## 0805131

# THREE CHINESE POEMS

Su Shi dreaming of my deceased wife on the night of the 20<sup>th</sup> day of the first month

LI SHANGYIN HER PROMISES TO COME WERE EMPTY WORDS

MEI YEOCHEN SACRIFICE TO THE CAT THAT SCARED ALL THE RATS

(MMVIII)

FOR CHAMBER SEPTET,

WITH MEZZO-SOPRANO AND ORIENTAL INSTRUMENTS

(C. 14 MINS)

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## **NOTES**

To be performed as interpreted by the players.

36-key Chinese sheng yusheng

mezzo-soprano (Pinyin fluent)

Tuned Tibetan crystal singing bowls; C, D, E, F, G, A, B,

with yarn, rubber, and coil mallets

(Tuned metallic singing bowls are viable, if less desirable)

20" orchestral gong, 8" opera gong, lion drum

Viola de gamba (Treble)

Viola de gamba (Bass)

#### Su Shi dreaming of my deceased wife on the night of the 20<sup>th</sup> day of the first month

十年生死两茫茫 不思量自难忘 千里孤坟无处话 淒涼 纵使相逢应不识 尘满面髦如霜 夜来幽梦忽还乡 小轩窗正梳妆 相顾无言惟有泪千行 料得年年肠断处 明月夜短松岗

Shí nián shēng sǐ liăng máng máng Bù sĩ liàng zì nán wàng Qiān lǐ gũ fén wú chù huà gĩ liáng Zòng shǐ xiảng féng yīng bù shí Chén mặn miàn bìn rú shuặng Yè lái yöu mèng hũ huán xiảng Xiǎo xuān chuāng zhèng shū zhuāng Xiảng gù wú yán wéi yôu lèi giản xíng Liào děi nián nián cháng duàn chù Míng yuè yè duặn sông gặng

Ten years living dead both boundless Not think of capacity self hardly possible forget Thousand li alone grave not place say wife cold Even if together meet must not recognise Dust cover face, temples like frost Night come deep dream suddenly return home Little window properly dress make up Expect must every year heart break place Bright moon night thin pine guard

Ten boundless years now separate the living and the dead, I have not often thought of her, but neither can I forget. Her lonely grave is a thousand li distant, I can't say where my wife lies cold. We could not recognise each other even if we met again, My face is all but covered with dust, my temples glazed with frost. In deepest night, a sudden dream returns me to my homeland, She sits before a little window, and sorts her dress and make-up. Mutual look not speak, just be tears too much flow We look at each other without a word, a thousand tears now flow. I must accept that every year I'll think of that heart breaking place, Where the moon shines brightly in the night, and bare pines guard the tomb.

### LI SHANGYIN HER PROMISES TO COME WERE EMPTY WORDS

Lái shì kông yán qù jué zông
Yuè xié lóu shàng wǔ gēng zhông
Mèng wéi yuǎn bié tí nán huàn
Shū bèi cuī chéng mò wèi nóng
Là zhào bàn lŏng jīn fěi cuì
Shè xūn wēi dù xiù fú róng
Liú láng yǐ hèn péng shān yuǎn
Gèng gé péng shān yī wàn chóng

Come be empty word go without trace
Moon slant tower on fifth watch bell
Dream be far part call hard call
Write reason hurry achieve ink not thick
Candle shine half cover gold emerald
Musk vapour tiny degree embroider lotus
Liu young already regret Peng shan far
More separate Peng shan ten thousand times

Her promises to come were empty words, she's gone without a trace, The moon is slanting on the tower as I hear the fifth watch bell. In my dream we were far apart, I found it hard to call, Hurriedly I try to write, but find the ink too thin. The candle's radiance covers half the gold and emerald bed, A tiny hint of musky scent remains on embroidered lotus. Young Liu already regretted that Pengshan hill lay far away, We two are separated by ten thousand Pengshan hills.

