

## 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=aff).2(II=corA).3(II=Ebcl,III=bcl).2(II=dbn)  
-4.3.2.1-timp.perc(4):glsp/marimbaphone/bass  
marimbaphone/xylo/vib/vibraslap/cencerros/4tgl/8susp.cym(3sm,3med,2lg)/3tam-t(sm,med,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-harp-accordion-mandolin-pft(=cel,

**World Premiere: 30 Jun 2007**

Bayerische Staatsoper, München, Germany  
Achim Freyer, director; Bayerische Staatsoper  
Conductor: Kent Nagano

## FULL ORCHESTRA

### Rocaná

(Room of Light)

2008

21 min

for orchestra

3(I=fl,II=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=afi, III=picc).3(II=corA).3(III=Ebcl).3(III=dbn)-4.4.4(I,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/afi).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

2(II=picc).2(II=corA).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/guiro/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/javanese gong in D/3timp/BD/sm tamb/2SD/steel  
dr/zanza/guiro/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, Großer Saal, 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/afl).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/afl).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)

## snagS&Snarls

### Scenes from 'Alice in Wonderland'

2003-04

13 min

for soprano and orchestra

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

2(II=afl,picc).2(II=corA).2(II=Ebcl,bcl).2(II=dbn)-2.3.2.1-perc(3): I=ttl/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/tpl.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

Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra and Bergen Opera Choir

Conductor: Luca Pfaff

## ENSEMBLE AND CHAMBER WITHOUT VOICE(S)

### 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)/3cyms/2tam-t(lg,sm)/thundersheet(lg);tamb(sm)/2bongos/3small drums/TD/BD/3timp/wind  
chimes(glass)/stones/2tgl(sm,med)/3cyms/tam-t(med)/thundersheet(med)/glsp/marimb  
a-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,af,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/flexatone/finger  
cym/susp.cym-prepared pft(4hands)-strings(1.1.1.2.1)

**World Premiere: 09 Oct 2009**

Konzerthaus, Großer Saal, Berlin, Germany  
Ensemble Modern  
Conductor: Johannes Kalitzke

### ParaMetaString

1996

20 min

for string quartet and tape

**World Premiere: 31 May 1996**

Art Center Concert Hall, Seoul, 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/gdsp/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//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

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### **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

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**World premiere of version: 25 Sep 1998**

Parochialkirche, Berlin, Germany

Thierry Miroglio, percussion;

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### **Double Bind?**

**2007**

17 min

for violin and electronics

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**World Premiere: 12 Feb 2007**

Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord, Paris, France

Hae-Sun Kang, violin;

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**MISCELLANEOUS**

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**Allegro ma non troppo**

**1993-94**

13 min

for tape

**World Premiere: 02 Feb 1994**

Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Germany  
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**Gradus ad Infinitum**

**1989**

11 min

for tape

**World Premiere: 06 Sep 1989**

De IJsbreker, Amsterdam, Netherlands  
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