

LUNAR NEW YEAR

WITH THE MINNESOTA ORCHESTRA

Junping Qian, conductor
Vân-Ánh Vanessa Võ, vocals, đàn bầu and đàn tranh
Zhengang Xie, jing hu | Mei Hu, yue qin
Roz Tsai, host | Fei Xie, artistic advisor

Saturday, February 17, 2024, 7PM | Orchestra Hall

Li Huanzhi	<i>Spring Festival Overture</i>	CA. 5'
Texu Kim	<i>Dub-Sanjo</i>	CA. 8'
Tyzen Hsiao	<i>The Angel from Formosa</i>	CA. 5'
Vân-Ánh Vanessa Võ	<i>Lullaby for a Country</i> for Soprano and Orchestra Love Yearning Sorrow Fire <i>Vân-Ánh Vanessa Võ, vocals, đàn bầu and đàn tranh</i>	CA. 16'
I N T E R M I S S I O N		CA. 20'
Johann Strauss, Jr.	<i>Voices of Spring</i> (Frühlingsstimmen) Waltz, Opus 410	CA. 6'
ZhenQiang Xie/ Guang Han	<i>Flying Dragon and Dancing Phoenix</i> * for Jing Hu, Yue Qin and Orchestra <i>Zhengang Xie, jing hu Mei Hu, yue qin</i>	CA. 15'
Hua Wu	<i>Welcome Spring</i> for Jing Hu and Orchestra <i>Zhengang Xie, jing hu</i>	CA. 3'
Traditional/ arr. Yukikazu Suzuki	<i>Colorful Clouds Chasing the Moon</i>	CA. 5'
Jianping Tang	<i>Dance of the Golden Snake</i>	CA. 4'

* World premiere; commissioned by the Minnesota Orchestra

PRE-CONCERT AND INTERMISSION

Music and dance presented in partnership with the Alliance of Chinese Culture & Arts and Carleton College’s Department of Music.
Saturday, February 17, Roberta Mann Grand Foyer, Target Atrium and N. Bud Grossman Mezzanine

This concert will be broadcast live on stations of [YourClassical Minnesota Public Radio](#).



JUNPING QIAN,
CONDUCTOR

Junping Qian, who is now in his third year of leading the Minnesota Orchestra's Lunar New Year celebration, served as assistant conductor of the Royal Scottish National Orchestra from 2018 to 2020 and was a visiting faculty member at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. He won first prize at the 2017 Bucharest International Conducting Competition and was also a prize-winner in the 2019 International Competition of Young Conductors Lovro von Matačić in Zagreb, the 2021 Hans von Bülow International Conducting Competition and the 2022 Princess Astrid Competition in Trondheim. Since making his European debut at the Verbier Festival in 2012, Qian has conducted on four continents with orchestras such as the Konzerthausorchester Berlin, London Philharmonic Orchestra, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Orchestre de Paris, Danish National Symphony Orchestra, Hungarian State Opera, Roma Sinfonietta, Minnesota Orchestra, Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra and Kammerorchester Basel. Qian graduated from the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia and the Hochschule für Musik Hanns Eisler in Berlin. His teachers and mentors include Daniel Harding, Sir Roger Norrington, Thomas Søndergård, Christoph Eschenbach, Christian Ehwald, Mark Gibson and Otto Werner Mueller. More: junpingqian.com.



VÂN-ÁNH VANESSA VÕ,
VOCALS, ĐÀN BẦU AND ĐÀN TRẦNH

Vân-Ánh Vanessa Võ is an award-winning performer of the 16-string đàn tranh (zither) and an Emmy Award-winning composer who has collaborated with Kronos Quartet, Alonzo King LINES Ballet and Yo-Yo Ma. She also uses the monochord (đàn bầu), bamboo xylophone (đàn trung), traditional drums (trống) and other instruments to create music that blends Vietnamese instruments and traditions with other genres and structures. Võ co-composed and arranged music for the Oscar-nominated documentary *Daughter from Danang* as well as the Emmy-winning soundtrack for *Bolinas 52*, among other film projects. She graduated with distinction from the Vietnamese Academy of Music, where she later taught, and has since performed in more than 14 countries, including appearances at venues such as Carnegie Hall, the Kennedy Center and Lincoln Center as well as the 2012 London Olympic Games Music Festival. Her recent projects include premiering the first part of the Mekong trilogy production, *Mekong: SOUL*, commissioned by the Kennedy Center, and co-composing an original soundtrack for the PBS documentary *The People vs. Agent Orange* with Blake Leyh. During President Barack Obama's administration, Võ became the first Vietnamese artist to perform at the White House and received the Artist Laureate Award for her community contributions through the arts. More: vananhvo.com.



