

SOLO YO-YOMA

MARK O'CONNOR

- 1 *Appalachia Waltz (solo cello version)* 4'25

BRIGHT SHENG

Seven Tunes Heard in China

- 2 *I. Seasons* 1'30
3 *II. Guessing Song* 0'59
4 *III. Little Cabbage* 2'00
5 *IV. The Drunken Fisherman* 4'25
6 *V. Diu Diu Dong* 2'12
7 *VI. Pastoral Ballade* 4'35
8 *VII. Tibetan Dance* 3'25

DAVID WILDE

- 9 *The Cellist of Sarajevo* 7'00
A Lament in Rondo Form for Solo Cello, Op. 12

ALEXANDER TCHEREPNIN

Suite for Solo Cello

- 10 *I. Quasi Cadenza (Quarter note=80)* 1'40
11 *II. Quarter note=96* 1'25
12 *III. Eighth note=42* 1'57
13 *IV. Vivace (Quarter note=104)* 1'35

ZOLTÁN KODÁLY

Sonata for Solo Cello, Op. 8

- 14 *I. Allegro maestoso ma appassionato* 8'01
15 *II. Adagio* 9'59
16 *III. Allegro molto vivace* 9'31



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YO-YOMA

SOLO
O'CONNOR
SHENG
WILDE
TCHEREPNIN
KODÁLY



THE ZEN GARDEN OF THE RYOAN-JI TEMPLE IN KYOTO

Photograph: © Kazuaki Takasaki (Sintery Royal 12)

In early 1999, during a trip to Japan, Yo-Yo Ma visited the Zen garden of the Ryoan-ji Temple in Kyoto. The garden is thought to have been designed at the end of the fifteenth century, and consists of fifteen rocks placed amid white sand in several groups of two and three. No single vantage point provides a complete view of all of the rocks, and in one Zen gloss, the garden's meaning emerges from contemplating the contradiction implicit in trying to see the whole at any one moment: to take in all the rocks, a viewer must move, but doing so means relinquishing one perspective in order to gain another.

YO-YO MA's visit led to ruminations about moving and not moving, wandering and roots, in music. "It's interesting to find music that's wandered a lot," he said. "But no matter how much one absorbs by wandering, there's always going to be a piece missing, and that's the piece that comes from having roots. The best that music can do is to show both. It's the balance between them that will create something meaningful, because ultimately that's what we are struggling with forever. It's the human dilemma, and at the same time, it embodies a continuing human spirit."

IN QUITE DIFFERENT WAYS, the five solo pieces on this recording all represent the work of composers striving to balance

wandering and roots, innovation and tradition. The spirit of the ancestral is alive in each of them, yet they are composed in musical languages that are our contemporaries. And notwithstanding their strong links to very different places and cultures – China, Hungary, Sarajevo, Appalachia – a listener can't help but hear underlying commonalities. For example, bagpipe-like drones turn up in the double stops of Mark O'Connor's "Appalachia Waltz" just as they do in the Hungarian folksong-inspired melodies of Kodály's Sonata. Five-tone scales, common in Hungarian music as well as Chinese music, appear in several of Bright Sheng's "Seven Tunes Heard in China" and are also pervasive in the Suite for Cello of Alexander Tcherepnin, a Russian-born composer and pianist who lived in China in the mid-1930s and studied Chinese and Japanese music. Did drones and pentatonic scales achieve such universality because many cultures independently came up with the same musical ideas, or because they constituted a common musical currency of antiquity? Did the nomadic peoples who moved back and forth across Eurasia long before the emergence of the Silk Road create extended families of related musics that have survived until our time, a kind of musical analog to language families like

Indo-European? The image of a great chain of peripatetic musicians sharing their trade craft is indeed alluring.

THE MUSICIAN AS WANDERER may well represent an old archetype, but not all music is easy to take on the road. One might view the pieces Yo-Yo Ma has gathered in this collection as rooted but also exportable. In each case, this quality arises not simply from the composer's worldliness, but perhaps from his effort to convey to a cosmopolitan audience the spirit of a culture not his own. In its own way, each piece is a response to the challenge of the Zen rock garden.

