A PERFORMANCE GUIDE TO WU YIMING’S A POEM CARVED IN STONE

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*A Poem Carved in Stone*, a work for piano solo by Washington DC-based Chinese composer Wu Yiming, was composed in Spring 2020 and is dedicated to the author of this dissertation. The piece is inspired by the poetry of Han Shan, a recluse who lived during the Tang Dynasty (618-907 A.D.). His poetry is in Chan (Zen) tradition. Wu depicts the imagery and philosophy in Han Shan’s poetry through highly complex rhythms, extreme sound effects and pitches, tone clusters, and extended piano techniques. This dissertation provides practical instructions for achieving these effects and executing the unconventional techniques found in this piece, which include playing inside of the piano, various standing and sitting positions, and coordination and balance. A guide to interpret this piece is from both the composer’s and the performer’s perspective. Observations are drawn directly from communications and coaching received from the composer. This study briefly explores the historical and cultural context of Han Shan’s poetry and discusses how Wu’s use of modern western compositional devices reflects the Zen philosophy. An interview with the composer is included along with an overview of both his compositions and those of composers who influenced him. It is hoped that this dissertation will encourage pianists who are not experienced with non-traditional techniques to explore new music from living composers.
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By

Dongni Xie
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

*A Poem Carved in Stone*, a work for piano solo by Washington DC-based Chinese composer Wu Yiming was composed in Spring 2020 and is dedicated to the author of this dissertation. The piece is inspired by the poetry of Han Shan, a recluse who lived during the Tang Dynasty (618-907 A.D.).¹ His poetry is in Chan (Zen)² tradition.³ Wu depicts the imagery and philosophy in Han Shan’s poetry through highly complex rhythms, extreme sound effects and pitches, tone clusters, and extended piano techniques. This dissertation provides practical instructions for achieving these effects and executing the unconventional techniques found in this piece, which include playing inside of the piano, various standing and sitting positions, and coordination and balance. This study briefly explores the historical and cultural context of Han Shan’s poetry and discuss how Wu’s use of modern western compositional devices reflects the Zen philosophy. An interview with the composer is included along with an overview of both his compositions and those of composers who influenced him.

As the dedicatee of *A Poem Carved in Stone*, I am well-positioned to offer a performance guide to this piece which includes an analysis from both the composer’s and the performer’s perspective. Observations are drawn directly from communications and coachings received from the composer. It is my hope that this dissertation will encourage pianists who are not experienced with non-traditional techniques to explore new music from living composers.

¹ Han Shan’s identity remains mysterious according to resources.
CHAPTER 2

WU YIMING: BACKGROUND

Born in 1983 in Wuxi, China, Wu Yiming established himself as a promising young composer - a “great hope for the future”\(^4\) - after receiving myriad prizes in international competitions, including being the youngest recipient ever of the prestigious Toru Takemitsu Composition Award.\(^5\) His *Reminiscence of a Dream* for orchestra was premiered by the Tokyo Philharmonic Orchestra under the baton of Chikara Iwamura in 2007. While still only 27 years old, other works were premiered by the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra and Royal Symphonic Wind Band Vooruit Harelbeke.\(^6\)

Having grown up in the Jiangnan region of China, Wu is fluent in the Chinese folk music idiom and skilled at composing traditional Chinese instrumental music (*Minyue*). Similar to other young Chinese composers, Wu received “solid early musical trainings”\(^7\) and was familiar with Western classical music, learning Western compositional techniques at a young age.\(^8\) During his college years at the Central Conservatory in Beijing, Wu explored various compositional styles while endeavoring to craft his own. *The December Concert of Swan for Chinese Chamber Orchestra* was composed in his junior year and received a prize from The Ministry of Culture of the PRC.\(^9\) World renowned Chinese composer Chen Yi said of it: “Wu’s approach to using

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\(^4\) From Oscar Bettison’s recommendation letter, provided by Wu Yiming.
\(^5\) Wu Yiming was 24 years old when awarded the third prize, https://www.operacity.jp/en/concert/award/result/result2007/index.php
\(^7\) Lei Weng, “Influences of Chinese Traditional Cultures on Chinese Composers in the United States since the 1980s, as Exemplified in Their Piano Works.” (DMA diss., University of Cincinnati, 2008), 12, https://etd.ohiolink.edu/.
\(^8\) Ibid.
\(^9\) Yi Guo.
Chinese instruments in western orchestration is extraordinary and perfect.”\textsuperscript{10} Following the premiere of his \textit{Garden of Fantasy} for winds in Harelberk, Belgium 2008, conductor Lucas Vis exclaimed “…I am enchanted by the orchestration with a pinch of Chinese art.”\textsuperscript{11} Clearly, his ability to integrate the timbre of traditional Chinese instruments with western orchestration was being met with critical acclaim.

Chinese poetry has always inspired Wu’s compositions. Besides \textit{A Poem Carved in Stone}, the connection with Chinese poetry can be found in Wu’s other two works. Wu’s orchestral work \textit{Reminiscence of a Dream} (2006) was inspired by (a poem) \textit{Song of Peach Blossom Cottage} by Tang Yin (1470-1524).\textsuperscript{12} Tang Yin was a famous painter, poet and calligrapher of the Ming dynasty (1369-1644) who lived and was active in the Jiangnan region of China where Wu grew up. Wu was inspired by the free, simple and reclusive spirit conveyed by the poem.\textsuperscript{13} The other work, \textit{On a Gate-Tower at Youzhou}, for tenor and piano (2012) is a setting of the poem \textit{Song on Mounting the Youzhou Tower}. This was written by Chen Zi’ang (661-702),\textsuperscript{14} a poet of the Tang dynasty whose poems “reveal his desire to escape the material world and express his discontentment with the corrupt officials.”\textsuperscript{15}

One of the composers who has had a major influence on Wu’s work is Toru Takemitsu.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{10} Chen Yi commented after she heard the performance of \textit{The December Concert of Swan for Chinese Chamber Orchestra}. Wu Yiming to Dongni Xie, March 2020.

\textsuperscript{11} “Wu Yiming Won Prize in Belgium”, \textit{People Daily} (overseas) (PRC) 07, December 8, 2008.


\textsuperscript{13} Wu Yiming to Dongni Xie, March 2020.


\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{16} Chou Wen-Chung states that Takemitsu is one of the two composers who have most successful attempted to combine Eastern and Western instruments in his article “Asian Concepts and Twentieth-Century Western Composers.” \textit{The Musical Quarterly} 57, no. 2 (1971):221.
Wu’s composition professor Dong Liqiang, studied composition in Japan, specializing in Takemitsu’s compositions. Wu’s *Reminiscence of a Dream* took third prize in the Toru Takemitsu Composition Award competition. Japanese composer Shin-Ichiro Ikebe complimented Wu’s “exquisite orchestration” and said he clearly heard the influence of Takemitsu.

Wu has acknowledged Xu Zhenmin and Michael Hersch as influential professors who have played an important role in his compositional development. He credited professor Xu Zhenmin as “my mentor; and his use of harmony had an impact on me. My work *On a Gate-Tower at Youzhou*, is an homage to Xu’s *Song on Mounting the Youzhou Tower*.” Wu says that Michael Hersch’s piano writing inspired his *A Poem Carved in Stone*. “I started this piece when I first came to Peabody and was studying with him.”

