

Post-Classical Ensemble

The Song of the Earth

featuring

Angel Gil-Ordóñez, music director
Joseph Horowitz, artistic director



FRIDAY, MARCH 16, 2007 . 8PM
INA AND JACK KAY THEATRE

POST-CLASSICAL ENSEMBLE

Angel Gil-Ordóñez, music director
Joseph Horowitz, artistic director

Sara Stern, flute and piccolo
Igor Leschisin, oboe and English horn
David Jones, clarinet and bass clarinet
Don Shore, bassoon
Mark Hughes, horn
John Spirtas, percussion
Naoko Takao, piano
Jeffrey Watson, harmonium and celesta
Oleg Rylatko, violin (concertmaster)
Eric Lee, violin
Lisa Ponton, viola
Gita Ladd, violoncello
Edgardo Malaga, double bass

Min Xiao-fen, pipa
Wang Guowei, erhu
Delores Ziegler, mezzo-soprano
Shi Hong Aldin, reader

PRELUDE

Lecture Room 2200, 7PM
Zhou Long, Min Xiao-fen, Wang Guowei, Angel Gil-Ordóñez and
Joseph Horowitz

The Song of the Earth

This program will be performed with no intermission

ANONYMOUS

Traditional Chinese Music

Min Xiao-fen, pipa and Wang Guowei, erhu

MENG HAO-RAN AND WANG WEI

Poetry

Shi hong Aldin, reader

ZHOU LONG (b. 1953)

The Farewell (2007)*

After texts by Wang Wei and Meng Haoran

GUSTAV MAHLER (1860-1911)

Der Abschied from Das Lied von der Erde (1909)**

Delores Ziegler, mezzo-soprano

Post-Classical Ensemble

Angel Gil-Ordóñez, conductor

POST-CONCERT DISCUSSION

**World premiere performance, commissioned by the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center*

***As arranged for chamber orchestra, for Arnold Schoenberg's Society for Private Musical Performances*

This program is presented with the support of the National Endowment for the Arts

Das Lied von der Erde

It is unsurprising that Hans Bethge's anthology *The Chinese Flute*, adapting eighty-three Chinese poems, should have come to the attention of Gustav Mahler. The turn of the 20th century witnessed a vogue in Chinese literature in German-speaking lands. Bethge's *Nachdichtungen* (paraphrase poems) were based on German translations of French translations of Chinese poetry. Mahler chose seven 8th century poems from Bethge's collection for his 1908-09 symphonic song cycle *Das Lied von der Erde* (The Song of the Earth). The music is shadowed by Mahler's recent discovery that he suffered from serious heart disease. "All of his sorrows, his fear, he put into this work," wrote his wife, Alma. Mahler died at the age of 50 on May 18, 1911.

Tonight we hear the last and longest movement of *Das Lied*: the "Der Abschied" (the farewell). Mahler here sets a Bethge text principally adapting "Staying at Teacher's Mountain Retreat, Awaiting a Friend in Vain," by Meng Hao-Ran (also known as Mong-Kao-Jen); and "Farewell" by Wang Wei. The awaited "friend" of the first poem is in fact Wang Wei, whose "Farewell" is addressed to his friend Meng Hao-Ran. Mahler's revisions of the German text — he is in fact the author of the final four lines — serve to shade the meaning of "farewell" towards leave taking from life itself — surely the import of his music.

In the ingenious 1921 reduction prepared for Arnold Schoenberg's historic Society for Private Musical Performances in his native Vienna, Mahler's large orchestra is replaced by thirteen players: flute doubling on piccolo, oboe doubling in English horn, clarinet doubling on bass clarinet, bassoon, French horn, harmonium doubling on celesta, piano, percussion and string quintet.

The composer Anton von Webern wrote to his friend and fellow Schoenberg-disciple Alban Berg on October 30, 1911:

On 19 and 20 November there is the Mahler Memorial in Munich. . . . Yesterday the Berliner Tageblatt printed the enclosed on Mahler's Das Lied von der Erde. Is it possible that we are not to be there? A new work by Mahler for the first time since his death! . . . Once you have read the end of the poem of Das Lied von der Erde in the enclosed cutting, my dear man, would you not expect to hear the most wonderful music that there is? Something of such magnificence as has never yet existed? . . . For Heaven's sake, what kind of music must that be?! I feel I must already be able to imagine it before having heard it. Well, can you stand it? I can't!