#### MEI YEOCHEN SACRIFICE TO THE CAT THAT SCARED ALL THE RATS

众鼠惊祭猫 自有五白猫 鼠不侵我书 今朝五白死 祭与饭与鱼 送之于中河 咒尔非尔疏 昔尔啮一鼠 街 鸣绕 庭 除 欲使众鼠惊 意将清我庐 一从登舟来 舟中同屋居 糗粮虽其薄 免食漏窃余 此实尔有勤 有勤胜鸡猪 世人重驱驾 谓不如马驴 已矣莫复论 为尔聊郗歔

Zì yǒu wǔ bái māo Shǔ bù aīn wǒ shū Jīn cháo wǔ bái sǐ Jì vũ fàn vũ vú Sòng zhī yú zhōng hé Zhòu ěr fēi ěr shū Xí ěr niè vì shǔ Xián míng rào tíng chú Yù shǐ zhòng shǔ jīng Yì jiāng gīng wǒ lú Yì cóng dēng zhōu lái Zhōu zhōng tóng wū jū Qiǔ liáng suī qí bó Miăn shí lòu giè vú Cĭ shí ĕr yŏu gín Yǒu aín shèna iī zhū Shì rén zhòng qũ jià Wèi bù rú mã lú Yĩ vĩ mò fù lùn Wéi ěr liáo chī xū

Self have 5 white cat Rat not invade my books Today morning 5 white die Sacrifice with rice and fish See off it at middle river Incantation you not you neglect Before you bite one rat Hold in mouth cry around yard remove Want cause crowd rat frightened Thought will clear my cottage From board boat come Boat in together room live Dry grain although its thin Evade eat drip steal from This real you have industriousness Have industriousness surpass chicken pig Ordinary person stress spur horse drive Say not like horse donkey Already finish not again discuss For you somewhat cry

When I had my Five White cat, The rats did not invade my books. This morning Five White died, I sacrifice with rice and fish. I see you off in the middle of the river. I chant for you: I won't neglect you. Once when you'd bitten a rat. You took it crying round the yard. You wanted to scare all the rats. So as to make my cottage clean. Since we came on board this boat, On the boat we've shared a room. Although the grain is dry and scarce, I eat not fearing piss or theft. That's because of your hard work, Harder working than chickens or pigs. People stress their mighty steeds. Saying nothing's like a horse or ass. Enough-I'm not going to argue, But cry for you a little.

#### **COMMENT**

Following from an increasing personal interest in the Chinese language, and culture, the three poems of Three Chinese Poems are taken from contrasting contexts within the history of Chinese literature. The aim was to ally the thematic character of the pieces with the music, while creating a fusion of Western and Asian forms, as in the coming together of instruments of quite different provenance. The Sheng is a type of mouthorgan that has developed from a simple 21-note model carved from wood for the mainstay of Chinese cultural celebrations throughout the ages, to a common 36-key model reinforced by metal in widespread usage today. The bold and brassy textures seemed to offer lots of potential to juxtapose against voice. The Lusheng is a larger (up to 7 metres), therefore lower sibling to the Sheng, and generally constructed from wood has a more mellow and pastoral texture, while keeping the dynamic range of the Sheng. Also limited to a pentatonic tuning (as was the early Sheng) it worked as a good model for building typically Asian melodies that shift in and out between the other textures. In turn, this motivated the choice of mezzo, rather than soprano, the conventional choice for Chinese opera, for the lower textures worked well alongside the lusheng. Crystal singing bowls are a type of ceremonial instrument used widely in Tibet for meditation, and as such their tuning from C-B is claimed to offer differ vibrations for healing across different areas of the physique. Although their use here is not

