

Unsuk Chin



Unsuk Chin Photo © Woenki Kim

An introduction to the music of Unsuk Chin by Paul Griffiths

This iridescence, where does it come from? Colours shimmer, float and weave over Unsuk Chin's music, and their sources are multiple. They are produced by harmonies that reflect natural resonance, building up, as in her Violin Concerto, from the basic acoustic facts of octave and fifth. More directly, these colours derive from chimings built into the music: the sounds of the piano, of bells and of the large, delicately handled percussion sections that feature in Chin's scores for orchestra or ensemble. They arise, too, from the rapid flutterings between different instrumental sounds that have been characteristic of her music since her breakthrough piece *Akrostikon-Wortspiel* of 1991-93. On other occasions they are imaginary presences, like the human voices that seem to sound through the glowing sonorities of the orchestral monument *santika Ekatala*. Elsewhere again they spring from her instrumental matchings, her skill in projecting sound from a solo horn into a complex mixture of piano, percussion and string ensemble (to mention just one of the cascading wonderful moments in her *Double Concerto*), and so in discovering the colours between instruments. Music for her is mobile sound, sound evanescent and perhaps illusory. She makes ear and mind race – and be glad to race through such gleaming soundscapes.

Just as the colours on a butterfly's wing come from light diffracted by pattern, so Chin's seem to have developed from a productive interference she brought about between two vital musical streams she encountered growing up as a composer through the 1970s and 1980s. As with the spectral composers of Paris, her work in electronic music deepened her awareness of how sounds could be constituted and transformed by purely instrumental means, and so of how the orchestra could be again the magic box it was for Rimsky-Korsakov or Ravel. At the same time, the ostinatos and oscillations of small melodic cells, drawn from Balinese gamelan music, became ways to define chords on musical courses that dart along through harmonies of complex lustre.

Her aural imagination, her mastery in counterpointing instrumental lines or rival rhythms, and her dexterity in relating the seemingly unlike (whether

sounds or compositional practices) must all have been helped by her studies with Ligeti, whose lessons her music has – happily – retained in its clarity, fascination, capricious energy and sheer sonic beauty. But listen, she knows a different kind of darkness, of strength and of memory. Her music makes no parade of national flavour: her preferences for the sounds of plucked or struck strings, for slowly drifting glissandos and for arrays of bells and gongs all carry no specific cultural overtones, and that indeed is one of her strengths. She has left home now. She is moving on.

Paul Griffiths, 2003
(Writer of books on music, novels and librettos)

OPERAS

Alice in Wonderland

2004-07

2 hr

Opera in eight scenes

Text: Libretto by David Henry Hwang and Unsuk Chin based on the Lewis Carroll books 'Alice in Wonderland' and 'Through the Looking Glass' (E)

3S,M,CT,2T,2B; chorus between 40-60 singers; additional children's chorus with a minimum of 20;

3(II=picc,III=picc,af).2(II=corA).3(II=Ebcl,III=bcl).2(II=dbn)

-4.3.2.1-timp.perc(4):glsp/marimbaphone/bass

marimbaphone/xyl/vib/vibraslap/cencerros/4tgl/8susp.cym(3sm,3med,2lg)/3tam-t(sm,m ed,lg)/sand.bl and

sandpaper(fine,med,coarse)/3tom-t/3tamb(2sm)/3maracas/4pea-whistle/bird-whistle/5tp

l.bl(v.high)/guiro/1crystal wine glass/2 metal.bl(v.high)/castanets(high, low)/alarm

clock/6SD/crot/plate bells(A,E,F)/4chromonica(Bb,C,D,E)/finger

cyms/3sistrum/2cyms(1sm)/gran cassa/8pop-bottles(different

sizes)/ratchet(sm)/3whip/wood wind chime/bell tree/2metal grille(sm,med)/2Javanese

gongs(Bb,C)/siren/flexatone/wind machine/anvil/timbales(sm)/Brazilian bamboo

shaker/2trash-cans/20wine glasses/15forks/13spoons/5sm metal casseroles/3metal

rattles/5thin metal sticks/auto-horn/t.bells/2chimes(v.low pitch)/2thunder

sheets(sm,lg)/4bongos/swanee flute/glass wind chimes/lion's roar/harmonica-harp-pft(=