ZHENGANG XIE, JING HU
MEI HU, YUE QIN

Jing hu master Mr. Zhengang Xie and yue qin master Ms. Mei Hu, a husband-and-wife team, are listed as members of the elite group among the musicians in the Directory of Current Chinese Artists of 1998, which Hu participated in editing. While in China, as the top "Cheng" style Peking Opera fiddlers, Xie and Hu performed and recorded as solo jing hu and yue qin players with many top Beijing Opera houses, including the Beijing Opera House and National Opera House. In addition to performing traditional Peking Opera repertoire, Xie has participated in many new opera productions, such as the Peking Opera TV show *Cao Xueqin* and the new opera *The Legend of The White Snake*. Xie has also performed in the Great Hall of People in Beijing during a Lunar New Year celebration, and was greeted by the Chairman Jiang Zemin, among other top Chinese government officials. Since moving to the U.S. in 1999, the couple has brought Chinese music, particularly Peking Opera, to their community. While living in Cincinnati from 2000 to 2020, Xie and Hu performed in concert halls, schools and universities around the region. In collaborations with the University of Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, they performed concertos such as *In the Dark Night*, *The Qiao Family Compound* and *The God of Mountain*. Xie and Hu are active in creating performance videos online, as well as performing around

(continued on next page)

the Twin Cities area. They were featured soloists with the Minnesota Orchestra at the inaugural Lunar New Year concert in 2022, and this past summer they toured Spain with Carleton College Chinese ensemble on an invitation from pipa master Gao Hong. Xie and Hu currently reside in Plymouth, Minnesota, near their son, Minnesota Orchestra Principal Bassoon Fei Xie, and his family.



FEI XIE, ARTISTIC ADVISOR

Fei Xie joined the Minnesota Orchestra as principal bassoon in 2017 after serving as principal bassoon of the Baltimore Symphony, an ensemble he first joined as second bassoonist in 2008. When he won the principal role in 2012, Xie became the first Chinese-born bassoonist to hold such a position in a major American symphony orchestra. Xie has appeared as soloist with the Minnesota Orchestra—performing Mozart’s Bassoon Concerto in January 2021—Baltimore Symphony, Festival Mozaic Orchestra and the Sichuan Conservatory Symphony Orchestra in China, and he has taught masterclasses and coached orchestral bassoonists throughout the U.S., China and Brazil. He has also appeared in numerous chamber music concerts at Orchestra Hall, most recently in last month’s performance of Samuel Barber’s *Summer Music* and Wynton Marsalis’ *4 Bassoons Talking*. He took on the role of artistic consultant for the Orchestra’s first two Lunar New Year celebrations in February 2022 and January 2023 and continues in that capacity this year. The 2022 concerts also saw Xie joined onstage by his mother and father—the professional Peking Opera musicians Mei Hu and Zhengang Xie, who are yue qin and jing hu masters, respectively—and they reunite for this year’s program as well. More: minnesotaorchestra.org.

ZHENQIANG XIE, COMPOSER

ZhenQiang Xie, president of the Chinese Opera Music Society, national first-class composer and expert of the Ministry of Culture, is currently a professor and director of the music department of the National Academy of Chinese Opera. He has composed more than 50 large-scale plays for the National Peking Opera Theater of China, Beijing Peking Opera Theater and other provincial theaters, and has composed more than 60 music works for national important evening party CCTV and the Spring Festival gala of various provincial TV stations. His *Radiant Snow and Ice* won the award for outstanding works for the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics. In 1999 he was compiled into Biography of Contemporary Dramatists, published by China Drama Press.

PROGRAM NOTES

Program notes for tonight’s concert are provided in an insert and are accessible at minnesotaorchestra.org/lunarnewyearnotes or via the QR code below.



ROZ TSAI, HOST

Dr. Benhong Rosaline Tsai, who also hosted the Minnesota Orchestra’s Lunar New Year concerts in 2022 and 2023, is a global talent management executive who has held transformative leadership roles in multiple Fortune 500 organizations such as Ecolab, Honeywell and Xcel Energy. She currently serves as Vice President of Talent, Learning, and Org Effectiveness at Thrivent, a Fortune 500 financial services firm based in Minneapolis. She is a long-time community volunteer for youth development, arts and culture organizations, most recently completing her term as board chair for Minnesota non-profit BestPrep. A native of Tianjin, China, Tsai completed her undergraduate studies at Nankai University and obtained her master of science degree at St. Cloud State University. She holds a doctorate degree from University of Minnesota, where she currently serves as adjunct faculty for the Carlson School of Management. More: carlsonschool.umn.edu.

