

Biographies and Program for Issue Project Room

The concert begins with a set of Wu Fei's solo improvisations and compositions on guzheng and voice. Wu's solo outings offer a sort of modern "poetry" on strings and voice, tracing streams in the ether like trails of ink from the calligrapher's brush. This will be followed by Jenny Q Chai's selection of works representing the extension of piano technique and the new view of piano as an evolving instrument. Chai's program dives into realms including electronics and visual art, combines playing with singing and speaking techniques, and will feature the work of American and European composers such as Rzewski, Cage, Lachenmann, Boucourechliev and Rakowski, as well as composers of the younger generation. The two musicians will join each other at the conclusion of the evening to perform Fei's most recent composition, entitled "Before I Wake" and featured on her new release for Tzadik Records, "Yuan".

Wu Fei

Born and raised in Beijing, Wu Fei is a virtuoso composer and performer who began learning gu zheng and piano at the age of 6, started giving solo concerts at age 9, and at age 15 entered the China Conservatory of Music to study composition. After coming to the US in 2000, she went on to receive her M.A. in Composition from Mills College and a grant from "Meet the Composer". She began to diversify her sound and experiment widely, working with musicians as dynamic as John Zorn, Fred Frith, Elliott Sharp, Béla Fleck, Pauline Oliveros, Carla Kihlstedt, and Cecil Taylor and also as a commissioned composer for Percussions Claviers de Lyon (piece premiered at the Forbidden City Concert Hall, Beijing).

Wu Fei's compositions for choir, string quartet, chamber ensemble, Balinese gamelan, orchestra, film, and modern dance exhibit her remarkable skill and profound musical understanding. She has also appeared as a guest on Frith's "Eye to Ear II" (Tzadik, USA) and "Happy End Problem" (Recommended, UK) and Carla Kihlstedt's "Traineater" (Anti, USA). Wu Fei has performed in cities around the world, including New York, Rome, Beijing, Berlin, Dublin, Venice, Milano, and San Francisco and released her debut album in 2007, entitled "A Distant Youth" (Forrest Hill, Italy) and featuring Frith and Kihlstedt. Fall 2008 saw Wu Fei collaborating with such New York City luminaries as cellist Erik Friedlander, percussionist Billy Martin, and bassist Trevor Dunn and also serving as curator for the month of October at John Zorn's modern music venue, The Stone, in the East Village. November 2008 brought the release of her second album "Yuan" (Tzadik), a collection of chamber works and a new piece for solo piano performed by Stephen Drury. February 2009 will bring a music DVD entitled "Shan Qi" (Ozella Music, Germany), filmed in the Italian Alps and featuring the young artist and several outstanding European musicians. In 2009, Wu Fei will return to Europe and China for further concerts, collaborations, and recording projects.

www.wufeimusic.com

www.myspace.com/feiwu (chamber work)

www.myspace.com/feifeifei (solos & collaborations)

Jenny Q Chai

“The extension of the piano playing in all dimensions; the new view of piano as an evolving instrument, growing into other categories such as electronics and visual art, with techniques combining singing, speaking...it is imagination!”

– Jenny Q Chai

Jenny Q Chai is an active pianist specializing in contemporary music. She has premiered *Life Sketches* by Nils Vigeland in Orléans, France; *Exercise in Deism* by John Slover and *Intimate Rejection* by Ashley Fu-Tsun Wang in New York and *Kreutzer Sonata* by Frederick Rzewski in Ghent, Belgium, among others. Ms. Chai introduced the concept prepared piano to a Chinese audience with the world premier of *Mallet Dance* by John Slover in Shanghai Concert Hall. Her performance of Chen Yi's *Duo Ye* was also well received by the composer, “I could say that she has spoken out in my voice, she played the music in my style, and she really presented the colorful musical images with clear layers and focus sound.”

Ms. Chai has performed in major concert halls in the U.S. including Carnegie Hall with Curtis Symphony Orchestra under Andrea Previn, Steinway Hall and Rockefeller Center in New York, Kimmel Center, Academy of music and Field's Hall in Philadelphia, Kneisle Hall in Maine, Kennedy Center in Washington D.C. and Kravis Center in Florida. She has also toured in China, Korea and Europe extensively; having played in Darmsdadt International Festival for New Music, The Logos Tetrahedron Concert Hall, Ghent, Palau de la Música, Barcelona, Shanghai Grand Theater, Shanghai and Rodin Museum, Seoul among many others. Jenny Q Chai is an active competitor in the circuit of international piano competitions. Her awards include Kil's International Piano Competition in Sweden; Steinway Young Artist International Competition and Five Towns Art & Music Foundation International Piano Competition in New York, among many others.

