

Composers Series

JING JING LUO

for Nancy King and Robert Nathanson

A Song of Unending Sorrow

An Opera in 3 Acts for Soprano and Guitar

Act 1: The Nightmare	2
Act 2: In the Jade Tower—Love Scene	4
Act 3: The Dream Scene	10

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A Song of Unending Sorrow

An Opera in 3 Acts for Soprano and Guitar

Jing Jing Luo
(b. 1953)

Act 1: The Nightmare

Furiously, frightening (♩ = 60±)

Quiet (♩ = 40±) *mp* *mf* vib.

Furiously, frightening (♩ = 60±) *ff* *sfz*

Cha-ang hwen
(A Song of Unending Sorrow!)

sfz mi pa pai

Follow the note values generally but not precisely.
Play thirty-seconds as rapid pickups to the following
downbeat. Play thirty-seconds *a piacere*, that is, accelerate,
decelerate, accelerate and decelerate, and so forth *ad libitum*.

fp *f* *p* slow vibrato

guh Chi na's

Sadly (♩ = 40±) *mf* *ff* *sfz*

8va

pizz. H5 H4 H7 H3 H4

fp *mf* *ff* *sfz*

a high pitch

a low pitch *fp* *p* (Weeping sound) *sfz* *ff* *sfz*

Hwong di (Emperor) Ah! Em-per-or, C-raving, c-raving, c-raving,

golpe gliss. *sfz* *ff* *sfz*

poco - a - *poco* -

Violently *accel.* *poco accel.* (Laughing sound) *sfz* *ff* *sfz*

c-raving beau-ty ha! ha! ha! ha! shung, shung, shung,
(Birth)

Violently Repeat the figure in the box. *sfz* *ff* *sfz*

accel. *sfz* *accel.* *rall.* *ff* *sfz*

ff

shung shung shung
(continue repeating "shung")

accel. - - rall. - - -

Sighing, crying (♩ = 40±)

mp poco - a - poco - accel. - - -

sfz accel. - - rall. - - -

(dying away)

shung

Much faster

ff sfz ff sfz sfz

fff

H12 Bartok golpe pizz. vocalize Ha!

Ha!

3'00"±

The sound made here by both the singer and the guitarist is a short pitch followed by an airy, long, non-pitched, descending aspiration.

Act 2: In the Jade Tower—Love Scene

Sensuous and sauntering (♩ = 40±)

mf

mp

p 3 damp ④ *sim.*

p 3 damp ④ 3 3 6

poco - a - poco accel. - - - rall.

A tempo (♩ = 40±)

f ④ *mp* *ff* *mp* *f*

p *sim.* *p* *mp* *sfz*

poco accel. *rall.*

p

Shung _____ shung _____ shung _____

(Birth)
A tempo (♩ = 50±)

10 10

mp

(dying away) *mp*

hwan guh _____ *lavishly* _____ man uw _____

(Dragging song) (Slow dance)

mf

mf (dying away) man - uw (Slow dance) ning suh (Staring at bamboo trees)

ju

mp *f* **Fast** *ff* *fff* *accel.* - - - - *rall.* - - - -

a tempo *mf* *accel.* - - - - *mp* *rall.* - - - -

Ju ju ju ju ju ju ju ju (Bamboo trees)

sfz *pp* *sfz*

Jin - jhir (Today) Jin (Today)

ff *sfz* *ord.* *sfz*

slow vibrato fast vibrato

Jin - jhir (Today) Jwin (Emperor)

fff

Poignant, poised (♩ = 60±)

wong _____ Jwin
(Emperor)

Poignant, poised, flowing (♩ = 60±)

C1

f

wong _____

C2

Kan - bu - tzu _____
(Can't get enough of her even by staring at her all the time).

Suddenly bursting forth, very fast

sfz *ff* *sfz*

Freer, quieter

mp *ff*

the de - so - late moon _____ the pool - - s

Slower (♩ = 50±)

pont. pizz.

sfz *mf* *p* *mp*

sfz the Pal - - ace, *mp* All were ju - st as be - fore! *f p* *ff*

Ghostly Waltz (♩ = 96±)

sfz *mp* *f* *p* *ff* *mf*

mp Bell and dru - m would slow - - ly

sim.

toll the dra - - gging nigh - - t hours the River of Stars

grow sharp in the sky Porcelain mandarin du - cks on the roof grow grow

ff *mf* *rit.*

rit.

Freely, recitative

mf thi - ck with mor - ning mor - ning fro - st!

Freely

ff

suddenly bursting forth

Delightedly (♩ = 120±)

ff

H12

mf

p

Throughout, this chord has a dry and percussive sound, not too loud, like a small drum or cymbal: a) Strike it with *p* as if it were one note, not three, b) Immediately damp it with the right- and/or left-hand(s), and c) Keep its dynamic level lower than the top line.

C2

C2

C4

C4

sim.

ff

poco - - *a* - - *poco* - -

accel.

Crazy, screaming, crying!

ca. 7"

sfz

Silence 2"

As quickly as possible, take up the slider.
Then, strum, pluck, and slide wildly!

fp ————— *f* ————— *pp*
6'00"±

Calm (♩ = 40±)

8va

8va

sfz

H5 ③ H4 ② H7 ① H7 ④ H4 ① H7 ②

Shung
(Birth)

Act 3: The Dream Scene

Gentle, graceful (♩ = 40±)

con vibrato siempre

(As the guitar plays, speak slowly in a sing-song, falsetto voice)

"And his covers of Kingfisher-blue feel lonelier and colder, with the distance between life and death year after year, and yet no beloved spirit ever visited his dreams."

