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Abstract

Tonal music has been employed in many remarkable compositions, based on rules guiding harmonic structure, form, and rhythmic patterns through a systematical arrangement. Beyond tonal music, twentieth-century composers created atonal theory and twelve-tone methods in their outputs. These contemporary pieces not only focus on musical gesture, time space, and sound effect, but also provide a new principle of music theory for musical language and system. The world-renowned leading Chinese-American composer, Ching-chu Hu (b. 1969), has developed a concept of musical thread by combining unique characteristics of western and eastern musical materials through a transformation of aesthetic appreciation. The lyricism in his compositional methods is associated with a variety of contemporary elements representing the Post-tonal, Neo-Romantic, and Impressionist styles.

Being an active composer, pianist, and conductor, Hu’s compositions represent a high demand of performance and commissions at worldwide festivals. One of Hu’s outstanding piano solo pieces, Pulse, was composed in 2014. The movement titles of Pulse demonstrate four types of emotional state: “Anxious,” “Anticipation,” “Dream,” and “Adrenaline.” These movements, a contrast in mood, rhythm, texture, and meter display an understanding of a variety of compositional methods. Hu’s keyboard writing exhibits an orchestral texture while remaining pianistic. The design of musical gesture particularly represents visual concepts rather than the detailed material of musical
construction. Overall, the piece’s difficulty challenges performers with its quick changes in emotional expression and the complexity of its performance interpretation.

A remarkable work, *Pulse*, makes a significant contribution to a pianist’s experience by exploring the interpretation of narrative expression towards techniques. This research describes and analyzes Hu’s *Pulse* in six chapters: an introduction and overview of the research (Chapter 1), biographical information on Ching-chu Hu (Chapter 2), an research and exploration of Hu’s writing style (Chapter 3), a theory methodology of *Pulse* (Chapter 4), performance guidelines and Hu’s interpretative suggestions for *Pulse* (Chapter 5), and an interview with the composer, Ching-chu Hu (Chapter 6). The purpose of this research is to provide a guideline for pianists, so they can better understand the score, and the composer’s initial thoughts and intentions.
Dedicated To

My Husband and Parents
Acknowledgments

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In earlier composition styles, particularly in the Classical and Romantic eras, it is relatively easy to define the fundamental materials of composition: melodic lines, rhythms, textures, and themes. The compositional method behind this music is well-organized, and it presents a traditional setting, following functional theory, key structure, time signatures, harmonic rules, and regular tempo markings. However, in the early twentieth-century, French composer Claude Debussy (1862-1918) utilized pentatonic scales and multiple layers of sound, exhibiting a new concept of compositional technique beyond tonality. Meanwhile, Arnold Schoenberg (1874-1951) developed a new musical theory: serialism. Ever since then, atonal music had become more free, systematic, and subjective. In the late twentieth-century, for instance, modernist Elliott Carter (1908-2012) employed twelve-tone theory with rhythmic structures and units, transforming previous compositional styles to interpret musical expression and complexity.

In response to these developments of atonal elements, many composers began writing serial or electronic music to define a new generation of compositional styles. On the other hand, several composers from East Asia engaged previous musical materials and styles, creating new threads of composition that integrated folk songs or national characteristics into twenty-first century styles. These newer styles often draw on
perspectives and traditions beyond western aesthetics. This research will primarily focus on a mixture of western and eastern compositional styles, specifically the combination of Neo-Romanticism and Chinese folk music in the work of Chinese-American composer Ching-chu Hu (b. 1969). Through a stylistic analysis, this study explores how Hu combines these styles with post-tonal elements to represent characteristic of musical interpretation.

Hu successfully transforms these techniques using several ideas of compositional style including Chinese folk music, innovative rhythmic patterns, and lyrical poetry. His music reflects both early and late twentieth-century compositional techniques, along with narrative style and expressive interpretation. When I first heard Ching-chu Hu’s A Tempered Wish (2007) for violin and chamber orchestra, I was inspired by the character of the piece, with its distinct features of “western and eastern style.”¹ For instance, the music reflects a familiar Chinese tone associated with Chinese opera, and the instrumental setting employs a combination of traditional Chinese and western instruments.²

The purpose of this project is not only to explore the relationship between Chinese music and western music in Hu’s work, but also to examine how Hu incorporates post-tonal style as an expression by using a narrative style. Several research questions organize my analysis and interpretation. How does the composer suggest an interpretation by his score indication? How does a performer effectively interpret

contemporary music, as it relates to the composer’s original ideas? Although performers seek to interpret a contemporary piece consciously, their ideas may not align with the composer’s intent. This paper will address and answer these questions by focusing on rhythm, dynamics, articulation, and texture. In addition, I conducted a personal interview with Ching-chu Hu that serves as an additional source to better understand his intent and as a basis for interpretation.

Chapter 2 reviews Hu’s biography and production, while Chapter 3 explores some potential influences on Hu’s compositional style and his general musical creativity. Chapter 4 focuses on formal analysis and technical characterization of *Pulse*. Chapter 5 presents a performance guideline by which pianists can overcome the technical difficulties of *Pulse*, and includes insightful performance suggestions from the composer. Finally, Chapter 6 concludes the study, based on an interview that I conducted with Ching-chu Hu.

The composer and a performer often approach the score from different perspectives. As a consequence, it is helpful to learn from the composer’s guiding concepts in order to realize, as effectively as possible, his intentions. For the purposes of this project, Ching-chu Hu has approved reprinting excerpts from the musical scores of *Pulse* and *In Frozen Distance*. These materials are presented to enhance the contributions of the research, and to show both readers and performers the importance of the composer’s musical language and compositional aspects.

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3 Ching-chu Hu, interview by Pei-Sin Chen, Denison University, September 20, 2016.
Chapter 2: Biographical Information on Ching-chu Hu

The renowned Chinese-American composer Ching-chu Hu (b. 1969) was born in Iowa City, Iowa, and grew up in an artistic Chinese family. He credited the influence of Chinese culture and music for his insightful compositions: “being raised in an artistic Chinese family in the middle of the United States has influenced my music, just as my formal training has refined my compositional skills.” Indeed, in many of his compositions, Hu incorporated some Chinese elements into his outputs. For example, A Tempered Wish (2017) for violin and chamber orchestra represents Hu’s first impression of Chinese opera when he was young. Similar influences appear in In Frozen Distance (2001), which Hu dedicated to his father Hung-shu Hu (1935-2015). According to Hu’s personal website, one of his orchestral works, In Frozen Distance is related to his father’s Chinese paintings and sculptures:

My father, Hung-shu Hu, is an artist. His works, large and small, sculptures, installations, furniture pieces, and paintings are all around the world. My first memory of my father’s work comes from his paintings – stark, black and white,

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oil on canvas, contemporary visions of Chinese landscapes, these “dreams” of clarity and obfuscation.\(^8\)

Hu’s compositional style is not only inspired by his father, but also by his compositional mentors including William Bolcom (b.1938), William Albright (1944-1998), Michael Daugherty (b.1954), Leslie Bassett (1923-2016), Bright Sheng (b.1955), Evan Chambers (b.1963), David Gompper (b.1954), and Richard Hervig (1917-2010).\(^9\) In 1992, Hu studied Composition at Yale University; in 1993, Hu continued compositional study at Freiburg Musikhochschule in Freiburg, Germany; in 1996, he completed Master degree in Composition and Conducting at The University of Iowa; in 2001, he received Doctorate of Musical Arts in Composition at the University of Michigan.\(^10\)

Other than composition, Hu’s specializations and interests are in a variety of areas: conducting, piano, and double bass. As a highly active conductor, pianist, and composer, Hu has written for different types of solo instruments including strings, woodwinds, keyboard, vocal, choral, and orchestral.\(^11\) His compositions have been widely performed throughout the world, including performances in the United States, England, Germany, Russia, Austria, China, Taiwan, and Australia.\(^12\) Notable performance venues include the following:

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Kiev Philharmonic, the National Dance and Opera Orchestra of China, the Charleston Symphony Orchestra, the Columbus Symphony Youth Orchestra, Moscow Conservatory’s Studio New Music Ensemble, Brave New Works New Music Ensemble, the Brooklyn Rider String Quartet, Pittsburgh New Music Ensemble, and the University of Iowa Center for New Music.\(^\text{13}\)

Hu has not only published his works for professional performance, but also contributed compositions for academic research and special events.\(^\text{14}\) His top-rated discography includes the following CDs:


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Hu’s publications have been reviewed favorably by many magazines and radio stations:

Reviews have described his music as “breathtaking,” (allmusic) “richly textured” (Charleston Post and Currier), and “incredible” (The Columbus Dispatch). The Strad Magazine writes of his “tender luminous harmonies,” and the American Record Guide describes his music as “meditative and solemn…the best work [on the CD Violinguistics].”

One of his outstanding compositions, *The Swash of Water and Red*, was similarly praised by *The American Sound* on *Classical 101* in 2015:

Hu's work conveys the protean nature of water and the emotional connotations of the color red in a musical language heavily informed by Hu's Chinese-American cultural background and by his upbringing up in a home where all types of music filled the air.

Besides writing professional production, Hu also composed film scores.

According to *The American Sound*, “Hu’s current project unites music with film in an original score for the 1925 Charlie Chaplin’s silent film *The Gold Rush.*” Another project, *The Life and Times of Jimmy B.*, “was awarded a Directors Guild of America’s

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East Coast Filmmaker Award.” Moreover, Hu has received several academic awards and honors; most notably, he was the “first recipient of the Bayley-Bowen Fellowship, Denison University’s first endowed fellowship for a junior faculty member.” Hu is currently a Chair and Professor of Composition and Theory at Denison University, where he is honored as the Richard Lucier Endowed Professor.

