

Dr. Lam Bun Ching – Biographical Sketch

Siu Lien Ling Wong Visiting Fellow 2011/2012, Chung Chi College, The Chinese University of Hong Kong.

Born in Macao in 1954, Lam Bun Ching received her early musical training in her hometown. She started studying piano at the age of seven and gave her first public solo recital at fifteen. In the 1970's, she moved to Hong Kong for studies at The Chinese University of Hong Kong, and received a Bachelor of Arts degree in music in 1976. After graduation, she won a scholarship that opened doors to the world of composing. At the University of California in San Diego, under the guidance of Bernard Rands, Robert Erikson, Roger Reynolds, Pauline Oliveros and Thomas Nee, she definitively embarked on the career of a composer. She obtained her Ph.D. in 1981 and was immediately invited to teach composition, music theory and piano at the Cornish College of the Arts in Seattle (1981-86).

Currently living in Paris and New York, Lam is one of the most prominent and prolific composers of Chinese ethnicity working today. Throughout her career she has been awarded top honours for her compositions, including first prizes at the Aspen Music Festival (1980) and the Northwest Composers' Symposium (1982), the Prix de Rome (1992) and the Lili Boulanger Award (1992). In 1987, she received the highest honour at the Shanghai Music Competition, the first international competition for composers held in the People's Republic of China. In 1998, she received a fellowship from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and in 2002 she was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship for her exceptional creative contribution to the arts. Her works have been included in the ISCM (International Society for Contemporary Music) World Music Days in 1988, 2002 and 2007.

Lam Bun Ching has received numerous grants and commissions for new works in the United States, of which the most notable have been from the National Endowment for the Arts, Meet the Composer/Reader's Digest Commissioning Program, New York Foundation for the Arts, King County Arts Commission and Seattle Arts Commission. Among her other commissioned works are *Song of the Pipa* for the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra, *Sudden Thunder* for the American Composers Orchestra, *The Great River Flows East* for the Lincoln Center Out-of-Doors, *The Child God* for Bang on a Can, and *Last Spring* for Ursula Oppens and the Arditti Quartet. *Omi Hakkei*, which will be performed at the Chung Chi College Annual Education Conference on February 4, 2012, was composed in 2000 with funding from the Millennium Commissioning program of Chamber Music America for a "Music from China" series.

Lam's European reputation is equally illustrious. In October 2009, a retrospective of her chamber music was presented in a series of three concerts by the Heidelberg University as part of the "Cluster of Excellence" programme. A double CD *Heidelberg Concerts*, which comprise live recordings of two of the concerts, has just been released on the Mutable Music label. Lam is also active in Hong Kong and Macao. She has been composer-in-residence of the Macao Orchestra for the past three years, and has frequently given composition master classes and workshops in Hong Kong.

Lam Bun Ching's compositions have been featured in music festivals around the world, including Bang on a Can (New York), New Music America (Los Angeles), Steirischer Herbst (Austria), and the 24 Heures Communication (Belgium), the Melbourne Festival (Australia), the Tokyo Summer Festival and Pacific Sounding (Japan), the Hong Kong Arts Festival, and the Macao International Music Festival. Notable performances include: *Atlas* for the Atlas Ensemble, which consists of 30 musicians from Europe, China and the Middle East, was premiered at the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, as part of the Holland Festival (2004); and *Poestenkill Pastorale*, a commission by the Albany Symphony, was performed at a concert celebrating the 75th Anniversary of the orchestra (2006). Her other orchestral compositions have been performed by the American Composers Orchestra at Carnegie Hall, the Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra, the Macao Orchestra, the Albany Symphony, the Women's Philharmonic, the Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra, the National Youth Orchestra of Holland, and the Hong Kong Sinfonietta. In 2004, her chamber opera *Wenji - Eighteen Songs of the Nomad Flute* premiered at the Asia Society in New York and at the Hong Kong Arts Festival, and the work recently received a new staging at the Macao Arts Festival in 2009.

Besides her activities as a composer, Lam Bun Ching has equally devoted herself to the work of pianist and conductor. She often performs her own solo piano works and chamber compositions with piano, and in 2005 she was the piano soloist in *Saudades de Macau II*, an orchestral work commissioned by the 19th Macao International Music Festival. As a conductor she was recently invited to direct the Cosmopolitan Orchestra of New York and the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra/Macao Chamber Orchestra in programmes of her own works.

Lam Bun Ching's unique compositional voice reflects both her Chinese roots and her experiences living abroad, and her music both embraces and exemplifies diverse attitudes towards heritage and cultural identity. Although she has often drawn upon Chinese painting, calligraphy and poetry for aesthetic inspiration, her

works contain few gestures overtly derived from traditional Chinese folk music, but instead reveal kinship with both the Western and Asian avant garde. Her music explores an intimate world of beauty in which sonority, structure, and meaning seem effortlessly merged. They are instrumentally imaginative, giving graceful pleasure; yet they convey a sense of wonder and are by turns rapturous or mysterious, speaking to the deeper side of life.

Lam Bun Ching has served as composer-in-residence at the American Dance Festival (1988), the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra (2000) and the Jean MacDuff Vaux Composer-in-Residence at Mills College, California (2002). She was also appointed Visiting Professor in Composition at the School of Music of Yale University and at Bennington College in 1997. In 2010 she was honoured as "Outstanding Alumna of the Year" by the Alumni Association of the University of California, San Diego. Ten years ago, Lam was one of the ten alumni invited to speak in the Distinguished Alumni Lecture series celebrating the 50th Anniversary of Chung Chi College, The Chinese University of Hong Kong. We are delighted that she will again be returning to her alma mater as the Siu Lien Ling Wong Visiting Fellow in 2012, celebrating the 60th Anniversary of Chung Chi College.

This Biographical Sketch is written by Professor Mak Su Yin, Department of Music, The Chinese University of Hong Kong