Bruno Walter was the conductor of the premiere of *Das Lied von der Erde* in Munich on November 20, 1911. Both Webern and Berg attended. Webern wrote to Berg three days later: "It is like the procession of life or, better yet, of that which has been experienced, before the soul of the dying. The work of art is intensified; that which is mere fact evaporates . . ."

During my tenure as executive director of the Brooklyn Philharmonic Orchestra in the 1990s, the most important premiere we performed, in my opinion, was of a new work by a Chinese-American composer then unknown: Zhou Long. The work was *Poems from Tang* for string quartet and orchestra. It disclosed a major compositional talent, combining exquisite musical craftsmanship, a creative response to poetic texts and — rarest of all — an individual voice, melding Eastern and Western influences. *Poems from Tang* (a work still insufficiently known) was subsequently the winner of the BBC Master Prize. As artistic advisor to the Pacific Symphony, I was able to play a role in introducing it to California audiences as well as audiences abroad when in 2006 the orchestra went on tour. The charged quiescence of this marvelous score evoked for me another piece inspired by Tang poetry: the "Farewell" from Mahler's *Song of the Earth*. And so I had long envisioned commissioning from Zhou Long his own response to the poems of farewell by Meng Hao-Ran and Wang Wei that so inspired Mahler. Thanks to Ruth Waalkes and the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center, that intention has now become reality.

Zhou Long was born in Beijing in 1953 to Westernized parents, his father an oil painter and teacher of design, his mother a vocal professor at the Central Conservatory. When he was sixteen, the Cultural Revolution exiled him to a collective farm in Heilong Jiang, in northeast China, where he drove a tractor and hauled wheat on his back for five years. "There was no hope of going home; I thought I would spend the rest of my life there." A back injury rescued him: from 1974 to 1978 he played the accordion, conducted and composed for a song and dance troupe in Zhangjiakou, a small city near Beijing. Though only revolutionary songs were permitted, he learned folk music from farmers and clandestinely listened to broadcasts of Chinese traditional music over Soviet radio. One crucial experience in 1977 was a month in Mongolia, where he was sent to collect songs. He lived in a tent and was amazed to encounter roaring winds, fierce land fires and a wealth of striking love songs and drinking songs. His subsequent odyssey has included degrees from the Central Conservatory and Columbia University alongside his wife, the composer Chen Yi. Among the orchestras and organizations that have commissioned new works from his are the Bavarian Radio Orchestra, BBC, Brooklyn Philharmonic, Chanticleer and the Tokyo Philharmonic. He currently teaches at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. In 2003 he received a lifetime achievement award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

Zhou Long is a composer who early on discovered a special mission towards which the Cultural Revolution powerfully predisposed him. In his third year at the Central Conservatory, a Japanese traditional ensemble visited Beijing, as did a Canadian percussion ensemble. "These experiences opened my ears to how traditional instruments could deal with very modern rhythms and sounds. Also, I had never before seen an entire set of percussion instruments played by one person. This gave me a big shock. I was really impressed."

Chinese instruments now became Zhou Long's creative catalyst. In 1983, he composed *Valley Stream* for bamboo flute, guanzi, zheng and a battery of Western and Chinese percussion, including vibraphone and marimba. The capacities of players and instruments were stretched in an attempt "to preserve the idiomatic nuances of traditional Chinese music while experimenting with instrumentation, performance techniques, rhythm and sonority." *Valley Stream* was controversial — and yet won the Fourth Chinese National Composition Prize. When Zhou arrived in the United States in 1985 to attend Columbia University, *Valley Stream* already anchored his creative identity. At the same time, this was necessarily a period of ferment. "I came into contact with the Second Viennese School of Schoenberg, I wasn't scared, but confused." For two years he did not compose — "not a note." He studied Schoenberg's twelve-tone serial style and also avant-garde "aleatoric" music, in which performers must improvise. Neither was for him. But he refined his style, discarding Romantic harmonies in favor of a "pan-tonal" style, dispensing with a central key. Meanwhile, he composed for plays and films and orchestrated Chinese folk songs for the popular singer Sergio Franchi.

