received his Ph.D. from Harvard University. He never stopped on his way of composing. He once said, "I prefer to choose topics that are challenging to me and that are a bit tough to find simple answers to (Ma, 2019)." As a student at Harvard University, he frequented the Harvard-Yenching Library. His extensive knowledge of traditional Chinese culture has allowed him to develop a unique compositional style that is neither Oriental nor Western, or to say, both Oriental and Western. Based on his systematic study of Western composition, his work Saxophone Concerto "Xiaoxiang", inspired by a tragic story, was a finalist for the 2015 Pulitzer Prize for Music. And his 2020 Grawemeyer Award-winning work A Thousand Mountains, A Million Streams is the result of his work with climate researchers and marine experts to infuse nature's sounds as elements and integrate them with elements of Chinese painting.

"Together we dreamed of what we could do for art. In doing so, music helps to create a better world (Ma, 2019)." To explore what Lei Liang did for art, we can start to explore what he did in his earlier compositions.

At the age of ten, Liang applied to the China Xinghai Piano School but was unsuccessful due to his age and low level of piano playing. Pianist Guangren Zhou[2] thought that Liang had a rich imagination of music, and because of that, she kept him as a student. In 1988, when he was fifteen years old, a concert of his compositions was held in the Small Concert Hall of the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing, featuring ten students aged five to fifteen playing more than thirty pieces of his compositions (Liang, 2018).

Although the earliest work "Somniloquy" (Composed in 1992, choreography by Masashi Harada, a male Butoh dancer, trombone) can be tracked from Liang's official website, no information about its content can be found on the internet, except for some textual records. It can only be inferred from the title that it is a stage work with Japanese elements. In fact, "Dialectal Percussions" which was composed in 1994 is the earliest work of Lei Liang which has available recording and video.

"Dialectal Percussions" is a solo percussion work with a selection of temple bells, five

[2] Guangren Zhou (17 December 1928 - 7 March 2022), originally from Ningbo, Zhejiang Province, China, was a Chinese pianist and educator born in Hanover, Germany. She was a lifelong professor at the Central Conservatory of Music in China.

temple blocks, tam-tam, tom-tom, "xiao luo" small gongs, "da luo" big gongs, two "xiao bo" small cymbals, "peng zhong" Buddhist chanting bells (pair) and other East Asian and Buddhist percussion instruments. In Liang's Program Notes, he mentions that the inspiration for the work came from the Chinese language. As a tonal language, different tones and rhythms of the Chinese language can create a variety of manners of speaking to convey different messages, which are exactly similar elements to music. Liang has transformed the elements that make up the Chinese language into a musical language in this work.

1.2 Oriental elements in his compositions

The Oriental element is a very broad topic. It can be a certain element from the East - Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism - or Japanese ukiyo-e, Chinese landscape painting. For a clearer definition of oriental elements in this paper, we have tentatively limited the range of oriental elements to religions, languages, customs, architecture, philosophy, music, and art from China, Japan, Korea, and India. As a composer with an oriental background, oriental elements appear with great frequency in Liang's work.

Being born in China, it is natural that Liang would use Chinese language as an inspiration for his compositions. Chinese as the only logogram language which is still alive nowadays differs from Western phonogram in that each character can be seen as a word, also pronunciation is not related to writing. From the special writing system, a type of art called Shu Fa[3] has been developed. In "Brush-Stroke", "Winged Creatures", and "Aural Hypothesis", Liang draws on the aesthetics of Chinese calligraphy, combining features such as the brush movements and the direction of the line with the music. Especially in his small orchestra work "Brush-Stroke", where Liang incorporates two representative schools of Chinese calligraphy: the "slender gold script" by Hui-Tsung[4] and the "wild cursive script" by Huai-Su[5] to combine with the traditional Chinese instrument Guqin, a type of zither with seven strings, to represent the brush strokes of calligraphy in music. Just as Chou said, "Calligraphy is music in ink, and

[3] "The way of Writing", Chinese calligraphy.

[4] Emperor Hui-Tsung of the Song Dynasty (7 June 1082 – 4 June 1135), Ji Zhao, was the eighth emperor of the Northern Song Dynasty of China. He was also a very well-known calligrapher.

[5] Huai-Su (737–799), courtesy name Zang Zhen, was a Buddhist monk and calligrapher of the Tang Dynasty, famous for his cursive calligraphy.

music is calligraphy in sound" (Ban, 2017, p. 5).

Another important component of the Chinese language is pronunciation, which also appeared many times in the works of Liang. "Various words with the same pronunciation" is a very special feature of the Chinese language. The same pronunciation, with different tones and different ways of writing, can make one pronunciation have many meanings. "Yuan" is a saxophone quintet inspired by the pronunciation of the Chinese language. According to the Composer's Note, Liang selected "injustice", "grievance", and "pledge" from among the many meanings of the pronunciation "Yuan" as an inspiration and took some motifs from an old Chinese traditional play "Injustice to Dou-E" which composed by Hanqing Guan from Yuan Dynasty fused them to create this saxophone quintet. This composition represents the theme of injustice which is often found in Chinese history and literature. For example, the story "The Great Revenge of the Orphan of Zhao" was first mentioned in the ancient Chinese narrative historical book "Zuo Zhuan" which published around 4th Century BC during the Zhou Dynasty later adapted into a play by Junxiang Ji in Yuan Dynasty.

Besides language, Oriental religions are also one of Liang's sources of inspiration. Taoism and Buddhism are two of the most widely spread religions in East Asia. Taoism, founded by Lao Tzu, is both a religion and a philosophical discipline. The "Tao Te Ching", written by Lao Tzu, is both a religious classic and a philosophical book. In the opening section of "Magma" from "My window" which was composed for piano in 2007, the right hand mostly plays on black keys and the left hand mostly plays on white keys. Based on the author's observation, the opposition of black and white and the unity of left and right correspond to the widely known conception from the Tao Te Ching: Taiji, which is also known as Yin and Yang.

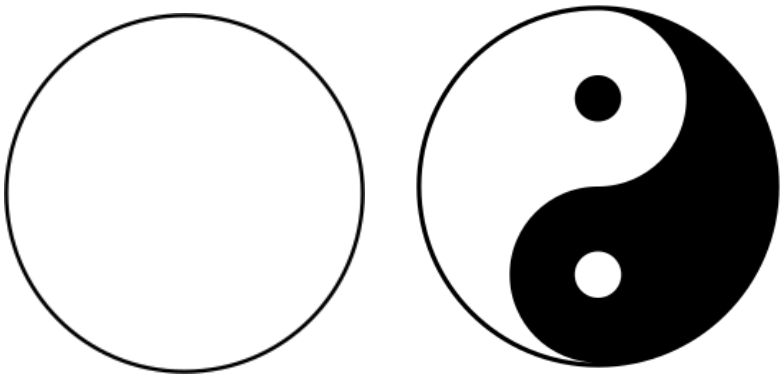

Figure 1. *Wuji and Taiji*

In Taoism, Yin and Yang are opposite to each other as Taiji, the Two; while together,

they are Wuji, the One. Everything is born from “Tao[6]”, but it is not dualism. As Tao Te Ching says, "The Tao gives birth to the One[7], the One gives birth to the Two[8], the Two gives birth to the Three[9], and the Three gives birth to everything." This coincides in some ways with the traditional Western method of composition, in which a motive develops into a phrase, then into a movement, and finally undergoes changes to form a work.

Taoism and Buddhism as non-dualistic religions have many things in common, one of the most important of which is the supersession of the present life, to see through the truth of life and the universe, breaking all worries, finally surpassing birth, ageing, sickness, and death. Meditation is also a common practice of mindfulness in these two religions, it is believed that by meditating in complete stillness, people can notice tiny sounds that are normally inaudible. In “Listening for blossoms”, Liang combined the element of “supersession” with meditation, used the “sound of blossoming flowers” from traditional Chinese and Japanese poetry as the theme, and expressed the momentary feeling of blossoming as described in the poetry with different layers of music to create a very hazy and fantastic musical world.

Through the analysis of Liang’s compositions, in addition to the elements mentioned above, Shamanism, Mongolian folk music, Chinese, Japanese and Korean folk music, and even Hinduism have also been used as inspiration by Liang. Overall, Liang's in-depth knowledge of various oriental elements has been transformed into musical inspiration and fused with the composition techniques that he has learnt to create unique works, which is also one of the highlights of his career as an international cross-cultural composer.