*A Poem Carved in Stone* is Wu’s first substantial piano solo work. His other solo works include *Vision* for flute solo and *On a Gate-Tower at Youzhou* for tenor and piano. He began writing this piece in 2011 when he first arrived in the United States to study at Peabody with Michael Hersch. Did he spend nine years on this work? The answer is no and yes. He paused writing this work during his study at Peabody and then restarted it again in 2019 after he decided to dedicate it to the author of this dissertation. “I couldn’t find a pianist who would like to spend time learning this work and was able to perform it.” However, the work remained in his mind

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17 Wu Yiming to Dongni Xie, March 2020.
18 Ibid.
20 Wu, email to Dongni Xie, March 2020.
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid.
and has ultimately become an accumulation of everything he has experienced in the intervening nine years. “I think it’s time now.” Influences from Chinese traditional instruments, the music of Toru Takemitsu, and Michael Hersch as well as Han Shan Poetry can all be found in *A Poem Carved in Stone* and are delineated in the following chapters.
CHAPTER 3

THE POETRY OF HAN SHAN

According to scholars, Han Shan’s real name is unknown. This mysterious monk named himself “Han Shan” (寒山), which means “Cold mountain or cold cliff” in Chinese. “Han Shan” (寒山) is also the name of the place where he lived for seventy years in the Tiantai Mountains. Cold Mountain appears as a symbol in many of his poems which “symbolize the spiritual quest for enlightenment and the difficulties and obstacles one encounters along the way.”

Han Shan’s historical and cultural prominence is reflected in both Asian and Western cultures. Han Shan appears in the sources of Taoist and Buddhist scriptures dating back as far as the ninth century and his poems have been well accepted since they first appeared in Japan in the sixteenth century. Translations and scholarly studies of his poetry have been published in the West since 1954. Due to the worldwide distribution of his poetry, Han Shan has had a profound impact on literature, media, art and music. Since Gary Snyder’s English translation of Han Shan’s poetry came out in 1958, “Snyder’s ‘Cold Mountain Poems’ has been widely read by American college students and poetry lovers for more than half a century” and “Han Shan became a timely icon for these three generations of counterculture youth.”

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23 It is said that he lived in a cave located in Cold Cliff (寒山) - a chain of rock cliffs located in the Tiantai Mountains. See Ling Chung, “Han Shan, Dharma Bums, and Charles Frazier’s Cold Mountain,” Comparative Literature Studies 48, no. 4 (2011): 541, https://doi.org/10.5325/complitstudies.48.4.0541.
24 Robert G. Henricks, 12.
26 Ibid., 16.
27 Robert G. Henricks, 459
28 Ling Chung, 545.
29 Ibid., 542.
Jack Kerouac quotes three poems of Han Shan in his novel *The Dharma Bums* which was published in 1958.\(^{30}\) Later in the 1990s, American novelist Charles Frazier quotes the first two lines of Han Shan’s poem\(^{31}\) as an epigraph in his historical novel *Cold Mountain* (1997), which won the U.S. National Book Award. Its film adaptation received seven nominations at the 76th Academy Award in 2003.\(^{32}\) Apart from being influential in literature and media, Han Shan’s poetry has been featured in paintings and prints by Brice Marden.\(^{33}\) These paintings and prints have been exhibited at the Tate (UK),\(^{34}\) the Metropolitan Museum\(^{35}\) and the Museum of Modern Art.\(^{36}\) Finally, Han Shan’s poetry has been an inspiration in music. Jonathan Harvey, “a distinguished British composer of international importance,”\(^{37}\) uses Han Shan’s poem in the first movement of his work *One Evening*\(^{38}\) which is for singers, instruments, electronics, and tape.\(^{39}\) Harvey argues that “what we love in music is what we call emptiness” and we can often find “emptiness” in good music.\(^{40}\) Harvey believes that the emptiness he seeks is hidden in Han

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30 Ling Chung, 542.
31 “Men ask the way to Cold Mountain. Cold Mountain: there is no through trail.” from Gary Snyder’s translation. See Gary Snyder *Riprap and Cold Mountain Poems* (Washington, DC: Shoemaker Hoard, 2004), 44.
33 Peter Schjeldahl describes Brice Marden as “the most profound abstract painter of the past four decades” in “True Colors”. New Yorker (6 November 2016).
38 There are four movements in One Evening and there are four texts to each movement. See Jonathan Harvey, “Music, Ambiguity, Buddhism: A Composer’s Perspective,” n.d., 26.
39 Max Paddison and Irène Deliège, 294.
Shan’s text – “Clear and empty shines the ocean like moonlight on snow, no trace of man nor
gods… you will see that your body and mind, like the mountains… of the outer world, are all
contained inside the true mind, wonderful and illumined.”41 It can be safely concluded that
Harvey and Wu both are inspired by Han Shan’s poetry and philosophy; as they depict the “true
mind” through their music.

The “poem” in the title of *A Poem Carved in Stone* refers to Han Shan’s poem No. 200. I
use Robert G. Henricks’s *The Poetry of Han-Shan: A Complete, Annotated Translation of Cold
Mountain* to provide an English translation of the poem. In the introduction to his book, Henrick
argues that Han Shan likes to use “fresh, striking, and dramatic images”42 in his poems. More
importantly, Henricks points out that terms such as “way”, “cliff”, “moon” and “mountain”
contain symbolic meanings which imply the spiritual search and realization of enlightenment in
Zen philosophy.43 Similarly, Mojca Pretnar identifies Han Shan’s poetry in Zen philosophy in
her article *Deciphering the Discourse Metaphor of Han Shan*:

As noted by Henricks, many of the Han Shan poems can be considered Zen poems, and
understood in terms of general Zen themes, such as the theme that there is no set way to
reach enlightenment, and there is thus no assurance that reading scriptures, meditating,
following the master’s teachings and so on can help one achieve this goal. The key
doctrine in Zen is that we already possess the enlightened mind that we seek, and the only
way to become enlightened is to realize that one’s true nature inside, and thus one’s state
of mind, is the most important thing, more so than the path one takes.44

Han Shan’s poem No. 200, as well, employs terms such as “cliff”, “moon” and “way” to
hint at his approach to enlightenment in Zen – “In good Zen fashion, that we need no guide in

41 Jonathan Harvey, 294.
42 Robert G. Henricks, 13.
43 Ibid., 16-20.
our search for enlightenment. We have the record of what others have done (their footprints), and we have that small spot inside – the original mind – that, so long as it shines, will always keep us on course.”  

On top of rocks one thousand years old,  
footprints of ancient men;  
In front of a one hundred thousand foot cliff,  
one spot that is empty and void.  

When the bright moon shines,  
it is constantly spotless and pure;  
No need to be troubled to look for someone  
to ask which way is west and which east.  

_A Poem Carved in Stone_ is an embodiment in words of Wu Yiming’s musical approach to Zen philosophy and enlightenment. In our interview Wu declared that “How I feel about my life and world now is not the discontentment or resentment found in Chen Zi’ang’s poem anymore; I find myself leaning towards Han Shan’s attitude and thoughts. This piece is a musical turnout on my way to the nature of the true mind.”  