A milestone achievement was the sextet *The Ineffable*, composed in 1994 for two plucked Chinese instruments — the 21-string zheng and the four-string pipa — plus flute, violin and cello. A sixth performer, a busy percussionist, commands a battery including glockenspiel, marimba, vibraphone and xylophone, plus a variety of bells and drums. Though there is some pairing of flute and percussion, pipa and zheng, and violin and cello, the net effect is not one of dialogue or juxtaposition. Rather, with his creative recourse to quarter tones, to varied vibratos and glissandos, Zhou Long stretches the Western instrument eastward and the Chinese instruments westward, to achieve a volatile common ground.

Says Zhou, "People often consider Chinese instruments soft. But when played softly, they penetrate sharply and powerfully. I can use them fearlessly in combination with Western instruments. And Chinese instruments can be made to play complicated Western rhythms or very high notes with good sound. So Chinese players can learn a lot, and derive a great benefit, from Western instrumental practice. Similarly, with special bowings, and special trills and vibratos, Western instruments can imitate Chinese instruments."

Tonight's *The Farewell* (after Wang Wei, Meng Haoran) is a further such exercise in combining Western and Chinese musical resources. The composer has furnished the program note that follows.

— Joseph Horowitz, artistic director

Gustav Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* creates a perfect match between a 20th century European composer and 8th century Chinese Tang Dynasty poets. Within an ancient civilization, poets such as Li Bai, Qian Qi, Meng Hao-Ran and Wang Wei created newly distinguished literary forms that were highly cultivated and intellectual. Many centuries later, Mahler found true inspiration in transforming Tang poems into German lieder.

The German text used in *Das Lied von der Erde* underwent substantial literary changes from the original Tang poems, but the emotion and sentiment remain intact and resemble the poems for Mahler's other songs. *Das Lied von der Erde* voices Mahler's epiphany: Earth is mother. A person stands on the Earth, becomes an original, natural part thereof and cannot alter the inevitable cycles of life and death. A person's birth and death are no different than flowers blooming and fading away. Mahler embraced this Chinese ideology of man and nature merging into an organic whole.

The heart of *Das Lied* lies in last movement "Der Abschied" (the farewell). Mahler himself says goodbye to life in this *Song of the Earth*. "Der Abschied" was arranged for chamber ensemble in 1921 for Schoenberg's Society for Private Music Performance in Vienna. My new piece adds two traditional Chinese instruments, pipa and erhu, to that orchestration. There is no vocal part, but I invite the recitation of the poems by Wang Wei and Meng Haoran in Chinese as a preface, as at tonight's premiere performance.

As a composer with a Chinese background, I have also derived inspiration from the Tang poems. What I have tried to do, compared to Mahler, is more directly to combine ancient Chinese and Western musical traditions into a coherent personal statement. In the first half of the piece, traditional tunes have been used. *Three Variations on Plum Blossom* and *Parting at the Yangguan* — both of which I adapt — are originally songs with instruments. The music stays in the mood of a noble solitude. The second half is based on four of the Chinese poems that influenced the German text by Hans Bethge set by Mahler: "Staying at Teacher's Mountain Retreat, Awaiting a Friend in Vain" by Meng Hao-Ran, "Goodbye to Wang Wei," by Meng Hao-Ran, "In Dreamland" by Meng Hao-Ran and "Farewell," by Wang Wei.

— Zhou Long

“Staying at Teacher’s Mountain Retreat, Awaiting a Friend in Vain”

By Meng Haoran

Dusk sun passes the western peak
 Valleys have suddenly darkened
 moon above pine trees chills the night
 wind, brook, filled with clear sound
 woodcutters are almost all home
 birds, in mist, are roosting
 The man expected to stay the night has not yet come
 lonely lute awaits at rattan trail

“Farewell”

By Wang Wei

Dismount horse, drink your wine
 Ask you: “Where to?”
 You say: “At odds with the world
 Return to rest by the South Hill.”
 Please go. Ask no more.
 Endless, the white clouds.

