

Xiaoyong Chen

- Biography -

Xiaoyong Chen was born in Peking on 13 May 1955, where he first studied violin and then composition from 1980 until 1985 at the Central Conservatory. He completed studies immediately afterwards with György Ligeti in 1989 at the Academy of Music and Theatre in Hamburg.

Chen celebrated his European debut as a composer in 1987 at the Donaueschingen Music Days with the premiere performance of his *FIRST STRING QUARTET* by the Auryn Quartet. In 1992 the orchestral work *DYEH...* was premiered as a commissioned work of the Southwest German Radio in Baden-Baden. During the same year Chen was awarded the composition prize of West German Radio's Young Composers' Forum for his composition "YÜN" for soprano and 11 instrumentalists, which was launched by Peter Eötvös with the Ensemble Modern in Cologne, then subsequently presented in Leipzig and Dresden. His *WARP* for chamber ensemble and the *FIRST STRING QUARTET* were performed during the course of a tour of the *Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen* in Amsterdam and Vienna. Since then there has been an intensive collaboration with this orchestra out of which three composition commissions have arisen: *WARP* (1994), *EVAPORA* (1996) and *INVISIBLE LANDSCAPES* (1998). The *Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie* produced the portrait CD entitled *Invisible Landscapes* in 1999 in cooperation with Radio Bremen; this CD was awarded the highest number of points in all five quality categories in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*. Also in 1999, he wrote the orchestral work *INTERLACED LANDSCAPES*, which was commissioned by the *Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation*; this work received seven performances with the Orquesta Gulbenkian under Muhai Tang on a tour through China and Portugal. The composition *FUSION* for ensemble was written in the year 2000 to a commission from the cellist Yo-Yo Ma for his *Silk Road Project*. The composition *XI-FUSION III* for ensemble was given its world premiere as a commission from the Asia-Africa Institute of the University of Hamburg in June 2002.

Xiaoyong Chen belongs to a small group of Chinese composers who have very recently aroused great attention on an international scale. He has worked with numerous orchestras and ensembles; these include the Southwest Radio Symphony Orchestra Baden-Baden, the KBS Symphony Orchestra Seoul, Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, State Philharmonic Orchestra Hamburg, National Symphony Orchestra of Taiwan, Gulbenkian Symphony Orchestra, Ensemble Modern, London Sinfonietta, Ensemble 2e2m Paris, Ensemble *work in progress* Berlin, Nieuw Ensemble Amsterdam, Silk Road Ensemble New York, Auryn Quartet, Arditti String Quartet, Kairos Quartet, etc.

Performances of his works have meanwhile taken place on all continents, including the following festivals: Asian Music Festival and Pacific Music Festival in Japan, Dresden Contemporary Music Days, *ars nova* of the Southwest German Radio, Asian Contemporary Music Festival Korea, MUSICARAMA - International Contemporary Music Festival of Hong Kong, Holland Festival, Vienna *Graben-Fest-Tage*, Festival "Présences" of Radio France (Paris), New Music Days Hannover, Festival ARS MUSICA (Belgium), World Music Days in Manchester (1998) and Hong Kong (2002), *das neue Werk* Hamburg, Festival of Our Time Münster, Brahms Festival Lübeck, International Summer Courses for New Music Darmstadt, Tromp Music Biennale in Holland, New Music Days Würzburg, New Music Biennale Hannover, Tanglewood Festival (USA).

Xiaoyong Chen received the Christoph and Stephan Kaske Prize in Munich in 1993 and the Bach Prize Stipend of the *Hansestadt* Hamburg in 1995. Guest professorships have constantly taken him to Taiwan, Hong Kong and China since 1997. Since 1987 he has been a lecturer at the Asia-Africa Institute of the University of Hamburg and since 2006 he has been professor for composition at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music. In October 2010 Chen was appointed Guest Professor in the areas of New Music, Composition and Chinese Musical Culture at the Academy of Music and Theatre in Hamburg.

"I had to reflect upon our world, my music and the general problems of the new music scene in depth for a long time: we live in a world in which people are overwhelmed with superficial information. Their attention for important information has thus been weakened. They have become spiritually exhausted and passive, so that they are no longer capable of developing their imaginations freely. It is exactly the same in music."

This statement by the composer gives an insight into his compositional development. It is very closely bound to East Asian philosophy, in which the intrinsic value of things and of sound are considered of far greater value than they are in Western thinking.

The maximum development of the minimum is important to him; the range of the musical material used is not decisive, but rather its sensitive development with new and unexpected means in order to make a profound experience of the sound possible for the listener.

Moreover, Chen's music is very closely tied up with the characteristics of Chinese music and language; this is reflected in its subtle melodic language. The slightest alterations, temporal extensions, the spreading out of intervals and differentiated dynamic contrasts are characteristic of his compositions.

Without disowning his roots, Chen writes neither a purely Chinese nor a purely European music. A musical arch of tension arises between East and West through openness, curiosity and attentiveness; this speaks to a wide variety of listeners, arousing their curiosity as well.

Chen is now working on several commissioned works for the *ensemble acht* (Hamburg), *Art Point/ensemble Musica Temporale* (Dresden), Norrkörrping Symphony Orchestra (Sweden), RTV Slovenia Symphony Orchestra, etc.