

CHOU WEN-CHUNG

WINDSWEPT PEAKS

for B♭ Clarinet, Violin, Violoncello, and Piano



duration: approximately 18 minutes

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Performance Notes for Windswept Peaks

To portray the feelings of windswept peaks with their gnarled pines and craggy rocks, symbolizing ancient Chinese artist-scholars, I relied on my remembrance of the tragic environment and the contradictory emotions of my childhood days in World War II, when I tried to nullify the destruction and killing around me by turning more and more to music. (I became awakened to the supreme beauty of the slow movement in Bach's and Mozart's violin concertos while howling artillery shells flew overhead in air thick with the smell of death.)

The original planning and sketching for this piece was interrupted by the Tiananmen event on June 4, 1989, and when I resumed composing months later, the tragic memories of my teenage years took over and the piece literally wrote itself. Instead of a tranquil work about the beauty of nature, it turned out to be all about unfulfilled aspirations and imposed disruptions, about sweetness that only takes place in dreams, and brutality that must always be recalled gently as if it were poetry. In short, the piece consists of a broad range of emotions constantly interrupting or in extreme juxtaposition of each other. This means all the musical dimensions are sharply etched to magnify the meaning of intervallic relations in the simultaneous progression of different thematic material.

Thus in performance, all such expressive elements as dynamics, timbre, and articulation must be in perfect balance among the four voices. And every single brief phrase, however abrupt, must be projected robustly as if it were a solo cadenza— an emotional outburst aborted by other events. The continuity of the music is not that of each line, but the dovetailing of all four. Such brief gestures need exaggeration as the phrases are intentionally composed with great restraint. (This constraint and the discipline it demands is actually why this piece came to be so composed. It can be best explained by citing the emotional turmoil felt when hiding from enemy soldiers, searching for me and fellow fugitives, and witnessing the brutality which ultimately led to the death of many innocent civilians.)

The structure of the piece is that of a “broken” arch, with episodes intervening between the upward and downward curves and the “keystone” segment, which *begins* at the temporal midpoint (m.184) of the piece. This disrupted and askewed imagery in sound suggests the nature of remembrances, where recollections are never precise or inclusive. While the piece is not a palindrome, the events do return in a reverse order. Mm 1-11 is the introduction by the VI/Vc duo followed by the pno/cl duo in m 12. The strings suggest awakening and excitement without a specific resolution. The ensuing eruptions from the Pn/Cl duo with the Cl reaching its high A like an agonized voice in the midst of total destruction, only lead to a fragmented exchange of sweetened remembrances. Mm 13–33 is a bridge leading to the arch which shapes the structure of the piece by having the rising curve (mm 34–79) and the falling curve (mm 327-357) separated by passages expressing agitation and nostalgia.

The keystone takes place in mm 184–326 (itself another arch) during which a sense of violent chaos, of being *torn apart*, is expressed by means of extreme registral shifts and tempo changes. (One such image in my personal memories would be having backed into a steep rock formation, unable to move farther, while being in the direct line of fire from a low strafing plane. Another would be rushing towards a school bus which had just been strafed, opening the

door for the survivors, and being confronted by the falling body of a fellow student whose head had just been cleaved open moments earlier.) Mm 287–326 is a recap of similar passages before the keystone but in reverse order. The end of the arch is followed by a “dream” sequence in m 358, leading to a coda which is the superposition of the two duos in the introduction, concluding with the high A, once again the lone voice out of total silence.

While the pitch structure is based on my *pien* (variable) modes, the progression of the four voices, however, conforms to the principles of cursive (*grass*) brush calligraphy, with modal segments flowing and intercepting each other the way brushstrokes would. Examining samples of cursive calligraphy would help one perceive the articulation, flow and stress in each voice and how to relate to the others. For example, in the introduction, the strings’ multiple stops should be played with restrained strength as in deliberate brush strokes, while *gliss* and slow vibratos should evoke a graciously flowing stroke floating into the next. And the two strings should succeed or complement each other as strokes of the same ideogram would in calligraphy. Or, in m 12, the brief phrases of Pn and Cl should weave into each other as a series of interlocking fragmentary strokes would.