1.3 Western techniques in his compositions

Although it is difficult to find any available information which directly mentioned Liang's experiences of learning Western compositional techniques, we can still identify the influence of Western compositional techniques through some of his works.

According to Liang's Note, “One-Note Polyphony” is one of his favourite compositional techniques, which consisted of the same note repeated by different instruments

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[6] Tao: The laws of how the universe works.

[7] One: Also as known as Wuji, literally means “without end”.

[8] Two: Taiji, Yin and Yang, also means Heaven and Earth

[9] Three: In ancient Chinese culture, three usually means many.

or playing methods to show the changes in timbre and give the music a flow (Liang, 2012). The use of “One-Note Polyphony” is not only due to the fact that the traditional instruments of East Asia are mostly monophonic, and the traditional Western harmonies are not well suited to expressing the timbre of these instruments, but also because of that Liang studied for six years with Robert Cogan at the New England Conservatory of Music, where serialism and spectralism were popular compositional techniques of his teachers.

For example, according to the article posted in The San Diego Union-Tribune, in “The moon is following us”, Liang and researchers from the California Institute for Telecommunications and Information Technology used spectral techniques to sample a Chinese folk song and obtain several sets of data then used as part of the motif for the composition. As well as Liang's new composition “Six Seasons”, which premiered on 15 October 2022, is based on the sound materials acquired from the High-frequency Acoustic Recording Package that the US Coast Guard placed on the ocean floor (Varga, 2022). In the author’s opinion, the similarity to Arthur Honegger's orchestral composition “Pacific 231” which was composed in 1923 in terms of how it was inspired cannot be ignored. The idea of this composition was related to a train’s movement, from a standstill to the start of the locomotive, then increasing speed to the maximum speed, later deceleration and stop. Honegger reported that he wanted to translate the visual experience of a speeding train, as well as its sounds, into the orchestral texture (Downes, 1924). Compared to “Pacific 231”, “Six seasons” is more of a high-tech version of a spectralism composition.

The influence of serialism reflected in Liang is his obsession with numbers. The chamber music work "Garden six" for six saxophones has six movements, six lines of music per movement, six notes per line, six types of time values, and six special techniques throughout the piece. This work requires six saxophones to play six movements at the same time, thus creating an overlap of six voices, which must be played in six minutes. According to musicologist Lixia Ban, Liang often employs a free sequential approach, and it is clear that he is influenced by integral serialism composers such as Babbitt (Ban, 2008). In one of his lectures, Liang mentioned why he used the number “six”: "I was more interested in the number six and decided to use only six different tones, six types of time values and six types of timbres. I wanted to make something different from the sequential music I studied in the past, that is, I

wanted to have a state of breathing. I don't breathe in 4/4 time (Liang, 2020). "

Continue with compositional structure, through the third piece “Magma” from the cycle “My Windows”, Liang used a structure in which the left hand is with a C major tonality and the right hand is in D flat major, which can be found as early as in Ligeti's works. It also shows the influence of the 20th-century Western composers on him. He once suggested to students in composition classes a subversive change to the structure to add a sense of surprise to the structure of the composition by using the climax as the beginning and the opening section as the end. The subversion of traditional structure has been a major direction of development in Western music since the 20th century (Stuckenschmidt, 1969).

Despite using many of the compositional techniques of the Western avant-garde school, the heart of Liang’s inspiration for his work is still based on oriental aesthetics, which is qualitatively different from traditional Western avant-garde works. Liang once mentioned his requirements for himself in an interview with the Beijing Contemporary Art Foundation[10], “A good composition has to be conceptually pioneering, and through that, it also has to consist of breakthroughs in musical materials and compositional techniques. It can be called a good composition only when all those three conditions have been achieved.” Liang is always trying to avoid making either a typical Oriental melody or a specific Western compositional technique as a label for his compositions. He is also avoiding composing traditional music sections in either Oriental or Western (Liang, 2012). However, breaking with tradition does not mean completely overturning it, but fusing and balancing new elements with the “tradition”.

[10] https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/0pn2PUfLABbklAKuH6JtyQ

2. ANALYSIS OF INTERPRETATION AND AESTHETICS OF "GARDEN EIGHT"

When it comes to the fusion and balance of oriental elements and Western composition technique, one work that must be mentioned is his early composition "Garden Eight" which was composed in 1996. In this composition, Liang applied many oriental elements and managed to avoid the appearance of typical oriental melodies. For the first time, Liang sets out specific requirements for the performer in this piece, so it is of great interest to research both from the performer's and aesthetical points of view.

2.1 The background of "Garden Eight"

In 1996, while still attending the New England Conservatory of Music in America, Liang wrote the work "Garden Eight", which was composed for any instrument at the beginning. Liang was 24 years old at the time when he was graduating from his undergraduate degree and moving on to a master's degree for more in-depth study. In his Program Notes, he mentions that "Garden Eight" is a set of works to be contributed to the "Yuan Ye" (also translated as The Craft of Gardens), one of the earliest books on garden design in China written by Cheng Ji in the Ming Dynasty (1631). Chinese Garden is one of the characteristics of Chinese architecture, which is concerned with precision and appropriateness, ingenuity, and elegance. The design of the Chinese garden brings together oriental arts such as architecture, painting, calligraphy, sculpture, literature, and horticulture, with a respect for nature. Local materials are often used and the design ideas are adapted to the seasons, reflecting the folklore and the personality of the owner. Liang described this as the first work in which he found his voice as a composer, and since then it has been extended in the same direction with different expressions (Liang, 2012). In 2004, Liang revised the solo piano version for easier reading.

In this cycle, Liang repeats six different tones and six different time values to memorize a friend whom he has met six times before. Some scholars have listed all the notes that appear in the piece in order, to try to find the logic of the composer's sequence of repeating these six notes, but the conclusion is that there is no clear pattern to follow (Chenxi Zhao, 2016). However, is it possible to propose a hypothesis that, like the Taoist practice of "creating

something out of nothing", "disorder" is the logic of this composition? The piece is so logic-free in its structure and tonality that it relies on two points in terms of memorisation. Because of the logic of the "disorder", notes were never get reused, so it is simply a matter of remembering the first note of each group in groups of six, with the imaginary scenario created by the colours of sound made by the interval distances.

2.2 The aesthetic of "Garden Eight"

There are two special symbols on the surface of the score, a dotted line of concatenation, which represents the phrase, which is not a real phrase, but rather the orientation of the intention in oriental aesthetics. The performer needs to imagine it as a real phrase to perform, and proper performance is not only about playing the desired sound but also about enhancing the presence of the dotted line through carefully staged body movements to create a more kinesthetic-auditory and visual connection.

The second symbol is +, which refers to hooking directly on the strings. Hooking is one of the techniques frequently used to play the Guqin, a traditional Chinese instrument.

Figure 2. *Guqin, 1634 (Ming Dynasty)*

Guqin is a traditional Chinese solo instrument with over three thousand years of history. It has seven strings and thirteen marked pitch positions, with a range of up to four octaves. In ancient East Asia, literati were required to know the four arts: Qin, Qi, Shu and Hua (guqin, Go chess, calligraphy and Chinese painting), and the Qin was the primary among these four arts. Shangying Xu, one of the most famous guqin performers back in the Ming dynasty thoroughly

described the techniques of playing guqin in his book "Xi Shan Qin Kuang" (Stream and Mountain Guqin Impressions). There are three basic techniques for playing the guqin, the scattered tone, the overtone, and the pressed tone. The scattered tone is an empty string tone, in which the pitch is not pressed, but only pluck the string with the right hand, resulting in a solid and long-lasting sound; the overtone is a plucked string with the right hand while the left hand lightly taps the pitch, resulting in an ethereal and clear sound; and the pressed tone is a sliding tone with the left-hand vibrato based on the technique of overtone, which, like all other stringed instrument, changes in pitch within the sliding area (Xu, 1641).

Throughout this composition, we could see that the composer has used many rest signs which correspond to the "space-leaving" technique often used in Chinese painting. In the oriental aesthetic, leaving some blank is a very important part of the art, as mentioned in the "Xi Shan Qin Kuang": "Stillness comes from the centre, sound comes from the heart, if there are distractions in the heart, if the fingers are disturbed by things, how can we have a calmness when we play with them?"(Xu, 1641) The existence of silence is to prepare the performer physically for the performance, as well as to concentrate on the desired scene in the mind. Liang marked the tempo of 46 quarter notes per minute in the beginning, coincidentally, the human heart rate during deep sleep is also often in the range of 45-50 bpm. This tempo reflects the composer's desire for stillness and stability throughout the piece.