Jenny Q Chai has been covered on major medium throughout China, such as XMWB News, JF Daily, Laodong News, SHM Daily, Shanghai Morning Post, Shanghai Evening Post, Shanghai Culture, SHXB News, XWWB News; magazines such as Music Friends and China Women; broadcasting interviews on contemporary music and concert reviews on music channel of Chinese National TV Station and SMG Radio Station.

Ms. Chai has earned her Bachelor's degree at Curtis Institute of Music under Seymour Lipkin and Master's degree at Manhattan School of Music under Solomon Mikowsky where she is a D.M.A. candidate studying with Anthony de Mare.

www.jennychai.com
www.myspace/chaipiano

Jenny Q Chai's Program:

Helmut Lachenmann *Guero*

(treating piano like guero, gliding on various parts of the piano)

John Cage *The Wonderful Widow of Eighteen Springs/ Nouth Upon Nacht*

(treating closed-lid piano like a percussion instrument with high voice/ slamming the piano lid with high voice)

Frederick Rzewski *Kreutzer Sonata*

(piano and fast speaking narrative voice)

Jean-Olivier Begin *Scatura Nera*

(piano with piano lid lifted to 80 degrees, with a white cover and visual effects projected and electronic sounds)

Andre Boucourechliev *Orion III*

Helmut Lachenmann: *Guero* (1970)

In *Guero*, as in *Pression* for cello or *Dal Niente* for clarinet, Lachenmann was to re-invent the whole nature of the instrument, in response to a commission from Alfons Kontarsky. The performer scrapes along and over the white and black keys (or both in combination), eventually progressing towards the strings, thus producing six 'manuals', each of which resembles the South American rasing percussion instrument. Unusual instrumental techniques, by the very nature of their conventional exclusion, give the archaic notion of 'refined' playing its identity. The way in which such techniques draw attention to themselves is a strategy by which Lachenmann avoids a phantasmagorical sensation of music 'from on high', and grounds it more firmly within the means of its production. (Ian Pace)

John Cage: *The Wonderful Widow of Eighteen Springs* (1942)

Cage's *The Wonderful World of Eighteen Springs* calls for a singer and a pianist. The words are adapted from James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*. The singer is instructed to "sing without vibrato, as in folk-singing." The pianist is instructed to close the piano completely. Letters and notes indicate what outer parts of the instruments are to be played "with fingers" or "with knuckles of closed hand." (Joseph Horowitz)

**Frederic Rzewski: *Kreutzer Sonata* (1996)
(text by Leo Tolstoy)**

Kreutzer Sonata was written early in 1996 during the period when I was in the middle of work on Part Two (Tracks) of my 'novel for piano', *The Road*. I knew that at a later stage in the work I wanted to have a series of melodramas, short pieces for speaking pianist based on texts taken from various sources in literature, carrying my literary metaphor to the point that excerpts from the real novels would be integrated into the music. It was no accident, therefore, that I chose Tolstoy's short novel to begin the series. Its original draft was intended as a dramatic monologue for his friend the actor V. N. Andreyev-Burlak. I decided to use only the most salient part of the text, namely the protagonist's description of how he killed his wife. In thus stripping the text down to its bare essentials, I also became aware of its comic potential as well, and decided to highlight this, so that the listeners are at the same time confronted with the hideous details of this masterpiece of realism and with their impulse to laugh.

(Frederic Rzewski)

Jean-Olivier Begin: *Scatula Nera* (2008)

Scatula Nera (literally Black Box in Italian) is a multimedia performance for solo piano and electronics. Making reference to the famous security device and the keyboard instrument as well, this innovative soundscape piece involves is accompanied by video projections on the piano lid that reveals to the audience the content of the black box. Written for pianist Jenny Q Chai, *Scatula Nera* is a sonic and visual journey into the very last moment of the life of a piano.

(Jean-Olivier Begin)

André Boucourechliev: *Orion III* (1983)

Commissioned by the French State for an international contemporary piano competition in 1983, *Orion III* is quite evidently a work of high virtuosity. Is it for all that an excuse for digital acrobatics, a willfully organized obstacle course for the thrill of triumphing over it?

Certainly, the first and last parts of the work, slow and tempestuous, require from the performer that *virtù* that has given rise to so many great works of the romantic piano - the memory of which is, indeed, present here. But the virtuosity can and must also show itself in the sophistication of the dynamics and colors, in the superimposed, differentiated sound levels; it is on this that the central section of *Orion III* calls, being no less perilous, no less demanding than the others. Virtuosity at the service of this pure poetry of the piano of which composers of today, just like those of yesterday, should never cease to dream...

(André Boucourechliev)