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Chapter 3: Ching-chu Hu’s Compositional Approaches

Listen. Feel. Most importantly, make sure your fingertips are all over your music.
–Ching-chu Hu, biography

Overview of Ching-chu Hu’s Compositional Style

Hu has written for different musical genres including strings, choral, vocal, orchestral, solo, and ensemble works. Based on his published work from 1994 to 2014, his music evokes an orchestral-like sonority with a combination of western and eastern styles. Indeed, as a conductor and composer, Hu notably creates different types of sound in multiple layers. Besides that, his music reflects early twentieth-century styles such as Impressionism and Neo-Romanticism. His compositional rationale is related to post-tonal technique, followed by Neo-Romantic elements and an Impressionist style. Accordingly, Hu’s compositions do not serve as a serial type; rather, his music takes an emotional perspective on lyrical expression with post-tonal quality. Chapter 3 will mainly examine Hu’s aesthetic approaches and features.

Neo-Romanticism

In moving from the nineteenth-century to the twentieth-century, musical configuration gradually presented more concrete direction and titles, which guided listeners to experience and to perceive the musical context. Cognitively, musical gestures combine four elements of listeners’ perceptions:

Musical gesture stems from the generic level of perception, where it is tied to gestalt perception, motor movement and mental imagery. Gestures, accordingly, are rich gestalts that combine auditory information (hearing the movement) with implied visual information (imagining the movement), somatosensory information (feeling the movement) and emotional information (interpreting the movement).25

Indeed, a musical gesture combines hearing, visualizing, feeling, and interpreting to communicate with the listener. Most importantly, it reflects a presence of moment. Throughout his work, Hu utilizes several types of gestural movements by adapting dynamic level, melodic contour, musical phrases, and leaping motions to affect the performance expectation. In a sense, his music mainly employs expression to imply the musical character to performers and listeners.

From the fundamental perspective of a romantic musical style, German Romanticism is central: “The language of music is then felt as a compensation for this loss, because it can sustain and restore affective immediacy in world threatens to destroy it. This feeling is the key to one aspect of music’s relationship to Romanticism.”26 These statements illustrate a combination of language and music, portraying a subject and a

connection. In Hu’s writing style, his musical perception is associated with Neo-Romantic style, and most of his works feature a contrasting emotional level and an imaginative atmosphere. The titles of his major works clearly show his interest in different emotional states, even as he adapts post-tonal music through Neo-Romantic style: *Expectations* (1997), *Passions* (2001), *A Matter of Love* (2005), *The Hope Moment* (2009), *Joy Rising* (2013), and *Pulse* (2014).\(^{27}\)

Another point of view on feeling and emotion, which composers emphasized in their compositional perspective, is explained in a different statement. According to Daniel Albright, the Neo-Romantic style is defined largely in terms of emotional expression:

> In the late twentieth century, the term NeoRomanticism came to suggest a music that imitated the high emotional saturation of the music of (for example) Schumann, but in the 1920s it meant a subdued and modest sort of emotionalism, in which the excessive gestures of the Expressionists were boiled down into some solid residue of stable feeling.\(^ {28}\)

In fact, it is noticeable that Hu tends to use musical gesture beyond the musical structure of melody, texture, and rhythm. These gestures can evoke a musical contour with ascending and descending motion. In this way, Hu effectively captures contrasting emotions with lyrical expression.


For instance, *The Hope Moment* (2009) for violin and piano is filled with lyrical expression and narrative elaboration, as is Hu’s explanation of the title:

There is a moment between breaths – a moment between the inhale and the exhale – where one pauses for an instant. This is a moment of rest, of suspension, and a moment of hope. I sense the infinite possibilities within this time of repose. Whether we face a daunting task or a pleasant experience, we all seem to take a deep breath and prepare for the next moment.29

In this description, Hu specifically emphasizes the “moment” and “breath” in his broader conception of emotion. A similar method can be found in *Pulse* (2014), whose movement titles identify four parts of emotional statements: *Anxious, Anticipation, Dream,* and *Adrenaline.* During our interview, Hu pointed out that a “pulse” is your heart’s interior movement, and that it represents not only an emotion but also a “moment.”30

Referring to a useful definition of Neo-Romanticism: “In their search for expressive tools that connect directly with listeners, some composers adopted the familiar tonal idiom of nineteenth-century Romanticism or incorporated its sounds and gestures, a trend known as Neo-Romanticism.”31 It is apparent that Hu’s music is associated with post-tonal vocabulary although he also exemplifies some romantic traits including potential tonal centers (major, minor) and flexible time (*rubato*). Most importantly, he captures emotional statements in his subtitles to *Pulse,* which enriches the definition of his Neo-Romantic idea. Overall, Hu clearly demonstrates that Neo-Romanticism is one of his central compositional strategies.

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30 Ching-chu Hu, interview by Pei-Sin Chen, September 20, 2016, Denison University.

Implementation of Chinese Styles

Besides Neo-Romanticism, some of Hu’s works represent distinct Chinese styles by using Chinese instruments and musical tones. One of his orchestral works, *A Tempered Wish* (2007), evokes these characteristics by using various Chinese instruments such as Chinese cymbals, blocks, and erhus. These instruments create a contrasting sonority, resulting in a sharp, deep, and soft sound. This presents a unique timbre between western and eastern instruments. According to Hu’s notes in *A Tempered Wish*, he specifically explored a variety of Chinese instruments as a new feature of his sound experiment:

*A Tempered Wish* is rich in allusion to many Chinese sounds Hu associates with his childhood. While solo violin is featured in this clever composition for chamber orchestra, any number of instruments and instrumental groups come to the fore over the course of the work’s three sections, not the least of which being an assortment of pitched and non-pitched percussion instruments—some thirteen in all—performed by two percussionists and a pianist. The sections themselves are clearly marked off from one another, with distinctive traits associated with Chinese folk and opera traditions registering in each: the outer sections mirror the folk sounds, and the inner section Chinese opera.

Indeed, Chinese sounds represent various timbres from pitch to non-pitch tones, from ascending to descending lines, and from soft to intense. It is clear to see how Hu intends to use western instruments to imitate Chinese folk tones, and how he manipulates Chinese sounds as a unique sonority.

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Under the influence of Chinese culture, Hu expanded his interests to include both Chinese music and Chinese poetry. For instance, his choral work *Jìng Yè Sì* (2010) getting a text from the Chinese poet Li Bai (706-762) was inspired by Chinese literature. Similar Chinese elements can be found in Hu’s other orchestral work, as shown in the excerpt from *In Frozen Distance* (2001) in Figure 3.1. Figure 3.1 clearly shows Chinese melodic materials and various sound effects between western and eastern instruments. For instance, the oboe and flute show a pentatonic scale (C-D-E-G-A) with stepwise motion in measures 117-122; the first, second violins, and viola simultaneously represent a pentatonic scale with an accented pizzicato playing in measure 121. In particular, in the first setting of the percussion instrument, the temple blocks present a pitched timbre with descending movement in measure 122. These temple blocks create a low voice and energetic sound.

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Figure 3.1. Ching-chu Hu, *In Frozen Distance*, mm 117-122.\(^{35}\)

\(^{35}\) Ching-chu Hu, “In Frozen Distance,” score, 2001, Special Collections, Denison University.
Similarly, in Figure 3.2, the frequent usage of glissando playing in harpsichord, piano, violins, viola, and cello conveys musical flow to indicate the tonal setting between arising and descending movements. This compositional method is common to much of Hu’s output. For instance, Hu’s compositional style in *In Frozen Distance* is similar to his keyboard writing in *Pulse*, especially in the first movement “Anxious,” (Figure 3.3) and the fourth movement, “Adrenaline.” (Figure 3.4)
Ching-chu Hu, “In Frozen Distance,” score, 2001, Special Collections, Denison University.
Influence of Early Twentieth-Century Composers

As previously observed, most of Hu’s compositions are related to a Neo-Romantic style. His writing styles are not only influenced by Chinese music, but also by several early twentieth-century composers, particularly Claude Debussy (1862-1918), Béla Bartók (1881-1945), and Alberto Ginastera (1916-1983). For instance, there are many compositional similarities between Pulse (2014) and Debussy’s piano pieces. In Debussy’s Clair de Lune (1905), Figure 3.5, the frequent combination of parallel fifths

and fourths can be found in the upper voices. This type of method illustrates the frequent usages of pedal and parallel harmonic intervals, a characteristic of an Impressionist style.

Figure 3.5. Claude Debussy, *Claire de Lune*, mm. 15-17.\textsuperscript{39}

This similar character can be found in Hu’s first movement of *Pulse* (2014). In Figure 3.6, the upper voice shows interval harmonies on combination of perfect fifths and fourths. The triad in root and first inversion moves vertically from downward to upward motion. This harmonic progression features consonant sonority, and its chord positions specify the tone color of Impressionist idea.

\textsuperscript{39} Ching-chu Hu, “Pulse for piano,” score, 2014, Special Collections, Sebtzi and Torena Music.
Even though Hu’s music is written with post-tonal characteristic, his stylistic arrangements sound more like tonal music. Hu’s usage of tonality suggests the direct influence of Bartok’s style. Bartok’s 14 Bagatelles for Solo Piano, Op. 6 (Figure 3.7) shows a symmetrical approach as a hint for the transformation of the tonality. Antokoletz states that “Symmetrical pitch collections, which tend to negate those properties of traditional major and minor scales that establish a sense of tonality, have a fundamental function in many of Bartok’s works in establishing a new sense of pitch-class priority.”

This significance of symmetrical pitch collection, which shows inverted lines of harmonic intervals between upper and lower voices, is very close to Hu’s writing style (Figure 3.8).

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Likewise, Hu’s compositional style can be found in Alberto Ginastera’s *Danzas Argentinas*. Comparing to Figures 3.9 and 3.10, these dance-like movements characteristically show similar arrangement of rhythmic configuration on both registers. Figure 3.9, an excerpt from Ginastera’s *Danzas Argentinas*, illustrates the interchangeable rhythmic structure between right and left hands. The lack of the beat on the left hand emphasizes on the first beat, while the right hand then takes over the pause from left hand by presenting a new setting of rhythmic figures. Because of the changing setting of the pause, the music moves forward naturally without any indication of an accelerando marking. Similar patterns appear in Hu’s *Pulse* (Figure 3.10). In particular,

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Hu utilizes this dancing rhythm to alternate the dominant movement. He also subdivides the rhythmic structure in an effort to build up the contrary motion and emotion.