Of the duos, one is complementary (VI/Vc) and one divergent (Pn/Cl), considering their sonic characteristics, performance technique, as well as the resulting musical and physical postures and gestures— significant considerations in calligraphy. While the two duos are treated as homogeneous in the arch sections and the dream sequence, their heterogeneous qualities are emphasized in the keystone sequences to enhance the sense of “torn apart.” Their divergent sound-production and nature of gestures suggest fragmented ink spots splattered on paper when the brush moves swiftly, literally “dancing” over the paper.

Tempo/rhythm is thus an important factor in cursive brushwork. Speed and its change determine the character of a stroke, and vice versa. As the tempo speeds or slows from ideogram to ideogram, or stroke to stroke, the speed within an ideogram or a stroke would also vary. In the rising arch, a sense of long sustained *accel* should be projected. It may then be desirable to *accel* from section to section, say mm 34 to 39, rather than maintaining 72, and increase to 84 at the end. (If such a *cresc* is too small to execute evenly over the duration, one could consider reaching beyond 84 and then start at 84 again to effect a second *accel* in the next section.) The same applies to the falling arch in *rall*.

At the instant of executing a brushstroke, as in the performance of this score, calculated elasticity in speed is crucial. (The metronome marks given represent a *norm*, for reference only.) As postures and gestures are equally crucial in calligraphy, to propel strokes with swiftly changing character, it may be wise to carefully consider the seating of the two duos so as to accentuate the close interaction within or between the duos. *Windswept Peaks* aims at portraying extreme emotions with the restraint of a seemingly placid exercise in cursive calligraphy that reveals a disciplined spatio-temporal interplay of integrated but free-flowing lines.



Broad and slow vibrato



Snap pizzicato by lifting the string with one finger (between a regular and a Bartók pizzicato)



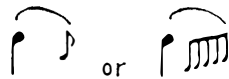
Exaggerated portamento -- partial slide between the two pitches



Even glissando to the second note, starting at the beginning of a note-value



Grace-note(s) to be played at the beginning of note-value or rest



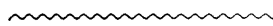
Grace-note(s) to be played at the conclusion of note-value or rest



Grace-notes to be played at increasing speed



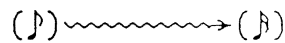
Stop the string near the bridge as the note is being played



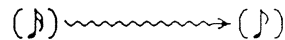
Tremolo to be played as fast as possible



Measured roll played at speed as indicated by the note-value



Measured roll played at increasing or decreasing speed as indicated



Tempo markings and other score expressions are indicated only above the violin and clarinet parts. Cello and piano should follow the same changes. Also, some measures use two simultaneous meters, one for violin and cello, and one for clarinet and piano.

Calligraphy by the composer.

Performance material is available from the publisher on definite order.

CHOU WEN-CHUNG

WINDSWEPT PEAKS

(EP 67359)

Errata

1. Page 11 Measure 70, Violin part, the E \sharp should be E \flat .
2. Page 15 Measure 96, Clarinet part, the \sharp accidental (before the C) should be removed.
3. Page 23 Measure 155, Piano part, there should be an *sf* at the beginning of the bar, before the first grace note.
4. Page 30 Measure 212, the tempo indication, **A little incessantly**, should be, **A little insistently**.
5. Page 46 Measure 326, Clarinet part, the \sharp accidental (before the C) should be removed.
6. Page 49 Measure 343, the tempo indication $\text{♩}=\text{♩}=64$ should read $\text{♩}=\text{♩}, \text{♩}=64$

Windswept Peaks

Chou Wen-chung

Energetic and expansive ♩.=84

Violin

Violoncello

B♭ Clarinet

Piano

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