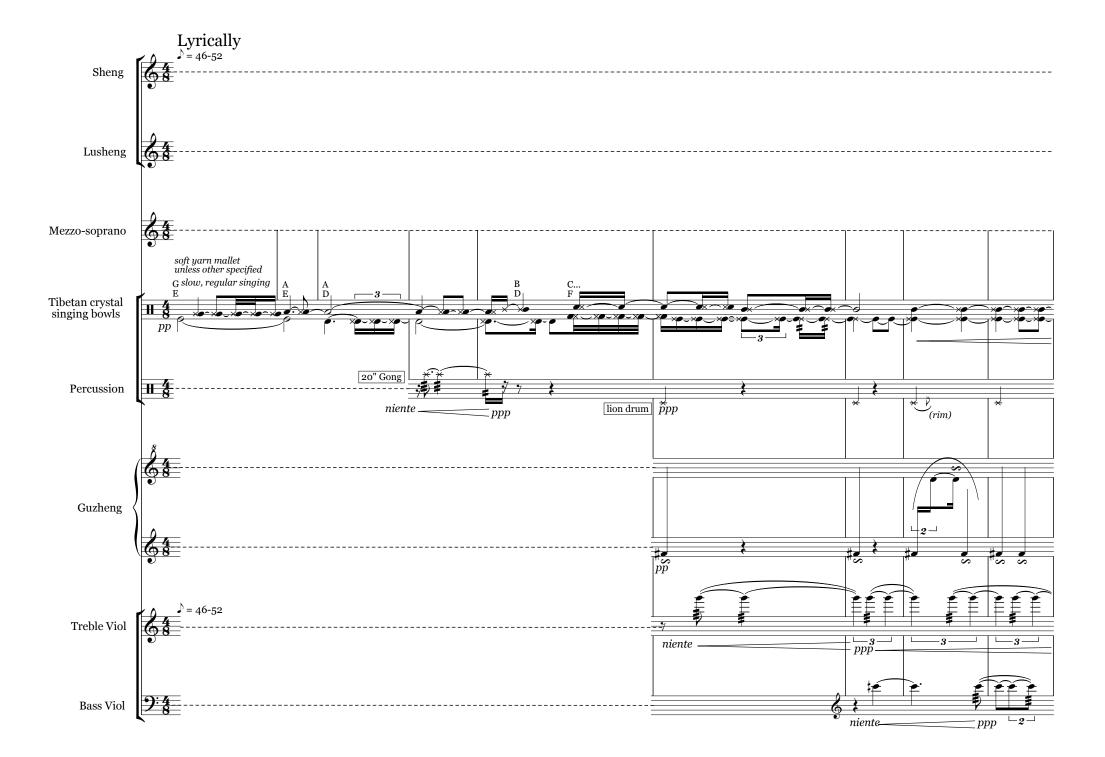
particularly therapeutic or mystical in this sense, the ethereal, sine-type texture works I feel well with voice and the two wind instruments. Striking, as opposed to 'singing' the bowls has a quite distinct reverberating warmth that made it useful for simple settings alongside melismatic vocal melody. The gongs provide a) context, and b) textural colour, particularly used in sustained rolls, and the lion drum as a fairly conventional rhythmic device. Finally, the viols have a less brash, and altogether subtler tone than their more modern counterparts, which makes them preferable here, and they have an unusually exotic following also, which I felt better suited the piece. I've stayed away from extended techniques and harmonics on count of there being no (discoverable) model for their correct scoring.

The structure is then based around the 3 poems with 'areas of ellision' or intermission between that often make some more virtuosic solo explorations amongst without the vocal setting. Overall, the piece over the 14 minutes gains in textural layers, developing from a sparse, simple and ethereal setting with the singing bowls and the outset, to the numerous competing textures of the final poem, particularly the closing measures. The piece in a sense closes into its own density during the final poem, only released by the enduring 'xü' after the closing FFF.

