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I, Yoomi Jun Kim,

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The Evolution of Alexina Louie's Piano Music:
Reflections of a Soul Searching Journey

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Committee Chair signature: Joel Hoffman, DMA
The Evolution of Alexina Louie’s Piano Music: Reflections of a Soul Searching Journey

A document submitted to the

Division of Graduate Studies and Research
of the University of Cincinnati

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Musical Arts

In the Keyboard Studies Division
of the College-Conservatory of Music

April 2009

By

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ABSTRACT

This document examines the piano music of Canada’s foremost contemporary art music composer Alexina Louie (b. 1949) who is repeatedly praised for drawing out virtuosic yet sonorous techniques and coloristic effects on the piano. The significance of investigating Louie’s music is reflected in the extensive articles, surveys, and doctoral theses. However, these previous studies focus largely on her exotic Asian influences as they are written before Louie’s new intentional stylistic changes in recent years which incorporate jazz and blues idioms. Therefore, by examining both early and new styles, this document will provide a thorough, up-to-date overview of Louie’s music and also illustrate the eclectic and versatile nature of her compositional styles. Furthermore, comprehensive insight into the “New Style” will be achieved through an in-depth analysis of one of Louie’s recent boogie-woogie piano pieces In a Flash. Regardless of the difference in styles, the presence of Alexina Louie’s unique musical language will be explored through an investigation of wide-ranging piano, chamber, and orchestral literature. In addition, Louie’s musical views and influences will be uncovered through her philosophy in music and biographical sketches. Most importantly, extensive interviews with Alexina Louie facilitated by the author and different articles and commentaries will provide direct access to understanding Louie’s personal voice in music. Together with author’s interviews with commissioned pianists and a fellow acclaimed composer who studied composition under Louie, the information garnered from Louie through these interviews will provide valuable insight into her work, including her own compositional processes and performance suggestions.
Soli Deo Gloria
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First of all, I would like to extend my great appreciation toward the internationally acclaimed composer, Dr. Alexina Louie, for all her help and the information that she has given me in completing this document, including a gracious three hour long interview and countless emails and phone conversations. I feel honored to have gotten to know her through this document. She has an immense passion for music and I deeply respect her as a musician; she has been a great role model for me. I would also like to thank Dr. Jon Kimura Parker, Dr. Jamie Parker, and Dr. Jeffrey Ryan who kindly agreed to have email interviews in the midst of their busy schedules and provided me with valuable insights.

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I also can't imagine a life without my dear husband and forever best friend, Dr. Jimmy Kim, who has been my number one fan and the greatest supporter of my musical studies. My indebtedness extends to my mother-in-law and father-in-law who have been supportive of my career pursuits. Cherishing every moment with my three sons, Luke, Elijah, and Evan, whom I feel privileged to raise, has provided me with endless joy and laughter while completing my doctoral studies. My acknowledgements would be incomplete without mentioning my caring and devoted parents who have allowed me to “taste” what it means to receive unconditional love here on Earth; it is their love that encouraged me to study and strive for my best. Lastly, but most importantly, I would like to thank God for leading and guiding me in every step of my life and allowing me to meet all of these wonderful people who have inspired and shaped me in a positive way.
REPRINT AUTHORIZATION LETTER

June 27, 2008

Yoomi Kim
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Alexina Louie
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INTRODUCTION

The piano music of Alexina Louie is constantly admired for drawing out the “fine effects” and the “full resources” of the piano.\(^1\) It simply “brings out the best” in whoever performs her pieces.\(^2\) Music critic Ronald Hambleton once claimed that “for explosive originality, there was nothing on the program to equal the three vividly contrasting episodes of Alexina Louie’s *Scenes from a Jade Terrace*” after a Jon Kimura Parker solo recital which included Louie’s work. He further described Louie’s piece as “powerful yet subtle music” that “expands the keyboard’s possibilities,” providing the pianist with “a vast new palette to work with” stemming from her “auditory imagination.”\(^3\) As an experienced and competent pianist herself, Louie knows how to enable pianists to display powerful yet sonorous techniques on the piano. As a result, her piano music is invaluable to pianists.

Being a significant figure in contemporary classical music, Louie is also an icon to Canada’s general classical music circles. She is constantly being commissioned, and the requests to produce a wide range of projects are endless. Furthermore, Louie has also been the recipient of numerous prestigious awards and honors. Her popularity is not limited to just new music audiences but also to the general music-loving public. As a result, she continues to be one of the most frequently performed living composers in Canada.\(^4\)

Interpreting music with conviction can certainly transmit the soulful experience of the

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\(^4\) In 1990, 1992, and 2003, she received the SOCAN Concert Music Award for the most performed Classical composer of the year.
performance to the audience. However, when it is perfectly unified with the intentions of the creator, the performance transcends to another level as the musician is more readily able to engage the composition with confidence in the manner in which it was expected to be played. Fully understanding the intentions of the composer augments the performer’s ability to express and communicate in a broad and comprehensive way. For works of the distant past, musicians can only intellectually speculate about the composer’s intentions. On the other hand, with Louie being a living composer, the opportunity to explore her musical world first hand is a privilege any musician can experience. Therefore, drawing on the extensive interviews administered by the author and other sources, this document will provide valuable information that will provide direct access to investigating Louie’s musical world.

The importance of examining Louie’s music has already been revealed through extensive studies and articles on Louie’s compositions including numerous Master’s and Doctoral theses. However, the majority of these documents concentrate on the Asian influences of her music since they are written before Louie’s new deliberate stylistic changes in recent years. Thus, this document will cover not only the cultural influences exposed in Louie’s compositions, but will also provide a window into the evolution of her music and life as a composer, thereby providing a comprehensive, up-to-date study of Louie’s creations.

In order to appreciate Louie’s music in a dynamic way, understanding her musical views and influences is crucial. Therefore, Chapter One will focus on the composer’s philosophy of music and life. In conjunction, closely examining the influences that shaped the composer’s voice through a biographical sketch will be covered in Chapter Two. Chapter Three will concentrate on identifying Louie’s musical language in order to appreciate the broad spectrum in her methods and technical approaches. This will be achieved through examples of Louie’s
chamber and orchestral repertoires illustrating the wide-ranging and eclectic nature of her music. Understanding her distinctive language will be further enhanced with informative details of Louie’s own compositional processes and practical performance instructions in this chapter. Chapter Four will demonstrate Louie’s utilization of this musical language in her piano compositions with specific musical examples. Lastly, an in-depth analysis of one of Louie’s recent piano pieces in Chapter Five will provide comprehensive insight into Louie’s “New Style.” The thorough study of the score will also validate the diverged application of Louie’s sound language that undergoes innovative stylistic transformations yet still maintains her “trademark” personal identity.

Whichever style she exploits, Louie constantly endeavors to craft soul searching music at the highest standard of her capability. She presents the visceral experience of music together with logic and cohesion – conveying the totality of art. In essence, regarded as a “master colorist” whose style is known for its expressiveness, Louie does not overlook the “sensual” and “emotional” aspect of music. As a result, her music is appreciated not only for its beauty, but also for its transparency as she strives to seek truth and honesty that transmits the importance of self-expression. One sees right into the life of Louie through her compositions. As Louie’s mission is to communicate the eternal nature of art to the audience, she continues to be the foremost pioneer of contemporary classical music.