“Farewell in the Mountain”

By Wang Wei

Bid each other farewell in the mountain
 Closing wooden gate at dusk
 Spring grass green again next year*
 Will the honored friend return?

Hans Bethge’s poem (the text for Mahler’s “Farewell”), does not draw upon “Farewell in the Mountain.” However, Mahler interpolated a line adapted from this Wang Wei poem: “Blüht auf im Lenz und grünt aufs neu!”

Der Abschied (The Farewell)

By Hans Bethge

As set by Gustav Mahler

Die Sonne scheidet hinter dem
 Gebirge.
 In alle Täler steigt der Abend nieder
 Mit seinen Schatten, die voll Kühlung
 sind.
 Osieh! Wie eine Silberbarke schwebt
 Der Mond am blauen Himmelssee
 herauf.
 Ich spüre eines feinen Windes Weh’n
 Hinter den dunklen Fichten!
 Der Bach singt voller Wohllaut durch
 das Dunkel.
 Die Blumen blassen im
 Dämmerchein.
 Die Erde atmet voll von Ruh’und
 Schlaf;
 Alle Sehnsucht will nun träumen.
 Die müden Menschen geh’n
 heimwärts,
 Um im Schlaf vergeß’nes Glück
 Und Jugend neu zu lernen.
 Die Vögel hocken still in ihren
 Zweigen.
 Die Welt schläft ein!
 Es wehet kühl im Schatten meiner
 Fichten.
 Ich stehe hier und harre meines
 Freundes;
 Ich harre sein zum letzten Lebewohl.
 Ich sehne mich, o Freund, an deiner
 Seite
 Die Schönheit dieses Abends zu
 genießen.
 Wo bleibst du? Du läßt mich lang
 allein!
 Ich wandle auf und nieder mit
 meiner Laute
 Auf Wegen, die von weichem
 Grase schwellen.
 O Schönheit! o ewigen
 Liebens-, Lebens-trunk’ne
 Welt!

Farewell

The sun sinks behind the mountains.
 Evening falls in the valleys with its
 shadows,
 full of cooling freshness.
 See, how the moon above floats like
 a
 silver ship on the blue sea of the
 heavens.
 I feel a gentle wind blowing behind
 the park pines!
 The brook sings loud and melodious
 through the darkness.
 The flowers grow pale in the
 twilight.
 The earth breathes deeply in rest and
 sleep.
 All longing now has turned to
 roaming,
 the tired people go homewards
 to find forgotten happiness in sleep
 and to learn youth anew!
 The birds crouch silent on the
 branches.
 The world falls asleep!
 There is a cool breeze in the shadow
 of the pines.
 I stand here waiting for my friend;
 I wait for him to take a last farewell.
 I long, my friend, to enjoy the beauty
 of the evening at your side.
 Where are you? You have left me
 alone so long!
 I wander up and down with lute
 on paths rich with soft grass.
 O beauty! O world, drunk for ever
 with love and life!
 He dismounted and gave him the
 parting cup,
 he asked him where he was going,
 and also why it must be.
 He spoke, and his tones were veiled;
 O my friend,

Er stieg vom Pferd und reichte ihm
den Trunk
Des Abschieds dar.
Er fragte ihn, wohin er führe
Und auch warum es müßte sein.
Er sprach, seine Stimme war
umflort;
Du, mein Freund,
Mir war auf dieser Welt das Glück
nicht hold!
Wohin ich geh'? Ich geh', ich wand're
in die Berge.
Ich suche Ruhe für mein einsam
Herz!
Ich wandle nach der Heimat,
meiner Stätte.
Ich werde niemals in die Ferne
schweifen.
Still ist mein Herz und harret
seiner Stunde!
Die liebe Erde allüberall
Blüht auf im Lenz und grünt aufs
neu!
Allüberall und ewigblauen licht die
Fernen!
Ewig...Ewig...

fortune was not kind to me in this
world!
Where am I going? I shall wander in
the mountains,
I am seeking rest for my lonely heart.
I shall wander to my native land, to
my home.
I shall never roam abroad.
Still in my heart; it is awaiting its hour!
Everywhere the lovely earth blossoms
forth in spring and grows green anew.
Everywhere, for ever, horizons are
blue and bright!
For ever and ever...