Liang sees this composition as a musical garden, each piece being a journey into a garden. As mentioned in the first volume of "Yuan Ye", a garden is appropriately constructed when the place is in harmony with the land. We can imagine these six pieces as six very different styles of gardens for interpretation.

2.3 The interpretation of "Garden Eight"

The interpretation of this composition requires a study of the performer's body movements, the different techniques of keyboard touching, the imagination of the piece and an analysis of the score.

Liang mentions the requirement for the pianist's body movements on the first page of "Garden Eight". He considers the movement of the pianist's fingers and arms to be one of the important kinesthetic elements of this work, so controlling the body's movements is crucial to

the performance of this piece.

As the composition is not related to any of the traditional compositions of Western from the past, as well as there are no difficult points of technique that may be found in traditional works, such as a paragraph needing to be played rapidly or complex rhythmic patterns, so it is impossible to make a traditional explanation about interpretation in terms of the pianistique. And as everyone has a different imagination as to how it should be interpreted, it is also impossible to describe it in detail, but only by the way of atmosphere. We have tentatively and subjectively divided the titles of the six pieces into two parts to give an insight into them.

The first part is Heaven and Earth. Human beings exist between heaven and earth, with their heads covered by the sky and their feet stepping on the earth, as stated in the ancient Chinese text "I Ching: the Book of Changes", it is said "In the ancient times when the Fu Hsi[11] was the king of the world, he looked up to the sky and observed the law on the earth.", indicating the relationship between heaven and earth and human beings in the ancient Chinese worldview. The second part is East, West, South and North. The four directions are the directional system formed by man in the world from himself as the centre of origin. Heaven, earth, east, west, south, and north these six concepts are combined to form the “Six Directions”, which is one of the ancient ways in China to describe the universe. In the next paragraphs, we will try to describe the first two works in a subjective and imaginative way as examples of how to approach them.

“Tian” (Heaven) [12]

Heaven is a transcendent being in Oriental culture, where the people believe that gods and goddesses live in the heavens, and only with sufficient spiritual cultivation can one attain ascension to heaven. The performer can imagine this piece as a garden where the gods or immortals live, holy and solemn, surrounded by clouds and mists. Example 1 shows the direction of the “first phrase” of this piece.

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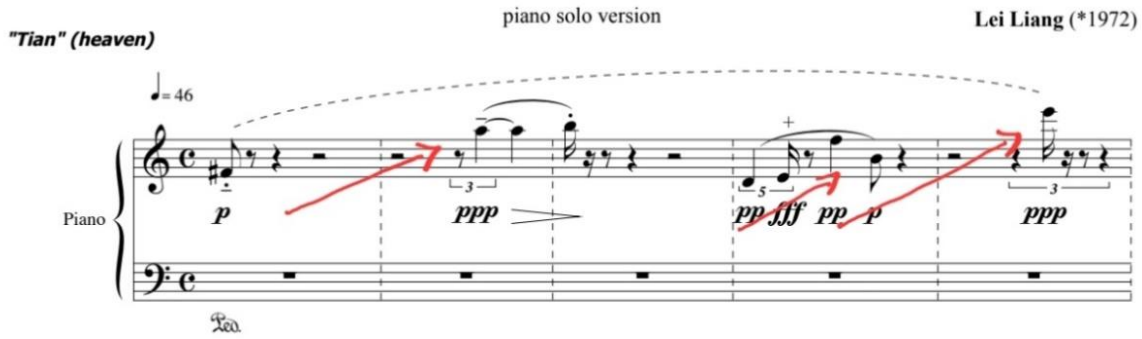
[11] Fu Hsi, a character in Chinese legend and mythology, along with his sister and wife Nüwa with creating humanity and the invention of music, hunting, fishing, domestication, and cooking as well as the Cangjie system of writing Chinese characters around 2,000 BC. Fuxi was counted as the first of the Three Sovereigns at the beginning of the Chinese dynastic period.

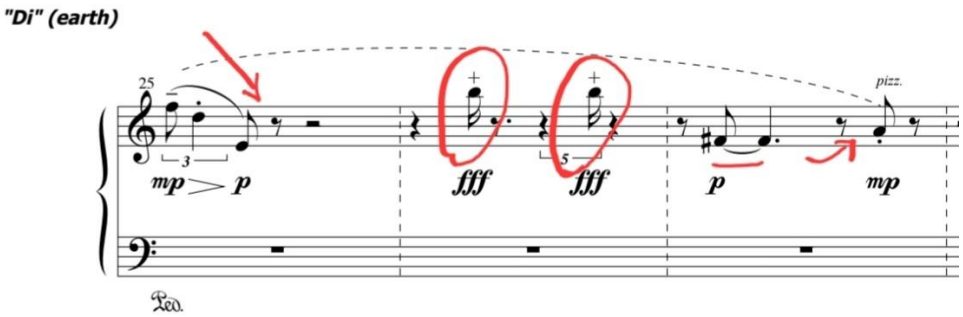
[12] The titles of each piece from “Garden Eight” were written in both Chinese pronunciation and translation in English by the composer.



Example 1. *Garden Eight: Tian (bb. 1-5)*

"Di" (Earth)

The earth is a representation of existence and materiality in Eastern culture, where everything comes to life and rests, which is the origin of all creation. The performer can imagine this piece as a person walking on the earth, with everything around him or her blossoming and disappearing into the boundless fields. This piece is divided into six phrases. As in Example 2, the first measure in the first phrase is three notes in a downward direction, which we can imagine as rain falling from the sky. The two plucked notes in the second measure represent the sound of the rain falling to the ground. The interval between the two notes in the third measure is a major third, with a milder colouring, which can be imagined as the sound of the rain falling to the ground and then slowly being absorbed by the earth.



Example 2. *Garden Eight: Di (bb. 1-3)*

Apart from the imagination of the atmosphere, there are also things to keep in mind concerning the interpretation. One is to pay attention to pedal retention. The composer clearly marks the pedal on the score from the first bar to the last, so the layering of the sound by making proper use of the differences in the strength of the touches is one of the main points in performing this composition. The second is the decisiveness of the phrasing, in other words,

the control of freedom. Performing too slowly and loosely can cause the phrase to lose its sense of direction and thus its control over the whole picture. However, too much intensity can make the 'breath' too short and break the atmosphere the composer is seeking, so a reasonable degree of freedom is also important.

Memorising this work can also be a challenge for the pianist. As a composition not based on traditional tonal and harmonic writing, it cannot be memorised through a conventional analysis of harmonic changes, and the high extent of similarity in musical materials due to the repetition of six notes makes it even easier to get stuck in a memory labyrinth. In this regard, the author suggests that memory should be achieved by combining the imagery of the atmosphere with the interpreted phrases. For example, playing each phrase individually to memorise the sound and the “pace”. Then memorising the interval relationships for the last note of one phrase and the first note of the phrase next to it, to deepen the impression of the order of the phrases, and then play all the phrases from the beginning to the end connected as the whole piece should be. Of course, this is just one way of memorising the piece, but it is also possible to memorise it from a purely numerical point of view, giving each note its own desired code and then memorising the order of the code by heart.

In conclusion, Garden Eight, as a composition using oriental elements, differs from the works based on Western aesthetics in both performance technique and interpretation. As regards interpretation, the composer gives the performer a great deal of room for interpretation, allowing for different understandings rather than “just one correct answer”, thus avoiding the homogenisation of the performance. When the performer puts his or her own inspiration into this composition that becomes united with it, the performer also can feel a greater sense of attachment to the composition and, indirectly, a stronger sense of confidence. The author of this thesis hopes that through the study and interpretation of works with an oriental aesthetic such as Garden Eight, the pianist will be given back the freedom of interpretation and performance, returning to the very essence of music.

3. THE SHACKLES OF PIANO PERFORMANCE NOWADAYS AND THE IMPACT OF ORIENTAL ELEMENTS

The art of piano performance has changed radically over the years. From the harpsichord to the modern piano, advances in piano-making technology have made the keyboard much more sensitive, and the functions of the pedals more versatile resulting in the playing techniques require becoming more and more sophisticated. The author of this thesis analyzed the relevant history and raised the following points.