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5 Jeffrey Ryan, interview by author, March 17, 2009. This email interview is affixed in the appendix section of this document.
CHAPTER ONE
LOUIE AND PHILOSOPHY

I strive to have my compositions represent me in a true way – for me the act of creation is the search for musical and human truth.⁶

When Alexina Louie was a child, she was a very quiet, shy, tentative little girl who would never speak her mind. It was not until she learned to play the piano that Louie was able to express herself, and she is now indebted to music for her transformation. “My art has given me my life … If music had not come into my life the way that it did, I would be quite a different person than I am now.”⁷ This self-expression through music eventually freed Louie to communicate unreservedly in many other avenues of her life.⁸

With respect to her childhood insecurity, Louie states that “people feel alienated when things are out of their control.”⁹ For Louie, any feeling of alienation or timidity was replaced by a sense of success and confidence as she learned to control sound through the time and effort put forth into learning music. Therefore, Louie passionately advocates the importance of self-expression through arts that can enrich and liberate people from the bondage of uncertainty and frustration:

There are many children who don’t have an outlet for their self-expression … they get very frustrated, get angry, or they might do something violent, throw something or scream or have a temper tantrum. But if there is a way that they can channel that energy to do something positive that reflects who they are, there is a sense of satisfaction. Maybe if more people got to develop their artistic natures or be exposed to art there might

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⁶Alexina Louie, interview by author, April 1, 2008, Toronto, Ontario, video tape recording; transcribed and edited in the appendix of this document.


⁸Ibid.

⁹Louie, interview by author, April 1, 2008.
be fewer frustrated people around.\textsuperscript{10}

Rather than frustration, a bright light sparkled in Louie’s life with the fulfillment of experiencing her soulful existence through music. It is because the more she was able to connect with music the more she was able to express who she was. In turn, finding truth in life became increasingly important for her, and has become vital in her compositions.\textsuperscript{11} As a result, Louie’s drive for genuineness and truthfulness are clearly reflected in her works and sincerely represent her at particular points in her life.\textsuperscript{12}

Louie considers artists to be vulnerable people who reflect their life through music. Through this vulnerability, a competent artist can “lead the audience through unknown territory that ordinary people may not allow themselves to take” since they may not be as open or as vulnerable as artists.\textsuperscript{13} Indeed, Louie even parallels her own life with one of her orchestral works, \textit{Music for a Thousand Autumns}, written just after composer Claude Vivier’s sudden death in 1983. She explains that the three movements represent three time periods of her life – her present, past, and future.\textsuperscript{14} She exploits her perspectives and reflections about life and death through this composition as the title itself signifies - “music for eternity” in Japanese gagaku music.\textsuperscript{15} “His [Claude Vivier’s] death made me think very carefully about the contribution of the

\textsuperscript{10}\textsuperscript{}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{11}\textsuperscript{}Anderson, \textit{Reflection in a Dancing Eye}, 287.

\textsuperscript{12}\textsuperscript{}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{13}\textsuperscript{}Anderson, 288


artist to the world, and what exists after the artist dies.”\textsuperscript{16} Reflecting on the significant role of artists and their “music for eternity,” she believes that Claude Vivier will not cease to exist throughout generations because of his music, and likewise, she desires that her music transcend time and exist permanently.\textsuperscript{17}

In order for Louie to create an eternal piece of art and communicate effectively through music, finding her own truth and continuously discovering more about herself as a human being have become an essential part of her compositions. She comments about this in a simple yet coherent way: “we are all born with whatever gifts and personalities we have; and in order to be fulfilled, we first have to know something about ourselves, and to be able to make our own contribution to this world.”\textsuperscript{18} Louie believes that fulfillment comes with the knowledge of one’s self and in turn, an effective contribution of one’s self to the world. Her musical passion and contribution thus leads to personal fulfillment as she plays a vital part in our society as an artist.

Although she exudes a pleasant and easy-going nature when interacting with other people, Louie does not take the musical mission of composer lightly. She struggles and “agonizes over every note.”\textsuperscript{19} In an interview with the author, recounting her great effort to write a piano piece, \textit{Scenes from a Jade Terrace}, she admits:

\begin{quote}
I just couldn't write Jackie Parker [Jon Kimura Parker] a banal piece or write a banal piece for the piano, which is my instrument. I struggled with this piece. I would walk around and get stuck. I would come up with banal solutions. I would just go mad and walk around and pace. Of course, when you are working that hard, it often wouldn’t come because you’re trying to force.\textsuperscript{20}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{16}Louie, program notes to \textit{Music for a Thousand Autumns} (1983).

\textsuperscript{17}Louie, interview by Diane Bégay, June 21, 1993; quoted in Bégay, 112.

\textsuperscript{18}Louie, interview by author, April 1, 2008.


\textsuperscript{20}Louie, interview by author, April 1, 2008.
Believing that music itself seeks all truths, Louie endures with tenacious persistence to find the right sound for a specific passage, even if she has to spend an extended period of time making different musical choices in areas such as pitch, tempo markings, and phrasing. “I care about every note I write – you don’t just fill in parts. It’s a painful and very lonely process, but it’s a part of the journey you’re on.”

She feels that she is “cheating if (she) does not find the right choice out of many solutions that (she) explores for each passage,” and she considers composing music a “real labour!” Alexina Louie struggles with how every note of her pieces can contribute to presenting truth, believing that if there is truth, there is an eternal nature to art.

Her primary goal as a composer is then to unite this truth that originates the timeless artistic statement with her intellectuality:

Music only of the intellect is empty. Music only of the other side [music of the heart] often is weak because structurally, architecturally especially, the music has got to have form and shape in order for the language to be true. Otherwise it becomes just an amorphous mass.

As a result, Louie strives to craft music that speaks of the eternal value of the art and to live a life of what she calls “an artist,” bringing logic and emotion into one harmonious place.

In order to seek truth that expresses the eternal value of music, what Alexina Louie had to do was to find her own musical language – one that was “not just written as an exercise nor to earn a living.” This often meant declining numerous commission requests to fully devote her

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22 Louie, interview by author, April 1, 2008.

23 Ibid.


25 Louie, interview by author, April 1, 2008.
time on projects to which she was already committed. In fact, she twice turned down commissions from Jon Kimura Parker before finally writing a piano piece for him, *Scenes from a Jade Terrace*, which took Louie nearly six months to complete. In the same way, she spent six years to write an opera called *The Scarlet Princess* for which she had only been paid for three years of work.26 After hearing the world premiere of this opera, an acclaimed music critic in Toronto, William Littler, concluded, “This is one of the most fascinating operas to enter the Canadian repertoire in the past three decades.”27 He further commented on the depth of Louie’s effort exhibited in this highly crafted work of art:

> It took Toronto composer Alexina Louie six years to compose *The Scarlet Princess*, and it showed. Seldom have I heard a Canadian opera so richly, carefully and inventively scored, so full of the promise of theatrical life.28

Aiming for excellence, intellectuality is unquestionably present in Louie’s music. Yet, Alexina Louie regards music as a visceral experience for the composer. Therefore, her ultimate decisions are always determined by the sound of the music, and it is her ears that carry through her compositions.29 She describes her experiences of following the path of musical intuition as an innate trait as a composer:

> Everything is “in” the music. Music has elasticity. You know where the music is going, and the music knows the destination of its sound. Following the instinct of music, you might want to linger on certain notes or create sonorous harmonies. Music itself flows which is the nature of the music. It’s not note-by-note that I find my own voice to the music.30

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28Ibid.

