

THE POLITICS OF HARMONY
A MASQUE

STOLEN OUT OF ANCIENT AUTHORS
BY
RICHARD MONACO

AND SET FOR VOICES AND INSTRUMENTS
BY
CHARLES WUORINEN

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Duration: 35 minutes

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VOICES

ALTO: who takes the Narrator's part, and an Aria
TENOR: who takes the two Dukes' parts
BASS: who takes the two Ch'in Masters parts, and an Aria

INSTRUMENTS

2 VIOLINS
2 CONTRABASSES
2 HARPS
2 FLUTES (including 2 Alto Flutes and 1 Piccolo)
2 TUBAS
PIANO
3 PERCUSSION

PRELUDING DRUMS

PROLOGUE

BASS ARIA: *The Yellow Emperor Creates Music in Pure Chiieh Mode*

Rare light, soft with ages, invests the yellow king,
on the clear peak where he convokes spirits at his will.
Six dragons draw him in an ivory carriage,
like clouds they coil and move, mount, and fill.
Lords of the air pace him,
Wind and rain spread out before him,
Thoughts like cut crystal impacting bright broken sun and sky, shimmer his placid mind.
Gay, pure, and puissant, he leads dark beasts;
ghosts sway to song and follow like blown mist.
Wild serpents twist in his harmonious wake.
Sky vibrates to the phoenix's melodious flame.
Rare song, like struck crystal rings from his tempered heart,
An exquisite cry spreads from him, ripples Heaven,
Soft, rare, ageless grief.

FIRST NARRATION

Narr: On the road to Chin Duke Ling and his retinue halted in the cool of the evening on the bank of the river Pu.
That night, waking from a placid dream he heard, distant and pure, the sound of a lute's faint tones inflected on the wind.

FIRST CH'IN TUNE

SECOND NARRATION

Narr: Ling called the members of his suite and asked if any had heard the music.
None had. Then he summoned the youthful master Chüan and said to him:

FIRST DIALOGUE

Ling: "I have heard a lute being stroked. No one else has heard it. Perhaps an ancient ghost plays tones of subtle meaning. Listen, and note down this tune for me."

Narr: Chuan agreed, He sat in the correct position, lute before him, still as the moon.
Listened...

SECOND CH' IN TUNE

FIRST DIALOGUE CONTINUED

...and wrote down the tune. That morning he went to the Duke and told him:

Chüan: "I have the notes now but beg you for another night in which to comprehend them."

Narr: The Duke agreed. Again the young master sat up under the pines and stars. By dawn he was satisfied. He went to the Duke and said respectfully:

Chüan: "I can play the tune now but I do not know if it expresses rare thoughts in solitude."

Ling: "The tune is not lewd."

Chüan: "But the notes are unfamiliar."

THIRD NARRATION

Narr: Continuing through the green land the Duke remained thoughtful ...

TRAVELING TO CHIN

Narr: At Chin they were received by Duke P'ing who spread a Banquet on the sparkling wind terrace where five mountains towered like five lords and plum attended pine.

SYMPHONY: BANQUET

SECOND DIALOGUE

Narr: When all were warm with wine, Ling said:

"On my way here, learned friend, I heard an unfamiliar tune whose meaning is obscure. Please permit me to present it for your lofty delectation."

P'ing: "Kindly have it played. My ears and mind are clear."

Narr: With refined fingers Chuan played

THIRD CH'IN TUNE

SECOND DIALOGUE CONTINUED

Narr: Before he was half done a venerable man beside him reached out a hand to deaden the sounds. Ling asked who the man was. Ping said:

P'ing: "Wise old master K'uang, and bold old master K'uang."

Narr: K'uang, eyes sparkling, respectful, said:

K'uang: "Music of a doomed state must not be heard."

Narr: All were silent. Then Duke Ping asked:

P'ing: "Who made this music? When was it played and why?"

Narr: K'uang, hands folded, beard white, replies:

K'uang: "It was composed by master Yen to please the tyrant Chou. When he was destroyed Yen fled and drowned himself in the river Pu. By that river must this tune have been heard."

Narr: Duke P'ing sipped his wine; then he said:

P'ing: "Tones blend to delight; mend the heart not ache it."

