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New Music Concerts presents

MALAYSIAN VOICES

CURATED BY CHONG KEE YONG


The Music Gallery 197 John Street

Sunday May 8, 2011

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Robert Aitken, artistic director

40th season | 336th event

Sunday May 8, 2011

The Music Gallery, 197 John Street

7:15 Introduction | 8:00 pm Concert

New Music Concerts presents

MALAYSIAN VOICES

CURATED BY CHONG KEE YONG

Programme:

Chong Kee Yong (Malaysia 1971)

Mourning the murder of an old Banyan tree (2002) ✨

Robert Aitken flutes Max Christie clarinets Stephen Clarke piano Rick Sacks
percussion Timothy Ying violin David Hetherington cello Chong Kee Yong direction

Tazul Izan Tajuddin (Malaysia 1970)

Torrent of Images – A Memorial (2003) ✨

Adam Sherkin solo piano

Neo Nai Wen (Malaysia 1984)

The Forgotten Sound (2009) ✨

Dianne Aitken flute Max Christie clarinet Rick Sacks percussion Carol Lynn Fujino
violin Virginia Barron viola David Hetherington cello Robert Aitken direction

Chow Jun Yi (Malaysia 1987)

A Night without Voices (2009) ✨

Dianne Aitken flute Max Christie clarinet Stephen Clarke piano Rick Sacks
percussion Timothy Ying violin David Hetherington cello Robert Aitken direction

— Intermission —

Chong Kee Yong

Bell Stone (2011) 🌐

Aiyun Huang solo percussion

Yii Kah Hoe (Malaysia 1970)

Wild Cursive (2010) ✨

Rick Sacks vibraphone Carol Lynn Fujino violin Virginia Barron viola
David Hetherington cello Robert Aitken direction

Chong Kee Yong

Threnody to the mother of the Earth (2011) 🌐

Robert Aitken solo flute Dianne Aitken flutes Keith Atkinson oboe
Max Christie clarinets Stephen Clarke piano Rick Sacks, Aiyun Huang percussion
Timothy Ying, Carol Lynn Fujino violins Virginia Barron viola David Hetherington
cello Roberto Occhipinto contrabass Chong Kee Yong direction

✨ Canadian premiere | 🌐 World premiere

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Robert Aitken, c.m., Artistic Director

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CHONG Kee Yong is one of the Malaysia's leading contemporary music composers. Few composers can manage to fashion a truly individual voice from the experimental techniques of today. Chong belongs to this special class who can turn a melange of exquisite timbres into a compelling piece of music, music that composer Peter Eötvös describes as "imaginative and poetic" and Jonathan Harvey calls "very inventive and artistically pure". His style is highly experimental and innovative, yet deeply spiritual and lyrical in its own way. Chong's musical language is enriched by his own Chinese, as well as the multicultural Malaysian, heritage.

Chong was born in Kluang, Johor, where his parents were farmers. He graduated from the Malaysian Institute of Arts in Kuala Lumpur, completed his Bachelor of Arts at the Xian Conservatory and pursued his final studies at the Royal Conservatory of Music in Brussels. There he acquired the tools for his compositional style, a delightful balance between cutting edge modern techniques and a deep sense of poetic beauty. In 2001 Chong graduated as Master of Composition with Highest Honours. His post-graduation studies include numerous master classes with composers such as Brian Ferneyhough, Daan Manneke, Zoltan Janey, Peter Eötvös, Salvatore Sciarrino, Henri Pousseur, and Hanspeter Kyburz.

Chong's distinctive style has won him an unending series of awards and commissions. His list of prizes at various competitions is remarkable, for example the Prix Marcel Hastir by Belgian Royal Academy of Sciences, Letters & Fine Arts (1999, 2003), the 4th International Andrzej Panufnik Competition for Young Composers in Poland (2002), the Grand Prix at the 2nd Seoul International Competition for Composers (2003), the Max-Reger-Tage International Composition Competition in Germany (2004), the winner of 1st Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra Composer Forum (2003) & 1st Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra International Composers' Award (2004), 2nd Lepo Sumera International young composer prize (2006), Lutoslawski award (2006), BMW award in the International Isang Yun Music Prize in Korea (2007), Second prize in the Preisträgerkonzert des Internationalen Kompositionswettbewerbes "global music – contemporary expression" in Germany and 3rd prize in the Luxembourg International Composition Award 2008. Most recently, in 2009 Chong received a prestigious commission from the Serge Koussevitzky Music Foundation (USA), the special prize in the Giga Herzt Awards from ZKM | Institute for Music and Acoustics Karlsruhe (Germany) and the prestigious "The Outstanding Young Malaysian Awards" in the Cultural Achievement category (Malaysia). He was the artistic director of Kuala Lumpur Contemporary Music Festival 2009.