29Louie, interview by author, April 1, 2008.

30Louie, interview by author, August 11, 2001, Cincinnati, Ohio, phone conversation; transcribed and
Louie’s faithfulness to her musical passion unquestionably translates into her success as a full-time professional composer. She is constantly being commissioned, and the requests to produce a wide range of projects are endless. Her music has been performed by Canada’s leading orchestras, new music ensembles, chamber groups and soloists. Prominent pianists such as Jon Kimura Parker, Angela Hewitt, and Pierre-Laurent Aimard, and major conductors including Sir Andrew Davis, Leonard Slatkin, Alexander Lazarev, Pinchas Zukerman, and Charles Dutoit, among many others, have commissioned and performed her pieces. Many of her piano pieces are included in renowned Canadian and international competition lists. Furthermore, her popularity is not limited to just new music audiences but also to the general music-loving public, and as a result, she continues to be one of the most frequently performed living composers in Canada.

Louie has also been the recipient of numerous awards and honors. In 1986, she became the youngest ever to be named “Canadian Composer of the Year.” In 1988, she received a Juno Award, which is the Canadian equivalent of a Grammy Award, in the category of Best Classical Composition for her work entitled *Songs of Paradise*, and again won a second Juno for *Shattered Night, Shivering Stars* in 2000. In 1994, she was presented with the Chalmer’s National Music Award for the vocal movements of *Gallery Fanfares, Arias and Interludes*, and in 1995, Louie was awarded a Canada Council “A” Grant. The following year, in 1996, she was appointed Composer-in-Residence with the Canadian Opera Company. Louie also received the first National Arts Centre Award, a new prize spanning four years of creativity with the National Arts Centre.

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31Louie, biographical notes in *Scenes from a Jade Terrace* (Toronto, Canada: Gordon V. Thompson Music, 1996).
Centre Orchestra, in the spring of 2002. She has written three compositions for the NACO and has worked closely with the Orchestra on a number of educational and outreach programs.\(^{32}\) She has also been involved as a Lead Composer of the NAC Summer Music Institute’s Young Composers Programme. Furthermore, she was named to the Order of Ontario in 2001 and the Order of Canada in 2005, the country’s highest and most prestigious honor, in recognition of her achievements as “a creative force in contemporary classical music.”\(^ {33}\) In 2006, she was also made a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada.\(^ {34}\) The Fellowship in the Society is the highest academic accolade available to scientists and scholars in Canada.

Louie’s profiles have appeared on major Canadian television networks such as the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation’s Gzowsky and Co. and Canadian Television’s W5. The National Film Board of Canada and Rhombus Media have co-produced a documentary film of Alexina Louie’s \textit{The Eternal Earth}.\(^ {35}\) In addition, Louie’s five-minute tragic opera buffa, \textit{Toothpaste}, has been made into a Bravo!FACT music video. This mini-opera has captured world-wide attention through its screenings at MIDEM (Cannes) and INPUT (Rotterdam), and has been broadcast in over a dozen countries. \textit{Toothpaste} was followed by another made-for-TV domestic comic opera, \textit{Burnt Toast}, a set of eight comedic mini-operas which won the Grand

\(^{32}\) As a result of this award, Louie has travelled on a number of tours with NAC Orchestra, giving composition lectures to young composers and musicians. The latest tour was described and broadcast in October 2008. See “NAC Orchestra bound for Canadian West in latest tour (Broadcast transcript),” The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) (Oct 16, 2008).


\(^{34}\) The Royal Society of Canada is the oldest association of scientists and scholars in Canada. It is dedicated to encouraging education and the advancement of knowledge in the natural and social sciences and the humanities.

\(^{35}\) This film about composer Alexina Louie, \textit{The Eternal Earth}, is the first of a series of 10 half-hour films about Canadian composers that Rhombus is making for the National Film Board; Liam Lacey, “Filmmakers Set Out to Demystify the Arts,” \textit{The Globe and Mail} (Canada), March 7, 1987.
Prix at the renowned 43rd Golden Prague Film Festival (2006) competing against a field of 146 other international films.

Louie frequently collaborates with her husband Alex Pauk,36 to score orchestral music for film. Together they scored music for Don McKellar’s feature film Last Night.37 Their score received a 1998 Genie nomination for Best Original Score and the music has been released as a CD on the Sony Classical label. Their other joint film composing projects include Rhombus Media’s docudrama Ravel’s Brain, Jeremy Podeswa’s feature film The Five Senses, Don McBrearty’s Interrogation of Michael Crowe, Kevin McMahon’s The Face of Victory, and Moze Mossanen’s Roxana, for which the writing team won the Yorkton Film Festival’s Golden Sheaf Award. Their accomplishments in the film music industry are evident as they were awarded the prestigious Louis Applebaum Composition Award for excellence in composing for film and television.38 Honoring their artistic workmanship, the Applebaum Award jurors stated that “their body of work is of the highest caliber and demonstrates an ability to work in all film media, with a significant degree of sophistication and originality.”39

Louie is also an avid supporter of implementing excellent music programs in the public education system. She makes an enlightening remark about the importance of music in our

36Alex Pauk is a founder/director/conductor of Toronto’s award-winning Esprit Orchestra (founded 1983) that focuses on contemporary “classical” music, early 20th century music, and new film scores. He is a recipient of SOCAN, Chalmers, and three Lieutenant Governor’s Awards. He was named Musician of the Year (1999) by the Toronto Musician’s Association, and he has contributed advancing fellow composers’ careers through commissions, high profile performances, recordings and broadcasts.

37In 2002, readers of Playback Magazine voted “Last Night” the ninth greatest Canadian film of all-time. It was also the winner of the Prix de Jeunesse, Cannes Film Festival in 1998.