Figure 3.9. Alberto E. Ginastera, *Danzas Argentinas*, “I. Danza del Viejo boyero,” mm. 1-4.\(^{44}\)

\[
\text{Animato e allegro } \left( \frac{\text{C}}{\text{q}} = 138 \right)
\]

Figure 3.10. Ching-chu Hu, *Pulse for piano*, “Anxious,” mm. 84-87.\(^{45}\)

\[
\text{accel.} \quad \text{Allegro } \left( \frac{\text{C}}{\text{q}} = 120 \right)
\]

Chapter 4: Analytic Approaches to Ching-chu Hu’s *Pulse for piano* (2014)

*Pulse* deals with matters of the heart. Excitement, nervousness, sadness, love – all felt through the beating of the heart.

– Ching-chu Hu, *Pulse*

Ching-chu Hu composed *Pulse*, a piano solo piece in an unpublished special collection, in 2014. In his compositional rationale, Hu elaborates four different types of emotional character, and portrays the heartbeat as a human being’s daily life in terms of personal experience and expression. Hu uses wide ranges of register on the keyboard, presenting the shifting of black and white keys in an expressive way as the texture moves closer. The brilliant, expectative, grateful, and intensive piece contains four movements: I. Anxious, II. Anticipation, III. Dream, and IV. Adrenaline. Each movement is represented connectively, and linked differently in various types of emotion.

The first movement, “Anxious,” begins with a magnificent opening introduction, which shows leading motifs with an opposite direction and with a combination of ascending and descending motion on both registers. The tempo setting is varied, and suggests moving forward passages in the frequent change of rhythmic proportions throughout the first movement. This characteristic of the musical elements presents an

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elasticity of musical line consisting of rapid passages as the main leading character. The second movement, “Anticipation,” starts with a flowing movement as a narrative statement, which depicts a question and answer between the upper and lower voices. The layer of the sound is composed of dynamic level among mf, mp, and p. The upper and lower registers frequently move in inverse motion. Throughout the movement, the music itself emphasizes musical gesture: flow, pause, and silence. At the end, the running passages gradually disappear and its mood continues in the following third movement. The third movement, “Dream,” begins with a slow pace to convey mystery and calmness. The melodic line is in a diffusely sentimental expression, using a lyrical narration to tell a reminiscent story in a dream. The tone color alternates between dark and bright, and the end of the phrase presents a consonant harmony as a resolved and peaceful ending. The final movement, “Adrenaline,” initially exhibits an excited, vivid, and vigorous character. The intensive, ringing sonority releases contradictory feelings not only physically, but also aurally. The compositional style combines western and eastern elements, with a conflicted and dissonant sound between the lower and higher registers. The previous motif from the first movement reappears at the end of the fourth movement, and it moves forward consistently. The texture is fuller than the previous three movements, and the wide range of keyboard writing is pianistic and virtuosic.

From the brief summary above, it is apparent that each movement conveys a different emotional expression and an individual personality, with the beat units and settings following the title’s main compositional principle. The following sections will explore each movement of Hu’s Pulse using an analytic approach.
First Movement: “Anxious”

According to Hu’s program notes, “‘Anxious’ begins with a fanfare tempo marking before it settles into its regular and angular groove.” At the beginning of the first movement, the single note E first appears in the upper voice as a welcoming introduction, followed by a glissando marking in an arising direction while the bass line presents a downward motion. The complexity of metric proportions and change of tempi setting employ the main concept of beats by the use of various rhythmic figures, repetitive movement, and alternation of rhythmic units. In describing the psychological aspects of “meter-rhythm interactions,” London points out:

The relationship between the rhythmic surface – the real-world timing of musical events – and the listener’s metric entrainment is complex. Essentially, however, meter serves as a temporal ground for the perception of rhythmic figures. Although some melodic patterns have a pitch contour and rhythmic pattern that strongly suggest one and only one metric construal, most passages are metrically malleable.

Indeed, there are several types of rhythmic proportions including cross-rhythm and polyrhythm. Among these four movements, the musical materials are based on musical pitches, registers, and tempo, yet rhythmic structures can be defined as the leading units for presenting emotional states and levels. There are also other compositional approaches. Here, I focus on how Hu transforms the rhythmic structures to feature post-tonal methodologies in the first movement “Anxious.”

Compositional Style

**Pitch-class Collection**

When analyzing non-tonal music, the musical content is challenging in regard to defining melody, harmony, and rhythm. According to Straus, “Pitch-class sets are the basic building blocks of much post-tonal music.” Lester describes the definition of analysis on pitch-class: “Context is all-important. The insight of the analyst focuses attention on crucial pitches. If this grouping of pitches is important to the sound of passage, it becomes a candidate for designation as a pitch-class set in analysis of that passage.” Indeed, Hu adapts pitch-class by using an order of pitch collection as a clear motive and theme at the beginning of the first movement. In Figure 4.1, the implementation of the pitch-class is the arrangement of the pitch collection. The bass line shows the pitch-class in ascending order: E♭-G♭-A♭-B (measure 1), D♭-E♭-F-A♭ (measure 2). These two measures establish the structure as the leading motivic movement, which will later re-appear in other sections.

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Polyrhythm

Hu’s complex rhythmic patterns vary in each measure. Most of them move between the higher and lower voices, and these rhythmic units meet together on the downbeat. Moreover, the lower and upper voices present different rhythmic structures in opposite directions, with descending and ascending motion. For instance, in Figure 4.2, the bass line and upper voice show a five against six on the third and fourth beats in measure 3, and feature the polyrhythm as different rhythmic structures playing between the registers. In measure 4, the lower and higher voices show a quartal chord with $f$, and then continually represent polyrhythms in other measures. Obviously, the design of polyrhythms demonstrates a consistent forward motion and an effect of contrasting dynamic within each measure, as a presence of subtitle’s character “Anxious.”

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Dynamic Contrasts

The use of dynamic levels is employed to convey a contrasting sound in this movement. Hu alternately uses the range of dynamic contrasts from $p$ to $ff$ in terms of the function of chord progressions. Furthermore, he effectively marks the dynamic level in a clear direction. As can be seen in Figure 4.3, dynamic contrast is filled with a dramatic range of expression; in measures 15 and 16, the dynamic marking goes from crescendo to $mf$, and then it suddenly returns to $mp$. In this way, Hu utilizes the reducing volume of sound to emphasize harmonic changes and dissonances.

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Texture and Range

Post-tonal music underscores a new concept of texture: time setting, sound experiment and musical gesture. According to Lester, “In fact, since non-tonal pieces lack the clear cut-harmonic meanings common to many tonal pieces, texture may actually be more important than pitch in projecting a sense of cadence or another type of important goal.”53 In Hu’s first movement, the texture begins with a horizontal line, followed by chromatic patterns and descending and ascending scales; in the “Allegro” section, it turns to a vertical line as shown in Figure 4.4. The range of the keyboard pitch extends from the lowest note B♭ (Figure 4.1) to the highest note F (Figure 4.4). Moreover, the voices change from two-part voices to three-part voices. Because of the textural transference, the texture moves from a thinner to a thicker register. This texture implies that the performer should plan a certain level of strength and movement to capture the music’s intensity and energy, properly.

Form Structure

Table 4.1 gives an overview of the form of Hu’s first movement, and also demonstrates how Hu sets free form against tonal function and tradition. Hu freely utilizes form structure using improvisation, frequent changes of meter, irregular phrases, and expansion of the texture. This eclectic approach supports Randel’s point about the malleability of “form” in the twentieth-century, as modernist composers move beyond traditional form settings:

Any attempt to define forms of this kind too rigidly will be futile or will at the very least greatly diminish the usefulness of the definition by excluding too many specific compositions.

The forms of tonal music inherited from the 18th century were considerably modified in the 19th, and with the abandonment of tonality by many composers early in the 20th century, the importance of these forms declined considerably.  

Table 4.1 Form Analysis of Ching-chu Hu, *Pulse for piano, “Anxious.”*\(^{56}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Tempo and Time Signature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>mm. 1-21</td>
<td>Fanfare ( \text{j}=92 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mm. 4, 5, 8, 9</td>
<td>5/4( \Rightarrow ) 4/4( \Rightarrow ) 5/4( \Rightarrow ) 4/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mm. 11, 12-13, 16, 20</td>
<td>3/4( \Rightarrow ) 4/4( \Rightarrow ) 3/4( \Rightarrow ) 4/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>mm. 22-75</td>
<td>Allegro ( \text{j}=120 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mm. 58, 59, 60, 61, 62</td>
<td>7/8( \Rightarrow ) 6/8( \Rightarrow ) 4/8( \Rightarrow ) 4/8( \Rightarrow ) 4/8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mm. 64, 66, 71, 72, 73</td>
<td>5/8( \Rightarrow ) 4/8( \Rightarrow ) 5/8( \Rightarrow ) 4/8( \Rightarrow ) 4/8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>mm. 76-85</td>
<td>Meno Mosso ( \text{j}=100 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mm. 76-85</td>
<td>3/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>mm. 86-117</td>
<td>Allegro ( \text{j}=120 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mm. 86, 87, 88, 91, 92, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100</td>
<td>5/8( \Rightarrow ) 6/8( \Rightarrow ) 5/8( \Rightarrow ) 6/8( \Rightarrow ) 5/8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mm. 101, 102, 103, 104, 105</td>
<td>4/8( \Rightarrow ) 5/8( \Rightarrow ) 7/8( \Rightarrow ) 6/8( \Rightarrow ) 5/8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mm. 106, 107, 108, 109, 110</td>
<td>6/8( \Rightarrow ) 5/8( \Rightarrow ) 6/8( \Rightarrow ) 5/8( \Rightarrow ) 6/8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mm. 111, 112, 113, 114, 115, 116, 117</td>
<td>5/8( \Rightarrow ) 6/8( \Rightarrow ) 5/8( \Rightarrow ) 6/8( \Rightarrow ) 5/8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>mm. 118-134</td>
<td>Tempo I ( \text{j}=92 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mm. 118-134</td>
<td>4/4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Changing Meters**