World Premiere: 30 Jun 2007

Bayerische Staatsoper, München, Germany

Achim Freyer, director; Bayerische Staatsoper

Conductor: Kent Nagano

FULL ORCHESTRA

Alice in Wonderland

Prelude to Scene V

2007

2 min 30 sec

for orchestra

2(II=picc).picc.2.2.Ebcl.1.2(II=dbn)
-4.3.2.1-timp.perc(4):glsp/3pea-whistles/cym(med)/tam-t/tpl.bl/xyl/whip/crot/maracas/BD
/marimba/bass marimba/vib/swanee flute/t.bells-harp-pft-acc-strings

Rocaná

(Room of Light)

2008

21 min

for orchestra

3(I=af1,III=picc).3(III=corA).3(III=bcl).3(III=dbn)-6.4.3(I=tenor trbn, II&III=bass
trbn).1-timp-perc(4):2 anvils/BD/bass marimba/cencerros (chromatic)/crot/cyms/3
susp.cym (sm, med, lg)/2 dobachi/glass wind chime/glsp/hi-hat/2 Japanese temple
bells/5 Javanese gongs (pitches: C#2, D2, A2, Bb2,
G#3)/jingles/lithophone/maracas/marimba/mark tree/4 metal blocks/sandbox (fine)/3 SD
(sm, med, lg)/3 tam-t (sm, med, lg)/2 tgl (sm, med)/tubular
bells/vib/whip/xyl-harp-pft/cel-strings(16-14-12-10-8)

* crotales, cymbals, tam-tams and vibraphone are all bowed as well as struck

"...a continuous 20-minute score Chin has crafted as a field of unquiet aural dreams. She is fascinated by the volatility of orchestral sounds and how they evolve into other, seemingly unrelated musical events, travelling in waves as light does. Her huge orchestral palette is laced with all manner of percussion, including Japanese temple bells and a xylophone of stones. At times, she employs it as sparingly as a neo-pointillist painter; at other times, violent chords ricochet around the brasses, turning the ensemble into a mechanistic juggernaut." Chicago Tribune

"The piece is a knockout. It begins with a gnarly, clattering, explosion...Then comes a pattern of background harmonies, always simmering, eerily quiet and pervasive. But throughout the work, jolts of energy keep happening: leaping lines, ominous 12-tonish themes that pierce the tranquil background buzz, outbursts of wailing brasses and metallic strings that come at you like a musical flamethrower." New York Times

World Premiere: 03 Mar 2008

Salle Wilfrid-Pelletier de la Place des Arts, Montreal, Canada

Orchestre Symphonique de Montreal

Conductor: Kent Nagano

SOLO INSTRUMENT(S) AND ORCHESTRA

Concerto for Cello and Orchestra

2006-8

30 min

for cello and orchestra

3(II=af), III=picc).3(II=corA).3(III=Ebcl).3(III=dbn)-4.4.4(1,II=ttrbn, III,IV=btrbn).1-timp.perc(4):3cyms(sm,med,lg)/2guiros/4metal.bl/8pop bottles/5SD(3sm,med,lg)/3tom-t/9tgl/BD/claves/crot/gisp/maracas/marimba/pitched gong/sand box/sand paper/shocallo/tamb/tam-t/temple bells/TD/thunder-sheet/t.bells/vib/whip/xyl-2harp-pft(=cel)-strings(16.16.14.12.10)

World Premiere: 13 Aug 2009

Royal Albert Hall, London, United Kingdom
Alban Gerhardt, cello; BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra
Conductor: Ilan Volkov

Double Concerto

(Doppelkonzert)

2002

20 min

for piano, percussion and ensemble

prepared pft solo-perc solo:vib/xyl/marimba/6cowbells/cencerros/t.bells/Japanese temple bells/handbells/TD/3tom-t/timp; 2(II=picc,af).1(=corA).1(=Ebcl).1(=dbn)-2.1.1.1-perc(1):gisp/lithophone/ant.cym/5Javanese gongs/bouteillophone/4metal bl/h.bells/tgl/3clash
cyms/3tam-t/2timbali/tamb/SD/BD/2tpl.bl/claves-harp-2vln.2vla.2vlc.db