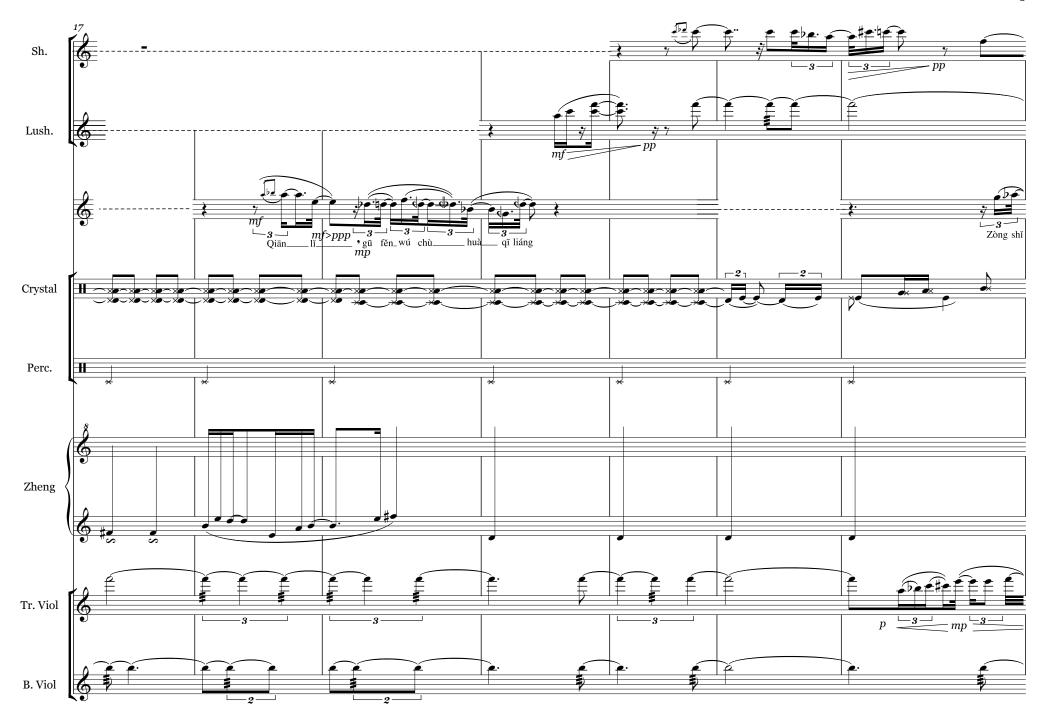
Notation presented some problems initially, since it is convention to score in *jianpu* or numerical notation, for interpretation within Asian culture. It is dubious, however, whether this could be real-time translated by Western chamber performers, and so traditional scalic Western notation seemed preferable, despite any patriarchalism this implies. Getting to grips with *jianpu* myself was a motivation, and indeed perhaps a more desireable outcome may be a dual-notation score, but this was problematically complicated and easy to misread while putting the work together. Pinyin translation similarly seemed more viable than *hanzi* for Western readers, and perhaps more particularly was necessary for the accentuation of individual syllables internal to each structure.