Huanzhi Li

Spring Festival Overture

— The first movement of Huanzhi Li's *Spring Festival Suite* has become exceptionally popular as a standalone work, receiving performances in numerous arrangements for Chinese and Western instruments in both orchestral and chamber ensembles. A prolific composer who wrote over 400 pieces, Li often incorporated folk music and dance into his compositions. In his *Spring Festival Overture*, Li immediately infuses a cheerful mood by using lively melodies from folk dance tunes to accompany folk dances from the Shaanxi province of China. The middle section features a more subtle and lyrical approach that is followed by another Shaanxi folk dance tune that soon leads to an accelerated tempo and an exciting percussive return to the original theme.

Born in Hong Kong in 1919, Li studied at the Shanghai School of Music and the Lu Xun Institute of Arts in Yan'an. Before attending Lu Xun, he studied numerous styles of Chinese opera as well as Western composition, including popular songwriting. At Lu Xun he broadened his studies to include choral music as well as conducting with the composer Xian Xinghai. He went on to serve as dean of the music department of North China Associated University and as the chairman of the Chinese Musicians' Association. He composed *Spring Festival Overture* in 1955-56.

Texu Kim

Dub-Sanjo

— Texu Kim, a 2015 alumnus of the Minnesota Orchestra Composer Institute, composed *Dub-Sanjo* on a commission from the Korean National Symphony Orchestra, which premiered it in 2017 with Kwang-Hyun Kim conducting. Subsequent performances were staged by the New World Symphony, Oakland Symphony and Detroit Symphony. The Minnesota Orchestra will reprise the work on March 8 and 9 in performances led by Eun Sun Kim.

Born in 1980, Texu Kim began work on *Dub-Sanjo* while in residence at Copland House in Cortlandt Manor, New York, after receiving the Aaron Copland Award. He has provided the following comments about the work:

"*Sanjo* is a virtuosic Korean folk music tradition performed by an instrumentalist with a barrel drum accompaniment. The first ones were created by players of the Korean plucked instrument *gayageum* and have been aurally transmitted with many variations (now there are also written scores). I combined various melodic patterns in diverse *gayageum sanjos* and arranged them into a short

orchestral overture. (Original *sanjos* are 30 to 60 minutes long.) *Dub* is a short form of *duboo* (meaning 'together' in Korean) and indicates that this piece connects different traditions and is played by multiple players (as opposed to a solo instrumentalist)."

Tyzen Hsiao

The Angel from Formosa

— Neo-Romantic Taiwanese composer Tyzen Hsiao, who lived from 1938 to 2015, was an important composer, conductor and pianist during Taiwan's revitalization of literary and performing arts during the 1970s and '80s. His lush tonal style was influenced by the music of Rachmaninoff, Bartók and Chopin along with Presbyterian hymns and Taiwanese folk music. His music has been the focus of graduate study and research at his hometown of Kaohsiung's National Sun Yat-sen University, Florida State University in the U.S. and other institutions.

In Hsiao's 1999 composition *The Angel from Formosa*, the composer reminisces about his peaceful upbringing in rural Taiwan (formerly known as Formosa, "The Beautiful Island"). It has often been compared to Samuel Barber's popular Adagio for Strings. This emotional piece begins softly with a simple melody in the warm low register of the flute. The oboe soon takes over and develops the melody accompanied by gentle harp arpeggios and soft pizzicato in the cellos and basses. The full string section enters and leads to a lush brass solo. The piece concludes by slowly fading away, with the strumming of the harp evoking an angelic final call for remembrance. The composer dedicated *The Angel from Formosa* to the late Taiwanese pianist Wen-wan Chen, who was a champion of Hsiao's music.

