



TAN Dun

Piano Concerto "The Fire"

Tan Dun (born 18 August 1957) is a Chinese classical composer, pianist, viola d'amore player and conductor. Born in a village in Changsha, he was introduced to the rituals and ceremonies of the village shaman at an early age. He became fascinated with the music they made, often using natural objects such as rocks and water. During the Cultural Revolution, Tan was sent to work as a rice planter on the Huangjin commune, where he became involved in the local music scene and learned to play traditional Chinese string instruments. Following a ferry accident that resulted in the death of several members of a Peking opera, Tan Dun was recalled from his farming duties to act as a fiddler and arranger in the troupe. When the Cultural Revolution was over, Tan became one of thirty (out of thousands of applicants) to be admitted to the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing in 1977. He would go on to become the first Chinese composer to win an international composition prize since the founding of the People's Republic, and by the time he arrived in the United States in 1986, Tan Dun was already famous in China. He completed his dissertation as a doctorate student in New York City's Columbia University in 1993. Tan is perhaps most famous for composing the score for *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000), for which he won an Academy Award, a Grammy Award, and a BAFTA Award. Tan has served as dean of the Bard College Conservatory of Music since 2019.

Piano Concerto "The Fire" (2008) was commissioned for the New York Philharmonic under the direction of Lorin Maazel, and written by Tan for renowned Chinese pianist Lang Lang. The concerto is reportedly inspired by the composer's love for martial arts, and the soloist is instructed to play certain passages of the music with fists and forearms. Before the piece's premiere, Tan said "Mr. Lang embodies the qualities of a martial arts master in his playing. The ancient practice is an art of seeming contradictions. A stance of physical stillness can convey tension and quickness, and bursts of action can seem cool and deliberate...Lang Lang's highest achievement is the way he can bring out the piano's eastern side, by making it both water and fire. Ultimately, the piano concerto is about overcoming the opposition between piano and orchestra to make one and one equal one."

The premiere of the piece took place in New York City on 9 April 2008, with Lang Lang as the soloist, and Leonard Slatkin conducting the New York Philharmonic. Each of the three movements (first movement marked *Lento*, second movement marked *Adagio melancholia*, and the last movement marked *Allegretto*) is broken up with episodic sections, as the piece opens with a low, quietly menacing trill on the piano, over which the orchestra floats heavy, yet calm chords that shift harmonically through numerous colours. The percussion section enters energetically, forcing the pianist to tackle his/her instrument with pummeling chords and spiraling runs. The percussiveness and harsh harmonies of the piano seem to model the piano concertos of Bartok, but the ensuing passages of gentle melodies over arpeggio accompaniments are more reminiscent of Rachmaninoff's tackling of the genre. The orchestral writing shows significant reaches into traditional Chinese music, as the score calls for Chinese Taiko drums and gongs, and the violins make frequent use of the distinctively Chinese glissandi. Even the piano uses rapid tremolo figures to suggest a pipa, an instrument which resembles the Chinese version of a lute, while in other moments, creates haunting melodic lines of fast repeated notes like a guqin, the Chinese zither. Described by some critics as "mishmash of genres", sections of the piece tend to evoke the scenic nature of the Yangtze Valley, while others sounded more like a Manhattan piano lounge.