39The Louis Applebaum Composers Award was awarded to Alexina Louie and Alex Pauk in November 2002; see the Esprit Orchestra’s website, http://www.espritorchestra.com/content/applebaum.html (accessed December 17, 2008)
I keep saying that if kids here in Canada were all playing in a big jazz band after school, they would learn to accomplish something. They would learn how to play an instrument—which takes time, talent, and good teachers—they would learn how to express themselves so they would not be frustrated and have to put graffiti on subway walls to express themselves. They would learn how to touch their inner selves without having to take drugs, and they would learn a sense of community, because they would be practicing together, with a common goal. If you take that picture of kids and expand it into society, you have people who can listen to each other, because that is what you do in a band. You have people who have learned how to accomplish things on their own, because that is what it is to learn how to play an instrument... Instituting music for kids doesn’t mean that everybody’s going to be an artist, but would go such a long way toward developing enlightened human beings.\textsuperscript{40}

Louie’s concern and focus as an educator is not about just raising full time artists, but in utilizing her musical talents and skills for the betterment of society. Therefore, since 1985, Louie has been involved in an outreach program called the Toward a Living Art Programme through the Esprit Orchestra, where she serves as one of the board directors.\textsuperscript{41} This outreach program offers a wide range of experiences to approximately 1500 students annually. The students get to observe Esprit musicians at rehearsals and performances, attend special student concerts and workshops, and receive free concert tickets and study guides. Some even get to compose for the orchestra. Another project created by the Esprit orchestra is called Creative Sparks, which integrates various professional composers with a number of Toronto-area schools and nurtures the compositional and performance talents of high school and middle school students.\textsuperscript{42} Louie was also one of three notable Canadian musicians who worked on a pedagogical development project called “Creating Music in the Classroom” organized by the Canadian Music Centre. The

\textsuperscript{40} Anderson, \textit{Reflection in a Dancing Eye}, 289.

\textsuperscript{41} Taken from Esprit Orchestra’s concert program notes, Jane Mallett Theatre, St. Lawrence Centre for the Arts, Toronto, Ontario (March 2, 2008).

\textsuperscript{42} Taken from Esprit Orchestra’s \textit{New Wave Composers Festival} concert program notes, Toronto, Ontario (May 4-11, 2008).
purpose of the project was to strengthen a music education program for the Ontario district education system.\(^{43}\)

Alexina Louie is not someone who just believes in the importance of music, but an artist who actually goes forth and strives to accomplish her musical vision. Endeavoring to make an artistic statement in every aspect of her musical compositions instead of composing music that merely caters to the entertainment of the audience is the focal point of her personal musical philosophy:

I’m intensely passionate about music, and I have a real need to give that to other people. It takes a lot of courage for me to write the way I do; sometimes it’s very lonely. People say, ‘Oh why don’t you write something popular and fun?’ I could do that. I could entertain people. I was trained to do that, but that sort of writing wouldn’t serve my needs, the kind of personal journey I’m involved in.\(^{44}\)

Louie’s musical passion then translates into a dedicated aspiration to instill the importance of self-expression through music and, therefore, enabling people to express themselves freely in life. Just as she was able to find her voice through the arts, it is Louie’s desire to introduce art to the next generation so that they can have an “avenue to learn about themselves and the world in which they live.”\(^{45}\) As a responsible ambassador of music to our society, it is Louie’s desire “to illuminate the soul, to share a common humanity, and to bring something beautiful into the world through her music.”\(^{46}\) Indebted to the power of the arts, she first challenges herself to find the eternal truth in music and strives preeminently to share that genuine musical passion with people

\(^{43}\)Mira Kruja, “Piano Inside Out,” 106.


\(^{45}\)Anderson, Reflection in a Dancing Eye, 292.

around her for the greater benefit of humanity.
I want to create music at the highest level that I am capable of. It should be of the highest musical level as well as the highest technical level.

My art music should communicate with performers and listeners and it should move them in a deeply human way.\footnote{Louie, interview by author, April 1, 2008.}

Alexina Louie was born in Vancouver, Canada, of Chinese descent on July 30, 1949. She was raised in a non-musical family but was encouraged by her parents to take piano lessons from a local teacher when she turned seven years old. However, it was not until she began taking lessons from a remarkable piano teacher Jean Lyons (1921-2005) that Louie started to realize the deeper meaning of music, and therefore learn to express herself through the piano.\footnote{Louie, interview by Kruja, July 17, 2003.} Louie remembers Lyons as an exceptionally nurturing person. Even though Lyons could be strict, tough and demanding, Louie recalls that everything was done with a “sense of humor and support.”\footnote{Louie, interview by author, April 1, 2008.} Lyons also gave Louie her first job when she was fourteen years old. Louie’s responsibility was to help a blind student who could not practice piano on his own. Louie worked with him “a half hour every day, seven days a week, for four years.”\footnote{Ibid.} Through this experience, Louie was able to appreciate the value of music and to witness what people could achieve even with disability. Earning her own money through music and developing an inspiring, nurturing pedagogical style began with this first assignment and has continued throughout her studies and musical career.
Another significant teacher in Alexina Louie’s life is Cortland Hultberg\textsuperscript{51} (1931-2002) whose love for music “infected” Louie with further curiosity in the subject.\textsuperscript{52} His first year theory class, Theory of the Medieval and Renaissance eras, which is usually not the most appealing subject to music students, became one of the most admired courses at the University of British Columbia. According to Louie, “Renaissance and Medieval music was like the far side of the moon, but he [Hultberg] made it so interesting and did it in such a loving manner that we [the students] all got sucked right into it.”\textsuperscript{53} Louie’s desire to study further with this inspiring teacher led her to take composition lessons, the only course Hultberg taught for second year students. Thus, the direction of Louie’s professional career was determined by this moment of fulfilling her inquisitive desire to learn. Louie, therefore, acknowledges the importance of the two teachers who played key roles in shaping her musical character and the future: “If I had never met her [Jean Lyons], I wouldn’t be the person that I am today. If I didn’t meet him [Cortland Hultberg], I would certainly NOT be a composer.”\textsuperscript{54}

Encouraged by Hultbert, Louie decided to further her studies in composition after graduating from UBC. Although she earned a Bachelor of Music in Music History, and not in Music Composition, her aspiration to “create” and express music using her own imaginative approach compelled her to choose composition for her graduate studies. She wanted to “learn

\textsuperscript{51}Tara Wohlberg, “Music Prof Had Amazing Ears,” \textit{The Globe and Mail}, March 9, 2002, F2; this article appeared as an obituary to Hultberg detailing his biography and his life as a flourishing professor who was the first person from the school of music to receive the campus-wide Master Teacher Award. Louie describes her professor in this tribute: “He made you learn without realizing – almost by osmosis. Everything was always a brilliant discovery.”

\textsuperscript{52}Louie, interview by author, April 1, 2008.


\textsuperscript{54}Louie, interview by author, April 1, 2008.
about music writing in a very visceral way, rather than just as analysis or historical studies.”

Nevertheless, Louie’s undergraduate years were a firm foundation for becoming a well-rounded musician with all the opportunities to complete extensive music electives and minors that provided a strong traditional musical base in history, theory and piano.

With Louie’s competency in piano performance, she was in great demand as a collaborative pianist at the University of California in San Diego where she was offered, as a composition major, the prestigious Regents Fellowships given to outstanding entering graduate students (1970). As a result, it was still practicing the piano that occupied most of her time.

She also continued to teach piano during the weekends and made her living as a cocktail pianist. However, when she injured her right wrist from intense piano practicing in 1972, she had to compromise her performing career and concentrate on composition as a sole medium of self-expression.

Under the guidance of her composition professors at UCSD, Robert Erickson (1917-1997) and Pauline Oliveros (b. 1932), Louie was able to experience the musical setting of a composition department that favored controversial, mystical and unusual musical ideas in the early 1970s. The music school was at a developmental stage and the atmosphere of experimentation was the most predominant component. Louie recalls the place as “a hotbed of the weirdest, wildest, wackiest people and music.” In fact, the unconventional, open, and free environment of California at the end of the Vietnam War challenged her concepts not just in music but as a human being.