PROGRAM NOTES

Vân-Ánh Vanessa Võ *Lullaby for a Country*

— Tonight’s performance features a new version of *Lullaby for a Country*, written by Vân-Ánh Vanessa Võ and featuring the vocal and instrumental talents of the composer herself. (A profile of Võ appears on page 36 of February *Showcase* magazine.) The original version was commissioned and premiered in 2016 by the Oakland Symphony, with the late maestro Michael Morgan conducting. The composer-soloist has provided the following comments on her work:

“*Lullaby for a Country* is inspired by lullaby tunes from 54 ethnic groups in Vietnam. Personally, I grew up with lullabies that my mom sang to me. I heard people around me singing them a lot, and I sang them to my daughters. It’s tradition in Vietnam that all moms will sing lullabies for their children. The Vietnamese lullabies, although in different dialects, all show the same common themes of providing comfort to children, giving encouragement and longing for loved ones. Lullabies have been used to pass on the values and teachings of the culture to support the children of the next generation. These lullabies represent the deepest sense of comfort, calm and inner strength that many Vietnamese have called upon in order to overcome the insurmountable psychological and emotional challenges in life.

“*Lullaby for a Country* consists of four movements: *Love*, *Yearning*, *Sorry* and *Fire*.

“*Love* starts with vocal soft voice singing over the pad of strings. The music is inspired by the following Vietnamese Southern lullaby.”

*Oh my dear little child, just sleep,
And I am here for you
I know the road is not easy,
But I will take your hands and walk you.*

*Oh my dear little child
Hold my hands and I will guide you
You know you have to take school exams
But I have to take the test of life.*

*Oh my little child... Oh my little child
Who can count the leaves in the forest?
Who can count the layers of the vast sky?
Who can count the stars at night?
Who can count the love and sacrifice that our parents have
given us?*

Infinite sky, boundless ocean, endless miles of landscape

Nothing can stop our parents from caring for us.

“The lullaby’s melody continues to nurture the child’s soul with the sound of đàn bầu, a Vietnamese one-string instrument. Like the human voice, đàn bầu expresses different levels of emotion in its seamless sound.

“*Yearning* is [much more free in form and] musical scale. It carries the desires that each of us have in our minds and bodies.

“*Sorrow* is another form of lullaby in which lost souls will have chances to find their way back.

“*Fire* takes us to the land of hope. Hope helps us to surpass the most difficult time in life.”

Johann Strauss, Jr. *Voices of Spring* (Frühlingsstimmen) Waltz, Opus 410

— *Frühlingsstimmen* (Voices of Spring) was originally written by Johann Strauss, Jr., in 1882 for a charity performance for Vienna’s elite featuring Vienna Court Opera’s star soprano, Bianca Bianchi. Bianchi’s voice was ideal for navigating Strauss’ coloratura passages and the rendering of songs of the returning lark and nightingale, as Richard Genée’s text proclaims “spring awakens in splendor.” The premiere was such a success that Strauss rearranged the piece as an orchestral waltz (with optional solo soprano voice), and the instrumental version debuted just 17 days later.

In carrying on the musical dynasty established by his father, Strauss composed more than 500 waltzes, polkas and quadrilles starting at age 19 and quickly became known as “The Waltz King.” Though Strauss, who lived from 1825 to 1899, admired and often played his father’s music, there was a fierce rivalry between the two. While the elder Strauss saw his own career outshine his son’s during his lifetime, the younger Strauss surpassed his father’s popularity in the classical repertoire. He was admired and befriended by other prominent composers of his time, including Richard Wagner, Richard Strauss (of no relation) and Johannes Brahms.

In 1907, Strauss’ only living brother, Eduard, burned most of Johann’s orchestral archives in a furnace to prevent them from being claimed by other composers. Therefore, any works still performed today could be slightly different from the original versions.

Zhenqiang Xie and Guang Han *Flying Dragon and Dancing Phoenix*

—— Composer Zhenqiang Xie was commissioned by the Minnesota Orchestra to create the work *Flying Dragon and Dancing Phoenix* for tonight's world premiere performance. This piece, named in celebration of the Year of the Dragon in China, aims to spread Chinese "dragon culture" and original Chinese opera music on the occasion of the Dragon year.

The ancient dragon and phoenix are regarded as totems of the Chinese Han ethnic group, representing male and female, respectively, as well as the yin and yang of all things. Drawing inspiration from Chinese Peking Opera music, the composition features Zhengang Xie and Mei Hu as soloists performing prominent instruments of Peking Opera, the jing hu and yue qin, interacting with the orchestra to convey the joyous, harmonious, lively, and warm atmosphere of the New Year. (Xie and Hu's profiles appear on pages 36 and 37 of February *Showcase* magazine.)