World Premiere: 02 Feb 2003

Radio France, Salle Olivier Messiaen, Paris, France
Samuel Favre, perc / Dimitri Vassilakis, pft; Ensemble Intercontemporain
Conductor: Stefan Asbury

Piano Concerto

1996-97

25 min

for piano and orchestra

2(II=picc).2(II=corA).2.2-2.2.2.1-perc(2-3):xyl/marimba/gisp/vib/ant.cym/lithophone/2tgl/2susp.cym/2tam-t/maracas/4wdbl/glass wind chime/6cowbells/t.bells/2plate bells/tamb/4bongos/sm tom-t/3SD/TD/timp/BD-cel-harp-mandolin-strings (NB: can also be performed with 2 string players per part)

World Premiere: 06 Jun 1997

St. David's Hall, Cardiff, United Kingdom
Rolf Hind, piano; BBC National Orchestra of Wales
Conductor: Mark Wigglesworth

Šu

2009

19 min

Concerto for Chinese sheng and orchestra

3.3.3.3-4.4.3.1-perc(4):piano strings/t.bells/vib/bin-sasara/bamboo chime/2 Javanese gongs/guio/SD (lg)/tamb (lg)/Japanese temple bell (lg)/BD/tam-t (lg)-strings(12.12.10.10.8)

World Premiere: 28 Aug 2009

Suntory Hall, Tokyo, Japan
Wu Wei, sheng; Tokyo Symphony Orchestra
Conductor: Kazuyoshi Akiyama

Violin Concerto

(Violinkonzert)

2001

27 min

for violin and orchestra

2(II=picc).2(II=corA).2(II=Ebcl).2.dbn-4.4.2.1-timp.perc(5):gisp/2vib/xyl/2marimba/lithop hone/ant.cym/t.bells/cowbells/sm tgl/sm cyms/3susp.cym/lg thundersheet/metal bl/japanese gong in D/3timp/BD/sm tamb/2SD/steel dr/zanza/guio/claves-2harps-hpcd(=cel)-strings

"...this is a score of enormous beauty, rhetorical force and structural ingenuity; by rights it should become a staple of the concert landscape."
San Francisco Chronicle

"...the first masterpiece of the new century."

Alan Rich
9790060116636 **Violin, Orchestra (Full Score)**

World Premiere: 20 Jan 2002

Philharmonie, Berlin, Germany
Viviane Hagner, violin; Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin
Conductor: Kent Nagano

VOICE(S) AND ORCHESTRA

Miroirs des temps

1999, rev.2001

36 min

for ATTB soloists and orchestra. Contains transcriptions of Johannes Ciconia's 'Mercé, o morte' and 'Je suis trestout d'amour raimpli' (traditional, Cyprus)

Text: Mediaeval poets and Fernando Pessoa (Pt)

2(II=picc,af1).2(II=corA).2(II=Ebcl).1.dbn-4.2.2.1-timp.perc(6):vib/glsp/marimba/2tgl(sm,v sm)/finger cym/ant.cym/3susp.cym/3tam-t/4javanese gongs/6cowbells/sm SD/timp/BD/t.bell/plate bells-harp-cel-harmonium-mandolin-gtr-cimbalom-4recorders(SATB) -strings(12.12.10.8.6)

World Premiere: 07 Nov 1999

Royal Festival Hall, London, United Kingdom

The Hilliard Ensemble / London Philharmonic Orchestra

Conductor: Kent Nagano

Miroirs des temps (alternative version)

1999, rev.2001

19 min

for ATTB soloists and orchestra. Does not include transcriptions of Johannes Ciconia's 'Mercé, o morte' and 'Je suis trestout d'amour raimpli' (traditional, Cyprus) from original version

Text: Mediaeval poets and Fernando Pessoa (Pt)

2(II=picc,af1).2(II=corA).2(II=Ebcl).1.dbn-4.2.2.1-timp.perc(6):vib/glsp/marimba/2tgl(sm,v sm)/finger cym/ant.cym/3susp.cym/3tam-t/4javanese gongs/6cowbells/sm SD/timp/BD/t.bell/plate bells-harp-cel-harmonium-mandolin-gtr-cimbalom-4recorders(SATB) -strings(12.12.10.8.6)