3.1 The shackles of piano performance nowadays

Before the 19th century, the pieces entitled “Exercise” and “Practice” were not specifically designed to train the performing technique of pianists (or to say, pianistique) but were a form of composition such as Duet and Fuga. After the first industrial revolution, industrial advances allowed piano manufacturers to produce higher quality strings and components, which led to a qualitative improvement in the sound quality of the piano: a more responsive keyboard, changes in the mechanics of the piano that gave it a wider expressive range, and the need for more elaborate techniques to perform the different colours of sounds. At the beginning of the 19th century, etudes began to appear in the composer's compositions. The sole purpose of the early nineteenth-century etudes was to practice pianistique, as in the early "studies" by Johann Baptist Cramer and the etudes by Czerny that are still in use today. However, the situation changed again from the 1830s onwards. No longer satisfied with merely practicing pianistique, composers and pianists began to create musical exercises that could be used for both training and performance, and two of the most famous collections were Chopin's 24 Etudes and Liszt's Études d'Execution Transcendante. Virtuoso Pianist gradually became a new title for pianists to enjoy. Following the leading of Liszt, the magnificent Cadenza and the pianist's improvisation also became part of the impetus for audiences to go to concerts, and this overly technically focused aesthetic orientation has continued to the present day, placing piano performance in a difficult circumstance.

After the second industrial revolution, the appearance of factories that could produce pianos on a large scale led to a significant reduction in the cost of producing pianos. The

decreased price of domestic piano made it easier to be possessed by more families, which made the piano become one of the most popular musical instruments. As a consequence, the population learning to play the piano also grew in size. Massive numbers of players meant intense competition, and the ability to play grand repertoire and difficult pieces without mistakes became an essential requirement to become a professional classical pianist. The title of winner of a world-class competition is just one more knock on the door of a piano student on his way to becoming a professional pianist. With the advent of media streaming, audiences were able to enjoy music in the comfort of their own homes. So, in this era, the reasons for those who chose to go to the concert hall became more diverse: some to enjoy their favourite repertoire, some to have a social evening, and some just simply want to know if the pianist plays exactly as the recording did. Professional pianists have also become more limited in their performance and choice of music: Either with the selection of music that is too rare to reach the majority of audiences who are already used to enjoying traditional repertoire may result in poor attendance, or playing well-known repertoire entails greater risks. As each audience has a different approach and understanding of the repertoire, the slightest mistake or not-so-attractive interpretation can be blamed on and have the pianist labelled as an “amateur pianist” easily, and so on and so forth, in a negative cycle.

As the interpretations of the performers started to converge, a question that has existed from the beginning of the profession of the pianist, arose: are the performers the creators? Do we convey only the message that the composer needs it to convey? Assuming that the pianist is no more than a messenger for the composer, will the profession be replaced by AI when it becomes intelligent enough to do so? Since the invention of the gramophone, a part of the market of live performances has been squeezed out by recordings, so the only way to survive as a performer is to become a creator, to innovate in order not to be replaced. And the way to participate in that creation, which can be controlled by the performer, is to interpret the repertoire and construct the structure of the concert programme. As a pianist, the ability to analyze and interpret a composition is based on one's cultural background and range of perceptions, so understanding a composition from a new perspective is an obvious way of improving a pianist's interpretative abilities, and compositions with Oriental aesthetics are another solution to the drain on the repertoire caused by only basing their compositions on the

Western aesthetic.

3.2 The interviews with Ricardo Descalzo and Lei Liang

In order to demonstrate and compare the findings of this research paper, two interviews were conducted separately. With Ricardo Descalzo, a Spanish Contemporary pianist who played Garden Eight, and with Lei Liang, the composer. The interview with Ricardo Descalzo was conducted remotely on 4 April 2023 through Microsoft Teams, with a total of seven questions asked, and lasted 30 minutes. The interview with Lei Liang was conducted remotely on Zoom on 5 April 2023, with a total of six questions and lasted 30 minutes.

Ricardo Descalzo is a pianist and pedagogue from Spain working on the contemporary direction. He is currently working intensively on an audiovisual project of contemporary solo piano repertoire recorded in Video HD to be accessed freely. As a former student of Margarita Sitjes, Alexander Hrisanide, Ana Guijarro and Josep Colom, he has won several international competitions, including the first prize in the International Piano Competition "Ricard Viñes" in 1998. He is also an educator, having taught as a professor at several Spanish conservatories and now teaches contemporary piano performance at the Escuela Superior de Música de Alto Rendimiento (ESMAR).

As a pianist specialising in contemporary works, Ricardo Descalzo is always on the lookout for new compositions. In 2016, he uploaded a video of Garden Eight to his Youtube channel and wrote the description for the video:

"How many notes are needed to create a piece of music: 3000, 200, 25, 7, 2? I'm not a fan of compositions with few notes. But, how boring is trying always to play the most difficult pieces, and how sad, from the point of view of the performer, when difficulties are meaningless. And, at the same time, how difficult it is to play the seemingly simplest pieces and get a coherent and satisfying result. I know Lei Liang's music from many years and I like everything he writes. From the simplest, like this collection, to the most complex. He is a craftsman, so meticulous and sensitive...This is a collection of eight short pieces[13] that are not intended to evolve from one to another. Rather, they are like different views of the same landscape. 'These pieces are

[13] Actually there are six pieces in "Garden Eight"

musical gardens. To perform one of them is to walk through a garden of sounds...'[14] Not everyone will enjoy these delicate aromas; but if you do, you will go into ecstasies. Here come these sounds to the intimacy of a winter afternoon. If you do not know his music yet, let yourself immerse into his soundwolrd. You could begin with "March cathedral". What a wonderful music…Beware the audio of "Garden Eight", the first sounds should sound extremely delicate."

From this description presented in the paragraph above we can see that Descalzo has thought accordingly about the dilemmas we have mentioned previously. It is very interesting to learn from the interview with Descalzo that he has no oriental cultural background at all, but we have obtained a very important piece of information: from an early age he showed an extra interest in Debussy's music. As we wrote in the first chapter, the oriental elements in Debussy's work were a distinctive presence in relation to classical compositions traditionally based on a Western aesthetic. Although it is impossible to conclude that an understanding of Debussy can help in the performance of compositions with oriental elements, it is possible to speculate on how Ricardo could have interpreted the Garden Eight so freely and relevantly in the absence of an oriental cultural background. On the other hand, the contemporary works of the West are also the result of an attempt to move away from the traditional rigour of the work, a development which in effect gives the pianist more freedom of interpretation, so that, accordingly, it can be assumed that compositions with oriental elements, which are filled with atmosphere and white space, will also appeal to the pianist because of their free characteristics.

We also interviewed the pianist for a more specific interpretation and understanding of "Garden Eight". The first manuscript version of "Garden Eight" was written in 1996 and was revised in 2004 with measures and rests. Through discussions with Descalzo, we agreed that the first version of the manuscript with no traditional measures was much easier for the performer to understand, whereas the traditional Western notation of the revised version led the performer into a labyrinth of counting beats and bars. On the basis of the author's personal opinion, this dilemma is exactly the epitome of what most performers do when they practice their repertoire: getting caught up in the details and forgetting the overall scene, losing the dynamics and the flow of the music. One of the most important spots in playing "Garden Eight"

[14] From Liang's Program Notes

is freedom, and Descalzo, as a professor for many years, also says that freedom is a very important part of a successful performance, as the performer begins to master this freedom, the quality and dynamics of the performance also improves significantly.

When a piece is overloaded with techniques and notation, there is very little room for interpretation, but the Garden Eight gives the pianist sufficient freedom in this regard. Through the study of the Garden Eight, the pianist is free to interpret the work without the constraints of difficult technique and a crowded score, reclaiming a long-forgotten musical charm. This freedom is also a reminder of the pianist as a creator when the pianist is given enough opportunity to create the imagery he or she wants, which is tantamount to fusing himself or herself with the piece as a new composition. Descalzo is also in agreement: one of the things that attract him most about Liang's composition is the freedom of interpretation. Descalzo says that Liang's "Piano, Piano" for the improvising pianist which was composed in 2012 has similarities to Garden Eight in the "layer of sound" and "freedom of interpretation". According to Liang's Program Note, "Piano, Piano" is inspired by the Roman palimpsest. The composition consists of two sets of four pages of score each. One set (subtitled "Light") is printed on paper and the other (subtitled "Shadow") is printed on transparent pages. The improvising pianist can choose to overlap them in any number of combinations and create music with different layers to use his/her own judgement to freely interpret the scores. As well as in "Garden Eight", performers are free to form a piece with different layers using a long-keeping pedal and different interpretations of each note.