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45 The annotation of the poem No. 200 by Henricks. See Henricks Robert G. Henricks, 282

46 The poem No. 200 (English Translation) Robert G. Henricks, 282. The text of the poem No. 200 in Chinese and English translation is in Appendix II.

47 Wu, email to Dongni Xie, March 2020.
CHAPTER 4

PERFORMANCE GUIDE

In this chapter, I discuss the extended piano techniques and the interpretation of *A Poem Carved in Stone*. Because the piano notes mentioned in this chapter are in specific octaves, I use the Acoustical Society of America octave designation system to indicate the notes on the piano.

4.1 Extended Piano Techniques

4.1.1 Piano

Before pianists start learning the extended piano techniques in this piece, they should familiarize themselves with the component parts of the piano. The extended techniques in *A Poem Carved in Stone* are mainly executed on the strings. It is important to know how the iron bars divide strings into sections and remember the division of the strings, since it is “the most obvious visual reference inside the piano.” With different brands and models, the division of strings is slightly different. I use Steinway M and discuss the execution of the extended techniques based on this model. Steinway M is commonly used in music practice rooms in the United States, although I perform this piece on a Steinway D. The main difference in the string sections between Steinway M and D is the location of the bass bar as shown in Figures 4.1 and 4.2. This differentiation causes a few problems when pianists practice on Steinway M but perform on Steinway D, because quite a few of the string techniques are executed around the bass bar. First, pianists will have to get used to a new visual reference, since the bass bar is a landmark distinguishing the division of strings in the low register. Second, the location of partial

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49 Ibid., 27.
harmonic nodes will be relocated. Certain spots where pianists must press on the strings such as G2, become unreachable on the Steinway D.

**Figure 4.1: The strings and iron bars of Steinway M.**

![Steinway M](image1)

**Figure 4.2: The strings and iron bars of Steinway D.**

![Steinway D](image2)
4.1.2 Pedal

The usage of pedals plays an important role in *A Poem Carved in Stone*. Although there is no pedal marking on the score, pianists should use pedals to assist the implementation of extended techniques and to achieve the desired sound effects.\(^50\) Pianists will need to use the damper pedal and sostenuto pedal (middle pedal) and both pedals “must be timed carefully in order to produce the intended resonance.”\(^51\) Pianists should depress the damper pedal before the execution of extended techniques on strings, including harmonics, mute, pizzicato and glissando, to create more resonance. The sostenuto pedal (S.P.) is used in the following cases.

Example 4.1: Wu, *A Poem Carved in Stone*, mm.1-3.\(^52\)

![Example 4.1: Wu, *A Poem Carved in Stone*, mm.1-3.](image)

Score remains unpublished and has not been engraved. Used with permission from the composer.

In Example 4.1, the sostenuto pedal is used on the first two clusters to avoid the muddiness created by the damper pedal. The following A flat, played by a mallet on the strings, requires the use of sostenuto pedal as well, because the quintuplets in the bottom line (circled in orange) must sound articulated and short.\(^53\) While the sostenuto pedal is being used to hold the two clusters,

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50 Wu, email to Dongni Xie, May 2020.


53 Wu, email to Dongni Xie, May 2020.
the pianist can use the “finger sostenuto pedal” instead, raising the damper of A flat by holding
the key silently until the next bar. To make the mallet line more resonant, the pianist should use
the damper pedal sparingly on the rests between the two quintuplets. Similarly, in measure 3, the
pianist should depress the sostenuto pedal after silently depressing the A flat on the keyboard.

In measure 19 (Example 4.2), the sostenuto pedal is used to hold the cluster in sff, in
order to facilitate a clear entrance for the first quintuplet and the mallet line. The damper pedal
should be used for the mallet line to ensure a forte dynamic and sufficient resonance.


Score remains unpublished and has not been engraved. Used with permission from the composer.

4.1.3 Position

A performer’s position at the piano will vary greatly while playing *A Poem Carved in
Stone*. Usually, pianists remain in a standing position while implementing techniques inside the
piano. However, in this piece, highly demanding conventional techniques often occur
simultaneously with a series of extended techniques inside the instrument. This renders

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impractical the execution of some passages on the keyboard from a standing position. More importantly, pianists will not be able to use both the damper pedal and the sostenuto pedal. Therefore, the pianist should sit much higher than usual, and stay close to the piano, in order better see and reach the strings. Occasionally, the pianist may need to stand up when the partial harmonic nodes are too far to reach, which usually happens when there is no need for the sostenuto pedal. I have noticed that depressing the damper pedal with the left foot, especially when playing in the high register, helps to reduce the tension in the right knee and in the back. Apart from having a good balance and support while shifting between sitting and standing, one must be cautious during practice, being always mindful of any physical discomfort. In addition, the pianist should pay attention to the lighting when performing on the stage, to make sure that the division and markings of the strings are clear. The wrong lighting could cause the strings to “create distracting shadows on the soundboard and an unsettling three-dimensional effect.”

4.1.4 Preparation

To execute the extended piano techniques in the piece, pianists will need percussion mallets, a triangle beater, note tags to mark the damper, and chalk or sewing threads to mark the strings. Since “percussion mallets come in a variety of types and sizes” and a mallet’s head can be made of different materials, including yarn, rubber, wool, felt and hard plastic, which make various sounds on strings, the pianist should try different sizes and materials and pick the ones which make the best sound. The material of the chosen mallets should not be harder than the strings to avoid any damage, hence materials such as hard plastic, brass and aluminum are not

55 Jean-Francois Proulx, 22.
suitable for this piece.57 The sizes of the triangle beater range from small, medium to large. Pianists should pick one in a size which will make enough vibration when placing on the strings. The mallets and the triangle beater should be located somewhere easily accessible. For example, the beater can be placed in the “triangle” area of the bass bar, which is close to the string set of C#2 where the beater will be used (see Figure 4.3).

Figure 4.3: The placement of the triangle beater when not in use.

Where to put mallets is a bit tricky. One choice is the space between the bass bar and treble bar 1, on top of the tuning pins next to the wooden case (see Figure 4.4). There may be some extraneous sound if the stick hits the frame and bars. This could be mitigated by wrapping the stick with cotton sewing threads. Another option would be to put them on the keyboard, when the time window between two uses of mallet is extremely short. For example, in measure 2, I leave the mallet on the keyboard, as the mallet is used in measures 1 and 3.

57 Ibid., 102.
Finally, the music rack needs to be removed in order to be able to reach into the strings. *A Poem Carved in Stone* is a one movement piece with 89 measures and the A1 section (mm.63-89) repeats the A section (mm.1-34). It is therefore entirely possible and highly recommended to memorize the piece. For security, the pianist can have the score on the music rack placed at the back of the treble bars.

4.1.5 Techniques with Foreign Objects

4.1.5.1 Mallet

- Striking Strings

This technique requires the pianist to use a proper mallet to play directly upon the strings.
of the indicated notes which have specific pitches, ranging from a single note (Ab), a semitone (GAb) to a cluster (AbABb). I choose to use Innovative Percussion IP1005 mallet\textsuperscript{58} and Innovative Percussion ENS10 mallet\textsuperscript{59} in this piece. IP1005 (see Figure 4.5) is used to play on the string set of A flat; ENS10 (see Figure 4.6) is for the remaining combinations. Both mallets are hard, in order to imitate the timber of \textit{muyu}\textsuperscript{60} – a relatively dull and clear sound. Example 4.3 shows the notation of this technique.