Considering the meter setting, it is obvious that Hu arranges various meters by alternating between simple and duple meter. Especially in section D, the rapid changes of meter increase the beat from 5/8 to 6/8. London explains that “meter is [a] perceptual emergent property of a musical sound, that is, an aspect of our engagement with the production and perception of tones in time.”\(^{57}\) Indeed, the idea of meter features not only

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the presence of varied rhythmic passages, but also the flexible arrangement of tempo setting. Figures 4.5 and 4.6 illustrate the shifting meter:

Figure 4.5. Ching-chu Hu, *Pulse for piano*, “Anxious,” mm. 86-87.\(^{58}\)

Allegro \( \text{\textemdash} = 120 \)

![Figure 4.5](image1)

Figure 4.6. Ching-chu Hu, *Pulse for piano*, “Anxious,” mm. 88-89.\(^{59}\)

![Figure 4.6](image2)

The pitches in both voices are basically the same in Figures 4.5 and 4.6. Yet the meter in Figure 4.5 changes from 5/8 to 6/8, and it contains one more beat than Figure 4.6. Along similar lines, the bass line presents a sixteenth rest on the second beat of measure 89, so the note duration in measure 89 is clearly shorter than that in measure 87.


Second Movement: “Anticipation”

The second movement features running thirty-second notes throughout the movement. The tempo is marked $\text{"}=96$, which follows a rapid flowing movement, and it also presents an alternation of phrases between lower voice and higher voice. The subtitle “Anticipation” matches the narrative statements: uncertainty, questions, and indecision all convey a distance in time and sonority. In Hu’s description, “Anticipation is flighty, a fluttering of nerves of expectation.”

Compositional Style

Fourth and Fifth Chords

The beginning of the second movement presents both downward and upward motion in the upper and lower voices. Kostka explains that modern composers often move beyond the rule of the chord structures, defining “quartal chord” and “quintal chord” as one of twentieth-century compositional techniques. Indeed, in Figure 4.7 the running figures show blocked chords from the fourth by using three pitches: $D\#-G\#-C\#$. The fourth in these harmonic intervals is essentially presented as “quartal chords” in the opening measure.

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Likewise, the concept of "quintal chord" can be found in Figure 4.8. The thirty-second notes move from C♯ to D♯, followed by an ascending direction in measure 5. This shows that the pitches are built on intervals of a fifth: F♭-C♯-G♯-D♯-A♯.

Based on the above chord progression, the alternation of chords between fourth and fifth is followed by a flow of rhythmic passages between lower and higher voices.

---

Motivic Repetition

The main theme appearing in the very beginning of the second movement forms the motif throughout the second movement. The compositional techniques of the motivic materials feature the use of rhythmic passages and pitches, which are represented in the returning motives in different ways. For instance, comparing to Figure 4.7, Figure 4.9 shows the same rhythmic figures moving between two voices in a motivic relationship.

Figure 4.9. Ching-chu Hu, *Pulse for piano*, “Anticipation,” mm.18.\(^{64}\)

Parallel Fifth

In the middle section, the parallel fifth is adapted as a consonant sonority. Figure 4.10 illustrates the idea of perfect fifths: F\(_b\)-C\(_b\), G\(\#\)-D\(\#\), and C\(_b\)-G\(_b\).

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\(^{64}\) Ching-chu Hu, “Pulse for piano,” score, 2014, Special Collections, Sebtzi and Torena Music.
Figure 4.10. Ching-chu Hu, *Pulse for piano*, “Anticipation,” mm. 30-31.\(^{65}\)

Figure 4.11 demonstrates another use of parallel fifths using different pitches: E\(^\#\)-B\(^\#\) and A-E\(^\#\).

Figure 4.11. Ching-chu Hu, *Pulse for piano*, “Anticipation,” mm. 37.\(^{66}\)

**Polyrhythm**

The rhythmic patterns are freely varied, followed by irregular note durations. The quarter note is divided into various divisions of beats in the second movement, including triplet, quintuplet, sextuplet, and septuplet, as Figure 4.12 shows:

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On the third beat of measure 34, the upper voice and lower register show two against six rhythmic proportions, which are then later presented as three against six. In this way, the rhythms present irregular groupings in a regular beat as polyrhythm.

**Rests**

The use of rests is widely adapted in the second movement: whether they are placed on the downbeat or upbeat, the rhythm continues uninterruptedly. This creates a sound effect suggesting a question or an anticipation of progress. Figure 4.13 demonstrates the rest on the second beat of the measure, as well as on the fourth and half beat of measure 55. In measure 56, the meter is changed from 4/4 to 5/4, yet the rest is consistently presented on the second beat as a silence. Moreover, the rest shows grouping or phrasing from the beginning to the end of the section. For instance, in measure 56, the first beat has running seventh notes; after the rest on the second beat, the note is increased to a long running passage.

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Figure 4.13. Ching-chu Hu, *Pulse for piano*, “Anticipation,” mm. 55-56.

Texture

The principal texture is presented in a horizontal, ascending, and descending direction on the lower and upper voices. The overall texture is thin, and it gradually moves from the lower voice to the highest register in Figure 4.14. The clef moves from bass to treble, and the musical texture features light running passages with thirty-second notes in an uninterrupted passage.

Figure 4.14. Ching-chu Hu, *Pulse for piano*, “Anticipation,” mm. 68.

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Third Movement: “Dream”

The “Dream” movement is presented in a relaxed, easygoing, and quiet mood, featuring delicate balance and sonority. Later, the climax appears in the middle section, with repeated rhythmic figures in both registers as a contrasting motion. The tempo is marked $\text{♩}=72$ as an indication of the slow pace at the very beginning of the third movement. Considering the compositional method, the music is related to lyrical style as a leading component to convey a dream-like character. In Hu’s words, “the third movement ‘Dream’ is hazy, peaceful, as if images shift in and out of focus.”

Compositional Style

Chord Expansion

The design of sonority conveys a light, sweet, and beautiful tone color at the beginning of the third movement. Figure 4.15 illustrates the ties across the two registers: $\text{G}-\text{A}$-$\text{A}_b$-$\text{G}_b$-$\text{B}_b$-$\text{D}_b$. The sonority seems dissonant; however, it continues expanding one octave higher. For instance, in measure 1, the upper register is held by a long slur, and a minor seventh chord takes over the crushing sound, continuing to expand with an arpeggio as an echo.

---

Extended Hand-Spans

The use of extended chords appears frequently throughout the third movement, with extended chords including seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth appearing in some sections. In the above Figure 4.15, the chords are held by slurs on both registers in measure 3. The upper voice is presented as a 10th chord G-B♭ on the third beat. Another use of extended hand-spans can be found in Figure 4.16. As shown, in the 9th chord (A-B♭) on the third and half beat of measure 5, the tenuto marking is placed on the 9th chord to emphasize the dissonant harmonies. Although the chords seem to appear structurally in a dissonant way in terms of intensity, the sonority still remains, opening the tone quality and musical expression.

Figure 4.16. Ching-chu Hu, *Pulse for piano*, “Dream,” mm. 4-7.

Polyrhythm

The rhythmic patterns are widely combined with freely written passages. Most of the rhythmic proportions are divided into more complicated and irregular structure between two registers; for instance, Figure 4.17 illustrates independent and different rhythmic passages sharing the same beats as a kind of polyrhythm in measure 8. On the first beat of measure 8, the rhythm is presented as a triplet against a quintuplet; on the second beat, the rhythmic figures are much faster than the first beat, showing a triplet against a sextuplet. On the third and fourth beats, the rhythm holds back with longer note values. As a result, there is a consistent change of rhythms, demonstrating three types of polyrhythm style in different note durations and rhythmic passages. Besides that, there is another compositional approach to rhythmic patterns, as shown in Figure 4.17. It illustrates the unusual duration of note value in measure 10. The bass voice shows five-quarter notes in 3/4 meter; the length of the note value seems to exceed three quarter

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notes of the beat setting. In this way, the lower voice illustrates the cross-rhythm in a 5:3 ratio. As a result, it shows an irregular subdivision in the lower register.

Figure 4.17. Ching-chu Hu, *Pulse for piano*, “Dream,” mm. 8-11.73

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**Grace Note**

In the “Dream” movement, a new sonority is generated by ornamentation and harmonic intervals. In this compositional approach, the use of grace notes appears in a new section. The grace notes contain a leaping motion consisting of 7th and 8th chords on the higher register. Figure 4.18 illustrates the grace note G♭, which is presented in an upward direction in measure 30. In measure 31, the grace notes C and G are built one octave higher from the same pitches, but their direction is presented the same way as in measure 30. The tone quality is based on a bell-like sound with a light and quick attack in a higher register.

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Harmonic Pedal

The use of the pedal changes the bass line and creates a mysterious atmosphere throughout the third movement. Long sustaining pedals here are placed on each lower bass as a hint of changing harmonic progressions. In particular, the change of pedal on the bass is against the upper texture, which is followed by the complexity of harmonic intervals and rhythmic figures. For instance, Figure 4.19 shows frequent changes of pedals in the bass notes D♭, A♭, E♭, D♭, and A♭ from measures 38 to 41, while the higher voices are projected with chromaticism and rapid passages. Thus, bass pedaling can help define the design of the harmonic structure.

Parallel Voicing by Octave

The conception of parallel voicing shows an arrangement of orchestration. Figure 4.20 illustrates consecutive octaves in descending and ascending direction in the higher register. The parallel structure composed in triplets, quintuplets, and sextuplets, is set against running sixteenth notes in the bass voice creating what sounds like two rhythmically improvised lines but are in fact, freely complex polyrhythms.