To confirm and compare the pianist's point of view, we also interviewed the composer, Lei Liang. Liang said that he only expects the performer to be able to express the atmosphere without any restriction on the figurative aspects. Music is a being that transcends instruments and languages, and the piano can become any kind of instrument through imagination and interpretation, making a thousand different sounds, depending on the needs of the composer and the performer. This coincides with the points we have mentioned previously, as it is said that everyone can have a different understanding and interpretation of their own while being a creator. Regarding the revision of the score of "Garden Eight", Liang said that it was because some performers might not be able to easily understand what kind of atmosphere the composer intended to convey, so the score was re-written in a stricter and traditional way to make it easier

for them to understand and perform. Liang also mentioned that although the “Garden Eight” appears to be a monophonic piece, what needs to be done is to make it sound like multiple voices and that there are also rules of counterpoint, which is not an easy task in terms of composition. According to the author’s opinion, the interview with Liang confirmed the author's views on the layers of sound and the freedom of interpretation which were discussed in the interview with Descalzo. The question of the relevance of playing Debussy’s works and compositions with oriental elements is also commented on by Liang: “It is possible to hypothesize that the two may have some connections, but it is not possible to conclude that one can play Debussy is also capable of understanding pieces with oriental elements.”

3.3 The impact of oriental elements on piano performance

Combining the above research and interviews, we can conclude that the research of compositions containing oriental elements can have an impact on the art of piano performance in the following ways:

The first is that the performing technique is no longer confined to the traditional Western approach. The requirements of pianistique and colour of the sound for compositions with oriental elements are derived from oriental aesthetics, as in the case of “Garden Eight”, which imitates the sound of the guqin, allowing the piano to produce a timbre very different from that of traditional Western compositions, increasing the range of the performer's technique and enriching the imagination of sound.

The second is the “widening” of the range of performance. The performer needs to pay attention not only to the sound of the performance but also to the control of his or her body movements on stage. When the body movements merge with the sound of the performance, the range of the piano performance expands from only sound to sound and vision, and this linking of the auditory and the visual enriches the performance. From the performer's point of view, well-planned body movements also help the performance and avoid accidents on stage.

The third point is that by understanding compositions with oriental elements a new perspective based on oriental aesthetics is developed, which can be applied not only to analyze works with oriental elements but also to other works with non-oriental elements in order to give the audience a new experience.

The fourth point is that the freedom of the performer to be involved in the composition is greatly increased. In the case of “Garden Eight”, for example, the composer gives the performer sufficient freedom to interpret the piece in their own imagination and perspective. This not only facilitates the diversification of the artistic output but also enhances the confidence of the performer. When the performer is confident enough in their interpretation of the work, the psychological stress is reduced, which is beneficial to the pianist's mental health and, consequently, to the sustainability of the pianist's career in the long run. The performer's mind, in turn, is clearer in a state of lower psychological stress, and the performer's control of the body is smoother and freer in performance, resulting in a higher quality of performance.

Fifthly, with regard to the choice of repertoire, compositions with oriental elements are also a great advantage in expanding the pool of programs. Not only does performing a composition with oriental elements broaden the repertoire, but the balance of the repertoire by interspersing Western works with pieces containing oriental elements also. From the audience's point of view, the change in aesthetic perspective also can avoid aesthetic fatigue.

The sixth point is that the population of East Asia is approximately 1.6 billion, which is about 22% of the world's population. From the point of view of the pianist's professional development, the mastery of compositions with oriental elements helps to broaden the audience of the performer's range of activities.

CONCLUSIONS

In this master's thesis, the author analyzed Lei Liang's compositional aesthetics, showing further possibilities for interpreting compositions by explaining the aesthetics and possible interpretative approaches of the composition “Garden Eight” containing oriental elements, followed by interviews with the pianist Ricardo Descalzo and the composer himself, revealing the reflection of oriental elements on the art of piano performance and suggesting further possibilities for interpretations and the choice of repertoire. The conclusions of this thesis are therefore as follows:

1. As a new generation of composers of Chinese descent, Lei Liang's distinctive aesthetic vision makes his work uniquely different. With a rich background of knowledge and diverse sources of inspiration, Lei Liang's works are constantly appearing and each one is very refreshing. In his world, oriental elements no longer belong only to the East, nor are they a flavouring for Western music, but are part of global diversity and musical diversification. His views on music have also been recognized by the industry through the various awards he has won.

2. “Garden Eight”, a representative work from the early period of Lei Liang's work has not been researched thoroughly until now. From the analysis of “Garden Eight”, it is clear that the inspirations from which artworks are created can be very diverse. Oriental culture, painting aesthetics, religious philosophy, and even mathematical logic can all be central to a work of music. The interpretation of the “Garden Eight” also poses a challenge to the classical pianist, how to interpret and control a work that differs from the traditional logic of the West, and how to fill the meaning to a few notes through imagination, etc., are all new subjects.

3. Piano performance, a well-established discipline with a history spanning hundreds of years, nowadays, due to its unique features and commercialization, become more of a sport than an art, with flawless technique and a well-known and difficult repertoire all becoming competitive elements. Although the commercialization of the performance has led to problems with attendance and the need to please the audience in every way, back to the essentials, a piano performance is an act in which the pianist expresses information to the audience through the instrument. The instrument itself is a tool for conveying a sonic message, and the skill of playing

this 'tool' should not be a concern that overrides the music itself. Similar cultural backgrounds can lead pianists to imagine a similar interpretation of the repertoire and a lack of creativity, which also occurs in the choice of repertoire and can certainly be fatal for both the composition and the pianist.

4. “Garden Eight”, with its Oriental-style white space, allows the performer and the audience to return their interest to the beauty of the sound itself. For pianists, the piano, which can be an orchestra before, can now also be an oriental instrument, offering a wider range of options for imagining and manipulating timbres; in thinking about the aesthetics of the work, Oriental aesthetics, religion, and philosophy can also offer a new way of thinking for the pianist. More importantly, what the pianist needs most is freedom, whether in participating in the interpretation or in performing the composition. Freedom of interpretation is what prevents piano performances from tending to be homogeneous, and freedom of performance is what allows musical works to deliver the message that the composer and performer want to convey to the audience with high quality and clarity, and this is the most valuable result we have obtained through this research.

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APPENDIX A

Questions of Interviews

Interview questions with Ricardo Descalzo

1. How did you know Lei Liang and his compositions?
2. How did you manage to study this and all other compositions with oriental elements?
3. As a pianist who is educated in the West and has a completely Western background, does this composition bring you any new perspectives?
4. Do you think having this kind of “technique” to play pieces with oriental elements helps you with other pieces?
5. In general, what do you think about Lei Liang’s composition?
6. Liang suggested an approximate time for every piece on the score of “Garden Eight”. How did you control the time with such a huge freedom?
7. Have you ever tried some oriental instruments? Like Chinese Qin or Japanese Zither?

Interview questions with Lei Liang

1. Why are there only six pieces in “Garden Eight”?
2. Why did you revise the score of “Garden Eight”?
3. What do you think people without a background in Eastern culture need to know about this composition?
4. From the composer's point of view, how would you like the performer to perform this composition?
5. People usually ask what the composer expects from the audience. I would like to ask what you expect from the performers?
6. What do you expect the performers to get from this work?

APPENDIX B

Lei Liang

Garden Eight

(version for piano)

Program Notes

I have composed a series of pieces entitled *Gardens*, as a tribute to the Ming Dynasty *Yuen Yeh*, the earliest and the most exquisite Chinese horticultural treatise. Gardens, in this discourse, are not treated as a confined enclosure, but as an extended environment. A Chinese garden is a visual world as well as a world of other senses. Passing clouds, remote mountains, sound of ancient temple bells, transience of seasons, . . . all are part of the extended space. When we recite a poem or play the seven-stringed zither, our spirits immerse into the garden as we remain reflective observers.

These pieces are musical gardens. To perform one of them is to walk through a garden of sounds.

Garden Eight is derived from *Garden Six* (for saxophones). Both have six pages of music named "Tian" (heaven), "Di" (earth), "Dong" (east), "Nan" (south), "Hsi" (west), "Bei" (north). There are six pitches and, in the original 1996 notation, six durations. It was inspired by a friend whom the composer had seen only six times before composing this work in March 1996.

Garden Eight was composed for any solo instrument. Based on a three-year collaboration with pianist Jon Sakata which resulted in the recording of the composition released on the CD "March Cathedral" (Encounter Records) in 2000, I revised and re-notated the piano solo version in a more conventional notation in 2004. Given the flexibility of the original proportional notation, it can still yield many other interpretations among which this serves as an example. Other realizations have been made with electric guitar in *March Cathedral* (1998), pipa in *Garden Eleven* (1998) and harpsichord (2001). One can perform these pieces as a continuous work, or as six separate interludes, in pairs or in any combination.

