

Vijay Upadhyaya
Symphony No. 2

長安門
CHANG
AN
MEN
Gate to long lasting peace

World Premiere
13 November 2017, 7.30 pm
Beijing Concert Hall

China National Symphony Orchestra and Chorus
Soloists: Yayi Cai and Daniel Schostok
Conductor: Vijay Upadhyaya



European Premiere
11 December 2017, 8 pm
Vienna Musikverein, Golden Hall

Vienna University Philharmonic
Soloists: Yayi Cai and Daniel Schostok
Conductor: Vijay Upadhyaya



Chang'An Men, the 2nd Symphony by Vijay Upadhyaya, is a musical journey through various periods of Chinese history and culture and combines western symphonic and choral techniques with traditional Chinese music, literature and philosophy. Chang'An (the present-day city of Xi'an) was the capital of the Tang Dynasty in Ancient China and the beginning of the Silk Road. Chang'An Men literally means the gate to long-lasting peace, a vision which is so important in the present day and age. This is Vijay Upadhyaya's 2nd symphony, a work for large orchestra, 16-part chorus and two soloists. The work is divided into four movements and is approximately 75 minutes long.

Chinese vocal music traditions, where the melody follows Chinese intonation, have existed for thousands of years but this unique tradition linked to the language was neglected over the last few decades and never used in symphonic compositions. Chang'An Men endeavours to revive this unique tradition, according to the language utmost importance. A new style of counterpoint has been developed by Upadhyaya which strictly follows the language's tone patterns. This applies not only to the solo parts but also to the chorus and it is the first time that Chinese vocal traditions and language patterns are being combined with harmony, also establishing a new counterpoint style.

The work features four traditional Chinese instruments and musicians: one Nanyin singer and one Chinese percussionist as well as a guzheng and xiangzhang player, the latter being a little known percussion instrument from the Fujian province. These artists are being presented to those audiences abroad and in China who usually do not listen to traditional Chinese music.

The first movement incorporates text from Lunyu written by the Chinese philosopher Confucius. The movement is called Wu Chang, "the five virtues", and the five-beat rhythm used symbolically reflects these virtues of noble being, righteousness, proper conduct, wisdom and trustworthiness. These five virtues propagated by Confucius are found in all dimensions Chinese society and build the basis of Chinese unity and success today. Musically the teachings of the Lunyu are contrasted with the aggressiveness of the music representing the warring period in Chinese history which caused the emergence of this philosophy and an urge to sort out the confusion existing towards the end of the Zhou dynasty around 2,600 years ago. This chaos was overcome by the subsequent Qin dynasty, when the script was also harmonised.

The second movement, "Longing", is based on a poem from the Shijing. This is the oldest collection of Chinese poetry containing 305 poems which are 2,600 to 3,100 years old. The poems can be divided into "state and court poems" and songs expressing the daily life and desires of simple people. 95% of the poetry is written in a very short four-syllable meter. This poetry was traditionally performed to a slow and heavy musical accompaniment of bells, drums and stone chimes. The composition attempts to follow this tradition in its slow and rhythmical instrumental and vocal progressions. This also reflects the mood and the metric of the poetry; for the composer they also symbolize the heartbeat of the lover. The poem depicts longing and love in minimal and simplistic words, demonstrating the sensitivity as well as the liberty to express emotions in ancient Chinese culture. This is the most personal composition amongst the four movements where the composer encourages his Chinese friends to be more extroverted and openly emotional as was the case in the past. The 2nd and 3rd movements include a recurring tone style which is taken from the traditional music of Fujian. This style made its way along the silk route to Italy and is the source of the development of the trill in western music.

The third movement is based on a traditional Nanyin (the ancient southern Chinese language) song which combines two real stories from Chinese history reflecting the social standing of women during the Han dynasty. In comparison to Mandarin, which has 4 language tones, Nanyin, the language used in this movement has 7 tones. Upadhyaya has chosen this song to show how women were treated like a commodity in the past and that Chinese society today is perhaps one of the most developed as far as the equality of women is concerned.

The first story tells us about the girl Wang Zhaojun, one of the four great ancient beauties in Chinese history who lived during the Han dynasty. The emperor Yuandi wanted to select common girls as concubines and Zhaojun was sent to the palace with many other applicants. The emperor commissioned the painter Mao Yanshou to paint pictures of all of the applicants in order to make a selection based on the paintings. It was common to bribe the painter and most of the applicants did so, except for Zhaojun. The painter depicted her as being ugly and she was not selected to remain a maid at the palace. The second part tells us that years later the Hun chief had an audience with the Han emperor and expressed his desire to become an imperial son-in-law of the Han dynasty. Wang Zhaojun was finally selected as a concubine and sent far away to marry the Hun chief. One of the most famous stories in Chinese history is about Zhaojun being sent beyond the frontier. This song illustrates the sorrow of a woman leaving home and provides significant information on Chinese social structures at that time.

The fourth movement is inspired by Daodejing and the philosophy of Laozi, the master of Chinese spirituality. The word Dao means "the Way – the balance in Nature" and has been used as the principal theme of the movement. His philosophy looks for tenderness, kindness and – above all – for world peace and harmony with nature, something needed more than ever before, not only from one nation to another but as a comprehensive harmony and balance with our environment as a whole.

As a second theme, the allegory of water being unchangeable and the softest thing overcoming the hardest is often used. Just like water, the true way "Dao" will always be unchangeable and will finally overcome all aggression and violence. The music again relates to the warring and unstable period in which we find ourselves today, the destruction of nature being the present war. At the end of the movement a part of the Lunyu is repeated which says that the noble being is calm. The music depicts this conflict between present-day turmoil and the desire to be calm. It should also be noted here that Confucius and Laozi, as well as Buddha, were born just some decades apart and this remarkable and short period of time changed the order of mankind.