\textbf{Example 4.3: Striking string, Wu, \textit{A Poem Carved in Stone}, mm.1.\textsuperscript{61}}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{example43.png}
\caption{Example notation of the technique.}
\end{figure}

Score remains unpublished and has not been engraved. Used with permission by the composer.

“Using mallets properly is not quite as easy as it seems.”\textsuperscript{62} When striking the strings, the mallet could easily hit the wrong strings as a result of natural bouncing. In order to maintain control and stability while reaching inside the piano, it is best to hold the mallet in a stable position while keeping the wrist flexible.\textsuperscript{63} By holding the mallet “approximately one to three


\textsuperscript{60} Muyu is a wooden percussion instrument that originated from East Asia. It is used by monks and lay people in the Mahayana Buddhist tradition. It is often used during rituals usually involving the recitation of sutras, mantras, or other Buddhist texts. See “Wooden Fish,” Wikipedia, accessed August 7, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wooden_fish&oldid=971717684.

\textsuperscript{61} Wu, \textit{A Poem Carved in Stone}, 1.

\textsuperscript{62} Jean-Francois Proulx, 90.

\textsuperscript{63} Laurie Marie Hudicek, 105.
inches above the strings,"64 the pianist can “keep his eyes on the striking element as it approaches the target.”65 Also, the pianist should hold the hand “only as high as necessary for the striking motion not to be obstructed by the frame or case.”66 There is also another way to maintain the stability in the action. As shown in Figure 4.6, instead of striking on the strings further beyond the dampers (Figure 4.5), the pianist can also strike on the segment of strings between the damper and the agraffe, positioning the mallet against the cast iron frame. In this case, the cast iron frame helps to control the mallet’s bouncing reaction, which will improve accuracy while achieving a good resonant sound.

Figure 4.5: Striking on strings beyond dampers.

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64 Ibid.
65 Ibid.
66 Laurie Marie Hudicek, 105.
In measures 23-24 and 79-80, striking on the high-pitched strings produces a fairly weak sound. The dynamics also imply the acoustic limit. The big head rubber mallet fits better here, enabling a fuller coverage on the strings and a better clarity of the resulting sound. In addition, striking with the side of the mallet creates the best sound quality on those strings.


Score remains unpublished and has not been engraved. Used with permission by the composer.

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Finally, mallets could cause damage or even break the strings. Pianists should be careful and gentle while practicing this technique. Instead of hitting the strings repeatedly, it is preferable to strike on the iron frame or stress bar to practice the rhythm and the coordination, without causing damage to the strings.

- Striking the Iron Bar

In measure 3, one should use a mallet to strike the iron bar and then play on the A flat strings. The damper pedal should be pressed down before the mallet hits the iron bar, to create resonance.

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68 Jean-Francois Proulx, 90.
Example 4.5: Striking the iron bar, Wu, *A Poem Carved in Stone*, mm. 3.

Score remains unpublished and has not been engraved. Used with permission by the composer.

4.1.5.2 Triangle Beater

I choose to use a medium size triangle beater in this piece. In measures 11 and 67, the pianist needs to grab the beater to strike the cast iron frame and play the note C#2 while placing the beater on the vibrating strings, as shown in Example 4.6. The pianist should be careful when taking the beater away from the vibrating strings, to avoid making an extra buzz.


Score remains unpublished and has not been engraved. Used with permission by the composer.

Figure 4.8: Placing the triangle beater on the string set of C#2.

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4.1.6 String Techniques

Wu states that the string techniques in this piece are greatly inspired by the Chinese instrument guqin\(^71\) whose “sounds are produced by plucking open strings, stopped strings, and harmonics.”\(^72\) It is recommended to listen to some music performed by the guqin\(^73\) in order to better imitate the timber of the guqin, while implementing the string techniques. All four types of string techniques in the piece are executed on the strings between the agraffes and bridge pins. This distance is called the speaking length of a string, as shown in Figure 4.9.

![Figure 4.9: Speaking length and points of a string.](image)

4.1.6.1 Harmonics\(^74\)

Producing harmonics is the most difficult string technique in *A Poem Carved in Stone*, because the finger must be placed exactly on a specific point of the string. Firstly, pianists need to know the definition and relationship between *fundamental*, *harmonic*, *node* and *partial*. A string “vibrates as a whole to create the fundamental.”\(^75\) The fundamental is the actual pitch heard while playing a note on the keyboard. When the note is played, in addition to the actual

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\(^71\) The guqin is a plucked seven-string Chinese musical instrument. It has been played since ancient times and has traditionally been favored by scholars and literati as an instrument of great subtlety and refinement. See “Guqin,” Wikipedia, accessed August 11, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Guqin&oldid=972306834.

\(^72\) Ibid.

\(^73\) A guqin concert performed by the guqin master Chen Leiji can be heard at “Guqin Master Chen Leiji,” Asia Society, Performed January 20, 2018, YouTube video, 42:38, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=35ZKN-H7at4.


\(^75\) Laurie Marie Hudicek, 89.
pitch, there are several overtones produced although they are too feeble to be heard.\textsuperscript{76} The string “then vibrates in halves, thirds, quarters, and so on, each creating a different harmonic.”\textsuperscript{77} In order to hear the harmonic note instead of the actual pitch (fundamental), pianists must place the finger on a specific point of the strings while playing the same note (fundamental) on the keys. This specific point of the strings touched by the finger is called a node.\textsuperscript{78} “Every string in the piano has several nodes, each producing a different harmonic. The different harmonics that can be produced on a string are identified with the term \textit{partial}.”\textsuperscript{79}

In \textit{A Poem Carved in Stone}, all six harmonics are third partial harmonics as indicated in the score. The third partial is located close to the midpoint of the speaking length of a string (see Figure 4.10).

\begin{center}
\textbf{Figure 4.10: The ratio of the third partial of a string.}\textsuperscript{80}
\end{center}

The first third partial harmonic appears in measure 7 (see Example 4.7). The pianist needs to produce harmonic note D\textsubscript{4} by pressing the third partial node on the string set of G\textsubscript{2}. It is rare that the pianist can produce the correct pitch on the first try. It will be necessary to keep playing G\textsubscript{2} on the keyboard, while pressing different nodes around the area (marked with blue arrow in Figure 4.10) on the string set until one hears the pitch of D\textsubscript{4}. Searching for the fine-

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{78} Jean-Francois Proulx, 67
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., 68.
\textsuperscript{80} I diagrammed this figure based on the one in \textit{A Pedagogical Guide to Extended Piano Techniques}, see Jean-Francois Proulx, 71.
tuned sound is similar to how other instrumentalists work on intonation (yes finally pianists have to deal with being “in-tune”!) Once the third partial node is found, the pianist can move a tiny bit up or down on the strings till one hears a clear and full sound of D4 without any buzz.