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55 Louie, interview by Kruja, 136.
56 Ibid., 137.
57 Louie, quoted by Anderson, Reflection in a Dancing Eye, 286.
58 Ibid.
Many of the composers at the school were developing and utilizing alternative compositional mediums such as “new computer and electronic techniques, multi-phonic singing, and Tibetan chanting” that Louie was never exposed to at UBC. One of the unique musical experiences included climbing up on a ladder with a pitcher of water and pouring it onto a big drum staged at the bottom, thus creating an impressionable and unique musical sound. Louie’s principal mentor, Pauline Oliveros, who is an eccentric individualist in the field of electronic music, also introduced Louie to a weekly women’s music ensemble that focused on musical meditations. Each week Oliveros started her “meditations through sound” and the rest of the group “improvised together on these pieces.” Oliveros also familiarized Louie with unconventional approaches to listening to “music” or “sound” which incorporated woofing, grunting and crawling on the floor. Although it was not an easy task and rather challenging studying under Oliveros, Louie credits her teacher for broadening her perceptual sensitivity and for expanding her awareness of different musical styles: “We were her [Oliveros’] guinea pigs, but it changed the way I listened to and perceived sound.”

Louie also participated in timbral experiments with Robert Erickson, who co-founded the UCSD music department and produced countless musicians and composers including Morton Subotnick, Pauline Oliveros, and Terry Riley. Known as one of the first American composers to create tape music and recognized for his invented instruments such as stroking rods, tube drums,  

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59 Louie, interview by Kruja, 139.

60 Ibid.

61 Ibid.


63 Louie, quoted by Ulla Colgrass, “It was the best of years for Alexina Louie: Opera, film, ballet and the 25,000 Jules Léger Prize too! This composer’s on a roll,” The Globe and Mail, December 23, 1999, R5.
and the Percussion Loops Console, Erickson enhanced Louie’s perception of layering and blending sounds. Louie’s fascination with the treatment of sounds was further increased by her exposure to alternative and experimental composers-in-residence such as Robert Ashley and Terry Riley, one of the pioneering composers of minimalism. Louie then began to appreciate diverse musical styles that exploited color and timbre as one of the primary sources for creating music. Therefore, encountering a wide range of experimental music including mixed media, electronic music, improvisation, and environmental music eventually broadened her perception of sound. In an environment where anything was possible to create music, Louie was exposed to new styles of music that enriched the formation of her individual musical personality which was harmoniously joined by deep-rooted traditional Western musical foundations from her undergraduate UBC years.

While in California, Louie’s fascination with Asian music and literature in the 1970s also enhanced her musical language. This Asian influence became one of the vital components in shaping her uniquely personal and expressive style. Louie’s first encounter with a gagaku or “elegant music” ensemble, an ensemble that played Japanese Imperial Court music originating from China and Korea, developed into an extended desire to explore the heritage of her Asian roots. Louie was particularly impressed by the mysterious sound and meditative quality of Asian music. She read volumes of Chinese poetry, haiku, books of Japanese ghost stories, and other Asian literature. She also spent time actively listening to the music of Japan, Korea, Cambodia, and Indonesia, as well as other music from the East. Astonished by the depth evoked by the

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subtle and sophisticated sound of the *ch’in*, an ancient Chinese aristocratic zither, she even commuted from San Diego to Los Angeles to study the instrument with Lui Trun-Yuen at UCLA. Louie comments on the exploration of Asian music as an enlightening experience: “It opened my ears, introduced me to oriental music, and in doing so, helped me find my own voice.” Thus, exploring traditional Asian musical instruments and increasing her knowledge of Asian literature, philosophy, and musical idioms expanded the breadth of Louie’s distinctive and personal musical vocabulary.

Fulfilling her personal cultural and musical quest, Louie took a hiatus from composing after graduating from UCSD with a Master’s degree in composition in 1974. Aside from searching and developing her inner musical world, she also devoted her time teaching theory and electronic music at the Los Angeles City College and Pasadena City College. Many of her students, coming from a lower socio-economical status, appeared to be distracted by the subculture that they were immersed in. Thus, apart from teaching music, it was Louie’s desire to also encourage and challenge these students to think about “the intrinsic value in human life regardless of their possessions” without actually lecturing them about the concept. Furthermore, her primary goal as a music instructor was not about just teaching some simple musical notes, but to instill in her students’ hearts the value of music and self-expression, which is of the utmost importance to Louie. “My classes are always about talking and opening up

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69 Louie, interview by author, April 1, 2008.
because music is what we are.” Thus she often played music of the “great masters” and discussed with her students about how they felt about the piece. Firmly believing that “great art can change people if they are responsive to it,” Louie consistently strived to connect the emotions of her students with the intangible yet powerful music.

Louie then returned to Toronto after a decade of studying and teaching in California. The reason for returning to Canada was simple: it was the country of her birth and the good weather of California was “so comforting that any creative urge was swallowed up by the sunshine.” Without any musical connections, she began cultivating her career in Toronto and acquired many part-time positions teaching theory, piano and composition at the Royal Conservatory of Music and York University.

Louie’s life philosophy of striving to achieve excellence was reflected even in her teaching. As a committed educator, when asked to teach the first year theory evening class at York University, she sought to provide a very comprehensible and tangible understanding of theory and music. Back in the early 1980s when the university did not have electronic music labs, Louie decided to use recorders and ukuleles to help the students to recognize the relationship between sounds and the theory behind them. Since it was her first time playing any kind of stringed instrument, she had to learn first to tune the ukulele and then had to practice the instrument for hours before presenting it to the class. “I had my little instruction booklet and for two hours before each class, I would teach myself the chords that I would have to teach that

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70Louie, taken from Louie’s biographical file, Canadian Music Centre, Toronto, Canada.

71Louie, interview by author, April 1, 2008.

72Ibid.

In a generation that favored microwaving fast-paced results, Louie spent long hours of preparation to share the importance of understanding theory in an interactive and approachable manner, not just as a concept or system that resulted in many rules. She desired to bring music to life. More than anything, for Louie, teaching music meant “touching the emotions of students” because “the connection between music and emotion ignites their imaginations and is a common bond.” In essence, Louie was able to convey the fundamental meaning of music by following a path of excellence and passion.

Being faithful to what she firmly believed and persistently pursuing the highest level of her capability in making music, Alexina Louie eventually began to earn a living from commissions from individuals and organizations. Genuinely striving to communicate the love, passion, and the inner beauty of her music, she is now one of the most sought-after composers in Canada. *Maclean’s* first noted Louie’s flourishing musical career not long after she returned to Canada in the 1980s and designated her as “the brightest star on the Canadian contemporary music scene … not only one of Canada’s most popular composers but one of the few to earn a living solely from commissions.” Since then, she has continued to build on her reputation as a composer in high demand, and her music is internationally appreciated through performances of prominent world-class organizations and orchestras. In fact, Louie often faces as many as forty different performers, organizations, and orchestras who steadily request her to write music for them.

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74Louie, interview by author, April 1, 2008.