Chong Kee Yong *Mourning the murder of an old Banyan tree (2002)*

A long time ago, I read a poem, "Balade Terbunuhnya Beringin Tua Di Sebuah Bandaraya" by the Malaysian poet Dato Dr. Usman Awang. This poem led me to ponder what civilization has brought to us, and how it has also destroyed so much that we hold dear. I'm very afraid of losing our tradition, our culture, our language, our environment, our planet and more due to the constant pressure to develop and improve our lives.

In the Buddhist idiom the Banyan tree represents a consciousness of intelligence and awareness of The Way.

Balade Terbunuhnya Beringin Tua Di Sebuah Bandaraya
(A ballad mourning the murder of an old Banyan tree in a city)
by Dato Dr. Usman Awang

Fragment from the poem:

Sampai sekarang, tiap senjakala lembayung petang
Dengarlah suara Beringin mengucapkan pesan:
Selamat tinggal, selamat tinggal wahai awan
Selamat tinggal matari selamat tinggal bulan
Selamat tinggal, kupu-kupu sayang
Selamat tinggal, wahai burung-burung bersarang
Selamat tinggal anak-anak bermain riang
Namaku Beringin pohon tua yang terbuang
Dimusuhi oleh rancangan bernama Pembangunan

Translation:

To this day, when twilight graces the sky
You can hear the old banyan tree's farewell:
Goodbye, goodbye cloud
Goodbye sun, goodbye moon
Goodbye dear butterflies
Goodbye nesting birds
Goodbye frolicking children
I was an old Banyan tree, cast aside
By an enemy called Development.

This work was commissioned by the "Het Collectief" ensemble and is dedicated to them. The first performance was given by the "Het Collectief" ensemble and conductor Mr. Wibert Aerts at the "De Rode Pomp" festival in Gent, Belgium on June 8th, 2002, and at the "NADINE", Brussels, Belgium on June 9th, 2002. I completed a

revised version especially for the concert "OOST WEST in het MIM". It was performed by Kamermuziekensemble van Koninklijk Conservatorium Brussel and conducted by Mr. Bart Bouckaert at the concert hall of Muziekinstrumentenmuseum concert hall in Brussels, Belgium on December 5th, 2002.

— CHONG Kee Yong

Chong Kee Yong

Bell Stone (2011)

In 2004, I first visited the small island called Lyø in Denmark. I was there for an intensive week of composition. From time to time, I visited the "bell stone" on this island. It is a more than thousand year old dolmen which makes bright sounds when you hit it. It has such amazing sounds when you strike it, like hearing voices from the past, that I found myself greatly inspired.

In this work, I integrate some melodic fragments from Nanyin music, one of the oldest existing music genres of China. In the Western and Eastern Han Dynasties, and the Jin, Tang and the Northern and Southern Dynasties, immigrants from the central plains brought their musical culture with them to the Quanzhou-oriented Minnan area. Nanyin music is a beautiful genre that is soft and smooth in both lyrics and melodies. It is perfect for expressing heartfelt feelings of homesickness and yearning sentiment of a person traveling far away from home.

In Nov. 2003, I met the excellent Canadian/Tawainese percussionist Aiyun Huang at the 15th Boswil International Composition Seminar in Switzerland. After hearing her performance, I immediately wanted to write her a piece! So in 2005, I started to conceive this work, but due to both of us having very busy schedules, it was not until 2011 that I was able to finish "Bell stone" for Aiyun! I need to say a thousand thanks to Maestro Aitken who offered me the chance to invite Aiyun to be part of the "Malaysian Voices" concert on 8th May 2011 to give the world premiere of this work!

"Bell stone" is dedicated to my friend Aiyun Huang.