Example 4.7: Third partial harmonic, Wu, A Poem Carved in Stone, mm. 7. 81
(The note D4 and A4 in the middle of the chord indicate the third partial harmonic notes that need to be heard.)

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However, there is a problem when the pianist activates the third partial node on the strings of D3 (circled in orange in Example 4.7), because the node is not reachable (Figure 4.11) due to the D3’s string set crossing under the bass strings on the Steinway M. The same problem occurs later in measures 25 and 28.

Figure 4.11: Unreachable third partial node indicated by the index finger.

81 Wu, A Poem Carved in Stone, 1.
To solve this issue, the pianist should find another partial that is reachable and can produce the same harmonic note (A4). According to the harmonic series, the fourth partial of A2 produces the harmonic note A4, because the pitch of the fourth partial sounds two octaves above the fundamental.

Figure 4.12: The ratio of the fourth partial of a string.

In measures 25 and 28, the third partial node of Db3 and D3 string sets are unreachable as well. The pianist should press the fourth partial node of the string set of Ab2 and F#2, in order to produce the same harmonic notes (Ab4 and F#4) as Db3 and D3. The notes in red in Example 4.8 indicates the actual fundamental notes played on the keys. It is noticeable that the two fundamental notes in each measure form the interval of a second (mm. 1) and an octave (mm. 25 and 28). This method of finding the harmonic note positions the pianist’s hands in a more favorable position for playing an actual key on the piano. This saves time in locating them on the keyboard, leaving the pianist free to focus on the inside of the piano.

Example 4.8: Fourth partial of notes in red, Wu, A Poem Carved in Stone, mm. 7, 25 and 28.

Score remains unpublished and has not been engraved. Used with permission by the composer.

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83 Wu, A Poem Carved in Stone, 1 and 4.
When performing on a Steinway D, pianists will need to use different harmonic partials due to the fact that the string divisions are different from the model M, as discussed earlier in the chapter. In measure 7, one can produce harmonic notes D4 by pressing the second partial node of the string set of D2. In measure 28, one can produce harmonic notes F#4 and C#4 on the same set of strings – F#3, by pressing the second partial node\(^{84}\) (F#4) and third partial node (C#4), playing the key of F#3 twice.

**Example 4.9: Second partial of notes in red, Wu, *A Poem Carved in Stone*, mm. 7, 25 and 28.\(^{85}\)**

Score remains unpublished and has not been engraved. Used with permission by the composer.

Having found the correct nodes on the strings, the pianist should mark their locations with chalks or sewing threads. Chalk marks can be removed by the vibration of strings (bass strings especially) and by repeated touching. Since a pianist will need to touch the same nodes several times, the marking on the bass strings can sometimes disappear in the middle of the piece. Another disadvantage of chalk marks is that they can sometimes disappear under the stage lights. Therefore, I choose to mark the nodes with sewing threads. These are safer than erasable chalk, as they will not be erased by frequent contact with the pianist’s fingers. As shown in Figure 4.13, I knot threads of different colors around the strings on the Steinway M, to categorize the nodes of the six harmonic notes – D4, A4, Eb5, Ab4, F#4, C#5– as three pairs (see the

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\(^{84}\) According to the table of harmonic series, the second partial sounds one octave above the corresponding note played on the keyboard. See “Harmonics,” Grove Music Online.

harmonics in Example 4.8). Pairing them with colored threads shortens the time needed to locate the nodes. As shown in Figure 4.13, the nodes are marked in three colors as three pairs.

Figure 4.13: Marked strings with colored sewing threads on a Steinway M.

When activating the node on a set of strings, the pianist should use the fingertip to press strings firmly while the other hand plays on the key with “enough force to offset the muting of the strings.”86 After striking the key, the pianist should hold the pedal and remove the finger from the strings immediately, “so that harmonics ring more luminously.”87 When moving the finger away from the nodes, the pianist should act lightly, swiftly and carefully, in order not to accidentally retouch the strings, thereby stopping the sound.

86 Mayumi Tayake, 49.
4.1.6.2  Pizzicato

In this piece, *pizzicato* is required in measures 10 and 11 and as well in measures 66 and 67 where the pianist directly plucks on the strings of the corresponding notes. However, the string sets of these three pizzicato notes are a great distance from each other. Besides marking the strings and dampers, the pianist can also make use of the iron bars to locate the strings. For instance, the Eb5 is next to the treble bar 1 inside of the Steinway M while the E2 is next to the bass bar inside of the Steinway D. The pianist can use the thumb or any preferred finger to pluck firmly either the right or left side of the string set. “Starting the plucking motion with the finger on the string or very close to it helps to control this motion and obtain a good tone.”\(^{88}\) More importantly, which side of the string set to pluck will depend on which hand the pianist uses to

\(^{88}\) Jean-François Proulx, 35.
pull the string. As shown in Example 4.10, measures 10-11 is one of the places that requires the pianist to multitask.

Example 4.10: Pizzicato, Wu, *A Poem Carved in Stone*, mm. 10-11.\(^{89}\)

![Example 4.10: Pizzicato, Wu, *A Poem Carved in Stone*, mm. 10-11.\(^{89}\)](image)

Score remains unpublished and has not been engraved. Used with permission by the composer.

Therefore, the pianist needs to decide which hand to use for the repeated notes in the top line and which hand to use to put the triangle beater on the string set (circled in red), while executing the three pizzicatos. This author chooses to use her left-hand thumb on the first pizzicato (Eb5), leaving her right hand for the repeating D6. Immediately, her left hand moves down to pluck the left side of the string set of E2 while the right hand takes care of the beater. The last pizzicato is plucked by her right hand on the right side of the string set.

4.1.6.3 Mute

Wu draws a diamond on the stems of notes Bb4 in measure 13 and A2 in measure 14,\(^{90}\) to indicate a muted sound effect.

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\(^{90}\) The same mute symbol appears in mm. 69 and 70.
Example 4.11: *Mute*, Wu, *A Poem Carved in Stone*, mm. 13 and 14.\(^{91}\)

Score remains unpublished and has not been engraved. Used with permission by the composer.

To achieve this effect, the pianist locates a point close to the agraffe of the strings, and then depresses the key with a *sf*.\(^{92}\) The duration of each note in the score requires a long-lasting sound. In addition to depressing the damper pedal, the placement of the finger matters—the closer the finger is to the agraffe “more of the string is allowed to vibrate.”\(^{93}\)

**Figure 4.15: Execution of mute on the string set of Bb4 (very close to the agraffe).**

4.1.6.4  Glissando

In measures 13-15 and 69-71, the pianist will have to implement a series of glissandos on the strings and on the keyboard. Right after the mute Bb4 in measure 13, rapid glissandos (blue

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\(^{92}\) Wu told me that the use of muted sound effect is inspired by Japanese composer Akira Nishimura. This notation and performance note can be found in Nishimura’s music. See Nishimura Akira, *Clarinet concerto: Kavira*, Tokyo: Zen-On Music, 2006, 33.

\(^{93}\) Jean-Francois Proulx, 50.
arrow) are played back and forth on the strings between Bb4 and Bb5, followed by a glissando (orange arrow) on the keys going all the way to the highest note (C8). In measure 15, glissandos (blue arrow) are played in a sweeping motion on the strings between E5 and E6. Playing glissando on the strings is similar to playing glissando on the keys. Using the fingernail on the strings will result in more sound and speed.


