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Before Daybreak

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Koh Cheng Jin
Before Daybreak
《孤燈挑盡》

2020
for violin solo
6'



Program notes

“Fireflies flitting the hall, mutely he pined away;
The lonely lampwick burned out; still he could not sleep.
Slowly beat drums and rang bells; the night began to grow long;
bright shone the Milky Way; daybreak seemed to come late.” - translated by Xu Yuanchong

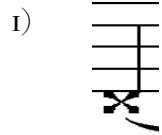
The moving words of Chinese poet Bai Juyi’s literary masterpiece *Song of Everlasting Sorrow*

《長恨歌》 continue to affect me today, especially as a composer writing in troubled times.

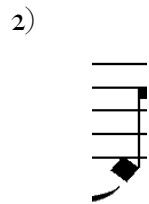
Through its painful narration of Emperor Tang Xuanzong’s mourning his beloved concubine Yang Guifei, the sentiments of isolation, longing and darkness, painted in the most graceful manner, may also resonate with contemporary citizens in certain circumstances.

As a violinist and Yang Qin (Chinese dulcimer) player myself, I find meaning in connecting both cultures so dear in the powerfully resonant tone of a single violin, which resembles closest to the lamenting voice. Paying homage to solitude and loss, this piece entangles nostalgic elements of Chinese music through the use of Erhu (Chinese fiddle) techniques with harsher sonorities that dissipate, at last, into the distance. Memories of the happier past occasionally flash by, though gone as soon as they come. It is a musical poem dedicated to all forms of yearning, as perpetual as they are, or have to be.

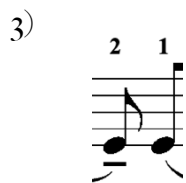
Performance instructions



This notation, found in the Ode to Remembrance section (Rehearsal A), indicates no vibrato on the note.



This notation indicates using sudden fast vibrato, increased bow speed and pressure on the note, without changing the bow's direction. As a result, a slight accent is created on this held note, creating tension. The player should then relax the fingers immediately afterwards before moving on to the next note. This playing style partially emulates one of the many vibrato techniques of Erhu (Chinese fiddle) playing, named 壓揉 *Ya Rou*, where the player adds pressure to the fingers with vibrato to express the intensity and flavor of the music. Since the amount of vibrato pressure that can be applied is limited by the fingerboard of the violin, the increased bow speed and pressure on the note will suffice.



This notation shows a fingering change on the same note. Each set of fingering change should be played with slight portamento in between the two notes. This emulates the 同指換把 *Tong Zhi Huan Ba* technique of Erhu playing, where the portamento, resulting from this change, adds more color to the texture.

Before Daybreak

《孤燈挑盡》

Actors, still young, began to have their hair grey;
 Eunuchs and waiting maids looked old in palace deep.
 Fireflies flitting the hall, mutely he pined away;
 The lonely lampwick burned out; still he could not sleep.
 Slowly beat drums and rang bells; the night began to grow long;
 bright shone the Milky Way; daybreak seemed to come late.

-Excerpt from Song of Everlasting Regret 《長恨歌》, Bai Juyi 白居易 (809).

KOH Cheng Jin 高程錦
 (April 2020)

Lament

♩ = 70

grave, freely

(vib.)

2

sul G

sul tasto

6

p mp p (no cresc.)

3

sul pont.

vib. portamento

ord.

1 0 1 0 1

pp ppp

4

sul A

6

p mp

5

sul A

3

tender

espr.

mp p mp ppp

7 *tr* **3**

accel.

9 *mf* *p*

10 *mf* *f*

A tempo
intense

11 *ff* *accel.* **6**

poco a poco agitato

13 *fff* **3** *8va* **3**

rit.

15 *f possibile* *sul G molto vib. (ugly sound)*

A Ode of Remembrance

♩ = 28

(♩ = 56)

17 processional

p pensive

B Flowingly

♩ = 60

41 *mf* 6 6 6 6

43 *mf* 6 6 rubato 6

45 *p* 6 6 6

47 *mf* 6 5 3 6

49 *f marcato* poco rit. 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 *ff*

Piu mosso

51 *mp* *p* *mf*

54 *mf*

58 *pp* *f* *arco* *stringendo*

Detailed description: This section of the score consists of three staves of music. The first staff (measures 51-53) begins with a mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic and features a sixteenth-note scale with a sixteenth-note chordal accompaniment. A sixteenth-note slur is marked with a '6' above it. The second staff (measures 54-57) continues with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic, including trills and a sixteenth-note chordal accompaniment. The third staff (measures 58-60) starts with a pianissimo (*pp*) dynamic and includes a forte (*f*) dynamic, with the instruction 'arco' and 'stringendo' indicating a change in playing style and tempo.

C **Happy Reminiscence**

$\text{♩} = 132$
playfully

60 *ff* *pizz.* *arco* *mp*

67 *sfp* *mp* *mf*

73 *sfp* *f* *mf*

Detailed description: This section of the score consists of three staves of music in 2/4 time. The first staff (measures 60-66) begins with a fortissimo (*ff*) dynamic and includes a pizzicato (*pizz.*) instruction. The second staff (measures 67-72) features dynamics of sforzando (*sfp*), mezzo-piano (*mp*), and mezzo-forte (*mf*), with a triplet of eighth notes. The third staff (measures 73-78) continues with dynamics of sforzando (*sfp*), forte (*f*), and mezzo-forte (*mf*), also including a triplet of eighth notes.

cantabile

80

f

85

ricochet

ppp

p

90

f

8va

mf

Broadened, warm

♩ = 128

93

trm

97

f

mp

3

3

5

5

bowing ad lib.

rit.

passionate

100

3

3

3

7

molto vib.

D Farewell

8^{va} ----- $\text{♩} = 80$

103 *soulful* *sul tasto*

fff *f* *p* *ppp*

Più lento - Allargando al fine

$\text{♩} = 30$
warm, soulful

106 *sul tasto*

p *mp* (no cresc.) *mp*

110 *Sul D (muffled)*

mp *mf*

114

niente