— CHONG Kee Yong

"Threnody to mother of the Earth" for flute and 11 musicians was composed for maestro Robert Aitken and is dedicated to him and to the memory of the victims of the earthquake and tsunami in Japan on 11 March 2011.

This work is a music ritual reflecting my profound sadness over Japan's worst natural disaster, a combined earthquake and tsunami. We should all treasure our loved ones, our mother earth and extend our blessing to all the victims in this natural disaster, that they may rest in peace.

— CHONG Kee Yong

Tazul Izan Tajuddin studied composition in Malaysia, the USA, Europe; he obtained his PhD in the UK. His music, as demonstrated in his *Arabesque*, *Tenunan*, *Mediasi Ukiran* and *Gamelbati* cycles, has been inspired by Malay and Indonesian cultures, Islamic geometrical patterns and Western European art combined with multi-cultural contemporary ideals.

He has won prestigious first prizes such as Toru Takemitsu and Lutoslawski Composition Awards, the 8th Tokyo International Competition for Chamber Music Composition, 2nd Molinari Quartet Composition Competition, 21st Japan Society of Contemporary Music Award for Composers, and the New Millennium Award UK. He has also received numerous scholarship awards initiated by the Prime Minister from the Malaysian Ministry of Culture, including a new work commissioned for the 50th Malaysian Anniversary Celebration. His works have been selected three times by the Sound and Music UK festival from 2001 until 2010. His work *Tenunan* was selected by the Asian Music Festival and ISCM Britain selected his work *Tenunan II* and was represented in the World Music Days 2007, Hong Kong. He was part of "The Theatre of Noise" in London with the Sculpted Sound Ensemble 2009 with whom he has been the principal conductor. Currently he is an Associate Professor in Composition at University of Technology MARA in Malaysia and is the artistic director and conductor of the UiTM-klpac Composers Concert Series which supports performances of new works by Malaysian composers. He has conducted his own works and performed in Asia, Europe, Australasia and North America and broadcast internationally. For further information please see www.tazultajuddin.com

Torrent of Images – A Memorial is a piece in tribute to the victims of the tragedy in Bali when terrorists bombed the holiday resort in Kuta, Bali on 12 October 2002.

The piece will eventually consist of three sections. This is the first of the three sections, called *Irrational*. This piece is constructed using a given scale, which is transposed, permuted and dislocated. This first movement consists of 12 small sections (patterns) in which the scale is distributed. There is also a hidden structure: the piece is built around a series of five numbers. Erratic treatment, randomness and displacement of notes are characteristics associated here with the word "irrational".

As the title suggests, metaphorically it evokes a torrent of images flooding through one's mind after such a tragedy which affected everyone. The piece irrationally moves from an obvious Balinese pentatonic scale into passages of obscure sustained clusters during which the scale replicates and shadows itself. This recurring image (the pentatonic scale as a memory of Bali) frequently returns, until at the end it becomes more intense. Eventually the tension is released, with a loud chord played in the lower register. This gesture is complemented by a solemn, repeated octave which ends the section. The gesture (repeated octaves) is symbolically (and perhaps metaphorically) a thoughtful reflection, a meditative and mourning gesture for the tragedy of the lost ones.

— Tazul Izan Tajuddin

NEO Nai Wen was born in Sabah, Malaysia at 15 October 1984. He received his Diploma in Music from SEGi College Subang Jaya, majoring in composition under the tutelage of Mr. Tan Chin Ho and with Mr. Yii Kah Hoe for music aesthetics and philosophy. In 2007 he had his first composition recital, and the following year, he was selected as one of the finalists in the HSBC contemporary composition competition. In 2009 he was also one of the finalists of Kuala Lumpur Music Festival Composition Competition.

Neo is also an active composer who participates in many festivals and events in the South East Asia Region such as Kuala Lumpur Contemporary Music Festival, Malaysian Composers Concert Series, Yogyakarta Contemporary

Music Festival and the Manila Composers Lab. The Goethe Institute granted him a scholarship to participate in the Darmstadt International Summer Course presented by the Internationales Musikinstitut of Darmstadt, Germany. In addition he has worked with world class ensembles such as Ensemble Mosaik (Germany) and The Rednote Ensemble (United Kingdom). His music has been performed in the United Kingdom, Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines. He was recently awarded a scholarship to study music composition at England's Birmingham Conservatory where his major teacher is Mr. Ed Bennett.