It is impossible to strictly implement the glissandos on the strings in measure 13. The treble bar 1 is located in the middle of the glissandos and this holds true for both Steinway M and Steinway D. The composer suggests that the performer can start and end the glissando in the approximate area defined by the two bars. Practically speaking, the glissandos in measure 13 would end by treble bar 1 which is D5 on the Steinway M and C#5 on the Steinway D.

It is impractical to use a plectrum to execute the string techniques in this piece. The performer is already tasked with too many things to do and would barely have time to pick it up and put it back during the performance. All the string techniques in this piece can be executed by using different parts of the finger. However, to prevent blisters, the pianist should not over practice the string techniques!

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94 Wu, email to Dongni Xie, January 2020.
96 Wu, email to Dongni Xie, January 2020.
97 A general term for a piece of material with which the strings of an instrument are plucked. Vladimir Ivanoff, "Plectrum," Grove Music Online.
4.1.7 Special Keyboard Techniques: Tone Clusters

Inspired by his composition professor at Peabody, American composer Michael Hersch, Wu makes liberal use of tone clusters which can be heard frequently in Hersch’s piano works such as *Vanishing Pavilion*. In *A Poem Carved in Stone*, clusters can be divided into two groups: semitone clusters and pentatonic clusters.

4.1.7.1 Semitone Cluster

The semitone cluster appears in two ways in the piece. One is with every note written out clearly.


![Example 4.13: Semitone cluster, Wu, *A Poem Carved in Stone*, mm. 5-6.](image)

Score remains unpublished and has not been engraved. Used with permission by the composer.

It is helpful to mark the contour of each cluster (the letters refer to notes from bottom to top) when learning the score. Once the contour notes are located, the pianist can fill in the notes between them, since all notes of each cluster are just a semitone apart. In measure 6, the increase of beams indicates *accelerando*. How should one best work on these clusters to locate them quickly in order to make an effective *accelerando*? An easy way is to follow the top note of each cluster. Looking at the top line of the cascade, we see an ascending chromatic scale: F-Gb-

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98 Wu, email to Dongni Xie, January 2020.
G-Ab-A-Bb-B-C. While practicing one can play the contour notes first, placing each major third in the indicated registers, following the chromatically ascending line. Then one can fill in each interval with the semitones between the contour notes. This approach applies in measure 34 as well. The other kind of semitone cluster is shown in Example 4.14.

**Example 4.14: Semitone cluster played by palm, Wu, A Poem Carved in Stone, mm. 4.**

Score remains unpublished and has not been engraved. Used with permission by the composer.

This symbol indicates a cluster on both white and black keys. The pianist needs to use the palm and fingers to press all keys below F2. Since each person’s palm size is different, the number of notes varies with each performer.

4.1.7.2 Pentatonic Clusters

A complete black block indicates that each cluster consists of only black keys (pentatonic notes).

**Example 4.15: Pentatonic clusters in black block, Wu, A Poem Carved in Stone, mm. 38-39.**

Score remains unpublished and has not been engraved. Used with permission by the composer.

Similar to Example 4.14, the coverage of keys varies with different palm sizes. The notation of these two groups of clusters suggests that the pianist must repeat the cluster rapidly in

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both measures. Musically speaking, the pianist should play them with a sense of direction, leading one group into the next instead of smashing the keys with an aggressive sound. Physically, the pianist should stay close to the keys, pressing down with flat fingers, relaxing the wrist, using natural arm weight and letting the hand bounce.

4.1.8 Combined Techniques

*A Poem Carved in Stone* is a demanding piano piece which requires the pianists to implement extended and conventional piano techniques at same time, maneuvering between the keyboard and inside of the piano. Body coordination, hand-eye coordination and a well-balanced position are crucial to execute all techniques in combination. Pianists need to carefully choreograph their movements including picking up, using and putting back tools. For example, in measure 1, the pianist should hold the mallet with the left hand while pressing down the first two clusters, instead of grabbing the mallet after playing the cluster and then striking the strings. The same approach can be used in measures 7 and 63. In this way, the transition from the keyboard to the strings is smoother.

**Figure 4.16: The left hand holding the mallet while playing the cluster.**

As discussed briefly in *pizzicato*, measures 10-15 also must be well choreographed. As shown in Example 4.16, a triangle beater (circled in blue) and the big rubber head mallet (circled
in red) will be used in measure 11. A series of moves should be done smoothly and coherently as marked in numbers.

**Example 4.16: Wu, *A Poem Carved in Stone*, mm. 10-15.**

The purple marks indicate the order in which each hand takes action. The trickiest ones are action 3-7, action 10-12, and action 15-16. During these actions, one hand often is grabbing the tool while the other hand is executing techniques inside of the piano. Having good eye-hand coordination and precision is essential. The first challenge is using the triangle beater between actions 3 and 4. When the left hand is on action 3 (pizzicato), simultaneously the right hand should be on action 4, grabbing the beater, striking the cast iron frame, putting it on the strings (C#2) and then leaving for action 5. Action 4 is completed with two hands, marked as RH – LH. Once the beater is in place, the left hand should immediately depress C#2. The next task is using

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the mallet between actions 5 and 6. Again, the left hand must grab the mallet while the right hand is on action 5 (pizzicato). This then facilitates the timely execution of action 6 (striking strings). Once these actions are completed, the beater and the mallet must be put back while taking action 7. The orange arrow shows when the mallet needs to be put back; the blue arrow marks when the beater can be removed (RH). Actions 10 and 16 require two hands at the same time but both hands should leave for the next position as quickly as possible. Note that on action 10, the left hand is pressing the strings while the right hand stays on the keys; however, in action 12 (glissando) the hands switch. The choreography of these six measures requires much practice until one can execute it smoothly without any hesitation.

4.1.9 Practice

Ideally, pianists should use the same grand piano whenever practicing this piece, so that they don’t have to mark dampers and strings every time. At a minimum they should have access to the same piano for at least one week. Although the score and notation look overwhelming at first, pianists should not feel intimidated. They should first capture the outline, locating both hands on the highest and lowest points of each phrase, including the furthest reaches inside the instrument. This may take some time as the score is laid out in five staves. Often the lowest note can be found in the middle staff. When practicing a part which requires multitasking, pianists should leave the small figures out, focusing on the main lines, in order to first discover the shapes of the patterns and the directions of the phrases. Ideally, the physical movements will then flow and blend into the music while multitasking.

4.2 Interpretation

In addition to understanding Han Shan’s poetry and mastering the execution of extended techniques, it is important to know the composer’s thoughts about interpreting his piece. This is
one of the luxuries of working with a living composer. To help performers to interpret the piece, Wu provides this Zen story which was in his mind while composing *A Poem Carved in Stone*:

There was once a young monk, who lived in a temple with an old monk deep in the mountains. Wherever the old monk wandered through the towering trees or traced the footsteps of the old sages, the young monk would follow him. One day, the old monk was finally as old as a storm-wrecked home. Outside a humble temple off the cliff, he breathed his last breath, frozen to death. Heavy snow started to fall. The candle-lit evening became all the more ominous. The tapping of *muyu* and the chanting of the sutras that came from inside the temple, all of a sudden, became gusts of wind, howling and galloping like the evil spirits. And yet, from the tip of their tongues, rosy and candlelit, came the intoxicating smell of wave after wave of peach-colored clouds, engulfing the young monk and hurling him off the bottomless cliff, with all their might. Bathed in moonlight, a stone came into sight, in which Han Shan’s poem102 is carved.103

This story presents performers with a vivid image, along with special sonic effects such as the tapping of *muyu* and the howling and galloping wind. In order to convey this imagery to the audience, the performer needs to understand Wu’s use of tempo, time signature and rhythm.