75Louie, taken from Louie’s biographical file, Canadian Music Centre, Toronto, Canada.


77Louie, interview by Kruja, 140.
fervent dedication to creating the highest level of music, Alexina Louie sincerely and eloquently connects her personal musical world with the audience.
CHAPTER THREE

COMPOSER’S MUSICAL LANGUAGE

I had to find out about myself because the music that I was going to write would only be interesting if it was a personal expression of some sort. If it was just generic music, there would be no reason to play my generic music instead of someone else’s.\textsuperscript{78}

“Composers feel validated when someone wants to visit their creation again.”\textsuperscript{79} This statement is especially true for Alexina Louie’s music. Numerous players and organizations are constantly requesting Louie to write more music for them. In particular, the demands for commissioning her piano music only continue to escalate. Louie’s imaginative and ingenious approach to the instrument is not the only factor for the popularity of her piano music. Not only does Louie effectively bring out the coloristic resources from the piano, she also knows how to arrange hand positions and even pianistic bravura techniques that lie easily under the hand. This is because she writes all of her compositions from the piano. As Louie’s music rises to be among Canada’s most substantial literature, understanding the composer’s own musical language by exploring her intentions, compositional processes, and performance suggestions can only enhance practical insights into her musical world.

As a passionate and soul-searching musician who simply aims to produce works of the highest personal standard, Louie crafts an extensive and eclectic body of compositions that resonates her distinctive musical style. As her life philosophy as an artist advocates the importance of communicating oneself truthfully through music, Louie’s encounter with both Eastern and Western cultures and musical trainings undoubtedly shape her unique compositional

\textsuperscript{78}Louie, interview by author, April 1, 2008.

voice. Her early experience as an improvising cocktail pianist combined with the avant-garde experimental musical study at UC San Diego and the fascination of Asian music and literatures in the 1970s have all enriched her personal musical language.

Louie’s exposure to Asian music has undeniably impacted her musical voice, especially in her early works. For instance, Louie uses the first melody that she ever learned on the ancient Chinese instrument, the *ch’in*, “Yearning on the River Shiang,” as the basis for “Ancient Music,” the second movement of *Music for a Thousand Autumnns* (1983, revised 1985), a work for twelve performers including a pianist. In addition to the characteristics of the simple melodic lines, the subtle nuances and idiomatic writings of the *ch’in* are fully manifested in many of her works. For example, in the second movement, “Midnight Music,” of her piano quintet, *Music from Night’s Edge* (1988), Louie brings out the quality of the *ch’in* through the *sul corde* glissandi inside the piano which is joined by scales, trills, pizzicato, and martelé effects from the strings.

The spirituality of the instrument also connects to Louie’s philosophy of searching for musical truth. Among the oldest and most respected instruments, the *ch’in* is traditionally played for moral elevation, as a way to regulate Heaven and the human being. Therefore, it requires deep concentration and meditation. The outcome of this meditative process develops into an unexpected, irregular and improvisatory style of music. Thus, in *ch’in* music, the Chinese system of notation only indicates the pitches, not the exact rhythmic values. Likewise, Louie’s use of rhythmic flexibility can be readily noticed with her extensive exploitation of *senza misura* sections. Again, the second movement of *Music from Night’s Edge*, “Midnight Music,”

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80 Louie, interview by Bégay, June 21, 1993; quoted in Bégay, “Contemporary Music in Canada,” 129.
82 Begay, 130.
exemplifies this metrical freedom. Reinforcing the meditative and improvisatory style of *ch‘in* music, this movement, which lasts for seven pages, contains no bar lines except for fifteen measures. Even in the measured bar lines, Louie frequently changes the rhythmic structures with metric changes. For most places in the movement, Louie simply suggests the approximate time indication at the end of each musical line.

Besides the influence of the *ch‘in*, Louie’s frequent metric changes and extended *senza misura* sections can also be explained by her improvisational skills on the piano, which became innate from her cocktail music playing days. Indeed, as an accomplished pianist, Louie always begins her writing process on the piano. When composing, she first improvises on the piano and writes down the notes on paper without any bar lines. After completing this, she goes back and puts in bar lines wherever they fit in the context of the music. Where bar lines do not seem to fit the music, Louie leaves them out and establishes a passage *senza misura*. This free shifting of meters, either through changing time signatures or extended *senza misura* sections, is especially manifested in her earlier works.

Stemming from improvisation, Louie’s compositional process clearly elucidates the importance of a free-flowing musical style. Louie explains that the extensive use of *senza misura* indeed liberates performers from the bar lines and consequently challenges players to unite her music with their “imagination and sensitivity” when shaping the passage. Therefore, when executed, Louie does not mind some flexibility in her music as long as the rhythm is not distorted from capturing the forward movement that leads to the goal points of each phrase.

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84 Ibid.
85 Louie, program notes to *Bringing the Tiger Down From the Mountain II* (1991).
She states the following:

There is a philosophy in some pianist circles that for contemporary keyboard music, it should be militaristic and very cold. This is not how I want my music to be played … There are certain people who play like that. It just does not resonate with me. It’s okay to stretch a little bit here and there. I don’t mind a bit of rubatos. I don’t want the music to be contorted, but musical rubatos are fine with me.87

In essence, Louie considers “communicating” music as the fundamental basis of performances and she wants pianists to convey her compositions as a visceral experience.88 An expert of Louie’s music, Jon Kimura Parker, has this ability to “tastefully” capture considerable musical freedom when interpreting her works. He remarks:

Her [Louie’s] music has to be played with freedom and passion. These are musical concepts that can’t be notated. It’s like playing a Chopin Mazurka or the Charleston rhythm in Gershwin – it needs a certain feel. Alexina’s music is filled with markings that encourage personal, passionate involvement.89

The beginning of Louie’s early pedagogical piece, “Distant Memories” from *Music for Piano* (1982, rev 1985) illustrates this explicitly. (Example 3.1) In fact, Louie’s intention for this movement was to familiarize young pianists to non-measured contemporary writings. Such performance directions as “from slow to as fast as possible” and “the number of repeated notes is left to the discretion of the performer” in the score visibly demand the performer’s imagination and creativity.

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87 Louie, interview by author, April 1, 2008.
88 Ibid.
89 Parker, email interview by author, March 9, 2008.
The interplay of white and black note patterns between hands exhibits another of Louie’s propensities that originates from her compositional process of improvising on the piano. She often improvises with one hand on the black keys and the other on the white keys. Creating polytonality through the simultaneous juxtaposition of black and white keys, Louie systematically constructs a contemporary sound quality and, at the same time, economically allows both hands to share the same registers without interfering with each other. As an established pianist who always begins her writing process on the piano, she acknowledges the
influence of the instrument:

Certainly I would say that my music is influenced by the fact that I play the piano and I write everything out on the piano ... Certain things come up time and again in my music and I think it has something to do with how I grab certain notes when I play and when I write.\(^9^0\) Also when I wrote early on, there would be patterns of black notes and white notes that I would choose because of the physical nature of playing the piano.\(^9^1\)

Even though the concept of fusing black and white keys may not necessarily be Louie’s innovation, she secures it as her own musical expression. While Debussy employs similar method in his pieces, notably in the opening passage of *Brouillards* from his *Préludes*, he applies the concept rather inconsistently and treats the rhythmic patterns of individual hands separately. Therefore “mostly” black notes of the right hand act as arpeggiating *appoggiaturas* to the white-key triads in the left hand.\(^9^2\) An eclectic composer György Ligeti, whom Louie highly admires,\(^9^3\) also displays the mixture of black and white notes, this time more systematically, in *Désordre* (1985) from his etudes for piano. However, his musical language speaks differently as this chromatic texture of black and white writing interrelates with precise algorithmic elements. For Louie, in conjunction with the exotic nature of her musical language, sections of simultaneous mixture of black and white keys are used to interrelate with other contrasting passages in the music. Unlike other composers who utilize the technique in just certain pieces, Louie consistently uses the element in most of her earlier works. It is also often combined with the free-flowing nature of her music and has become one of the “trademarks” of her writing style. The extensive use of the black and white writing within a section even entails Louie to write

\(^{9^0}\)Louie, interview by author, April 1, 2008.