Neo Nai Wen

The Forgotten Sound (2009)

If a city had a voice, it would be the voice of expectation or of hope. In this work, I try to create an extremely chaotic atmosphere at the beginning of the piece, because after listening to noise we always expect or hope for silence or calmness in its wake. Thereafter the work's conclusion is modeled like a Buddhist chant; this is the voice of the city that is in my imagination. It is in essence the sound that has long been absent from our city life. My music attempts to create, contrast and find balance between chaos and peace, and to explore elements of Buddhism in music.

— NEO Nai Wen

CHOW Jun Yi. Born in Malaysia in 1987, Chow started learning the piano and music theory at the early age of 5. Chow completed his Grade 8 exams with merit in both piano and music theory from The Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM) and also holds a performance diploma from the Yamaha School of Music. In 2005, Chow studied composition under renowned composer Mr. Qin Wen Chen. After gaining admittance into the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing he received tutelage from Mr. Chen Gang. Chow currently studies under the Head of the Composition Department, the renowned composer Mr. Tang Jian Ping. Chow received an honourable mention from the 2008 "Palatino" competition for violin works organized by the Central Conservatory of Music (CCOM) in May 2008 for his composition *Mountain Voices* for violin and piano. Chow was also a finalist of Malaysia HSBC Young Composer Workshop in 2008 and won awards for solfège, arranging, composition and singing from the CCOM. In May of 2009 Chow was awarded the first prize for his choir and percussion piece, *Spirit of the Rattling Earth*. Most recently Chow received the Malaysian

Young Composer Award and was first runner up for the Goethe South East Asian Young Composer Award presented during the first Kuala Lumpur Contemporary Music Festival. Chow was also the winner of the "Yan Huang" Award for Sheng composition during the 9th Music Festival of the Central Conservatory of Music.

Chow Jun Yi

A Night without Voices (2009)

("Have you ever talked to yourself?")

In this modern age, there's no doubt that prosperity is always increasing. People equate materialism with a better life. However, with this growing prosperity comes additional pressures and complications. They can't accept the loss of the short, sweet memories of their past. As a result, they are conflicted; they yearn to freeze themselves in that distant, nostalgic time. However, no matter what may happen, time marches on.

"A Night without Voices" represents a person in a city, outwardly happy and sweet, but all the while, when he tries to communicate with himself he feels an inward suffering brought on by the oppression and fear of life in the city. The piece begins with a "Music Box" theme which represents that sweet memory, countered by a "Darkness" theme. Eventually the "Music Box" theme is overwhelmed by the "Darkness" theme. Just like in reality, when people can't suppress their tension, they tolerate this "darkness" knowing there's always that sweet memory and hope inside their mind. In the middle part, the person traps himself in frozen time. He wishes that the time could stop for a while so that he could release his tension, to escape from his harsh reality. However, time will never stop. In the last part, along with the "Darkness", the music ends with the "Music Box" theme, which represents the person finally realizing that though he couldn't stop time, he will always have that sweet, fleeting memory to protect him.

— CHOW Jun Yi

Yii Kah Hoe is an active and renowned Malaysian composer. He was the winner of the second Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra Forum for Malaysian Composers in 2007. He was also awarded 3rd Prize for International Composition for Chinese Orchestra organized by the Singapore Chinese Orchestra in 2006. Yii was a finalist of the 8th International Competition for Composers "Città di Udine" in Italy, 2010.

Yii's music has been perceived as bold, avant-garde and awesome. His stunning pieces use traditional instruments to combine sounds and rhythms from many ethnic and local cultures. The sensitivity he mastered with space as a Chinese calligrapher in his younger days now comes through in his music.

Yii's music has been performed in U.S.A, London, Trinidad, Germany, Mexico, Melbourne, Bangkok, Hanoi, Malaysia, Manila, Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Indonesia and Singapore. He was festival director of the 1st Kuala Lumpur Contemporary Music Festival 2009 in Malaysia. Furthermore, as a keen educator, he currently holds the post of senior lecturer at SEGi College, Subang Jaya.