Peaceful, quiet

p

The sound made here by both the singer and the guitarist is a short pitch followed by an airy, long, non-pitched, descending aspiration.

Numb, senseless (♩ = 40±)

p

pp (sighing) Oh! Lone - - ly heart

mf mp

mp (sighing) Lone - ly *fp* (sighing) shung *pp* (Birth)

sfz

p > Suh (Death)

H12

f mp pp sfz mp mf

fp < *f* > *p* *fp* (speak) (Speak in a normal voice)

Shung (Birth) Suh (Death) All shall end...

fff > *pp* < , *fff* > *pp*

silence 10-20"

pp (dying away) Shung (Birth) 4'30"±

p *f* pizz.

Like a heartbeat (♩ = 48±)

Ashland, Ohio (2005-2006)

A Song of Unending Sorrow

A Song of Unending Sorrow was written by Jing Jing Luo in 2005 and 2006 on commission from Nancy King and Robert Nathanson. It is a three movement setting for soprano and guitar of a poem by the Tang Dynasty poet Ba Juyi (772-846 AD) translated in Witter Bynner's *The Jade Mountain* (Vintage Books, 1972).

The poem recounts the story of the Tang Emperor's love for one extraordinarily beautiful concubine. Due to the Emperor's utter neglect of the affairs of state and his total preoccupation with his love, the Tang army killed the concubine. Life went on for the Emperor but he could never get over the loss of his beloved. Shortly after the concubine's murder, the Emperor died at an early age of a broken heart.

Jing Jing Luo expresses the poem mostly through her music—rather than set the entire lengthy text, Jing Jing Luo chooses just a few excerpts. Most of the text is in English, some of it is in Chinese. Translations of the Chinese text appear on the score in italics:

Act 1 opens with an announcement “Chang hwen guh” (*A Song of Unending Sorrow*.) Later, the word “Shung” (birth) is repeated.

Act 2 begins and ends with “Shung.” It includes “hwan guh” (dragging song), “man uw” (slow song), “ning suh ju” (staring at bamboo trees), “jin jühr” (today), “jwin wong” (Emperor), and “kan bu tzu” (can't get enough of her even by staring at her all the time).

In Act 3, the two Chinese words are “suh” (death) and “shung” (birth).

The musical style of *A Song of Unending Sorrow* recalls Peking Opera. Standard notation is used throughout although the rhythmic style is proportional and free rather than precise. Any unusual notation is explained on the score the first time it appears.

Jing Jing Luo conceived *A Song of Unending Sorrow* as a staged work but she feels that it can also be performed as part of a recital with no staging. Performers may stage the piece as they wish or they can use the following option provided by the composer:

Act 1: The stage is dark and unoccupied as the piece begins except for a blue spot on the guitarist. The guitarist wears a white rope as a belt. As the guitarist begins playing, the soprano walks onstage slowly and silently and stands next to the guitarist before singing. As she sings, the soprano makes gestures with her hands. At the end of Act 1, all lights are turned off and there is 5” of silence.

Act 2: The stage is still dark except for two blue spots—one on the guitarist, the other on the soprano. A projection of an image of clouds, one of the composer's paintings, appears as a backdrop.

Act 3: The stage is dark—there are no spots except for the projection of an image of the moon, one of the composer's paintings, as a backdrop.

Jing Jing Luo

Jing Jing Luo (pronounced “Lo-ah”) was born in 1953 in Beijing, China to an artistic family. Her father was one China's most prominent composers, artists and ethnomusicologists; her mother was a famed singer of the Peking Opera.

After her father's death at the age of 40 during the Cultural Revolution, Jing Jing Luo was forced to work in a physical labor camp in the middle of the Gobi desert. When she was 16, she walked out of the desert on foot one moonlit night. Following her escape, Jing Jing Luo became a nurse's aid and, when she was 18, entered the nursing school of an Army hospital in the south of China. A year later, she entered the Conservatory of Music in Shanghai, where she majored in piano performance and composition and also learned to play traditional Chinese wind and string instruments.

Ms. Luo came to United States in the early 1980s and was quickly identified as part of the first generation of Mainland Chinese Avante Garde composers along

with composers such as Tan Dun, Ge Gan-Ru, Zhou Long, and Chen Yi. She was awarded a Rockefeller Fellowship and subsequently made her mark as a composer and as a performer. In addition to winning the Walter Hinrichsen Award of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, Jing Jing Luo has won numerous important commissions, awards, grants and prizes.

Jing Jing Luo's music has been performed by prominent soloists and by orchestras including the Beijing Symphony Orchestra and the Cleveland Chamber Symphony.

Jing Jing Luo studied at Columbia University and the Juilliard School and earned a Master's Degree from the New England Conservatory and a Phd from SUNY, Stony Brook. She has taught at Oberlin Conservatory, Nazareth College and Ashland University.

An extensive list of Jing Jing Luo's publications and recordings appears at <http://www.jingjingluo.com/>