Post-Classical Ensemble, called by the *Washington Post* “a welcome, edgy addition to the musical life of Washington,” was created by Angel Gil-Ordóñez and Joseph Horowitz in 2001, and made its official debut in May 2003. “More than an orchestra,” it breaks out of classical music, with its implied notion of a high-culture remote from popular art. Its concerts regularly incorporate folk song, dance, film, poetry and commentary in order to serve existing audiences hungry for deeper engagement and to cultivate adventurous new listeners. Of the Ensemble’s past programs, *Csárdás!*, with the participation of the Gáza Folk Band of Budapest, was recorded for national broadcast via Chicago’s WFMT, and has also been heard over National Public Radio. In June 2005, in association with the American Film Institute, Post-Classical Ensemble presented two classic American documentaries, *The River* and *The Plow that Broke the Plains*, whose scores by Virgil Thomson, were performed live. These presentations generated a state-of-the-art DVD produced by Naxos and released last January. The Ensemble made its sold-out Kennedy Center debut in fall 2005 in *Celebrating Don Quixote*, featuring a commissioned production of Manuel de Falla’s sublime puppet opera *Master Peter’s Puppet Show*. Next season, the Ensemble returns twice to the Clarice Smith Center and is also heard at the Library of Congress (Coolidge Auditorium) and Strathmore Center for the Performing Arts.

Angel Gil-Ordóñez, (music director) co-founder and music director of Post-Classical Ensemble, was formerly associate conductor of the National Symphony Orchestra of Spain. He has conducted symphonic music, opera and ballet throughout Europe, the United States and Latin America. In the United States he has appeared with the American Composers Orchestra, Opera Colorado, Pacific Symphony, Hartford Symphony, Brooklyn Philharmonic and National Gallery Orchestra in Washington, DC. Abroad, he has been heard with the Munich Philharmonic, Solistes de Berne, Schleswig-Holstein Music Festival and at Bellas Artes National Theatre in Mexico City. In summer 2000 he toured the major music festivals of Spain with the Valencia Symphony Orchestra in the Spanish premiere of Leonard Bernstein’s *Mass*. Born in Madrid, he worked closely with Sergiu Celibidache for more than six years in Germany. He also studied with Pierre Boulez and Iannis Xenakis in France. In addition to his music directorship with Post-Classical Ensemble, he is director of orchestral studies at Wesleyan University and music director of the Wesleyan Ensemble of the Americas. A specialist in the Spanish repertoire, Mr. Gil-Ordóñez has recorded four CDs devoted to Spanish composers and was recently awarded the Royal Order of Queen Isabella by the King of Spain.

Joseph Horowitz, (artistic director) co-founder and artistic director of Post-Classical Ensemble, has long been a pioneer in classical music programming, beginning with his tenure as artistic advisor for the annual Schubertiade at the 92nd Street Y. As executive director of the Brooklyn Philharmonic Orchestra, resident orchestra of the Brooklyn Academy of Music, he received national attention for The Russian Stravinsky, American Transcendentalists, Flamenco and other festivals exploring the folk roots of concert works. Now an artistic advisor to various American orchestras, he has created more than three dozen interdisciplinary music festivals since 1985 — including the annual American Composers Festival presented by the Pacific Symphony Orchestra. Called “our nation’s leading scholar of the symphony orchestra” by Charles Olton, former President of the American Symphony Orchestra League, Mr. Horowitz is also the award-winning author of seven books dealing with the institutional history of classical music in the United States — most recently, *Classical Music in America: A History of Its Rise and Fall* (Norton), supported by fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation, Columbia University and the National Endowment for the Humanities, and named one of the best books of 2005 by *The Economist*. As project director of an NEH National Education Project, he is the author of a book for young readers on Dvorak in America, linked to a state-of-the-art DVD. For the National Endowment for the Arts, Mr. Horowitz serves as artistic director of an annual national institute for music critics, based at Columbia University. A former *New York Times* music critic, Mr. Horowitz writes regularly for the *Times Literary Supplement* (UK) and contributes frequently to scholarly journals. He recently gave the annual Gardner Lecture in the Humanities at the University of Utah. His forthcoming book, *Artists in Exile: How Refugees from War and Revolution Transformed the American Performing Arts* (HarperCollins, March 2008), links with Post-Classical Ensemble programming at the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center next spring. For more information, see www.josephhorowitz.com.