\(^{9^1}\)Ibid.


\(^{9^3}\)Louie commented during her broadband network masterclass in Ottawa on June 4, 2003 that, many generations from now, Ligeti will be regarded as Bach of our time.
oversized accidentals in “The Enchanted Bells” from *Music for Piano*. Here, the left hand swells on the black notes while the right hand carries out the same gestures on the white notes, consistently using just open fifth intervals throughout the whole section.  (Example 3.2)

**Example 3.2: Oversized Accidentals for “Black and White Key” Writing**

Louie also frequently employs parallel and mirror writings. Example 3.2 demonstrates this when the parallel motion of the arpeggios continues for fourteen measures. Another earlier piano solo *Star-filled Night* (1987) captures various running passages that illustrate the mirror writing along with “gapped-scales” characterized by minor third intervals. (Example 3.3) These scales fit pianists’ hand positions comfortably since the minor third gaps are placed on the white keys, usually A-C or D-F. Composing every piece from the piano, Louie admits that her favourite interval might probably be A and C, which she also uses in her orchestral music. In addition to “gapped-scales” or other modal scales and open fifths, Louie’s music is distinguished by her extensive use of quartal harmonies, and intervals of the tritone, and minor second.

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94 The size of the oversized accidentals is not well represented by the publisher as Louie’s own writing is much larger.

95 Louie, interview by author, April 1, 2008.
Example 3.3: Mirroring “Gapped-Scales”

The significant use of figurations such as arpeggios and rapid scales gracefully brings out the full resources of pianistic bravura techniques. It demonstrates Louie’s competency as a pianist. At the same time, it also exhibits the influence of her much-adored instrument, harp.96 Towards the end of the first movement of Afterimages (1981) written for two pianos, Louie exclusively uses simple quarter notes that receive four arpeggiated grace notes for the entire section. The main quarter notes shape the melodic lines in the upper register of the pianos which is a common technique used in harp music. (Example 3.4a) The increasing use of the rapid scales that lasts for more than two pages in the second movement of Afterimages, “The Ringing Earth,” further signifies the influence of the harp and the composer’s love of the instrument. (Example 3.4b)

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96Louie, interview by author, April 1, 2008; during the interview with the author, Louie acknowledges that she loves the harp and that she is inspired by the instrument.
Example 3.4: Influence of Harp in Louie’s Music

3.4a: Arpeggiated Grace Notes

3.4b: Rapid Scales

Another stylistic trait in Louie’s music includes the extensive utilization of the upper registers. Her preference for serene and graceful resonances magnetizes her to the upper registers that produce what she calls the “crystalline sound.” Along with *senza misura*, this is clearly illustrated in “Distant Memories” where both right and left hands only play in the treble.

97Ibid.
clef for the entire movement. (Example 3.1) However, Louie describes this tendency as a weakness:

I like the crystalline nature of the upper register. In fact, when I first began writing music, my music really focused on the upper register. It’s what connects with me the most. I love that sound. The quality and the “mud” of the lower register – I call it mud – I find less interesting. My earlier pieces are weak, as a result.98

According to Esther Chu in her doctoral document, almost two-thirds of Louie’s piano compositions are written in the high register of the piano.99 This statement may be accurate for Louie’s earlier pieces. However, when Louie recognized her avoidance of the lower register, she formulated a deliberate attempt to include additional lower pitches in her work.100 This conscious effort to incorporate the low register sound in her compositions has contributed to the extremeness already apparent in her music.

The exaggerated contrasts in Louie’s compositions can be explained by the ideology of yin and yang which she uses in order to form coherent structures in her compositions. In Chinese philosophy, yin represents the Earth, which is dark, passive, and traditionally feminine, and yang represents Heaven, which is bright, aggressive and traditionally masculine.101 Apart from describing opposite qualities, yin and yang exist as a greater whole to balance and transform each other, and are never present in complete stasis. The constant interaction of the two produces an entity.102 The notion of yin-yang is actually a broad approach of explaining the interrelations of the natural forces of this world, not an actual power or object as commonly perceived by the

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98Ibid.


West.

Inspired by the concept of *yin* and *yang*, Louie applies the extreme contrasts to construct and unify her composition as a whole. One review describes her work as music that embodies “pointillistic and sonoristic devices, shimmering light and dark colors, and lyrical and percussive episodes contrasting the principles of *yin* and *yang*.”

Focused on extreme contrast, she seldom composes in the middle register, which she calls a “comfort zone.” For instance, in *I Leap through the Sky with Stars*, Louie utilizes the juxtaposition of the highest and lowest sounds of the piano. To illustrate, the six pages of crystalline piano playing in the higher register for both hands come to a halt when the right hand plays in the extremely high register and the left hand rumbles with the piano’s lowest two note trills, A and Bb. (Example 3.5)

**Example 3.5: Extremeness in Registers**

The *yin* and *yang* principle which Louie uses to bring extremeness to her music can also

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be seen in exaggerated musical contrasts in dynamics and musical gestures, not just in registers.

However, this concept of contrast in music is not uncommon, and Louie justifies the *yin-yang* principle as another extension of Western music:

> *Yin-yang* is a question of balance, and also conflict and contrast. But it’s in Western art music anyway … It was a different point of view to get to the same place. It inspired me in a way because there are bristling parts in my pieces that are just so loud and there are things that are so intimate. I wanted this distance.\(^{105}\)

Aiming for extreme distance, Louie recommends performers to exaggerate the musical contrasts when playing her music. She urges musicians to move towards the edge and to the extreme. Sometimes she even challenges performers who have been accustomed to “play nicely” to produce harsh, forced sounds.\(^{106}\) Similarly, Louie comments that when she writes *sf*, she is adamant about the intensiveness of the sound.\(^{107}\) Jon Kimura Parker concludes that “a successful performance of Louie’s music requires the control to produce a whispery *pianissimo* and the power to attain a correspondingly violent *fortissimo*.”\(^{108}\)

The principle of *yin-yang*, or the “interactions” of contrasts, applies to the rhythmic structure of Louie’s compositions as well. For instance, the extensive use of free-flowing *senza misura* sections discussed earlier in this chapter is complimented by pulsating rhythmic sections that are characterized by constant propulsion. Although repetitiveness in the rhythmic structure often seems to point to a minimalistic style of music, Louie’s musical vocabulary is different

\(^{105}\)Louie, interview by author, April 1, 2008.


