



American Record Guide

January/February 2019

CHEN-YI: *Concertos for String Instruments*
Lizhou Liu, va; David Russell, vc; Wang Guowei,
huqin; Mira Wang, v; Boston Modern Orchestra
Project/ Gil Rose

BMOP 1058—69 minutes

The orchestral and chamber music of Chinese composer Chen Yi is atmospheric and extravagantly colorful, full of delicate percussion showers, swooping glissandos, and shivery bent notes. Much of it is chant-like, some of it is songful, and sometimes it is relentless and brutal. It is full of adventure, eschewing the *Yellow River Concerto* clichés that bedevil a fair amount of contemporary Chinese music. As Frank Otteri puts it in his superb notes, Chen Yi has found a way to create a “seamless interweaving of traditional Chinese and western classical musical traditions”, both in the materials of the music and in the instruments themselves.

Spring in Dresden and the Suite for Cello and Chamber Winds are brittle and slightly sinister, no doubt influenced by Chen Yi’s immersion in the avant-garde when she attended Columbia University. The Fiddle Suite, which shows off the timbres and colors of various Chinese instruments, opens with a lovely piece for erhu, aptly called ‘Singing’, a demonstration that Chen-Yi can be lyrical when she wants to. My favorite work is the early *Xian Shi*, an exciting, go-for-broke Viola Concerto written when Chen-Yi was still an undergraduate in China, played with stunning intensity by Lizhou Liu and the orchestra.

SULLIVAN