Figure 4.20. Ching-chu Hu, *Pulse for piano*, “Dream,” mm. 79-80.76

Fourth Movement: “Adrenaline”

The fourth movement, “Adrenaline,” reflects the complexity and tension of music with an energetic posture and dissonant sound. The frequent change of harmonies, wide range of keyboard writing, and driving rhythmic activity represent the variation of emotional states. Nonetheless, this meter is written in 4/4, which is shown by a consistent beat throughout the movement. The rhythm gradually shifts between two registers and it suggests forward motion. The opening section presents a fuller sonority with \( f \), and the texture moves vertically in the upper voice while the lower voice shows a horizontal line. According to Hu’s program note, “the final movement, ‘Adrenaline’ deals with the excitement of a moment – its passion, its vulnerability, and its energy.”

Compositional Style

Rhythmic Ostinato and Syncopation

The set of rhythm is consistent in four beats throughout the fourth movement; however, the rhythmic structure is presented on the offbeat and downbeat alternately between higher and lower registers. In Figure 4.21, the bass note G is placed on first beat with an accent implying the rhythmic ostinato at the beginning of measure. The upper voice is syncopated by a thirty-second rest on the first beat while bass voice continues showing a shifting of normal beats. As a consequence, both registers are written in contrary motion. Considering the shifting texture between upper and lower registers, in

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measures 1-2 illustrate the stable and continuing beats, followed by descending motion in the higher voice and a rising direction in the lower voice. Both registers move separately as independent lines, and it seems that they move closer but alternate on the second beat.

Figure 4.21. Ching-chu Hu, *Pulse for piano*, “Adrenaline,” mm. 1-2.  

Non-Tertian Chords and Polychords

Hu’s use of chord progression is based on parallel perfect fourths with doubling octaves; it presents contrasting harmonic intervals as an opposite of tertian harmonies. Figure 4.22 demonstrates non-tertian chords in the upper voice: E-A-E, A-D-A, G-C-G,

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which are related to non-tertian chords as new wide sonority in measure 6. The bass line shows repetitive octave figures as another chord progression against the non-tertian chords. Additionally, these two independent chords are represented as polychords between the lower and higher voices. Among the exchange of harmonic progression, although the sonority is crushed and dissonant, it creates an intensive mood and excited gesture with rapid passages.

Figure 4.22. Ching-chu Hu, *Pulse for piano,* “Adrenaline,” mm. 6.  

Tone Cluster

The new compositional style creates harmonies that are varied and complicated; it shows different sound effects and new compositional material consisting of large harmonic intervals. Figure 4.23 illustrates the conflict sound as a tone cluster on both voices. In measure 17, it illustrates extended harmonic intervals, followed by parallel fourths on the top voice, while the low voice is presented in parallel fifths. Although the sonority in paired voices is consonant, when they move together, the sound becomes

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dissonant (Figure 4.23). As mentioned above, fourths and fifths with added seconds are used as a dramatic contrast in harmonic intervals: the upper voice is presented in the cluster notes of A♭-B♭-C-D♭-E♭-F while the lower voice is represented by B♭-C-D♭-E♭-F-G-A♭. The employment of small clusters creates an expansion of harmonies with repeated descending rhythmic figures in both voices.

Figure 4.23. Ching-chu Hu, Pulse for piano, “Adrenaline,” mm. 17.  

Tetrachord and Motif

The compositional aspect of pitch class can be found in “Adrenaline,” which illustrates the use of tetrachord by using fourth notes as parallel motion in one register. For instance, Figure 4.24 shows the bass part, represented as D♭-A♭-E♭-F, and illustrates the principle of tetrachord consisting of four segments of harmonic intervals. Considering the usage of a motivic relationship, Figure 4.24 shows repeating rhythmic figures in the

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bass line by the same pitch class, with alternation of downbeat and offbeat settings. Its fourth segment as a motivic unit is represented by inverted intervals and changing metric. This is essentially repeated several times in each measure, and it is also clearly applied to the thematic materials in this section.

Figure 4.24. Ching-chu Hu, *Pulse for piano*, “Adrenaline,” mm. 18-21.\textsuperscript{81}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure4_24.png}
\end{figure}

**Secundal Chords**

The usage of a repeated single pitch is built into the fourth movement as a new rhythmic mode, and it shows consistent and intensive sound on both registers. For instance, in Figure 4.25, the lower voice E♭ and the higher voice F show repeated major seconds as extremes of dissonant sonority, and both parts move simultaneously in

\textsuperscript{81} Ching-chu Hu, “Pulse for piano,” score, 2014, Special Collections, Sebtzi and Torena Music.
sixteenth rhythmic figures. The chords are placed on the black and white keys between the top part and low voice. This unusual sound is dramatic and effective, and Hu’s compositional approach breaks the traditional chord progression in this section. As noted above, this secundal chord can be considered as a tone cluster style.

Figure 4.25. Ching-chu Hu, *Pulse for piano*, “Adrenaline,” mm. 39.82

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**Pentatonic Scale**

In the highest climax section of the fourth movement, the melodic lines are combined with constant dissonance, followed by parallel octaves with stepwise motion in the bass line. In Figure 4.26, the upbeat with octave D♯ appears in the lower line (measure 58) while the upper line has a sixteenth rest. The top line exhibits a pentatonic scale in the upper voice, which is C-D-E-G-A (Figure 4.26), while the bass line presents chromatic octaves. Measures 58-59 show an independent compositional style in both voices. The top line also shows a combination of parallel fourth (A-D) and fifth (D-A) harmonic intervals throughout the measure. The texture of both voices conveys a richer and fuller writing style in measures 58-59.

Figure 4.26. Ching-chu Hu, *Pulse for piano*, “Adrenaline,” mm. 58-59.\textsuperscript{83}

\textsuperscript{83} Ching-chu Hu, “Pulse for piano,” score, 2014, Special Collections, Sebtzi and Torena Music.
Chapter 5: Performance Suggestions and Hu’s Interpretation of *Pulse*

*Pulse* (2014) presents a work that is both virtuosic and pianistic, requiring quick changes of emotion that place high demands on one’s piano technique. The underlying musical narrative describes four different characteristics of a heartbeat, in a variety of paces. In terms of rhythmic proportions, shifting tonalities, and changing meters, the music itself shows Neo-Romantic lyrical and Impressionistic styles. The expanded range on keys is combined with leaping and stepwise motions between lower and upper registers, while the hand span alternates between ninth and tenth chords. Sometimes this piece requires both hands to move in contrary direction, while at other times both hands move closely in parallel motion.

Clear articulation, tempi settings, varied rhythms, shifting textures, harmonic alternation, and changing dynamic levels represent the characteristics of Hu’s individual movements. For instance, the first movement, “Anxious,” conveys a dramatic character with frequent changes of meter and tempo, just as the music itself presents quick changes in mood. *Pulse* is rhythmically complex. One major difficulty in *Pulse* is the frequent use of polyrhythms, which are associated with irregular and mixed rhythmic proportions. The rhythmic structure varies and alternates between high and low voices. Although the rhythm presents differently between upper and lower voices, it also illustrates how the
pianist should shift his or her hands independently and simultaneously in a regular tempo setting. Furthermore, the rhythmic figures in *Pulse* are changeable and free; they create a time space between accelerando and ritardando, requiring significant temporal flexibility. Another challenge lies in controlling the sonority: there are a variety of harmonies presenting dissonances against consonances. Moreover, it is noticeable that some dissonant harmonies are inverted from closed to open positions. Consequently, the pianist should utilize different touches and movements to project colorful sounds and to create various characters.

From the perspective of interpretation, *Pulse* shows a complexity of emotional states, as clearly indicated in each movement’s subtitle. During a personal interview with the composer, Ching-chu Hu, I was fortunate to perform *Pulse* and get some significant feedback from him.\(^4\) Hu shared his thoughts and suggestions about performing the piece. The interview is transcribed in Chapter 6. This chapter will concentrate on the different perspectives on performance interpretation, and describe how a pianist can manipulate these practical methods to integrate Hu’s performance suggestions.

**Rhythm**

The challenge for the pianist is to effectively articulate these complex rhythmic ideas into an interpretation. *Pulse* contains several different types of rhythmic figures: triplet, quadruplet, quintuplet, sextuplet, and septuplet. Another rhythmic challenge for the pianist is the combination of the changing time signatures, various meters, different

tempo settings, and polyrhythms. Despite irregular changing meters, the main task throughout the first movement is maintaining a consistent set value. The continuous change of voices and layers tests the pianist’s technique and control. Regardless of the time signature, it is difficult for a performer to calculate the rapid changes of rhythmic patterns in a regular tempo setting. Consequently, it is important to practice cooperation and balance between the right and left hands. A pianist should learn how to practice separately in both hands, and move further to control opposite but simultaneous motion. For example, when playing five against six rhythmic patterns (Figure 5.1), both hands must move individually and simultaneously. To practice these rhythms, Hu said, “It does not have to be exact; it is just about the energy.”

Indeed, technique is not an end itself; rather, the exploration of musical gesture is the goal.

Figure 5.1. Ching-chu Hu, *Pulse for piano*, “Anxious,” mm. 3.

On the other hand, there are varied rhythms without a time signature. For instance, Figure 5.2 presents different rhythmic proportions by using an accelerando method between both hands. Hu suggested, “it is accelerated within that time period, but you would not exactly

85 Ching-chu Hu, interview by Pei-Sin Chen, Denison University, September 20, 2016.
have six or five rhythms.” As a result, the pianist should play freely within the tempo itself, whether it moves faster or slower. Specifically, feeling in one beat or conducting the measure in certain beat pattern is the practical approach.

Figure 5.2. Ching-chu Hu, *Pulse for piano*, “Anxious,” mm. 38.

**Articulation and Touch**

There are several types of articulation in keyboard writing including staccato, legato, and tenuto throughout the piece. Each movement employs a different articulation, which reflects or evokes certain emotional characteristics. For instance, the first movement “Anxious” represents legato playing in both registers (Figure 5.3). The rhythmic patterns seem to present syncopation between upbeat and offbeat, yet it is easy for the pianist to use non-legato playing in this case. There is a long slur on the top and bass lines; this indicates how the pianist should move smoothly and connectively in a horizontal way.

