

# R E V E L A T I O N S

CHAMBER MUSIC BY

Su Lian Tan

Jupiter String Quartet

Bruce Brubaker, piano



ARSIS

1. Life in Wayang: I. Gods Descend
2. Life in Wayang: II. Ballade
3. Life in Wayang: III. The Chattering Strings
4. Orfeo in Asia: I. Invocation
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## Program Notes

### *Life in Wayang*

*Wayang* is a type of traditional puppet theater found across the Malay world, most notably in Indonesia and Malaysia. In the type best known internationally, *wayang kulit*, painted leather shadow puppets depict stories adapted from the Hindu epics and accompanied by the layered, cyclical intonations and punctuating gong tones of bronze *gamelan* orchestras. Held outdoors, often in conjunction with religious events, *wayang* performances represent a central place of gathering within communities as children and adults alike can witness both the story world on the screen and the “behind-the-scenes” working of the puppeteer and musicians. *Life in Wayang*’s tripartite structure, mirroring that of traditional *wayang* narratives, transports the listener into the aural, mental, and communal states of *wayang* performance.

*Life in Wayang* was commissioned by the Takacs String Quartet. They premiered it in April 2003 at Middlebury College, Middlebury, Vermont.

I. This first movement struggles with our concepts of god and pious love. Beckoned towards the world of light and shadows by the solo violin, the listener is suddenly plunged by the entry of all four instrumental voices into a world where quickly-shifting tremolo and pizzicato evoke the flickering light and darkness of the *wayang* world, and the sharp shifts of the puppets as they enact sacred-secular dramas. Lush, sweeping dissonances interspersed with solo interjections suggest interplay of dramatic characters and the emotions of the audience. The emergence of an even, oscillating ostinato in the middle voices provides a *gamelan*-like core melody over which cello and violin voices twist and turn. With a sudden break to silence, a final pianissimo commentary carries the listener to the next movement.

II. As humans are prone to loving each other, so the music of the second movement charts this journey of rapture and heartbreak, easy and difficult, through twists and turns. Instrumental voices harmonizing in a Western Romantic idiom evoke ballads both familiar and forgotten, bringing the scale of the shadow play from celestial to human. Sudden interjections from the individual voices interrupt these sweet tonalities, returning the listener to the rhythmic and harmonic world of the first movement. Like chiming bells, new strident instrumental attacks mark metered triads that announce a final coda in which both tonalities are reconciled then fade away.

III. The third movement brings us back to the present as we resume our place in the audience of wayang performed in a celebration of community. The playful initial melody unfolds accompanied by pizzicato, which then fragments and intensifies into polyvocal conversation. As the narrative reaches its climax, the quartet's frantic rhythm slows. Suddenly, the wayang performance is over. With a final quiet commentary, the audience disperses.

## *Orfeo in Asia*

Orfeo—legendary musician, poet, and prophet of ancient Greek myth—has made his way not to the underworld to chase his beloved Eurydice, but is instead spirited away to Southeast Asia. Credited with the ability to charm all living things, Orfeo expands his musical skills as he explores an exotic new landscape.

I. Fascinated by new modalities he encounters, Orfeo tunes his lyre to a pentatonic tuning, outlined in the bass range of the piano. Droning voices emerge from the texture, resembling Islamic chant, broadcast from a nearby minaret. An encounter with a coy, introverted young woman reminiscent of Eurydice leads the poet into a meditative state marked by sparse, repeated minimalist thirds—first accented, then undulating, finally fading away.

II. The second movement finds Orfeo playing with new-found melodies, introduced quietly in the bass. Bard that he is, he explores blending counterpoint with the seemingly horizontal, cyclical layered melodies of the gamelan. Orfeo compares this newfound musical language to that of the chorales of Europe, as individual voices join and diverge, their sinuous forms embodying his enthrallment with the abstract, yet subtle and pristine movements of nine-year-old Balinese dancers. A lingering melody in pianissimo draws the scene to a close.

III. The expansive tolling of the gamelan's gongs heralds the start of the third movement. For our protagonist, the chase is on, marked here in swift bass melodies. A glimpse of Eurydice gives Orfeo pause as he attempts to synthesize his experiences through the meshing of the atonal and pentatonic, regular meter and free rhythm. A gentle ostinato, punctuated by short motives like the strokes of gongs, concludes his exploration.

## *Revelations*

*Revelations* was commissioned by Paul Nelson for Sophie Shao, cellist, and is dedicated to them. The piece represents the intricacies of life as a scholar, a teacher, and a role model.

I. The transformation of Baroque counterpoint through contemporary rhythms and a modern note palette evoke a central struggle of an academic life: the pressure to achieve individually while remaining devoted to a community of peers and students. These professional aims—sometimes conflicting, sometimes complimentary—are embodied in distinctive instrumental lines that progress in their own manner, yet are bound together by their contemporaneous expression. The challenge of pursuing higher ground in the face of relentless distractions becomes the central tenant of the piece as the instruments race urgently to an apex, a density of experience that concludes in tremolo.

II. The mezzo-soprano voice of the cello conveys the human voice. In the second movement, it “sings” about the emotions that result from the exertions, sometimes joyous and beautiful, other times weary from effort. The piano joins in these ruminations in illuminating this indeterminate and often tumultuous path as truths are revealed in a musical confession.