MARK O'CONNOR (b. 1961) grew up in Seattle and had his first direct contact with Appalachian music during boyhood visits to the South. Later, he moved to Georgia and Tennessee, and began playing the fiddle professionally. "Appalachia Waltz" does not contain actual folk tunes, but is the result of O'Connor's years of assimilating and personalizing a variety of fiddling idioms. "If I play 'Appalachia Waltz' for any fiddler," says O'Connor, "they'll say it sounds classical. If I play it for any classical violinist, they'll say it sounds like a fiddle or folk tune. This translates right to the core of what I've been working on: my music does not yet have a name, but it's gaining an audience. It borrows

from different genres, but hopefully in a cohesive way." The present version of "Appalachia Waltz" is a cello transcription of O'Connor's original composition for solo violin. That composition was subsequently arranged for the cello, violin, and bass trio that performed "Appalachia Waltz" on the eponymous compact disc. In the present version, the hard-edged drones and double stops of traditional Virginia and West Virginia fiddling are transformed into a nimble and delicate counterpoint. "It's supposed to sound simple and innocent," says O'Connor, "but the simplicity is deceptive. I've heard other cellists play the piece, and it's very difficult. What Yo-Yo Ma is able to do with the piece is not something that any virtuoso can do; they really have to understand it from the heart, which is where it's coming from."

FOR BRIGHT SHENG (b. 1955), a native of Shanghai, it was the experience of living for seven years in rural Qinghai during China's Cultural Revolution that ignited his interest in folk music as a compositional resource. Performing in a folk music and dance troupe to escape physical labor, Sheng recalls that he was drawn to the beauty, savageness, and sensuality of the local Qinghai music. With limited resources for the training of performers, Sheng turned to composition, and at age 22,

emerged from the countryside to continue his musical studies at the Shanghai Conservatory. He hadn't yet left China (Sheng immigrated to the United States in 1982), but he had already bridged two different musical worlds. Piecing together those worlds is the project that has occupied Sheng in compositions such as "Seven Tunes Heard in China." Sheng looks to Bartók, Kodály, and Stravinsky as influences and inspirations. "They were the ones who began a new approach to using roots music," said Sheng. "Before them, composers just harmonized folk melodies. They didn't convey the roughness, the savageness of this music." Like his famous predecessors, Sheng does not feel obliged to preserve the original forms of the folk melodies he appropriates. "I use them as a point of departure for my inspiration, and I take a lot of freedom," he says. Indeed, in "Seven Tunes," Sheng not only transfigures his source melodies through shifting tonalities, timbres, and rhythms, but welds a sophisticated harmonic language from contrapuntally overlapping melodic lines. Says Sheng, "I'm searching for a new idiom that doesn't belong to preconceived categories."

DAVID WILDE (b. 1935) is an English pianist and composer who lives and teaches in Hannover, Germany. About his inspiration for "The Cellist of Sarajevo," Mr. Wilde wrote:

"On May 27th, 1992, a grenade was thrown into a bread queue at the bakery in the pedestrian precinct Vase Miskina in Sarajevo. Twenty-two people were killed. Every day after this tragedy, the cellist Vedran Smailović, until recently with the Sarajevo Opera, went to the spot, in full evening dress, at four o'clock precisely, and risked his own life by playing in memory of the dead, regardless of mortar and machine gun fire and the risk of further grenade attacks. The report by John Burns of the *New York Times* of this heroic musical declaration made an impact more immediate than any political statement up to that time. I first read about it on a train from Nürnberg to Hannover. As I sat in the train, deeply moved, I listened; and somewhere deep within me a cello began to play a circular melody like a lament without end...."

YO-YO MA recounted how he began playing *The Cellist of Sarajevo*. "It was given to me by Dmitri Markevich, a cellist in Switzerland. I'd just met him, and he told me, 'You *have* to play this piece.' I was a little taken aback. People don't usually order me to play things. But I played it. And I decided I was going to keep playing it wherever I could as long as the conflict lasted. The worst thing we could feel is that we're totally powerless to affect anything. Perhaps this piece can help

bring us into a spiritual and emotional empathy with what's going on – not with judgment, but just with empathy."