The composition consists of three movements. The first incorporates Peking Opera's *Xingxian* and the tune "Liu Qing Niang," showcasing cheerful and harmonious scenes through variations in the first and second sections. The jing hu and yue qin are then featured playing the Peking Opera tune "Xiao Kai Men" to symbolize the playful scene of dragons and phoenixes. The latter climatic part of this movement introduces rapid double tonguing techniques on the piccolo and bassoon. The second movement cleverly uses the orchestra to mimic various drums and rhythmic changes of Peking Opera percussion instruments, depicting the festive scene of people forming long dragon lines—changing formations, shaking dragon heads and swaying dragon tails in a lively manner. The third movement draws from the Peking Opera tune "Ba Ban," with the main solo instruments echoing the orchestra, portraying the festive and lively parade that inspires more people to join in the joyous celebration. The composition skillfully leverages the technical characteristics of solo instruments and the orchestra, maintaining the melodic and modal features of traditional Chinese music while effectively incorporating Western compositional techniques, embodying a rich blend of classical opera music and modern aesthetic characteristics.

Zhenqiang Xie is the uncle of Fei Xie, the Minnesota Orchestra's principal bassoon and the artistic advisor for tonight's performance. Profiles of both Zhenqiang and Fei Xie appear on page 37 of February *Showcase* magazine.

Guang Han, the work's co-creator, is a composer at the National Peking Opera Company. He graduated from the China National Academy of Chinese Theatre Arts under

the guidance of Professors Zhenqiang Xie and Shijun Zhao. He has been involved in creative work with various theater troupes and Peking Opera productions and has composed music for various theatrical events.

Yanpei Zhang *Welcome Spring*, orchestrated by Guang Han

—— Jing hu master Zhengang Xie and yue qin master Mei Hu remain at center stage for a second work: *Welcome Spring*, an original composition by the renowned Peking Opera composer Yanpei Zhang, with orchestration by Guang Han. The piece has its origins in a famous melody from the Peking Opera and showcases the jing hu—a bowed instrument with two strings. Depicting the arrival of spring and the rejuvenation of all things, *Welcome Spring* portrays a joyful atmosphere with vivid rhythms and a beautiful melody. It expresses the delightful and cheerful ambience of spring.

Traditional/arr. Yukikazu Suzuki *Colorful Clouds Chasing the Moon*

—— *Colorful Clouds Chasing the Moon* is a renowned piece in Guangdong music. With its light and unique style, it depicts the carefree and leisurely life of ordinary citizens, showcasing the typical folk music style of Guangdong. Originating in the Qing Dynasty, it was presented for performance within the imperial court during Hongzhang Li's tenure as the governor-general of Guangdong and Guangxi. The title symbolizes an immortal riding a colorful auspicious cloud towards the Moon Palace. Descriptions of immortals riding colorful clouds are common in classical Chinese literature. This arrangement is the work of Yukikazu Suzuki, a Japanese composer who lived from 1954 to 2010.

PROGRAM NOTES

Jianping Tang *Dance of the Golden Snake*

— Composed by Jianping Tang, *Dance of the Golden Snake* is based on the Chinese folk tune “Dao Ba Ban.” The structure maintains a distinctive rhythmic character throughout and is in three sections played without pauses.

The first section begins with bright, uplifting tones continuously conveying a joyful, spirited and exuberant mood, resulting in a refreshing experience. Percussive passages infuse the melody with vivacity in the second section, allowing it to flow smoothly and briskly as it creates a vibrant and lively energy. In the third section the composer cleverly incorporates the structural form of folk drumming known as “screw top.” The call-and-response between phrases gradually shortens, and the tempo increases layer by layer. Accompanied by the rhythmic enhancement of percussion instruments like gongs, drums, cymbals and wood blocks, the emotions escalate until reaching the lively climax. This vividly reproduces the festive scene of dragon dancing and thunderous drums during joyous occasions, portraying distinct national characteristics and vitality. The entire composition, accompanied by spirited percussion, further intensifies the atmosphere of fervent celebration and exhilaration.

Jianping Tang, who was born in 1955, is one of China’s most successful contemporary composers. While studying at the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing, he became the first student trained entirely in China to receive a post-graduate degree in composition. He later went on to become head of the Composition Department at the Central Conservatory, a founding member of the Chinese Folk Orchestra Society, creative director for the China Symphony Development Foundation and director of the Chinese Opera Research Institute. He has composed in a variety of genre and styles, including electronic compositions, film scores, music for television, and music for dance dramas, ethnic instrumental ensembles, Mongolian throat singers, choirs and orchestras. His awards include the first “Golden Bell” award for composition, a Lotus Dance Drama Award and the Ministry of Culture’s distinguished Wenhua music award.

PROGRAM NOTES BY GAO HONG AND PAUL DICE.