Scenes from Alice in Wonderland

2004-07/2010-11

40 min

for soprano, mezzo soprano and orchestra

Text: David Henry Hwang and Unsuik Chin based on the Lewis Carroll books 'Alice in Wonderland' and 'Through the Looking Glass' (E)

2(II=picc,II=picc,af1).2(II=corA).2(II=Ebcl,bcl).2(II=dbn) -2.3.2.1-timp.perc(3):xyl/glsp/vib/marimba/bass marimba/crot/tubular chimes/cencerros/3susp.cym(small,medium,large)/cym/finger cym/BD/pedal BD/3SD/3tom-t/timbales/tgl/plate bells/3tam-t(small,medium,large)/Javanese gong/chimes/tamb/whip/cast/maracas/lion's roar/glass wind chimes/bell tree/2temple blocks/metal block/2 metal grills/2 metal rattles/2 metal casseroles/siren/2trash cans/pop bottles/wind machine/2 pea-whistles/swanee whistle/harmonica-harp-pft(=hpd, cel)-accordion-mand-strings(14.14.12.10.8)

World Premiere: 02 Apr 2011

Casa da Música, Porto, Portugal

Claire Booth, soprano / Susan Bickley, mezzo-soprano; Orquestra Sinfónica do Porto

Casa da Música

Conductor: Olari Elts

snagS&Snarls

2003-04

13 min

for soprano and orchestra

Text: Lewis Carroll's 'Alice in Wonderland', Unsuik Chin, and a traditional nursery rhyme (E)

2(II=af1,picc).2(II=corA).2(II=Ebcl,bcl).2(II=dbn)-2.3.2.1-perc(3): I=tgl/2cym(med,lg)/tam-t(lg)/cencerros/glsp/marimba; II=tamb/3SD/BD/cym(sm)/finger cym/6pop-bottles; III=xyl/harmonica/siren/2trash-cans/tgl/timbales(sm)/glasswind chimes/18wine glasses/15forks/8spoons/5sm metal casseroles-mandolin-harp-pft(=hpd,cel)-strings

World Premiere: 06 Jun 2004

Libbey Bowl, Ojai/California, USA

Margaret Thompson, mezzo-soprano; Los Angeles Opera Orchestra

Conductor: Kent Nagano

CHORUS AND ORCHESTRA

Kalá

2000

32 min

for soprano and bass soloists, mixed chorus and orchestra

Text: Gerhard Rühm (G), Inger Christensen (Dan), Unica Zürn (G), Gunnar Ekelöf (L), Arthur Rimbaud (F), Paavo Haavikko (Fin)

3(III=picc).3(III=corA).3(III=bcl).2.dbn-4.4.2.1-perc(7):glsp/vib/xyl/marimba/ant.cyms/t.bells/6cowbells/sm tgl/4susp.cym/4tam-t/3thundersheets/japanese gongs/sm tamb/3SD/2timp/BD/sistrum/glass chime/sleigh bells/3tpl.bowls/guio/metal rattle/maracas/tpi.bl-harp-cel-pft-harmonium-strings

World Premiere: 09 Mar 2001

Konserthuset, Gothenburg, Sweden

Piia Komi, soprano / Martin Snell, bass; Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra and Chorus

Conductor: Peter Eötvös

Die Troerinnen

(Trojan Women)

1986, rev.1990

22 min

for 3 female singers, female chorus and orchestra

Text: Euripides (Gr)

2S,M-female chorus;

2.picc.3.3.3-4.3.3.0-perc(2):vib/cyms/ant.cyms/glsp/marimba/tamb/tgl/t.bells;timp/gong/xyl/SD/tom-t(tgl)-cel-pft-harp-strings

World premiere of version: 23 Sep 1990

Konserthus, Oslo, Norway

Stina Tornberg, Anne-Lise Berntsen, Kirsten Dolberg ; Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra and Bergen Opera Choir

Conductor: Luca Pfaff

ENSEMBLE AND CHAMBER WITHOUT VOICE(S)

cosmigimmicks

a musical pantomime for seven instrumentalists

2011-12

24 min

for ensemble

tpt-perc(1):sand paper(fine&medium)/vib/cencerros/cym(sm)
-harp-gtr.mandolin-prepared pft-vln