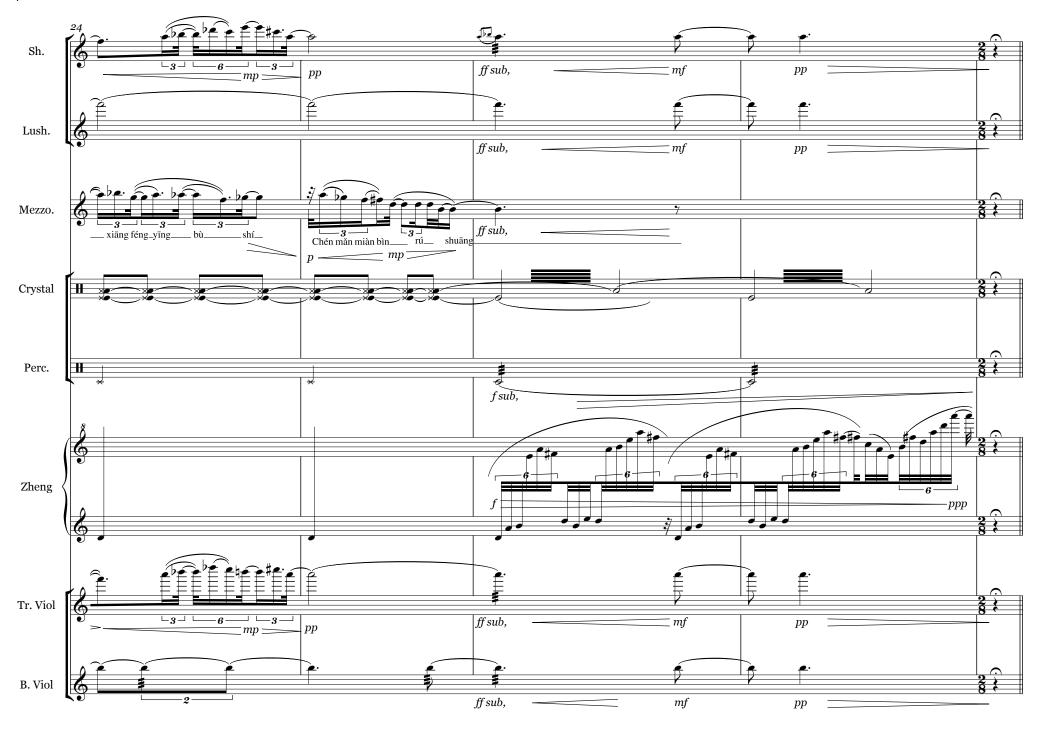
Very little specification has been given to technique and scoring, since by nature the poetry settings desires a good deal of flexibility and 'free'—if you like—improvisation. Resources on oriental instrumental technique remain relatively sparse in print in the UK, and online is not always too beneficial, so while every effort has been made to imply overall effect in each instance, interpretation should find more natural results that listing each and every desired texture.

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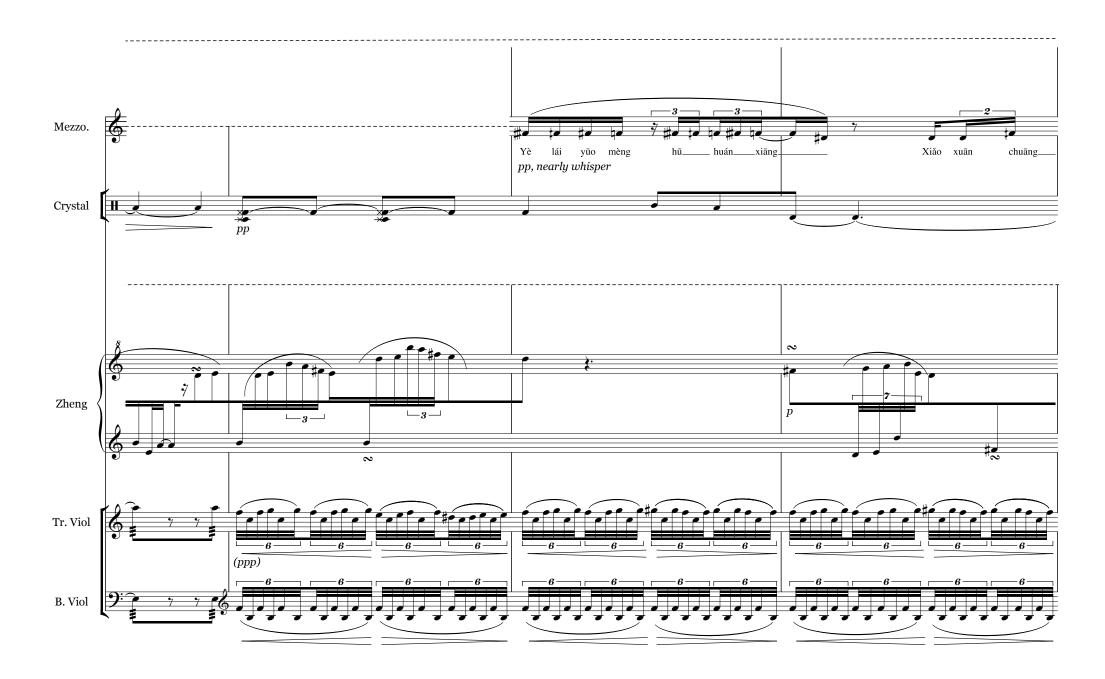












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