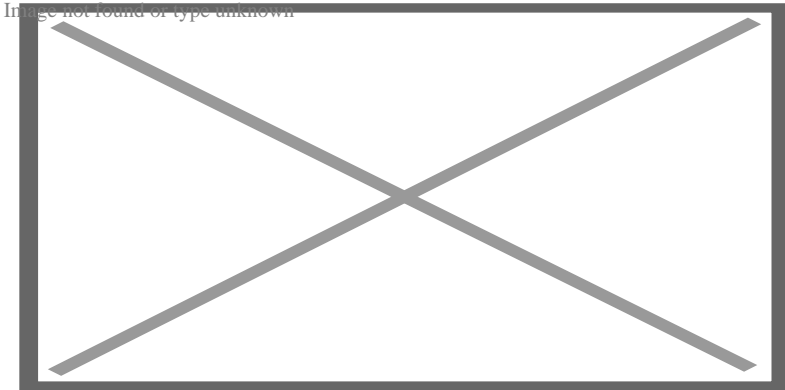


# Other Minds Festival: OM 15: Panel Discussion & Concert 1, 4 of 5

**Identifier**

OMF.2010.03.04.c1.D

**Object Type**

Digital Audio

**Musical Selections**

The Willows Are New, for piano (1957) (7:27) / Chou Wen-Chung

**Description**

The 15th Other Minds Festival of New Music (OM 15) began with a panel discussion with some of the composers and performers featured in the first night's concert, held on March 4, 2010. Joining moderator Charles Amirkhanian on stage was, Clemens Merkel, first violinist of the Quatuor Bozzini, Swiss composer Jürg Frey, and vocalist and composer Lisa Bielawa. Frey describes the inspiration and structure of the minimal, microtonal composition which was to be heard later in the evening, while Clemens provides a demonstration of the technique required to perform it, as well as commenting on the physical challenge of playing very slowly over a long duration of time. Lisa Bielawa then discusses her song cycle based on texts by Franz Kafka, and compares the vocal stylings of Carla Kildstadht, for whom the piece was composed, with those of her own work with the Philip Glass Ensemble, and the masterful avant-garde singing of Cathy Berberian. The panel then concludes with an excerpt from a film about Edgar Varèse, featuring an interview with his student and friend, Chou Wen-Chung, the evening's third featured composer, who was unfortunately unable to attend the Festival due to poor health.

Streichquartett II

This serene string quartet is a slow and subtle sequence of chords that create a series of semitones that seem to pulsate in a pattern of harmonic changes. Composer Jürg Frey introduces the piece in the program notes thusly: “When I was working on the ‘String Quartet’ (1988), I encountered the painting of Agnes Martin, I saw clear-cut forms, not overgrown with rhetoric and figuration. Instead, sensuality, radiance and intensity gripped the entire space. There was a kind of visibility to her art, which I felt corresponded to the audibility in my music.

Audibility: the moment when sound waves move in space and the air touches the body. The eardrum is the sensory connection between the outside and the inside world: we hear the sound and the composition. Over the years it became more and more clear to me, that there is no anonymous material, each material has its shape, and as soon as it exists in space and time, it carries a distinct handwriting. Anonymous material is rather an idea that brings the work to a point where concentration on what is essential become possible, and allows one to feel that he is starting from zero.”

### Twilight Colors

“Twilight Colors” is a double trio for woodwinds and strings, specifically for flute, oboe and clarinet in one trio; and violin, viola, and cello in the other. The woodwind trio is by itself a double trio with some movements written for alto flute, English horn and bass clarinet played by the same performers as a separate entity. Therefore the movements of the work consist of a string trio with combinations of one of the two woodwind trios, which offers changing color combination from movement to movement. This piece is inspired by the exceptional colors of the changing sky over the Hudson River Valley which attracted American painters who initiated a school of true landscape painting not dominated by the human figure... In conceiving the piece, I was influenced by the Chinese brush painters of the early 17th century who adopted fundamental brush stroke techniques from Chinese calligraphy to develop a landscape painting technique based on subtle brushstrokes and their sophisticated organization. The result was an extremely terse and abstract expression of the subject portrayed, and conceivably anticipated much of the abstract and the expressionist development in Western painting of the 20th century, which presumably evolved out of a different esthetic orientation. - Chou Wen-Chung

### The Willows Are New

“Yang Kuan”, another ch’in work bearing the name of the poem by Wang Wei (589-759) that inspires it, has been refashioned into a composition in which “mutations of the original material are woven over the entire range of the piano and embroidered with sonorities that are the magnified reflexes of brushstroke-like movements.” The title “The Willows Are New” comes from a line of the poem: “Green, green around the tavern the willows are new. Let us empty another cup of wine. For, once west of Yang Kuan there will be no more friends.”

### Kafka Songs

I was in Prague for the first time for just one day in October, and I walked all day, reeling, overwhelmed by its beauty and richness. In a small bookshop I stumbled across an edition of Franz Kafka’s “Meditation” (1912) in a beautiful translation by Siegfried Mortkowitz. “This Time” is itself a meditation on a very short excerpt from this volume: “And this time I only recognize these old games after being with them for such a long time. I rubbed my fingertips against each other to erase the shame.” I marveled that this writing was private, quietly observant, and so unlike the allegorical, dystopic Kafka I knew. This introspective side of Kafka seemed to beg for a solo performer who could create a whole world, alone. I wanted to write a series of pieces expressly for Carla Kihlstedt, who was looking to build a repertoire for herself as a solo violinist/vocalist. Initially, I wrote “This Time” as a stand-alone piece, for the 2001 MATA Festival in New York. Then I discovered the “Parables” on the bookshelf at Aaron Copland’s home, while in residence as a Copland Fellow. Again, I recognized Kafka the miniaturist. The thrill of this discovery and a growing intimacy with Carla Kihlstedt’s inimitable technique urged me to write “A Handful of World” and “Couriers.” The remaining four pieces, all settings from

“Meditation,” were written over the course of a year. They felt to me like journal entries, reflecting moments in both my own life and Carla’s as we have worked together over time. -- Lisa Bielawa

Notes: Works by and the appearance of Jürg Frey are presented in partnership with the Swiss Arts Council Pro Helvetia. Quatuor Bozzini is presented with the support of the Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec. “Twilight Colors” was commissioned by the Koussevitzky Foundation and dedicated to the fond memory of Olga Koussevitzky.

#### **People**

Other Minds Festival (features)  
Chou, Wen-Chung, 1923- (features)  
Zimmermann, Eva-Maria (Pianist) (features)

#### **Related Collection**

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