

# American Record Guide

independent critics reviewing classical recordings and music in concert

JULY/AUGUST 2019

**LIANG:** *Xiaoxiang; 5 Seasons; 1000*

*Mountains, a Million Streams*

Gao Hong, pipa; Cien-Kwan Lin, sax; Boston  
Modern Orchestra Project/ Gil Rose

BMOP 1061—57 minutes

Lei Liang (b. 1972) seeks to “create music as if painted with a sonic brush”. Painting seems to be among Mr Liang’s dominant interests. These works consist of abstract strokes of shape and color, inspired by his Chinese heritage. Growing up as his musicologist mother was shipped out as a farmer in the midst of the Cultural Revolution, he eventually settled in America, where he became involved with Chou-Wen Chung. He later earned his PhD at Harvard and now teaches at University of California-San Diego (a hotbed of American avant-gardeism).

*Xiaoxia* (2009, rev. 2014), for alto saxophone and orchestra, is named after an area between rivers in Hunan province. The soloist’s sonority fits in with the general atmosphere.

*Five Seasons* (2010, rev. 2014), for pipa (five-string lute) and orchestra (originally string quartet) is another version of the composer’s style: the segments are colorful and brief and can be considered continuous sketches without large-scale structure. They could be considered images seen in passing.

*A Thousand Mountains, A Million Streams* (2017), is a tone poem for large orchestra. Like everything else on this program, one needs to put “expectation” in any sense of linearity aside and concentrate instead on the Moment. These moments are influenced by the doings of the 60s avant-garde (Davidovsky and similar modernists were part of his early training) but all is profoundly colored by Liang’s local landscapes and nature. Lengthy notes by Robert Kirzinger.

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