World Premiere: 26 Apr 2012

Muziekgebouw aan 't IJ, Amsterdam, Netherlands

Nieuw Ensemble

Conductor: Celso Antunes

Fanfare chimérique

2010-11

18 min

for two ensembles of wind and brass with electronics

2.2.2.2-2.2.2.2-sampler

World Premiere: 15 Apr 2011

Centre Pompidou, Grande Salle, Paris, France

Ensemble intercontemporain

Conductor: Patrick Davin

Fantaisie mécanique

1994, rev.1997

13 min

for five instrumentalists

tpt.trbn-perc(2):tamb/2timb/3tom-t/TD/BD/3timp/vib/xyl/t.bells/tgl(lg)/3cym/2tam-t(lg,sm)
/thundersheet(lg); tamb(sm)/2bongos/3small drums/TD/BD/3timp/wind
chimes(glass)/Steinspiel/2tgl(sm,med)/3cym/tam-t(med)/thundersheet(med)/glsp/mari
mba-pft

World Premiere: 02 Dec 1994

Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France

Soloists of the Ensemble Intercontemporain

Gougalon

Szenen aus einem Straßentheater

(Scenes from a Street Theater)

2009

14 min

for ensemble

1(=picc,af1,metal bl).1(=corA,sm
tamb).1(=Ebcl,bcl,sistrum).0-0.1(=Etpt,guiro).1(=maracas).0-perc(2):tamb/2bongos/2co
ngas/1timp(lo)/cym(lg)/2timbales/2tom-t(sm,med)/TD/BD/whip/flex/finger
cym/susp.cym-prepared pft(4hands)-strings(1.1.1.2.1)

World premiere incomplete: 09 Oct 2009

Konzerthaus, Großer Saal, Berlin, Germany

Ensemble Modern

Conductor: Johannes Kalitzke

Gougalon (final version)

Szenen aus einem Straßentheater

(Scenes from a Street Theater)

2011

24 min

for ensemble

1(=picc,af1,metal bl).1(=corA,sm
tamb).1(=Ebcl,bcl,sistrum).0-0.1(=Etpt,guiro).1(=maracas).0-perc(2):tamb/2bongos/2co
ngas/1timp(lo)/cym(lg)/2timbales/2tom-t(sm,med)/TD/BD/whip/flex/finger
cym/susp.cym-prepared pft(4hands)-strings(1.1.1.2.1)

World premiere complete: 10 Jan 2012

Cité de la musique, Paris, France

Ensemble intercontemporain

Conductor: Susanna Mälkki

ParaMetaString

1996

20 min

for string quartet and tape

World Premiere: 31 May 1996

Art Center Concert Hall, Seoul, South Korea

Kronos Quartet

Xi

1998

23 min

for ensemble and electronics

1(=picc,af).1(=corA).1.1(=dbn)-1.1.1.1-perc(2):BD/3tam-t/3susp.cym/2japanese
gongs/plate bells/sm tgl/lg thundersheet/guiro/4tpl.bl/glsp/vib/xyl/marimba/bass
xyl/lithophone-harp-pft-kbd sampler-2vln.vla.vlc.db-tape

World Premiere: 24 Feb 1999

Cité de la Musique, Paris, France

Ensemble Intercontemporain

Conductor: David Robertson

ENSEMBLE AND CHAMBER WITH VOICE(S)

Akrostichon-Wortspiel

(Acrostic-Wordplay)

1991, rev.1993

17 min

Seven scenes from fairy-tales for soprano and ensemble

Text: Unsuik Chin

fl*(=picc,af).ob.cl*(=bcl)-perc(1):timp/tam-t/cyms/2tom-t(2diff sizes)/
tamb on a stand/guiro/ant.cyms/tgl/mouth harmonica/gisp/vib/SD/
sm tgl/marimba/xyl-mandolin-harp*-pft-vln*.vla.db

*these instruments should be tuned anywhere between a 4th & 6th of a
tone higher than concert pitch. Each instrument may take a
different tuning.