Shi Hong Aldin (reader) is a graduate of the Shanghai Theater Academy, where she studied acting, dance and voice. She was a member of the People’s Theater Company in Tianjin until 1979. Beginning in 1979 she taught acting in Shanghai and also acted in movies and television; she also recorded voice-overs for Western movies. She moved to the United States in 1990 and has taught Chinese at the China Institute in Manhattan since 1998. She has previously appeared with Post-Classical Ensemble reciting tonight’s poetry of Meng Hao-Ran and Wang Wei.

Min Xiao-Fen (pipa) learned the pipa with her father, Min Ji-Qian, a professor and pipa master at Nanjing University. She was pipa soloist for the Nanjing National Music Orchestra from 1980 to 1992. After arriving in the United States in 1992, she began working with the composers Zhou Long, Carl Stone and Chen Yi. She has been a featured soloist with the New York City Opera, Brooklyn Philharmonic, vocal ensemble Chanticleer, San Diego Symphony and Pacific Symphony Orchestra. She has performed solo concerts at the Vienna Music Festival, Utrecht International Lute Festival, Geneva Music Festival, Berlin Chinese Music Festival and at various jazz festivals in Paris, Quebec and Jakarta. Her recording *The Moon Rising* (Cala) was hailed by *BBC Music Magazine* as “one of the best CDs of 1996.” *Viper* (Avant), a recording of improvisations with Derek Bailey, was one of *The Wire* magazine’s “1998 Albums of the Year.” In 2003 she was invited to play a solo set of Thelonious Monk’s music by “Jazz at Lincoln Center.” In 2004 her piece *The Loneliest Monk* was commissioned and played by Kitchen House Blend at the Kitchen in New York. More recently, she has appeared with her Blue Pipa Trio at the JVC Jazz Festival. She is the founder of founder of Blue Pipa, Inc. For more information, visit www.bluepipa.org.

Wang Guowei (erhu) was born in 1961 in Shanghai and joined the Shanghai Traditional Orchestra at age seventeen, later becoming erhu soloist and concertmaster. He also earned a degree from the Shanghai Conservatory with a major in erhu performance. He gained national prominence for winning important awards, including the ART Cup at the 1989 International Chinese Instrumental Music Competition and for his performances at the 15th annual Shanghai Spring Music Festival. He toured with the Shanghai Traditional Orchestra to Singapore, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Belgium, Canada and the US.

As editor, producer and host of music programs for the Shanghai Radio and East Radio, Wang Guowei introduced music by contemporary composers to Chinese audiences. He is also a prolific author of articles and papers published in major Chinese music journals. In 1994 he founded (and subsequently directed) the East Radio Invitational Artists Chamber Ensemble, which gathered the most outstanding Shanghai musicians to perform classical and contemporary Chinese music. Wang Guowei assumed the position of Artistic Director of Music from China in 1996.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Delores Ziegler, (mezzo-soprano) American mezzo-soprano and associate professor of voice at the University of Maryland, enjoys a career including appearances in leading roles at the Metropolitan Opera, Vienna State Opera, Salzburg Festival and La Scala. Her Mahler performances include a performance of the Symphony No. 8 on Telarc with Robert Shaw and the Atlanta Symphony and a previous performance of the “Abschied” from *Song of the Earth* with Angel Gil-Ordóñez and Post-Classical Ensemble. Her extensive discography includes the Mozart Requiem, Mozart’s Great Mass and Mahler Symphony No. 8 on Telarc with Robert Shaw and the Atlanta Symphony; Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony with Riccardo Muti and the Philadelphia Orchestra on EMI; Bach’s *B-minor Mass* with Nikolaus Harnoncourt on Teldec; both the Boccherini and Pergolesi *Stabat Maters* on Frequenz, conducted by Claudio Scimone; and the Mozart *Coronation Mass* on Deutsche Grammophon with James Levine and the Berlin Philharmonic.

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