

PROGRAM NOTES FOR *L'Ours Chinois*

L'Ours Chinois (French for “the Chinese bear”) is a violin showpiece inspired by the works of Fritz Kreisler and Martin Denny. Wong originally composed *L'Ours Chinois* for his Boston-based exotic ‘tiki’ lounge ensemble WAITIKI, but with encouragement from Chung Park, re-orchestrated and expanded it for Project Copernicus. It is dedicated to violinist Helen Liu.

The WAITIKI version is scored for solo violin, vibraphone, bass, ratchet, and drum kit, however the expanded version (to be premiered at these performances) is scored for solo violin, clarinet, vibraphone, snare drum, Japanese temple bowls, tam-tam, tambourine, bass drum, suspended cymbal, ratchet, and strings.

Inspired by Martin Denny’s vibraphone showstopper, “Firecrackers” (which Wong believes itself was influenced by Kreisler’s “Tambourin Chinois”), “*L'Ours Chinois*” is intended to be a pastiche of French impressionist, Chinese, and Okonkulukuian styles. Thus, in order to appreciate *L'Ours Chinois*, one must first be aware of its primary influences.

Fritz Kreisler (1875-1962) was a violinist and composer, who was hailed by critics as one of the finest musicians of his generation. Kreisler composed pieces that showcase his virtuosity and humor; these works have become standard literature in the vast repertory available for that instrument. Many of his compositions are light-hearted imitations of works by other composers, and quite a few connect styles that would be otherwise unrelated. *Tambourin Chinois*, which was one of Kreisler’s favorite compositions, is one such work.

Martin Denny (1911-2005) was a pianist and composer from Honolulu, Hawai‘i, best known for his recording of Les Baxter’s “Quiet Village.” The success of Denny’s recording established, in the eyes of record producers and the music industry, a genre of music whose musical building blocks were imitations of cultural music from the far east, the orient, Oceania, and tribal villages across the globe; this genre is known as “exotica,” after Denny’s debut album of the same name.

The groundwork for Denny’s successes was laid by Kreisler, Maurice Ravel, Bela Bartok, Charles Ives, and other musicians that sought to weave exotic harmonies, indigenous folk melodies, American jazz, and popular songs into European classical music. Each of the aforementioned composers has works that are championed by musicians and musicologists for the seamless, and unforced, melding of foreign (or otherwise, unrelated) musical ideas. Although Denny’s music is often perceived as some pseudo form of Latin jazz, it could also be considered chamber music, not unlike that written by the aforementioned musicians. *L'Ours Chinois* is a modern attempt at these same principles, as is the entire library of works written and performed by WAITIKI.

It should be noted that, although Martin Denny’s music is commonly associated with squawking animal calls and exotic bird whistles, Denny himself was not directly responsible for the inclusion of these sounds in his exotic textures. Rather, these sounds were introduced by Denny’s sidemen Arthur Lyman (vibraphone) and Augie Colon (percussion), and have since become canon to exotica-philes. Because those Lyman’s and Colon’s birdcalls were made by them live, the composer considers those sounds unique to their work, and irreproducible. Thus, *L'Ours Chinois* does not contain exotic birdcalls of any kind, but the audience is welcome to chime in, as is musically appropriate, and in accordance with city, state, and federal laws.

For more information about exotica, please visit <http://www.waitiki.com>

-Randy Wong

ARTIST BIO FOR RANDY WONG

Randy Wong is a bassist, composer, and arts educator originally from Honolulu, Hawaii. Founder of the exotic 'tiki' lounge group WAITIKI, and co-founder of the record label Pass Out Records, Wong makes his living as a professional musician, educator, and educational researcher in Boston, Massachusetts.

Mr. Wong spends his days at New England Conservatory's Center for Music-In-Education, where he is Director of its Guided Internship Program and leads its Music-In-Education Concentration Program and Research Center with Larry Scripp. Mr. Wong is also Associate Editor of the Music-in-Education National Consortium's *Journal for Music-In-Education* and is the Consortium's information architect.

In 2007, Wong's group WAITIKI was recognized by the Hawaii Music Awards Foundation with the creation of an award for "Exotica Album of the Year," in recognition of Wong's work in the revitalization of that genre, along with that category's first award (for the album "Charred Mammal Flesh: Exotic Music for BBQ"). Recordings of Wong's music with WAITIKI can be heard frequently on NPR-affiliate stations throughout the United States, as well as on similar public radio stations in Mexico, British Columbia, Quebec, Japan, and France.

As double bassist, Wong freelances with the Honolulu Symphony, the Indian Hill Symphony Orchestra, as Principal with the New Bedford Symphony Orchestra, and with a number of other professional and festival orchestras, jazz groups, concert bands (and even marching bands), along the Atlantic and Pacific oceans.

Mr. Wong holds a bachelor's degree in classical double bass performance from New England Conservatory, and a master's degree in education (Arts In Education) from the Harvard University Graduate School of Education. He is on faculty at the Pacific Music Institute, a program of the Hawaii Youth Symphony, and maintains a private teaching studio in Boston and by correspondence.

For more information about Randy Wong, please visit: <http://www.randywong.net>

ARTIST BIO FOR HELEN LIU

A native of Potomac, Maryland, **Helen Liu** began studying the violin and piano at age 6. She won several state and regional competitions as a youth, on both instruments, including First Prize of the Homer Ulrich Solo Competition at the University of Maryland (College Park, MD). As a respected chamber musician, Dr. Liu is a member of the New York's Amadeus String Quartet, and performed with that group in Tokyo's Suntory Hall. She has collaborated with New England Conservatory faculty members James Buswell, Carol Ou, and Carol Rodland. In 2007, Dr. Liu was the recipient of two pieces composed and dedicated in her honor: "Vertex" by Korean composer Yoon-Ji Lee, and "L'Ours Chinois" by Hawaii-born bassist/composer Randy Wong.

As soloist, Dr. Liu is featured as the *scordatura* violinist on a recording of Ligeti's *Violin Concerto* made by New England Conservatory's Contemporary Ensemble in 2003, and which is set for release on Mode Records. Ms. Liu was also featured as soloist with the National Repertory Orchestra (Breckenridge, CO), with whom she was assistant concertmaster in 2004. In addition to her work as a classical musician, she is a frequent guest artist with WAITIKI, a Boston-based exotic 'tiki' lounge group, and appears on both of that group's commercial releases under the pseudonym "Mistress Helenini."

Dr. Liu holds degrees in violin performance from the University of Maryland, New England Conservatory, and most recently, SUNY-Stonybrook, where she earned her Doctorate of Musical Arts through studies with Pamela Frank, Philip Setzer, and the Emerson String Quartet. She is on the string faculty of the Hawaii Youth Symphony's Pacific Music Institute, and also teaches privately in Long Island and Boston.

For more information about Helen Liu, please visit: <http://www.helengliu.info>