9790060103728 (Full score)

World premiere complete: 08 Sep 1993

Queen Elizabeth Hall, London, United Kingdom

Penelope Walmsley-Clark, soprano; Premiere Ensemble

Conductor: George Benjamin

Cantatrix Sopranica

(Soprano Singer)

2004-05

26 min

for two sopranos, countertenor and ensemble

Text: Unsuik Chin, Harry Mathews, Arno Holz and a song from the Tang dynasty
(E-F-I-Chinese)

1(=picc).1(=corA).1(=Ebcl).1(dbn)-1.1.1.0-perc(2)-harp-gtr-pft(=hpd)-strings(1.1.1.1.1)

"Cantatrix Sopranica will surely add lustre to Chin's reputation as one of the most imaginative purveyors of modernism that is at once colourful, witty and of real substance... From its opening number, with its skittishly inventive, happily euphonious gloss on tuning and vocal ululation, to the last, which treats the voices as both instruments and theatrical characters, the work is sheer delight."

The Independent

"The first four movements begin with the innocent intervals of fifth and third which very soon become undermined. Glissandi smudge them; buzzing avalanches ("Boule de Neige") drown them. ...everything is silky soft and misty light. Moreover, it is comical... Never did a detailed new music work of new music appear so brief. The work was greeted with enthusiastic applause."

Rheinische Post

World Premiere: 18 May 2005

Queen Elizabeth Hall, London, United Kingdom

Anu Komsu, Piia Komsu, sop / Andrew Watts, cten; London Sinfonietta

Conductor: George Benjamin

Ma fin est mon commencement Mon commencement est ma fin

1999

6 min

for ATTB soloists and ensemble (third movement of 'Miroirs des temps')

Text: Guillaume de Machaut

4recorders(SATB).picc.0.1(=corA).2.1-0.2.1.0-perc(2):cym/trgl/finger
cym-mandolin-gtr-harp-strings(4vln.4vla.4vlc)

PIANO(S)

Piano Etude No.1 (in C)

1999, rev.2003 3 min

for solo piano
9790060802089

World Premiere: 25 May 1999

Hannover, Germany
Hiroaki Ooi, piano;

Piano Etude No.2 (Sequenzen)

1995, rev.2003 3 min

for solo piano
9790060802119

World Premiere: 15 Jun 1995

Berlin, Germany
Shiao-Li Ding, piano;

Piano Etude No.3 (Scherzo ad libitum)

1995, rev.2003 2 min

for solo piano
9790060829925

World Premiere: 11 Feb 1996

Public Library, Topeka/Kansas, USA
Shiao-Li Ding, piano;

Piano Etude No.4 (Scalen)

1995, rev.2003 2 min

for solo piano
9790060802096

World Premiere: 11 Feb 1996

Public Library, Topeka/Kansas, USA
Shiao-Li Ding, piano;

Piano Etude No.5 (Toccata)

2003 3 min

for solo piano
9790060829932

World Premiere: 16 Dec 2003

Tokyo Opera City Recital Hall, Tokyo, Japan
Hiroaki Ooi, piano;

Piano Etude No.6 (Grains)

2000 3 min

for piano solo
9790060829949

World Premiere: 26 Mar 2000

South Bank Centre, London, United Kingdom
Rolf Hind, piano;

INSTRUMENTAL

Allegro ma non troppo

1994/98

13 min

version for solo percussion and tape

perc(1): guiro/2tamb/3tom-t/sm
SD/TD/2timbales/BD/tgl/cast/2susp.cym(sm,lg)/hi-hat/2thai
gong/3tam-t/sistrum/carton/piece of paper/bunch of keys/2alarm clocks/2lg crystal
glasses/wine glass/3teaspoons/plastic bin/wooden stick/small book/music box/500
grains of rice/small metronome/egg timer-tape

9790060827181

World premiere of version: 25 Sep 1998

Parochialkirche, Berlin, Germany
Thierry Miroglio, percussion;

Double Bind?

2007

17 min

for violin and electronics

Electronics only available via IRCAM - contact Frank Madlener
frank.madlener@ircam.fr

World Premiere: 12 Feb 2007

Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord, Paris, France
Hae-Sun Kang, violin;

MISCELLANEOUS

Allegro ma non troppo

1993-94

13 min

for tape

World Premiere: 02 Feb 1994

Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Germany
 ;

Gradus ad Infinitum

1989

11 min

for tape

World Premiere: 06 Sep 1989

De IJsbreker, Amsterdam, Netherlands
 ;