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87 Ching-chu Hu, interview by Pei-Sin Chen, Denison University, September 20, 2016.
Regarding the perspective of playing the accent with running figures, the pianist should sustain the group of polyrhythms as one beat, and emphasize the first beat or third beat with accent markings in changing meters. For instance, Figure 5.4 shows an accent which is marked on the downbeat after the polyrhythm in both registers. Between the measures 8 and 9, the meter shifts from 5/4 to 4/4, and the accent seems to be placed on the quarter note after the running passages. In order to keep the beat consistently in changing meters, the performer needs to use a metronome and to practice each voice separately at a slow pace.

Raad gives another perspective on legato playing, emphasizing the tone:

A beautiful legato tone – the so-called transparent legato, requires striking the key with as little shock as possible, the arm and wrist supple, the fingers literally feeling into the keys to know exactly where the let-off, or escapement, begins, then sounding the note quickly but sustaining the touch until perfectly prepared to sound the next tone. \(^{91}\)

Being consistent with this perspective, Figure 5.5 illustrates running rhythmic figures in ascending and descending directions in Hu’s second movement, “Anticipation.”

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\(^{90}\) Ching-chu Hu, “Pulse for piano”, score, 2014, Special Collections, Sebtzi and Torena Music.


In this example, the phrase begins with an arising direction on the first beat and ends with a long phrase on the rest of the beats in measure 6. In order to enhance and master the lyrical tone with legato lines, it is obligatory for the pianist to follow the melodic contours between the left hand and the right hand, either with an ascending or descending motion. When practicing the balance of hands movement, it is effective to play these running thirty-second notes in a slow tempo, so the figures can evenly and clearly follow the legato line. Additionally, in order to create a soft sound (mp or p), the pianist should use less arm weight from the beginning to the end of phrases, paying close attention to the legato phrasing.

Considering keyboard articulation, Hu’s singing tone and narrative style convey other methods of touch in Pulse. Raad also claims the concept of lyrical style, “The songlike quality was used to evoke a particular atmosphere or a poetic idea.” For instance, Figure 5.6 (below) illustrates how the upper register presents a melodic tone (G-G♯-E♯-B♯) while the lower voice is the background. The touch in this case demonstrates a contrary motion and tension in both hands. As a result, to present the singing tone, the pianist should feel the weight of the right hand as heavier than that on the left hand.

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Another compositional approach to articulation is a combination of touches in the fourth movement, which presents a vivid character and carefree mood in Figure 5.7.

Figure 5.7 demonstrates three types of articulations: legato, staccato, and tenuto. The articulation begins with a slur and ends with a tenuto marking in measure 18, while in measure 19 it starts with a sixteenth rest on the first beat and ends with staccato playing. Both measures present contrasting ways by changing the order of articulation on each measure.

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beat, meaning it is important for the pianist to differentiate the articulation by counting the rhythm on each first beat.

A similar example of articulating tenuto, portato, and legato can be found in measures 23-24 (Figure 5.8). The tenuto is placed on the first beat of the bass voice in measure 23; the portato is shown on the second beat, followed by a dot under the legato line. Regarding the employment of these three types of touches, it is effective for the pianist to learn how the musical approach is presented in different touches. In this case, when projecting a clear articulation, the performer should experiment different musical character and sound effect whether it is based on long-short rhythmic value or musical contour.

Figure 5.8. Ching-chu Hu, *Pulse for piano*, “Anxious,” mm.11-13.96

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**Changing Tempo and Meter**

The irregular meters and tempi in each movement show dramatic narratives and flexible time-span in the musical contexts. The tempo indication is represented by a consistent change of beat, as is characteristic of emotional expression. Additionally, the

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length of musical phrases is of the essence in the intricate change of tempo and meter. In *Pulse*, when the tempo is written in exact same rate along with regular meters, the musical line is consistent and stable; on the contrary, when the tempo is changed with irregular meters, the musical phrase is interrupted and inconsistent. According to Lester’s explanation of the different types of tempo:

Our perception of tempo is based more on the speed at which we perceive the basic beat of a passage than on the speed of notes in that passage. The basic beat in a passage results from the harmonic rhythm as well as the pacing of phrases. Slow movements, for instance, may contain rapid notes in accompaniment patterns or quick scales, yet still sound slow because the slow pace of harmonic rhythm and the slow unfolding of phrases produce a slow beat.\(^97\)

Indeed, a slow movement generally shows an alternation between longer dimensions and moving passages of rhythmic structures, to present a flexible beat setting. Taking the third movement, “Dream,” as an example, the beginning (Figure 5.9) conveys a slow tempo with complicated and running rhythmic patterns such as sextuplets. Thus, the pianist should stay in a consistent and regular tempo between the left hand and right hand, and make sure both hands play evenly and subtly with slow beats.

Figure 5.9. Ching-chu Hu, *Pulse for piano*, “Dream,” mm.1-3.\(^98\)

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On the other hand, the tempo not only evokes an abrupt and interrupted posture in running passages, but it also speeds up the tempo and holds back the beat in flexible progress. As Figure 5.10 shows, in measures 8-13 the tempo marking is $\text{J} = 56$, while in measures 14-16 the tempo is changed to $\text{J} = 72$. In order to manipulate the beat in a changing tempo, using a metronome is another practical approach to keep rhythmic passages stable and consistent.

![Figure 5.10. Ching-chu Hu, Pulse for piano, “Dream,” mm. 8-16.](image)

Considering the changing meters, the rhythmic patterns consisting of similar durations of rhythmical value are represented with different meter settings. For instance,

Figure 5.11 illustrates frequently changing meters from 7/8 to 6/8 in measures 98-105, forcing the pianist to analyze the rhythmic patterns and to find a consistent pulse in different meters. Here, the meters seem to present four bar phrases from 7/8 to 6/8 in measures 98-101 and other four bar phrases from 5/8 to 6/8 in measures 102-105. Rhythmically, it shows offbeat and downbeat alternation between the right hand and left hand; thus, the pianist should subdivide the rhythms into small rhythmic units. Moreover, dividing the beats into two grouping beats in a compound meter is another effective method when following the rhythms. For instance, in Figure 5.11 the beats can be grouped into 4 and 3 groups of eighth notes in measure 98; hence, the pianist needs to know where the beats are and how he or she can incorporate them with articulation.

Figure 5.11. Ching-chu Hu, *Pulse for piano,* “Anxious,” mm.98-105.100

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Sound Effect and Expression

Many composers have experimented with sound effects on the piano. In Hu’s piece, this element not only reflects a conception of personal expression, but also creates an imaginative atmosphere for the pianist to interpret. Sandor argues that musical sounds are tied to emotional effects:

Music can produce powerful effects on us; it can make us feel extremely stimulated or extremely depressed. These effects are brought about by the alternation of tension and release of tension, and those states are created by dissonances and consonances, fast and slow tempos, loud and soft dynamics, accelerandos and ritardandos, crescendos and diminuendos, counterpoint and homophony, rhythmic irregularities and regularities, and asymmetry and symmetry.101

As a result, the pianist needs follow the indicated articulation by using different touches and by increasing his or her arm weight to create a greater intensity of sound.

In the second movement, “Anticipation,” the left hand and right hand show rapid passages in a narrative style; hence, the pianist should use rotation with alternating flat fingers, and he or she can utilize quick or slow reaction on keys in order to convey contrasting sounds. The third movement, “Dream,” reflects an image from the past to the present along with multiple layers of tone. In order to project this dedicated and subtle tone quality, the pianist should employ different touches with slow striking reactions on the keyboard, and he or she can employ fingertips by a curving or flattening motion to present a variety of sound effects. The fourth movement, “Adrenaline,” illustrates consistent dissonances and full sonority as a contrary expression, while both textures are

represented in opposite directions. In order to convey conflicting sounds with clarity, the pianist should effectively expand his or her arm to move horizontally when the rapid passages show frequent leaping motion. Furthermore, the pianist should practice very slowly in order to get familiar with the leaping direction.

**Dynamic Contrasts**

In each movement of *Pulse*, Hu clearly indicates the guideline of dynamic markings, which are to build a creative atmosphere. The dynamic level in these four movements consists of different emotional states; as a consequence, the pianist should utilize this contrasting dynamic to evoke sound effects and sonorities. According to Gieseking and Leimer, individual performers could present their dynamic levels from different perspectives:

The interpretation of the artist is based essentially on his different conceptions of the dynamic degrees. When we consider that each *piano*, each *forte*, each *crescendo*, and each *diminuendo*, even each accent sounds differently no matter how often played by the same pianist, we realize how greatly the delivery of a piece depends upon the disposition of an artist.  

In Figure 5.12, the pattern of intervallic fifths begins with stepwise motion presenting three types of dynamics: *mf*, *p*, and *mp*. Although the phrases are irregular, the pianist should keep the dynamic as a whole picture by using *dim* in measures 30 and 31.

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Another use of dynamic method can be found in Figure 5.13. The dynamic shows a soft sound as if at a far distance, and then gradually increases the volume as it is marked crescendo. In this case, pianist should press down the keys quietly and gently, and then restrain the rest of the sound successively from mp to mf. Hu explained, “These things become the focus in the melody and the accompaniment, and then fade away at the end.”

Figure 5.13. Ching-chu Hu, Pulse for piano, “Dream,” mm. 8-9.  

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104 Ching-chu Hu, interview by Pei-Sin Chen, Denison University, September 20, 2016.  
Pedaling

Hu explores several types of pedaling techniques in *Pulse*, including sustaining pedal, sostenuto pedal, and una corda pedal. The use of the pedal plays an important role for producing different tonal layers, not only to suspend the volume of the sound but also to control the presence of musical phrases. Figure 5.14 shows three types of voices: pentatonic chord color on the black keys, bi-tonal sustained chord over a pedal point on E♭.