—Dr. Elizabeth Clendinning, 2016  
Assistant Professor of Music, Wake Forest University



## Su Lian Tan

Su Lian Tan is a much sought-after flutist and composer. Her music has been described as “the stunner of the evening,” (*Washington Post*) and “...refined, cultured compositions...Rewarding for everyone...A must-own for flutists and flute enthusiasts” (*Fanfare Magazine*). Making her first recordings at the age of 14, she has been featured in *Flute Talk* and *American Record Guide*. Tan has been commissioned by groups such as the Grammy-winning Takacs String Quartet, Da Capo Chamber Players, and the Vermont Symphony. Recordings of her music include “Grand Theft and Other Felonies,” featuring Carol Wincenc performing Autumn Lute Song and Tan as a flutist, as well as “Music by Su Lian Tan,” featuring *Jamaica’s Songs*, written in collaboration with author Jamaica Kincaid. Her intermedia chamber opera *Lotus Lives*, for which she received a Discovery

Grant, has been performed to great acclaim. *Revelations*, dedicated to cellist Sophie Shao, and *Ming*, a concerto composed for virtuoso trumpeter Joe Burgstaller, the premier performance occurring in Singapore, received similar praise. Recent commissions include *Legends of Kintamani*, a concerto for cellist Darrett Adkins.

A dedicated teacher, Tan is Professor of Music at Middlebury College, where she continues to mentor talented young musicians. She has given seminars and master classes at Oberlin College, Boston University, and the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music in Singapore, to name a few. She has received numerous accolades and citations for teaching, as well as for her music, including awards from ASCAP, The Academy of Arts and Letters of Quebec, and the Toulmin and Naumburg Foundations. She has also been awarded several residencies from the Yaddo and MacDowell colonies. She holds degrees from the Trinity College, London (FTCL), Bennington College (BA), The Juilliard School (MM), and Princeton University (PhD).



## Jupiter String Quartet

The Jupiter String Quartet is a particularly intimate group, consisting of violinists Nelson Lee and Meg Freivogel, violist Liz Freivogel (older sister of Meg), and cellist Daniel McDonough (husband of Meg, brother-in-law of Liz). Formed in 2002, the members of this tightly-knit ensemble make it their mission to spread a love of chamber music through both performing and teaching. In addition to touring throughout the United States and abroad, the Jupiters are Artists-in-Residence at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where they maintain private studios and run the string chamber music program. The quartet also places a strong emphasis on developing relationships with future classical music audiences through outreach work in schools and other educational performances. They believe that chamber music, because of the intensity of its interplay and communication, is one of the most effective ways of spreading an enthusiasm for “classical” music to new audiences.

It was early exposure to chamber music that brought these four musicians to form the Jupiter String Quartet. In their early years together, the Jupiters studied with mentors from both the Cleveland and Takacs quartets extensively, and were lucky to find early success with several chamber music honors, including the grand prize at the Banff International String Quartet Competition, the grand prize at the Fischhoff National Chamber Music Competition, winner of the Young Concert Artists Competition, the Cleveland Quartet Award, and an Avery Fisher Career Grant, all between 2004 and 2008. They were also members of the Lincoln Center Chamber Music Two Society from 2007-10.

Today the quartet concertizes across the Americas, Europe, and Asia. They relish the opportunity to perform in the world's finest halls, including New York's Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Center, London's Wigmore Hall, Boston's Jordan Hall, Mexico City's Palacio de Bellas Artes, Washington, DC's Kennedy Center and Library of Congress, Austria's Esterhazy Palace, and Seoul's National Arts Center and Sejong Chamber Hall. They have been enthusiastically received at many major music festivals, including the Aspen Music Festival (where they performed their first complete Beethoven quartet cycle), West Cork (Ireland) Chamber Music Festival, Caramoor International Music Festival, Music at Menlo, Maverick Concerts, Madeline Island Music Festival, Rockport Music Festival, the Banff Centre, Yellow Barn Festival, Bowdoin International Music Festival, Lanaudiere Festival, Skaneateles Festival, and the Seoul Spring Festival, among others.

The Jupiter String Quartet feels a strong connection to the core string quartet repertoire. They have performed Beethoven string quartet cycles at the Aspen Music Festival, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and the Lanaudière Festival in Quebec, as well as a Bartók cycle at the University of Illinois. They also frequently commission and premiere new works, including string quartets by Syd Hodkinson, Hannah Lash, and Dan Visconti, as well as a quintet (with vocalist Thomas Hampson) by Mark Adamo, and another quintet by Pierre Jalbert.



## Bruce Brubaker

In live performances from the Hollywood Bowl to New York's Geffen Hall at Lincoln Center, from Hong Kong to France's International Piano Festival at La Roque d'Anthéron, and in recordings for ECM, InFiné, Bedroom Community, Arabesque, and Arsis—Bruce Brubaker is the new musician, visionary virtuoso, artistic provocateur. Named “Young Musician of the Year” by *Musical America*, Bruce Brubaker performs Mozart with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, and plays Philip Glass's piano music around the world. Profiled on NBC's *Today* show, Brubaker has performed with Meredith Monk, Nico Muhly, Lorraine Hunt, and John Cage. Brubaker is featured on Nico Muhly's album *Drones* and Meredith Monk's *Piano Songs*.

# Recording Credits

## **Mastering Engineer**

David Trembley

## ***Life in Wayang* and *Revelations***

Recording Engineers

Frank Horger

Graham Duncan

Recorded May 18-20, 2015

Foellinger Great Hall, Krannert Center for the Performing Arts

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Edited and Mixed

David Trembley

## ***Orfeo in Asia***

Recording Engineer

Antonio Oliart Ros

Recorded October 30, 2015

Frazer Performance Studio, WGBH

Boston, Massachusetts

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Executive Producer

Caitlin Custer, Arsis Audio

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