When it comes to reproducing the flowing quality and space of Chinese poetry in my music, the Western traditional metrical organization seems odd to me. Takemitsu’s approach to time and space have inspired me a lot, which helps me to construct the metrical organization and rhythms in my work. The slow tempo of *A Poem Carved in Stone* creates a Zen meditative atmosphere of the inner world, while the constantly changing time signatures and varied rhythms imply evil spirits from the outer world. This is my attempt at telling the story in a traditional oriental way.104

Although the rhythm is notated in great detail, the performer should pursue “a fluid, non-metrical rhythmic expression,”105 to interpret it with a feeling of liberation.106 For instance, the effects of harmonics (circled in pink) and pizzicato (circled in blue) depict the candle’s “intoxicating smell

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102 The poem refers to the poem No.200, see the end of Chapter 3 or Appendix B.
103 Wu wrote the story in Chinese. Dr. Shiya Wang helped me to translate it. The original text of the story is included in Appendix B.
104 Wu Yiming, email to Dongni Xie, April 2020.
105 Peter Burt, 274.
106 Wu Yiming, email to Dongni Xie, April 2020.
of wave after wave of peach-colored clouds."\textsuperscript{107} When imitating the timber of the guqin, the pianist should allow the sound itself to serve as the rhythm by listening to the sound as it disappears instead of counting the beat.\textsuperscript{108} Rather than counting and following irregular subdivision strictly, the performer should feel the pulse and allow the sound to simply resonate in space.

\textbf{Example 4.17: Wu, \textit{A Poem Carved in Stone}, mm. 7-11.}\textsuperscript{109}

![Example 4.17: Wu, A Poem Carved in Stone, mm. 7-11.](image)

Score remains unpublished and has not been engraved. Used with permission by the composer.

On the other hand, the performer should make use of the relatively stable rhythmic line in a phrase to maintain the inner pulse and direct the phrase. The remainder of the phrase is in "a fluid, non-metrical rhythmic expression."\textsuperscript{110} In measures 13 and 14 (Example 4.18), the semitone (F#\textsubscript{1}G\textsubscript{1} in the middle staff highlighted in yellow) which appears repeatedly at the end of each beat is one such example. Acoustically speaking, these are the lowest notes in the two bars. These bass figures imperceptibly give an impetus to the phrase. Similar cases can be found in the top line of measures 15 and 16 (highlighted in yellow).

\textsuperscript{107} Wu Yiming, email to Dongni Xie, April 2020.
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{109} Wu, \textit{A Poem Carved in Stone}, 1 and 2.
\textsuperscript{110} Peter Burt, 274.
Example 4.18: Wu, *A Poem Carved in Stone*, mm. 9-16.\textsuperscript{111}

![Score of A Poem Carved in Stone, mm. 9-16.](image)

Score remains unpublished and has not been engraved. Used with permission by the composer.

The score of *A Poem Carved in Stone* is full of dynamic details which should be performed as written. Wu states that the various dynamics of each muyu motif reflect the unstable inner world of the young monk.\textsuperscript{112} To bring out the dynamic variety, the performer’s approach and control of the mallet on the strings are key, as well as the use of pedals. In addition, the performer should consider the dynamic range of the other voices in order to ensure that the dynamics in the mallet line are not interrupted.

Example 4.19: Wu, *A Poem Carved in Stone*, mm. 1, 7 and 24.\textsuperscript{113}

![Mallet lines “muyu motif” in various dynamics.](image)

Score remains unpublished and has not been engraved. Used with permission by the composer.


\textsuperscript{112} Wu Yiming, email to Dongni Xie, January 2020.

\textsuperscript{113} Wu, *A Poem Carved in Stone*, 1 and 4.
The dynamic change and intensity of irregular rhythms express a wide range of emotional states from soft whispers to bizarre hysteria,\textsuperscript{114} which can be exemplified in the first seven bars (Example 4.20). Beneath the mallet line, the extremely detailed dynamics imitate the evil spirits. The performer should keep a balance between the mallet line and the underlying figures, conveying the image that “the monk is trying to dispel the devil by tapping the muyu, as the devil is sneaking into the room and whispering to the monk.”\textsuperscript{115} The performer must make an effective \textit{crescendo} and \textit{accelerando} on the cascade of clusters (measure 6), reflecting a state of “bizarre hysteria”, with the damper pedal halfway down so that the harmonics which follow can be heard.

\textbf{Example 4.20: Wu, \textit{A Poem Carved in Stone}, mm. 1-7.}\textsuperscript{116}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{example4.20}
\caption{Example 4.20: Wu, \textit{A Poem Carved in Stone}, mm. 1-7.}
\end{figure}

Score remains unpublished and has not been engraved. Used with permission by the composer.

\textsuperscript{114} Wu Yiming, email to Dongni Xie, January 2020.
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{116} Wu, \textit{A Poem Carved in Stone}, 1.
The performer is expected to create an extreme effect at the end of the B section (mm. 34-62). From measures 59-62, an accumulation of volume and speed in the rapidly repeating notes in the box brings about the climax of the piece. It is the moment of “peach-colored clouds engulfing the young monk and hurling him off the bottomless cliff, with all their might”. Abruptly, measure 62 stops (sf), followed by a sudden emptiness and stillness – a sixteenth rest and soft harmonics. Since the notes in the box run repeatedly for nearly four bars, it is best for the performer to start increasing the volume and speed from the second to the last bar, hopefully creating for the listeners the illusion of falling off cliff.\footnote{Wu Yiming, email to Dongni Xie, January 2020.}

\begin{example}
\textbf{Example 4.21: Wu, A Poem Carved in Stone, mm. 57-64.}\footnote{Wu, \textit{A Poem Carved in Stone}, 7.}
\end{example}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{example421}
\caption{Example 4.21: Wu, \textit{A Poem Carved in Stone}, mm. 57-64.}
\end{figure}

Score remains unpublished and has not been engraved. Used with permission by the composer.

With the freedom given in rhythm, the performer should follow the exact dynamic markings and broaden the sonic range.

To sum up, the ultimate goal when performing this piece is to present audiences with the imagery and philosophy of Han Shan’s poetry. The performer must understand the relationship

$\footnote{Wu Yiming, email to Dongni Xie, January 2020.}$

$\footnote{Wu, \textit{A Poem Carved in Stone}, 7.}$
of the poetry to the elements in this piece and be proficient with the extended techniques. The sonority created by the combination of traditional and extended techniques should fit the context. Having a comprehensive understanding of all of the above and the composer’s input, the performer should be able to “free” themselves from the complex notations and demanding techniques, and to enjoy reacting to the resonance when playing in different halls. The performance of this piece should be treated as an “improvisation.”