ALEXANDER TCHEREPNIN (1899-1977) was a teenager when he fled St. Petersburg in the wake of the Bolshevik Revolution and settled in Tbilisi, Georgia. Within three years, the Revolution had caught up with Tbilisi, and Tcherepnin moved to Paris. An outstanding pianist, Tcherepnin toured extensively, and was in China at the beginning of a world tour when he met Lee Hsien Ming, a gifted piano student, and resolved to marry her. He cancelled the remainder of his tour and settled in Shanghai, where he taught at the Conservatory and served as musical advisor to the Chinese Ministry of Education. Teaching and concertizing in China and Japan, Tcherepnin became a musical adventurer, exploring indigenous musical forms and experimenting with novel kinds of scales and counterpoint in his own compositions. The Suite for Cello, composed in 1946, after Tcherepnin had returned to Paris, combines the spirit of French Impressionism with tonal features that reflect the inspiration of the East: abundant pentatonicism, hybrid scales, and articulations that call to mind the sounds of Chinese stringed instruments. Through two generations, the peripatetic life of Alexander Tcherepnin and

his family has intersected with that of Yo-Yo Ma and his family: Dr. Hiao-Tsiun Ma, Yo-Yo Ma's father, studied with Alexander Tcherepnin in Paris, and Yo-Yo Ma himself studied music theory with the composer's son, Ivan Tcherepnin, who taught in the Music Department at Harvard University until his untimely death in 1998.

"**HUNGARIAN CULTURE** is an eternal struggle between tradition and Western culture," wrote **ZOLTÁN KODÁLY** (1882-1967). "One of our hands holds the hand of the Nogay-Tartars, the Votyaks and Cheremiss, the other, that of Bach and Palestrina. Can we bring these two distant worlds together?" Kodály's 1915 Sonata for Cello exemplifies his lifelong effort to do just that. Like (and often with) his contemporary, Béla Bartók, Kodály traveled extensively in the hinterlands of Eastern Europe to study and collect authentic folk music. The physical distance that separated villages from cities was often small, but traversing it was considered a form of cultural radicalism. The music that Kodály found in the villages was all but unknown to city dwellers, and it is perhaps to underscore his own sense of culture shock that Kodály's compositions seem sometimes to exaggerate the brutality and wildness that he experienced in folk music. In the Cello Sonata,

Kodály distills his folk music discoveries into a modernist language that is by turns joyously soulful, astringent, and darkly lyrical. Yo-Yo Ma says about the sonata, "Not since the Bach suites did someone stretch the limits of the cello as much as Kodály did."

REFLECTING AGAIN on the pieces in this collection, Yo-Yo Ma acknowledges the challenge of hearing and feeling music so strongly rooted in a composer's response to particular places and peoples. "It takes me a long time to learn a new style," says Mr. Ma. "When I start to get it, it's not just from the notes, but from understanding the composer's commitment to and advocacy of a style. And one style can offer insight into another. Learning from Mark O'Connor and Bright Sheng about Appalachian fiddle tunes and Chinese folk songs helped me understand what's going on in Kodály's sonata. It makes sense, for people really have been in contact with each other throughout."

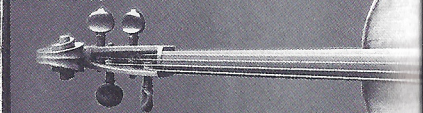
Theodore Levin

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YO-YO MA SOLO

MARK O'CONNOR

1 Appalachia Waltz

BRIGHT SHENG

2-8 Seven Tunes Heard in China

DAVID WILDE

9 The Cellist of Sarajevo

ALEXANDER
TCHEREPNIN

10-13 Suite for Solo Cello

ZOLTÁN KODÁLY

*14-16 Sonata for Solo
Cello, Op. 8*

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