Yii Kah Hoe

Wild Cursive (2010)

The motif of this piece comes from cursive handwriting of the renowned Chinese calligrapher, Huai Su. His forceful and flowing "wild cursive" calligraphic style is said to be inspired by the dagger dancing of Lady Gongsun. To understand how Huai Su derived his graphic ideas from the Lady Gongsun's dagger dancing, the composer sought inspiration from Huai Su's dramatic gestures. This relatively abstract piece, though inspired by Huai Su's wild cursive calligraphy, is never merely imitative. The composer hopes the audience will not try to find a clear melody line in the piece, just as it is not necessary to recognize the exact words in Huai Su's dynamic calligraphy.

— Yii Kah Hoe

Performer Biographies

World renowned Canadian flutist, composer and conductor **Robert Aitken** has been honoured with the Order of Canada and is a Chevalier de l'ordre des Arts et des Lettres (France). In 1970, having previously served as principal flute for both the Vancouver and Toronto Symphony Orchestras, Aitken embarked on a solo career that has taken him to virtually every corner of the globe. He has more than 70 recordings to his credit and such notables as John Cage, George Crumb, Elliott Carter, Toru Takemitsu, Gilles Tremblay, John Beckwith and Bruce Mather have dedicated works to him. In 2003 he was presented with a Lifetime Achievement Award from the National Flute Association (USA). In 2004, he retired as Professor für Flöte at the Staatliche Hochschule für Musik in Freiburg, Germany, a position he had held for 16 years. In 2009 Aitken was the recipient Canada's largest arts award, the

prestigious Walter Carsen Prize for Excellence in the Performing Arts. As a composer, he holds Bachelor and Masters degrees from the University of Toronto and all of his works are published by Universal Edition, Salabert, Ricordi and Peer Music. Robert Aitken was director of the Banff Centre Winter Program in Music, founder and artistic director of Music Today, Music at Shawnigan and co-founder, with Norma Beecroft, of New Music Concerts which he has directed since its inception in 1971.

The ever-evolving **Aiyun Huang** enjoys a musical life as a soloist, chamber musician, conductor, producer, researcher and teacher. She is a founding member of the Canadian trio Toca Loca with pianists Gregory Oh and Simon Docking. Her recent highlights include concerts in the cities of Milan, Berlin, New York, Montreal, Halifax, Ottawa, Toronto, Vancouver, San Diego, Singapore and Taipei. Aiyun has commissioned and championed over 100 works in the last decade working with composers internationally. Her 2009 premieres include three concerti: *Big Bang!* by Andrew Staniland, *Cepheid Variables* by Michael Oesterle, and *Schappchenjagd* by Peter Edward. She is a researcher at the Centre for Interdisciplinary Research in Music Media and Technology in Montreal. Aiyun was born in Kaohsiung, a city in the southern part of Taiwan. She left Taiwan when she was seventeen. She holds a Doctor of Musical Arts degree from the University of California, San Diego. Between 2004 and 2006, she was a Faculty Fellow at UCSD. Currently, she is the Chair of the Percussion Area as well as director of the McGill Percussion Ensemble at the Schulich School of Music of McGill University in Montreal, Canada.

Adam Sherkin is a dynamic and versatile musician who commands a multi-dimensional approach to performance and composition. A native of Toronto, Adam graduated from the Glenn Gould Professional School of the Royal Conservatory and the Royal College of Music, London. His works have been premiered at Glenn Gould Studio, Luminato Festival, the Spotlight Festival (Waterloo), the King's Lynn Festival (Norfolk), Bridgewater Hall (Manchester), The Warehouse and the National Portrait Gallery in London. Adam has appeared in performance at the Four Seasons Centre, the Toronto Centre for the Arts, St Martin-in-the-Fields, Covent Garden and the Royal Albert Hall. He is an Associate Composer of the Canadian Music Centre and current artistic director of The Sixth Sphere, a contemporary music series based at the Academy of Spherical Arts in Toronto. Sherkin received honorable mention in the 2011 Toronto Emerging Composer Award competition, which recognizes the excellent work of emerging music creators from the Greater Toronto Area who also exhibit innovation, experimentation and a willingness to take risks in their work.

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with Counterpoint Community Orchestra



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