Performance

Controlling the physical movements is vital to the performance of this composition. The movements of fingers and arms are conceived as important kinesthetic elements of the work. By specifying note values, modes of articulation and phrasing, I try to suggest ways in which the pianist experiences the keyboard. A correct execution should not only achieve the desired sonority, but also communicate kinesthetically the relationship between notes. Carefully choreographed movements should enhance the kinesthetic/acoustic/visual connection between seemingly isolated sonic events.

--- Lei Liang 2004

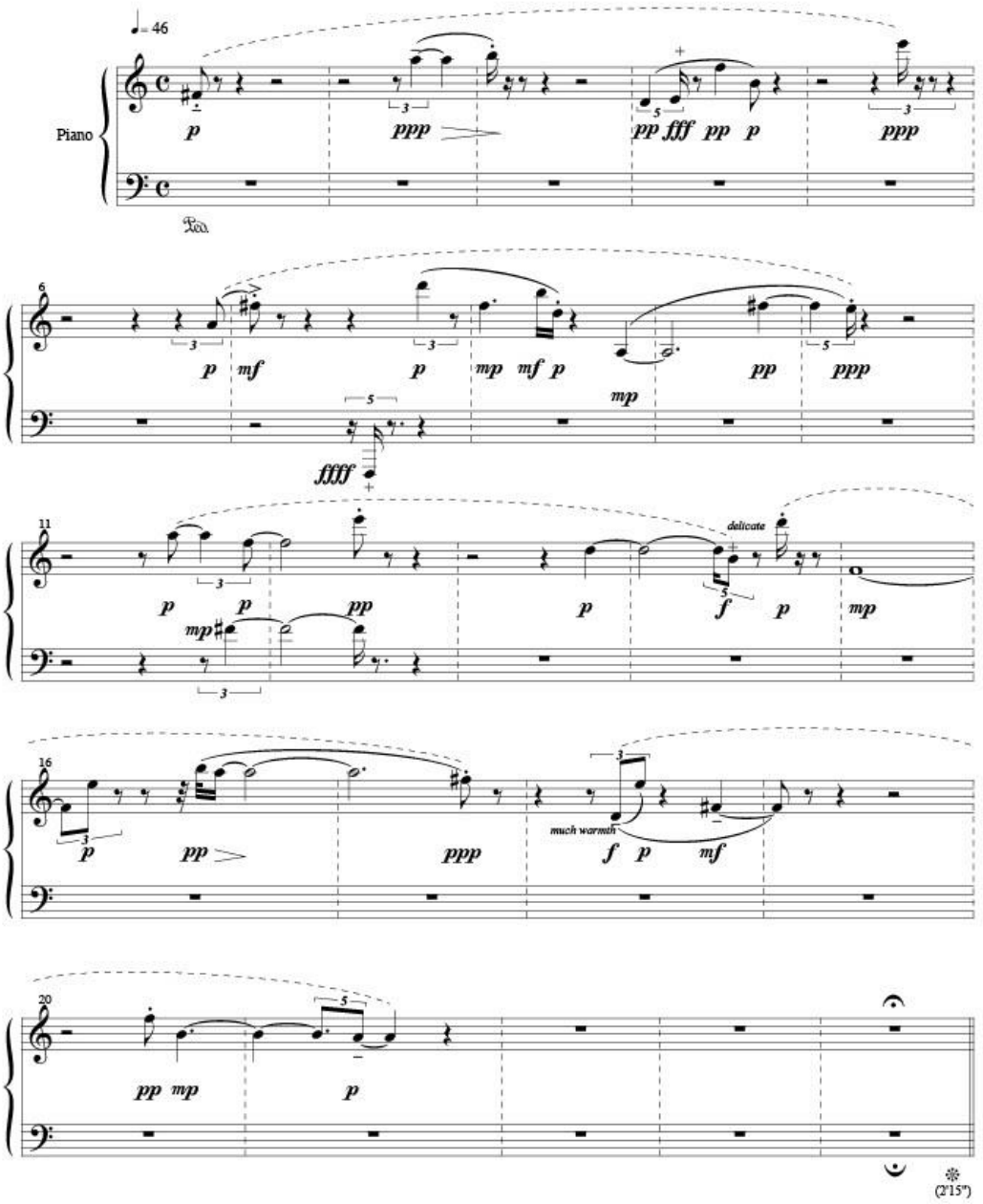
to a friend whom I have seen six times

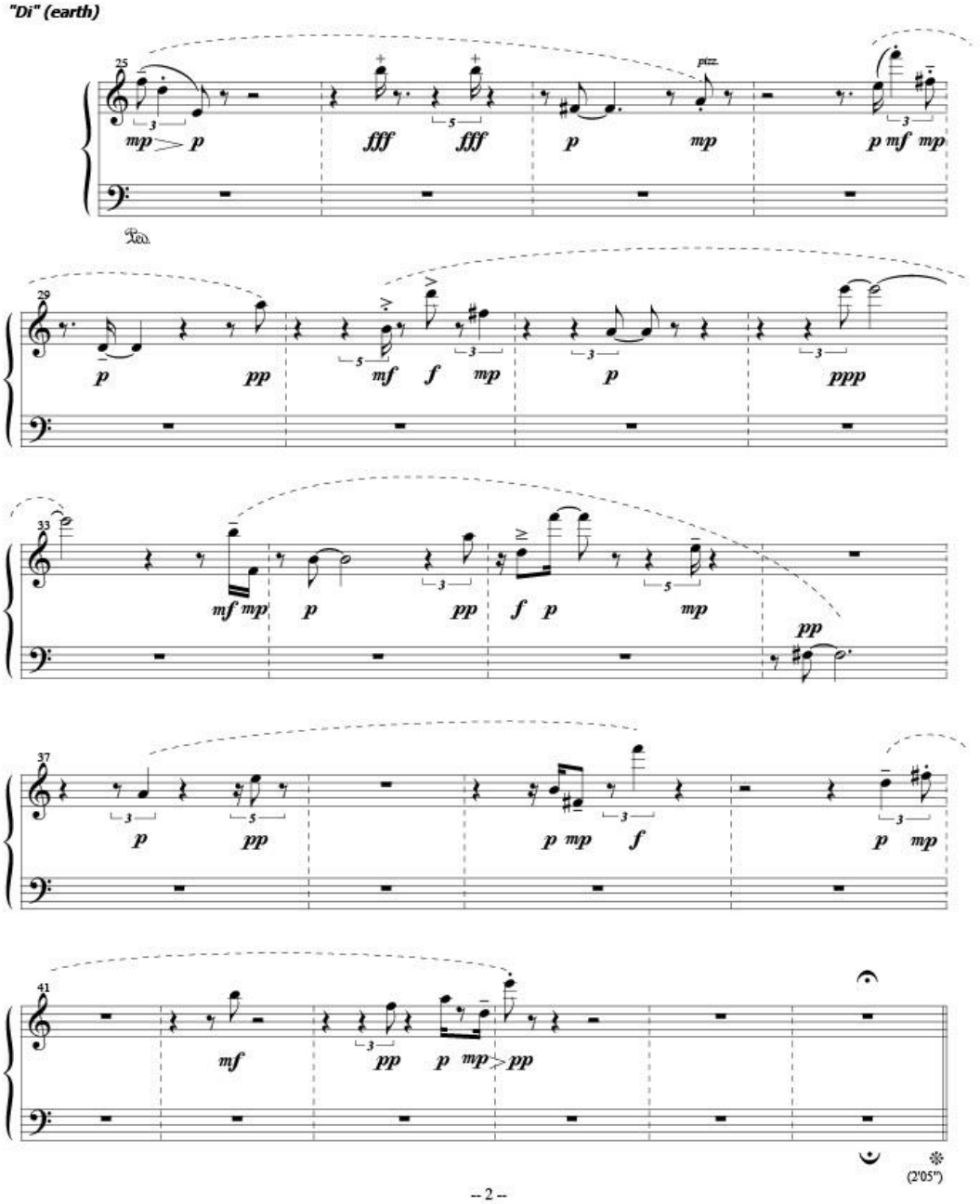
Garden Eight

piano solo version

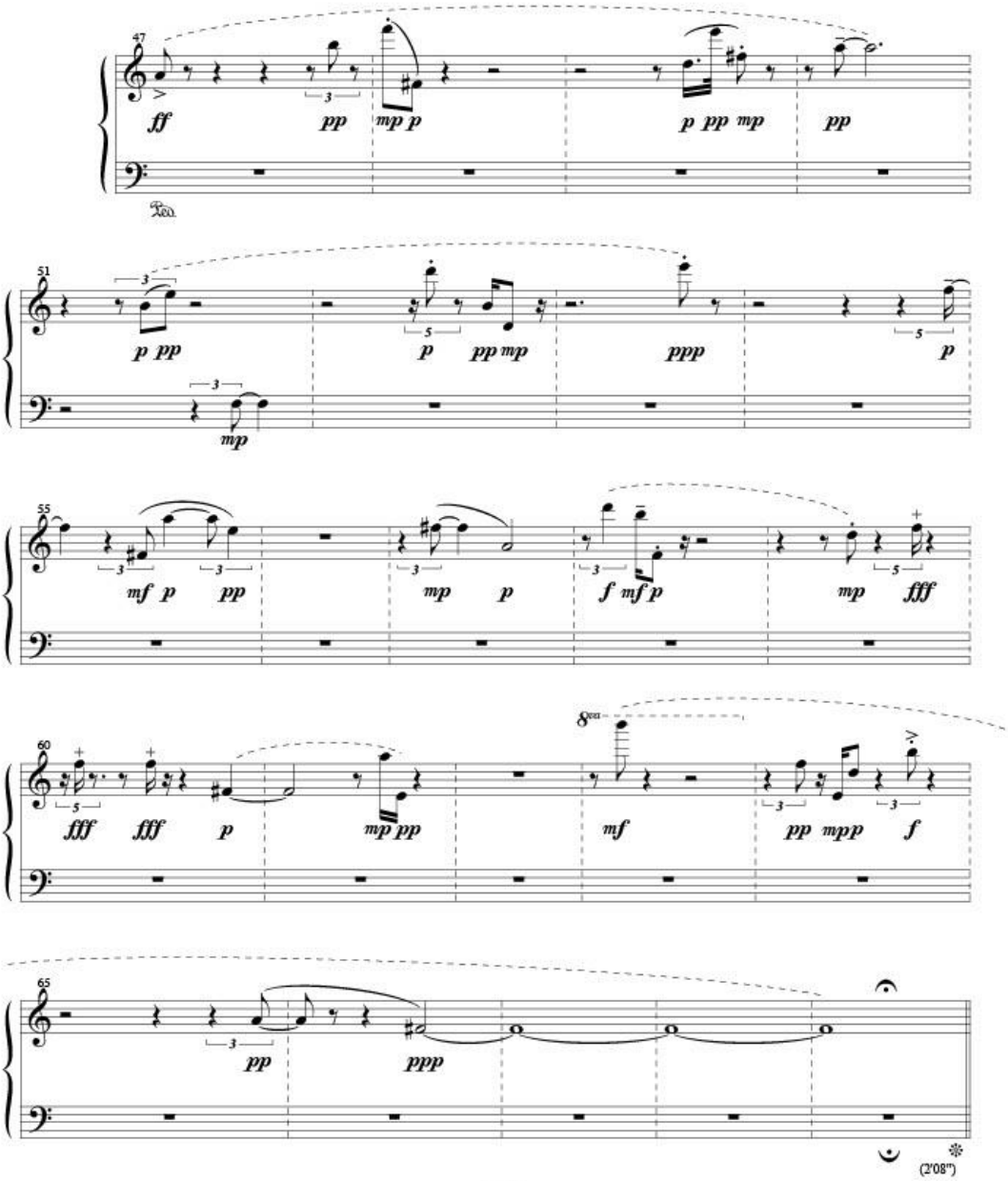
Lei Liang (*1972)

"Tian" (heaven)

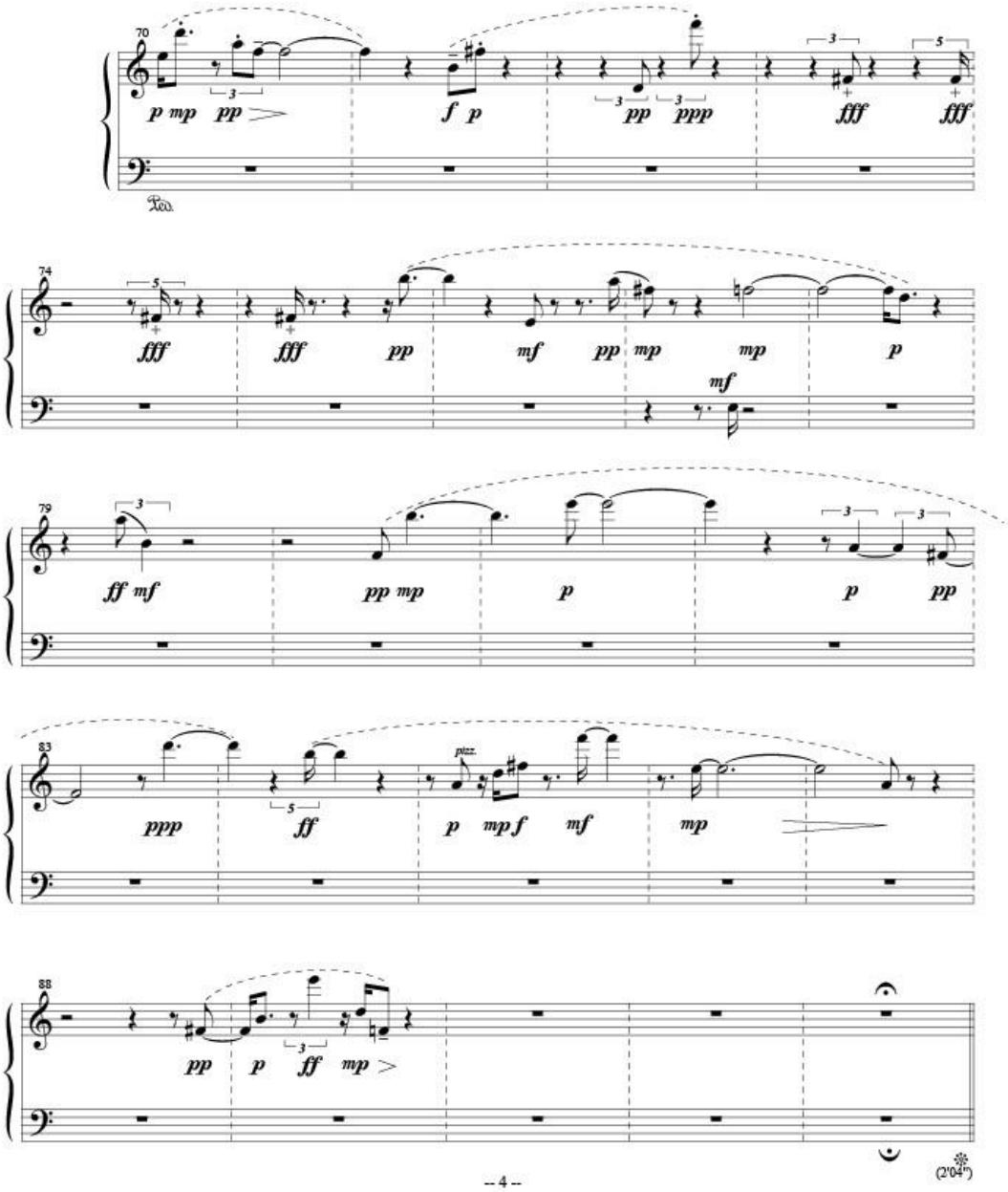



"Di" (earth)
25
pizz.
mp p
fff fff
p mp
p mf mp
Ped.
29
p pp
mf f mp
p
ppp
33
mf mp
p
pp
f p
mp
pp
37
p
pp
p mp
f
p mp
41
mf
pp
p mp pp
(2'05")