According to Banowetz, “in passages where a syncopated rhythm is difficult to project over an extended period, the pedal may be used to maintain the feeling of a regular pulse.”107 Indeed, this type of pedal with rhythmic patterns can be found in “Anxious,” where it demonstrates syncopation between higher and lower voices as in

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Figure 5.15. The syncopation in measure 45 consistently displays different motion between the right hand and left hand alternately; therefore, it is important to catch the pedal on the eighth notes instead of sixteenth notes.

Figure 5.15. Ching-chu Hu, *Pulse for piano*, “Anxious,” mm.45.  

![Figure 5.15](image)

Figure 5.16 shows how the pedal is based on the melodic materials on the right hand. The pianist should carefully follow a composer’s direction on pedaling marking, whether in the bass register or a higher one.

Figure 5.16. Ching-chu Hu, *Pulse for piano*, “Anticipation,” mm. 12.  

![Figure 5.16](image)

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Another relevant aspect of pedal use, as Banowetz notes, is that “often a pedal point must be held while the articulation of other parts demands clarity of pedal or even dryness.”\(^{110}\) For instance, Figure 5.17 presents a pedal point in the bass register from measures 1-2, while the upper register presents the ascending chords. It is clear to see how Hu deliberately expands the sound by using the long pedal to create the suspension of the chords. Its effect echoes the title “Dream,” as the pedal is held until the right hand is raised.

Figure 5.17. Ching-chu Hu, *Pulse for piano*, “Dream,” mm. 1-2.\(^{111}\)

![Musescore notation](https://example.com/musicalnotation.png)

Finally, in Figure 5.18, it is important for the pianist to use sostenuto pedaling to hold the bass note, E flat. In order to sustain a fuller sonority, the pianist should hold the upper two voices across the measure within the bass vibration.

Rests

Rests appear frequently in Pulse, and can be considered as a needed silence in the musical expression. According to Lhevinne, “very often the effect of the rest is even greater than that of the notes.” As a result, the rest conveys a pause and silence, as shown in Figure 5.19. Figure 5.19 shows rapid passages with a fast tempo in measure 12. The quarter rest appears on the third beat of measure 12, on a quartet note followed by expanded chords in both voices in measure 13. It is clear to see that the rest makes a powerful pause between the contrasting lines.


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Figure 5.18. Ching-chu Hu, Pulse for piano, “Anxious,” mm. 126-130.

Figure 5.19 shows rapid passages with a fast tempo in measure 12. The quarter rest appears on the third beat of measure 12, on a quartet note followed by expanded chords in both voices in measure 13. It is clear to see that the rest makes a powerful pause between the contrasting lines.
Besides that, placing a rest on different beats makes a different value of the rhythmic patterns. For instance, when comparing measures 59 and 61 (Figure 5.20), the eighth rest shows an upbeat in measure 59, and the eighth rests in measure 61 present an upbeat on both hands while the length of the note values are the same. However, the music and its interpretation are different. To master feeling the pause, the pianist should count the rest precisely by emphasizing the left hand with three beats of the dotted quarter notes in measure 59. However, in measures 60 and 61 the pianist should take a break on the first beat and play with less volume, since the rest is already on the downbeat.

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A similar approach can be found in Figure 5.21. It shows a longer rest to create a space between running notes and rests. Hu suggested, “I would not hold too long at the end.”

As a result, the pianist should use wrist motion while playing running notes and then hold the last note briefly.

Figure 5.21. Ching-chu Hu, Pulse for piano, “Anticipation,” mm. 2.
Chapter 6: An Interview with Composer Ching-chu Hu

Chapter 6 is primarily based on the setting and context of an interview with composer, Ching-chu Hu on September 20, 2016. My questions will probe Hu’s compositional methods and musical thread in Pulse, the inspiration of his compositional ideas, his performance expectation as a composer, performer and listener, and a future purpose for his compositional development.

1. Interviewer: Would you define Pulse as twelve-tone serial or post-tonal music? Could you share some thoughts about the style?

Ching-chu Hu: I would say that the piece is post-tonal and also Neo-Romantic style.

Interviewer: Neo-Romantic style?

Ching-chu Hu: Yes, this piece is Neo-Romantic, but I do not think it is serial music.

2. Interviewer: There are some detailed pedal markings in Pulse. Would you describe the effect of the pedaling that you would like to hear?

Ching-chu Hu: I tried to give the performer an idea of pedaling based on what I would like to do from a small section. Meaning that if there is a certain point where I want the sound to be divided more, I am very careful about that. For instance, I do not want you to
leave your foot off this harmony. I want you to let them ring. Other things, I think it shows I want it to be clean, you know. So it gives a performer the types of sound that I want.

3. **Interviewer:** *Pulse* is based on four types of emotional states. Would you share some of your ideas regarding musical expression and interpretation in each movement of *Pulse*?

Ching-chu Hu: Well, I think the title is pretty self-explanatory. Each title represents how you feel if you are anxious. The idea of *adrenaline* illustrates a sense when something pulses so quickly. So, that is what I think what I was trying to do with the music in each movement, which represents that feeling.

Interviewer: What about performance interpretation? For example, the first movement is called “Anxious.” What kind of emotional level is part of the interpretation?

Ching-chu Hu: I think it depends on what the performer brings to it. For me, I was thinking about the gesture. The musical ideas are very abrupt! And the lines are a bit angular, so that everything is sort of short ideas here and short ideas there, sort of right next to each other. So, it feels a little bit like you are not sure what is going on.

Interviewer: Got it! What about “Dream” in the third movement?

Ching-chu Hu: “Dream” for me is like an idea of creating comfort, and creating a haze. The pedal is a little bit more fluid. It is like the singular idea representing one motif that becomes clear. It is like how an image in a dream becomes clear when you are dreaming and it disappears back in the haze.
Interviewer: Could you talk about the second movement, “Anticipation”?

Ching-chu Hu: Anticipation is a sense of the moment when you are waiting for something. Let us say you just did your doctoral defense, and you are sitting outside of the committee’s room until the committee calls you back in to tell you. That time when you are sitting out there, even it is ten minutes or fifteen minutes will seem to be long, and all your thoughts are just fast and nervous!

Interviewer: Ha, that is right!

Ching-chu Hu: That is what the lines are about.

Interviewer: Ok, I got it. What about the “Adrenaline” in the fourth movement?

Ching-chu Hu: Adrenaline is like letting it go. For me, it’s more like getting confidence in that sense. For example, the athlete might have built up adrenaline before they go and compete in something, such as a track race. Once it starts and you hear everything begin and you let go, everything just pushes you. So that is the idea of “Adrenaline.” It is like everything pushes you, and everything should be flashing. So, the focus should be the visual part of a pianist, right?

Interviewer: Yes, I agree.

Ching-chu Hu: The hand gesture is very visual, I want the audience to see the performer making that gesture.

Interviewer: What about the sound effect?

Ching-chu Hu: The sound effect is related to the energy.
4. Interviewer: There are some rests in the first movement, which creates an unexpected and dramatic effect in *Pulse*. What are some meanings of glissando and hand-slap markings?

Ching-chu Hu: It is like something is interrupted and anxious. Or it is also like a gesture, which is not really fitted in. It is like a surprise!

5. Interviewer: The music sounds tonal in *Pulse*. I analyzed the first movement, and I found some pitch collections. It seems that it begins in E natural, and it ends on E flat major at the end of the first movement. But overall it is based on the pitch class collections. Right?

Ching-chu Hu: Yes, or it is like an overall gesture. It is a whole thing of the idea of the E moving to the E flat.

Interviewer: Yes, is that related to the pitch centricity or something else?

Ching-chu Hu: I think within each movement, I definitely believe that a sense of the pitch center moving from something to somewhere else.

6. Interviewer: There are some usages of accidental signs in the first movement of *Pulse*. Would you tell me about the meaning of the character between the white and black keys?

Ching-chu Hu: The difference between black and white collections is just creating the relationship or a contrast of sound, or a contrast of color. That is the main reason why
certain collections are white, and why certain movements are black. It is like letting them wrap up against each other.

Interviewer: So, is it like a conflict?

Ching-chu Hu: Yes, it is like a conflict.

Interviewer: Considering the complexity of various rhythmic patterns in Pulse, is the structure based on symmetry or mathematical proportion?

Ching-chu Hu: No, it is purely based on gesture. The focus is the gesture, and also trying to create something. I want to tell you which notes I want to hold a little bit longer than the other. So, I could control the flexibility of the rhythmic ideas.

Interviewer: What about the time-span in the third movement?

Ching-chu Hu: Time-span?

Interviewer: Yes, for example, at the beginning of the third movement, there is a changing meter and tempo. How did you choose the meter?

Ching-chu Hu: For me, I guess I still feel the pulse, but what I wanted to do is to make sure the gestures are clear. So, that is why sometime I went from 4/4 to 5/4. But then here, it is 5/4 and 4/4 or continues you know, these two measures are 4/4. Because I wanted to show the bar lines are showing the start of the phrases. But I also wanted to make sure that it has elasticity in the time. So, that is why sometimes it is mixed meters, but sometimes other certain things. I want the performer to have a sense of line and emotion that they can control as well. Does that help?

Interviewer: Yes, very helpful!
Ching-chu Hu: And then also when it comes to here. This is steadier than what it was with sextuplets, you know?

Interviewer: Yes!

7. **Interviewer: How would you define Pulse in terms of form, rhythm, pitch, harmony, or motif?**

Ching-chu Hu: I defined the pulse based on what your heart will do. So, everything is based on a pulse within one’s heart.

Interviewer: There are some melodic materials in each movement. Is there any meaning to the melodic lines?

Ching-chu Hu: Oh, I do not know if there is a meaning.

Interviewer: Is it related to a narrative style?

Ching-chu Hu: Well, I think, for me, it is part of the idea of... some melodic or textural moments of the first three movements coming back to the fourth movement. Some of the characteristics sort of come back. I think for me it is like creating four very different moments. Sometimes it is sweet. It is the sense that captures just the moment representing a movement whether it has been anxious, or been asleep, ready to go! That captures it in the absence of what it feels like.