119 Wu Yiming, email to Dongni Xie, April 2020.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

*A Poem Carved in Stone* is composed of many interesting elements including ancient Chinese poetry, Zen and extended piano techniques. I provide a detailed study on the extended techniques and a guide to interpret the piece along with a brief exploration of the imagery and philosophy of Han Shan’s poetry. Being a technically demanding piece, *A Poem Carved in Stone* also requires the performer’s imagination and creativity in producing sound from inside the piano as well as on the keys. Through learning *A Poem Carved in Stone*, I was able to discover a rich palette of tones and timbers that are not often heard in traditional classical works. However, the ability to realize tone and timber and bring them out comes from years of studying and playing the traditional classical works. “Contemporary music has its roots imbedded firmly in the past and a study of this point of view will prove both interesting and fruitful.”

It is unfortunate that while we demand the newest and the latest in so many aspects of our lives, most performers and audiences still prefer music composed two hundred years ago to music composed in our time. This study aims to encourage pianists - especially the ones who have never played pieces composed after the 1920s – to learn and perform more music written by living composers. It is my hope that this performance guide, in addition to offering instructions for playing *A Poem Carved in Stone*, can draw people’s attention to music from living composers, can raise pianists’ curiosity about new works with new techniques, and can help them enjoy the process of learning and recreating these works.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW WITH WU YIMING

(Emails January – June 2020)
Is this your first time composing a piano solo work and are there any similarities to earlier compositions?

Wu: Yes. I started writing *A Poem Carved in Stone* in 2011, when I was in my first year of master’s at Peabody, studying with Michael Hersch. I stopped my project before long, because I couldn’t find a pianist who would like to spend time learning this work and to be able to perform it. However, it had been in my mind since then. The piece reflects what I have experienced between 2011 and 2020. I think it’s time to complete it and let people hear it. An obvious similarity is the inspiration of Chinese poetry. The orchestral work *Reminiscence of a Dream* (2006) was inspired by Tang Yin’s *Song of Peach Blossom Cottage* (poem); *On A Gate-Tower at Youzhou for tenor and piano* (2012) was inspired by Cheng Zi’ang’s poem *Song on Mounting the Youzhou Tower*. Generally speaking, I like to capture and pursue the timber of certain Chinese instrument through western instruments. In this piece, I try to imitate the timber of *guqin* and *muyu* by employing extended techniques inside the piano.

Chinese poetry has inspired your other compositions. What makes *A Poem Carved in Stone* different from others?

Wu: First of all, this piece is a piano solo work. With this powerful instrument, I combined extensive extended and conventional piano techniques, in order to create extreme sound effects. It’s very demanding as you can see. *On A Gate-Tower at Youzhou* is easier to approach. Secondly, how I feel about my life and world now is not the discontentment or resentment found in Chen Zi’ang’s poem anymore; I find myself leaning towards Han Shan’s attitude and thoughts. This piece is a musical turnout on my way to the nature of the true mind.

Who has most influenced your compositional development?

Wu: Toru Takemitsu, I would say, in addition to my major professors. I started to study Takemitsu’s compositions (introduced by my professor Dong Liqiang) when I was in college and won third prize at the competition in my senior year. Takemitsu has been influential in my compositions since then. In *A Poem Carved in Stone*, my approach to time and space is greatly influenced by him. Michael Hersch’s piano writing inspired me as well, especially his use of clusters. Both Scriabin and my professor Xu Zhenmin’s use of harmony had an impact on me. In fact, my work *On A Gate-Tower at Youzhou*, is an homage to Xu’s *Song on Mounting the Youzhou Tower*.

Is *A Poem Carved in Stone* programme music? How does the title of the piece imply the music?

Wu: Well, most of my compositions come with a descriptive title. I never tried to categorize them as either programme music or absolute music. There was a Zen story, which relates to the title, in my mind while composing this piece. In this story, one of Han Shan’s poems appears at the end – “Bathed in moonlight, a stone came into sight, in which Han Shan’s poem is carved: 千年石上古人踪，万丈岩前一点空。明月照时常...”

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121 The full text in English translation is in Chapter 4.2 Interpretation. The original text in Chinese is in Appendix B.
This is why the piece is called *A Poem Carved in Stone*. It is all about the spiritual search and the nature of the true mind, with relating details, imagery and imaginative sound effects. The title, story and the poem provide an inspirational reference to the performers.

How much liberty do you allow a performer to have, especially in the passages that combine the extended and conventional techniques?

Wu: The tempo I set is eight note equals around 42. The performer can take the approximate tempo as it allows them to execute both types of techniques at the same time. As mentioned above, Takemitsu’s approach to time and space have inspired me a lot, when it comes to reproducing the flowing quality and space of Chinese poetry in my music. The performer should interpret it with a feeling of liberation, thinking of the imagery of the story and the poem and listening to the sound as it disappears instead of counting the beat. The performance should sound improvised.

Do you recommend any outside reading or listening that might help performers to understand it?

Wu: I would like to recommend that the performer listen to the original sound of *muyu* and *guqin*, which would help one to imagine and achieve the sound effects in this piece. In addition, I also suggest that the performer can listen to my professor Michael Hersch’s performance of his own piano work *Vanishing Pavilion*.123 His approach to this piano work and his interpretation are inspiring and instructive.

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122 See English translation of the poem Appendix B.

APPENDIX B

FULL TEXT OF HAN SHAN’S POEM NO. 200 AND ZEN STORY
二 00 千年石上古人踪

千年石上古人踪，万丈岩前一点空。

明月照时常皎洁，不劳寻讨问西东。\(^{124}\)

**English Translation**

On top of rocks one thousand years old,
footprints of ancient men;
In front of a one hundred thousand foot cliff,
one spot that is empty and void.

When the bright moon shines,
it is constantly spotless and pure;
No need to be troubled to look for someone
to ask which way is west and which east.\(^{125}\)

**The Original Text of the Zen Story Provided by Wu**

有一个少年僧，跟着老高僧避居在深山寺庙。老高僧常带他在千年石上、万丈林里漫游，
去巡访一个个高德贤人的踪迹。等到老高僧衰老得像风雨中倒下的破屋一样，冻死在悬崖
边一个很小的庙门前。这时候飘起了大雪，燃着烛火的夜更加浓黑。少年僧听见庙门深处
传来诵经声和木鱼声，忽然变成了狂风大作，变成妖魔鬼怪的哭叫、奔跑，而在烛火的红
舌尖上，飘散出冷香醉人的一波波桃色云，卷着少年僧直冲向了万丈悬崖，一块巨石滚落
而下……。月光照亮了刻在石头上的一首诗：千年石上古人踪，万丈岩前一点空。明月照
时常皎洁，不老寻讨问西东。寒山。\(^{126}\)

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\(^{124}\) Han shan zi, and Xu guang da. Han shan zi shi jiao zhu. (Xi an: Shan xi ren min chu ban she, 1991), 132.

\(^{125}\) The poem No. 200 (English Translation) Robert G. Henricks, 282.

\(^{126}\) Wu Yiming, email to Dongni Xie, February 2020.
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Discography


Scores