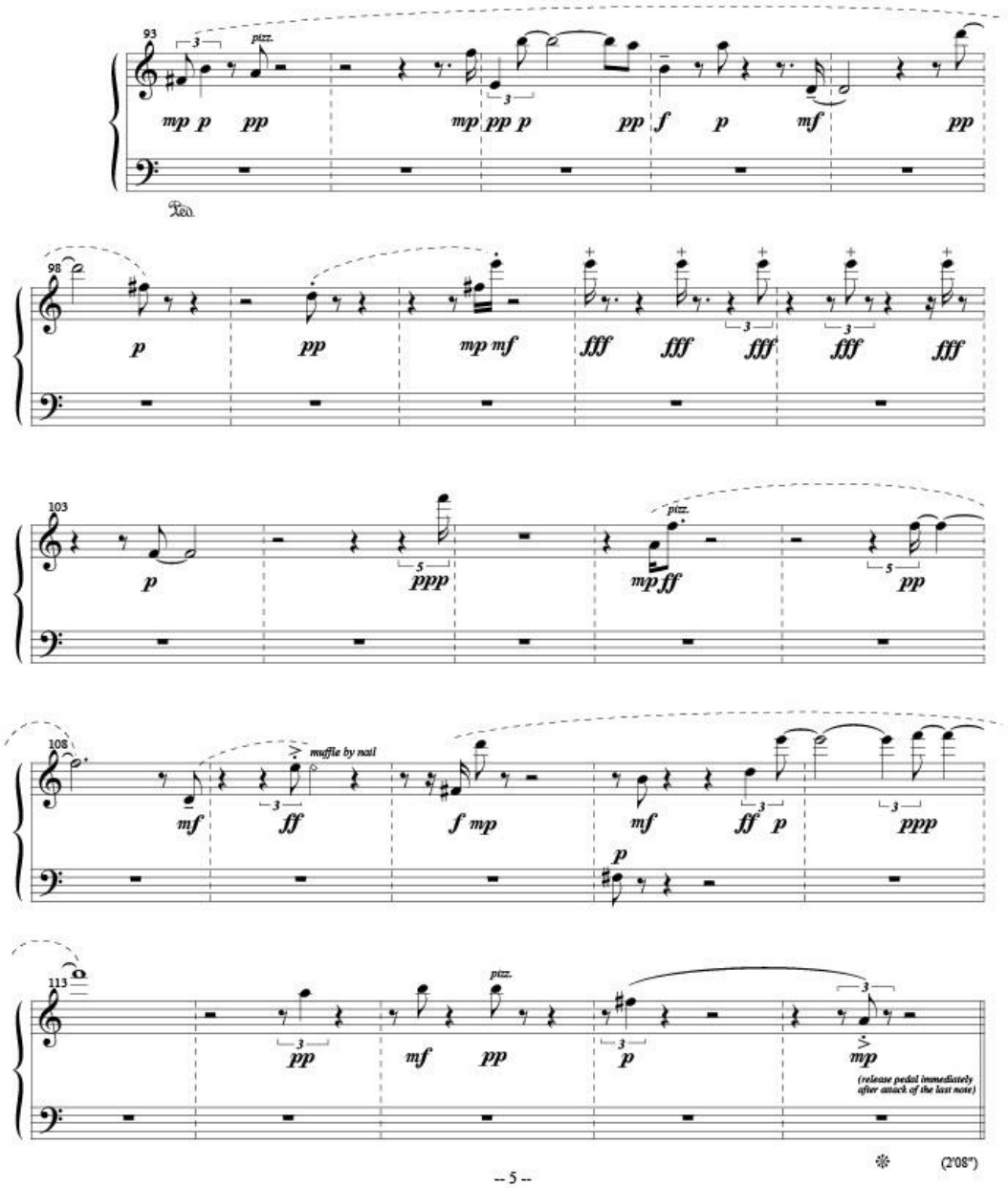
"Dong" (east)

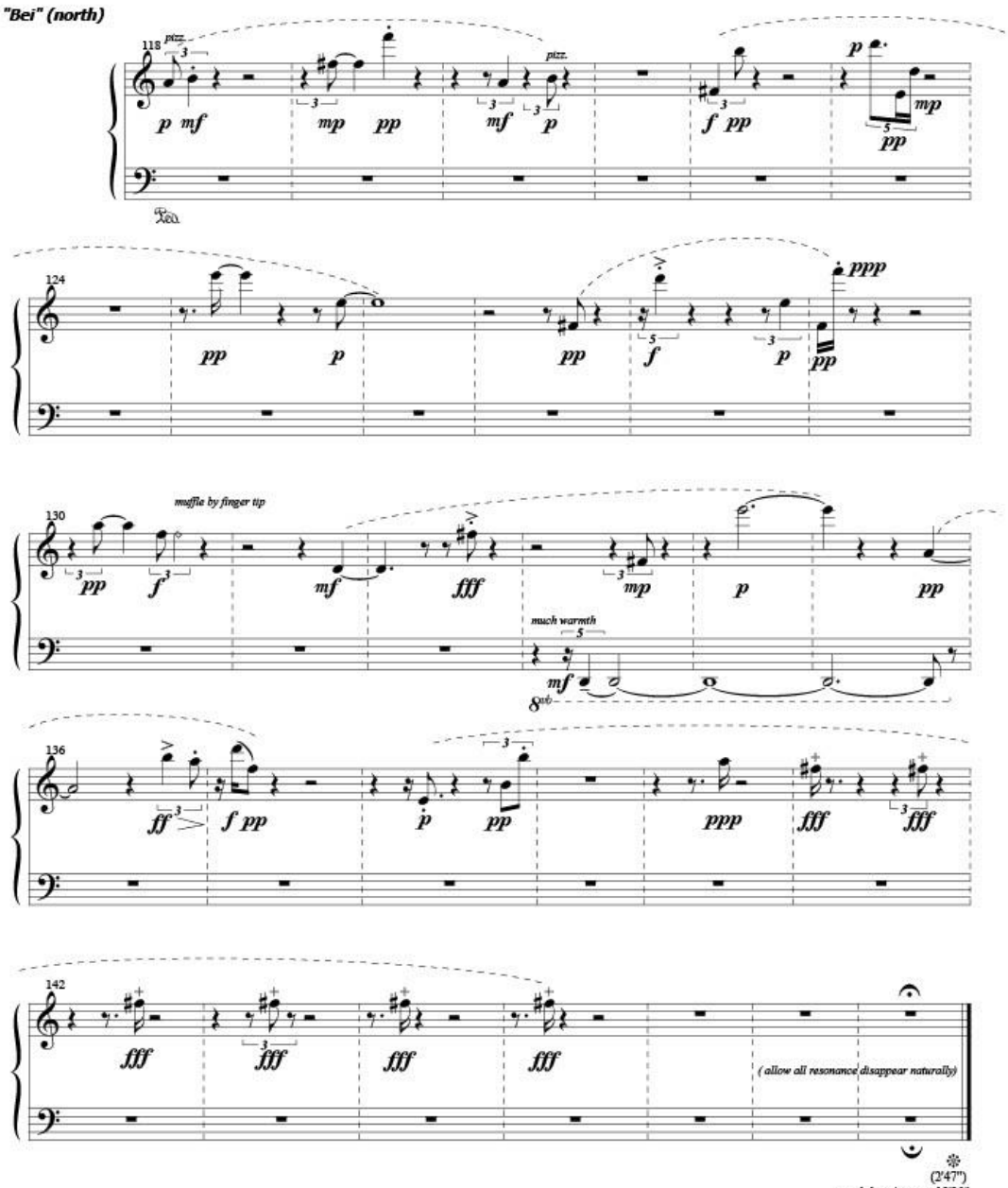

47
ff
pp
mp p
p pp mp
pp
Ped.
51
p pp
p
pp mp
ppp
p
mp
55
mf p
pp
mp
p
f mf p
mp
fff
60
fff
fff
p
mp pp
8va
mf
pp mpp
f
65
pp
ppp
(2'08")

"Nan" (south)


70
p mp pp
f p
pp ppp
fff fff
74
fff fff pp mf pp mp mp p
mf
79
ff mf
pp mp
p
p pp
83
pizz.
ppp ff p mp f mf mp
88
pp p ff mp
(2'04")

"Hsi" (west)


93
pizz.
mp p pp
mp pp p
pp f p mf pp
98
p
pp
mp mf
fff fff fff fff fff
103
p
ppp
mp ff
pizz.
pp
108
muffle by nail
mf ff
f mp
mf ff p ppp
p
113
pizz.
pp mf pp
p
mp
(release pedal immediately after attack of the last note)
(2'08")


"Bei" (north)
118
pizz.
p mf
mp pp
mf p
pizz.
f pp
p
mp
pp
Tea
124
pp
p
pp
f
p
ppp
pp
130
muffle by finger tip
pp
f
mf
fff
mp
much warmth
mf
8vb
p
pp
136
ff
f pp
p
pp
ppp
fff
fff
142
fff
fff
fff
fff
(allow all resonance disappear naturally)
(2'47")
total duration: ca. 13'30"
Cambridge 1996/ rev. 2004