Interviewer: Understood!

Ching-chu Hu: So, it does not have a story, and how they transpire and change. It is not about that.

Interviewer: It is just about the moment!
Ching-chu Hu: Yes! It is just about the moment.

8. Interviewer: How would you shift the tonality on *Pulse*? Is there any special meaning of the tonality?

Ching-chu Hu: Not the meaning of the overall architecture design, but it was more like I played for the boundary of the tonal. Sometimes it is not fitted, but sometimes there is a relationship. So, it is not atonal in a sense of being serial, and it is not post-modern neither. It is like a Neo-Romantic style when I was thinking about the tonality. It expands areas of tonal center.

9. Interviewer: Besides *Pulse*, there is another piano piece, *Flight*, which you composed in 1997. What is the difference or development in terms of keyboard writing style from your previous to present piece?

Ching-chu Hu: *Flight* is a single-movement piece. There is a spinning and flight movement. So this piece has more narrative style. It has a similarity in a sense of playing with a singular idea or texture that both hands need to work together in order to create one texture. It is not like, here is a melody, and there is an accompaniment. *Pulse* is something about showing off and flashing. There is a different style in terms of the performer’s driven expectation as opposed to painting a picture.

10. Interviewer: There are two pieces, *A Tempered Wish* and *In Frozen Distance*, which contain a variety of Chinese tonal elements in your compositional style.
Ching-chu Hu: Yes!

Interviewer: Would you say that Chinese elements also have an influence on *Pulse*?
Ching-chu Hu: Not as much, right?

Interviewer: Yes, but I found that the last movement in measure 6, the upper register presents Chinese folk music.

Ching-chu Hu: Oh I see! Yes, a little bit! It is not as much in the texture, compared to other pieces like *In Frozen Distance* and *A Tempered Wish*. The string quartet that I wrote, *The Swash of Water and Red*, this one definitely has Asian influences and uses Chinese instruments as well. But, it is not at this point.

11. Interviewer: Would you share how you were inspired by Chinese music?

Ching-chu Hu: It was from my parents playing it when I was a kid. I went to the Chinese opera, and listened to Chinese folk music. Having my relatives sing Chinese folk songs, things like that.

12. Interviewer: There are many remarkable discs in your recording output. Would you share how you come up with their titles?

Ching-chu Hu: Yes, it is hard to come up with a title. It depends on different situations. A lot of times, I title the piece at the end. But with this, four movements of *Pulse*, I knew what I would like to do, so their titles came first. I think the title of *Pulse* came a little bit later. But the movement titles came first at that moment.
13. Interviewer: According to your biography on your website, you mentioned that you composed a piece for a film, *The Life and Times of Jimmy B*. How did you compose this piece for that film production? What is the difference between writing a score for live performance and film?

Ching-chu Hu: That was interesting! I received the film footage, and I wrote music for different scenes. So, that was a lot of fun. I also wrote music for an orchestral film, which is called *The Gold Rush*. It was written in 1925 by Charlie Chaplin. So, the Newark Granville symphony will play the piece in February. They will show the whole film, and the entire show is my music for 90 minutes.

14. Interviewer: When listening to your discography *Snow Ash*, I was impressed and inspired by the beautiful tone and musical sensitivity. Would you define your compositional style as lyricism in general?

Ching-chu Hu: Yes!

15. Interviewer: What is the difference between writing a score for live performance and for a film?

Ching-chu Hu: For the live performance, you can play with time. For film, you cannot. For instance, the time is set in the film. Whatever you have has to fit the time. When you are writing for film, you can direct the listener to a character. So, I can set a mood, so that you would be sympathetic to the main character, or I can give a commentary that the main character is actually bad and the music shows that. On the other hand, in this piece,
you cannot do that. There is no way you can direct the listener to feel a certain way without a visual. In a film, if there are three people on the screen, my music can direct who you are going to look at. Right? Here, I can write something. For instance, I do not know where you are looking at…are you looking at a piano on stage? Are you looking at the theater? Are you looking at the person sitting next to you? Something like this.

16. Interviewer: In what way can music serve as a communication or language to convey an emotional state without words?

Ching-chu Hu: I think it can do a lot! I think music is very capable of doing that. You can set the mood, you can make the audience feel something, you can make the performer feel something, and the performer can relate it in a way or not. If you write a song, and the singer is presented as a character. A performer can bring the audiences to tears and change what the audience feels about it too.

17. Interviewer: How would you provide direction or guidelines to a performer when composing a piece? What is the message and hint that you would like the performer to experience and interpret?

Ching-chu Hu: Yes, I think that is very important. When I am writing a piece for a performer, it is collaborative. When I wrote this, I showed my friend my idea and also got my friend’s thoughts. And I really tried to give my friend a direction, something I would like to do, and my friend also gave me feedback too. So that is why some of the changes that I emailed to you, those are after I was working with my friend again. For instance,
where can the sound be cut-off, which will be easier for you to perform, but we still have the effect. Right? So, that is driven by the performer. Those changes are octaves rather than octaves with a third so that your hand can be a little bit looser. Also, I was to try to create a moment.

18. Interviewer: Besides music, how would you describe the influence of aesthetic appreciation on your compositions? What about poetry or painting?
Ching-chu Hu: Yes, I think that really influences me. I think also landscape and water in general are also very fascinating to me, though I do not know why. Maybe it is about ice, the sense of water, the sense of ocean, and the sense of drowning. For some reason, water has always been fascinating and inspiring for me. And yes, I love poetry and painting. When I read a poem I can set it to music. Then, I feel like the poem has guided the piece.
Interviewer: What about painting? Do you like the Impressionist style?
Ching-chu Hu: Yes, I like Impressionism and also modern styles.

19. Interviewer: What are other motivations and inspirations for your compositions?
Ching-chu Hu: I think it can be a life event, a friendship, a death, and a love. Any of these things can affect and inspire me.
20. Interviewer: What are your short-term and long-term compositional goals?

Ching-chu Hu: We’ll see. I am working on a poem right now, and we are going to write an opera. So that will be a big goal in the next couple years.

21. Interviewer: Are you currently planning to publish or compose any piece?

Ching-chu Hu: Right now I am self-published. I need to find the best way to do it. Sometime it is easier for me to self-publish than to find a publisher.
Conclusion

*Pulse* is relevant to four different categories of emotional aspects, which can be defined as guidelines for intuitive feeling in interpretation. This piece shows clear connections to its movement titles ("Anxious," "Anticipation," "Dream," and "Adrenaline"), embracing pulsating motion as its main character and concept. With respect to the characteristics of each movement, it specifically epitomizes various human heartbeats, and shows different sets of moods involving contrasting dynamics, harmonics, and gestures. The musical style is Neo-Romantic, using implications of narrative style, flexible and irregular phrases, expanding and shifting tonal centers, and changeable and complex rhythmic figures. Besides that, Hu’s subtle usage of Chinese tones and folk music exhibits exoticism in conjunction with western and eastern styles. His music is essentially based on post-tonal approach, followed by pitch-collection, tone clusters, and frequent changes of rhythmic structure.

In terms of execution, the “Anxious,” “Dream,” and “Adrenaline” movements have ninth or tenth chords alternating between the right and left hands, which require an extended hand position, as there are some wide ranges of pitches beyond the octave. Pianists with smaller hands may focus on the second movement, “Anticipation,” because this movement presents running passages without overstretching one’s hands. Regarding
the use of the pedal, Hu provides clear and specific guidelines and pedal markings in each movement. In order to strengthen the knowledge of complex rhythmic patterns in each movement, one should become familiar with different types of rhythmic figures and practice balance between right and left hands. Each movement features multiple types of polyrhythms requiring the pianist to control his or her hands independently and to move through individual lines simultaneously.

*Pulse* presents a high level of difficulty with a combination of musical sensitivity and virtuosity. Hu emphasizes the multiple layers of orchestral-like tunes in most of his works, and presents the resilience of musical interpretation between a performer and listener. The importance of musical gesture in *Pulse* moves beyond the detailed form structure and essential harmonic progression. According to Hu’s definition of musical gesture, one may experiment with the musical language of contemporary pieces by exploring the reflection of sound moments in each movement, representing the leading musical motifs within subdivided sections, and experiencing the musical character between time-span and rhythmic configuration.

Using this musical context, a pianist may understand how the composer intended to deliver an original message and communicate it to his audience. In light of the composer’s suggestions and expectations, *Pulse* is a remarkable piece, which shows both pianistic and virtuosic approaches in a modern style, and enriches emotional perspective through musical gestures. Through this study and performance, one can significantly improve an understanding of post-tonal music and strengthen one’s abilities to explore
different shades of acoustic sonority. As a result, I highly recommend Ching-chu Hu’s *Pulse.*
Bibliography


Hu, Ching-chu. *In Frozen Distance*. In the Author’s Possession.

Hu, Ching-chu. *Pulse for piano*. In the Author’s Possession.


Appendix A: List of Selected Piano and Chamber Works by Ching-chu Hu

Piano Solo

*Pulse* for piano (2014)

*Flight* for piano (1997)

Chamber Music

*Paper Fortunes* for erhu, two violins, and piano (2011)

*The Hope Movement* for violin and piano (2009)

*Snow Ash* for violin and piano (2008)

*Hózhó* for soprano saxophone and piano (2006)

*Flying Without Fear* for flute, clarinet, violin, violoncello, piano, and percussion (2005)

*Theater Music* for soprano and piano (2005)


*Ribbons* for trombone and piano (2002)

*Passions* for violin and piano (2001)

Music for a film by Alison McDonald, “*The Life and Times of Jimmy B.*” for clarinet, piano, violoncello, and choir (2000)

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Insights for contrabass and piano (1999)

Night for violoncello and piano (1998)

88 Saturday for flute, clarinet, violin, violoncello, piano, and two percussion (1995)