K'uang: "If you hear this tune: woe to all your land."

Narr: In the warm, serene air, P'ing frowned:

P'ing: "I love the old music like clouds in clear sky,"

Narr: He said, and said:

P'ing: "The old sounds bring rest. Now play what I request,"

Narr: In the mountain stillness Chüan played.

THIRD CH' IN TUNE CONCLUDED

THIRD DIALOGUE

Narr: Old P'ing reflected, then he said:

P'ing: "Are there tunes more sinister? I shall know this."

Narr: Old K'uang replied :

K'uang: "They are forbidden."

P'ing: "It is a gentle day... can you play these tunes?"

Narr: Master K'uang, grave and polite, said:

K'uang: "My lord's virtue and righteousness are not great enough to hear. I may not play them."

Narr: The Duke raised his arm and spoke out:

P'ing: "The old sounds bring rest. Now, play what I request."

FOURTH NARRATION

Narr: K'uang bowed, then played profound and rare:

FOURTH CH'IN TUNE

Narr: After the first piece sixteen dark cranes appeared and perched on the gate.

SECOND SYMPHONY: APPEARANCE OF SIXTEEN DARK CRANES

FIFTH CH'IN' TUNE

FOURTH NARRATION CONTINUED

After the second piece as played
they spread their wings and cried and danced.

THIRD SYMPHONY: DARK CRANES:

- a. Crying of Sixteen Dark Cranes
- b. Dancing of the Same

FOURTH NARRATION CONCLUDED

Narr: P'ing rose and drank the master's health now shaken with exquisite joy.

G.P.: DRINKING MASTER K'UANG'S HEALTH

ALTO ARIA. TROPE:

Another Description of the Sixteen Dark Cranes

The opening strain
Draws sixteen cranes
From Southern skies
Swaying as they fly,
Sadly to the tones'
Sweet ancient moan.

When the dark cranes stood loosely
On the South Gate
The Music moved them as puppets move on strings:
Easy, undulant, poised in a long row;
Graceful, and serious,
as Gods mourning for Gods.

With the grave closing tones,
They stretch long necks and utter vibrant cries.
As the dark music cries, the dance and song are one:
Exquisite steps on flowing wings;

Their voices fill the Lute;
And in a grand despair, the men, the birds, clouds and bright air:
In solemn waves of song all sway
To the rare, high harmony, gay
In the Time's flow of melodious grief.
The hearers are made wise, learning to weep and exult.

FOURTH DIALOGUE

Narr: The Duke sat down again. Gay as a child he asked:

P'ing: "Are there more sinister tunes? I must know this."

K'uang: "In the ancient days the Yellow Emperor reunited ghosts and spirits with tones too perfect for ordinary ears. I may not play them."

P'ing: "I am an old man, my bones are cold. Play them,"

Narr: Master K'uang was polite and calm and spoke with care:

K'uang: "My lord's heart is not pure enough. If you listen you will perish.
I must not play."

Narr: P'ing shook his head and laughed:

P'ing: "The old sounds bring rest. Please play what I request."

FIFTH NARRATION

Narr: Master K'uang's fingers floated over the lute strings:

SIXTH CH' IN TUNE

Narr: After the first tune clouds like dragons arose in the north.
The air blew cold,

FIFTH SYMPHONY: CLOUDS ARISE IN THE NORTHWEST

SEVENTH CH' IN TUNE

FIFTH NARRATION CONTINUED

Narr: After the second, the dragons coiled and darkened the air. Rain and wind broke
and old pines bent and creaked.

SIXTH SYMPHONY: STORM WIND AND TORRENT

Narr: All the company fled, robes whipping wildly in the wind; the five peaks trembled
and cold darkness fell.
And old Duke Ping, moaning with terror, groveled and shook in the icy rain.

DISORDER IS BROUGHT ABOUT BY NATURAL CALAMITIES

SIXTH NARRATION

And, thereafter, for long years that green land

SEVENTH SYMPHONY: DOUGHT

burned with drought.

NATURAL CLAMITIES AFFLICT CHIN

POSTLUDE

Exeunt Personae, slowly