\(^{107}\)Louie, interview by author, April 1, 2008.

from that of other classic minimalists such as Philip Glass, John Adams, and Steve Reich. Instead of the simplicity produced from the static and immobile nature of minimalism, Louie uses the repetition as a propelling driving force to create forward momentum. The harmonic rhythms tend to be faster in order to generate accelerating excitement towards the climactic passages. Rather than applying the minimalistic traits to the entire piece or for an extended duration, she simply utilizes the concept in order to contrast and balance other corresponding sections within a piece. The only exception to this is Louie’s solo piano piece “Changes” from *Music for Piano* which was created as a pedagogical piece to accustom children with minimalistic compositions. (Example 3.6) In most cases, Louie uses constantly driving sixteenth notes that have off-set rhythms characterized by the shifting of accents, and combined with virtuosity. The extensive use of arpeggiated intervals of a fourth in Example 3.6 also illustrates Louie’s frequent utilization of quartal harmonies.

Favouring the extreme interrelation of the *yin-yang* principle, Louie often creates contrasting movements or sections to balance the structural construction. For instance, the conventional fast-slow-fast structure is recurrently described as a *yang-yin-yang* design to explain Louie’s three movement construction. The *yin-yang* principle is also applied to explain the formal design within a specific movement. Jon Kimura Parker describes Louie’s manifestation of energy built by different intensity levels rather than by harmonic or thematic organization. He defines the first movement of *Music for a Thousand Autumns* with the formal plan of *yin-yang-yin* to describe a gradual accumulation of intensity that reaches its climactic

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109 Louie was certainly exposed to minimalism during her school years in San Diego, and the origin of her inspiration may be similar to one of the influences of the other minimalists, namely the off-set rhythms of Balinese gamelan music; Louie, interview by author, 25 January 2007.

110 Diane Bégay describes the overall structural plan of *The Eternal Earth* as yang-yin-yang in her DMA thesis, “Contemporary Music in Canada,” 141.
passage, the piano cadenza, which then leads back to a suddenly restrained *yin* section.\footnote{Parker, “The Solo Piano Music of Alexina Louie,” 27.}

**Example 3.6: Minimalistic Writing**

The exploration of Asian music is also explicit in *Music for Heaven and Earth* (1990), an orchestral work commissioned by the Toronto Symphony Orchestra for a tour of the Pacific Rim.\footnote{This piece was inspired by astronauts’ reflections on seeing the earth from outer space; Robert Everett-Green, “TS Plans Ambitious Tour of the Far East,” \textit{The Globe and Mail} (Canada), December 20, 1989.} The nature of this project aims to fully utilize exotic sounds from Chinese and Japanese traditions.\footnote{Since the commission was for the TSO’s Pacific Rim Tour, Louie was asked to limit composing for heavy or delicate instruments that would be difficult to transport. Louie’s solution was to substitute the Chinese Quartal Harmonies.}

The opening “Procession of Celestial Deities” possesses the influence of Japanese

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\footnote{Since the commission was for the TSO’s Pacific Rim Tour, Louie was asked to limit composing for heavy or delicate instruments that would be difficult to transport. Louie’s solution was to substitute the Chinese Quartal Harmonies.}
gagaku court music, and the sound of the dragon can be heard with clanging gongs and cymbals of the Beijing Opera in “Thunder Dragon.” Louie comments in the preface of the music that “the listener might detect the use of some exotic instruments in the percussion section among which are to be found Chinese opera gongs (bender gongs) and hand cymbals, Japanese temple bowls, a waterphone, a lion’s roar.” These exotic percussion instruments also demonstrate the intricacy of the tonal inflection in Louie’s music. This is apparent when the sound changes to some extent, as much as a tone or more, after the first stroke.

Louie’s approach to constructing bent tones on conventional Western instruments can be identified with the different types of vibratos and trills that she creates. For instance, in Bringing the Tiger down from the Mountain II (1991) written for cello and piano, Louie creates vibrato symbols and explains in the score for the cellist to “gradually change from fast narrow vibrato to slow wide vibrato as indicated.” With respect to Louie’s application to trills, it is somewhat different from traditional music writing and also shows the influence of Asian musical nuances. For example, the first movement of Louie’s piano quintet, “Ritual on a Moonlit Plain” from Music from Night’s Edge, consists of trills that prolong through almost the entire movement, and Louie treats these trills as the foremost dominant feature of the piece, not as auxiliary

mouth organ called sheng with the orchestra’s string section, nasal and high-pitched Asian wind instruments with flutes, piccolos, and oboes, and lastly koto with the harp; Louie, lecture, National Library of Canada (Ottawa) April 13, 1992, audiotape; quoted in Bégay, “Contemporary Music in Canada,” 140.


embellishments. Varied in lengths, these trills include not just minor and major second intervals, but also minor thirds and occasional tritones. (Example 3.7)

Jon Kimura Parker explains Louie’s manifestation of the trills and tremolos as a reference to “bent” pitches in his document:

Through substantial use of trills and tremolos, the composer achieves timbral effect from the piano which often draws attention to specific pitches. The effect is akin to the insistent bent-pitch trills on ancient Chinese and Japanese wind instruments which increase the emotional impact of chosen pitches ... Contrary to the “rumble” tremolos and trills of piano music from the Romantic period, these tremolos and trills are intended to be played with a stress on the principle note, emphasizing its position in the melodic or motivic line.118

Although Louie utilizes these Asian-flavoured techniques of different tonal inflections on conventional Western instruments, she does not see this compositional process as something exotic, but rather an extension of traditional music. She desires performers to execute these trills for the same reason that Bach used trills – to continue the sound and the resonance of the harmony.119

**Example 3.7: Extensive Use of Trills**

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119 Louie, interview by author, April 1, 2008.
Louie’s ability to design innovative musical colors is another personal musical trait that communicates to the audience. Hence most articles and music critics admiringly describe her compositions as foremost coloristic music. Robert Harris portrays Louie as “one of our great orchestral colourists” following the National Arts Centre Orchestra’s performance of Louie’s *Bringing the Tiger Down from the Mountain*. Also, after hearing Louie’s *Music for Heaven and Earth*, the general director of the San Francisco Opera, Lotfi Mansouri, remarks his affection towards what he calls “Alexina’s pallet of colors.” Louie is described as an “overt colorist” whose compositions testify “an imagination fueled by exotic sounds and atmospheric effects.” Other reviews appreciating the color of Louie’s music include such phrases as “music with form, substance and especially, color … a score full of shimmering colors and textures … full artillery of dynamic and coloristic effects … a marvel of subtle and sensual tonal colors.” Therefore, it is not surprising when Louie comments on the importance of timbre when composing her music:

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120 Louie arranged this piece, which was originally written for piano and cello, to be performed by the NAC Orchestra and the group’s principal cellist; Robert Harris, review of *Bringing the Tiger Down from the Mountain*, by Alexina Louie, “Dedicated Maestro Nurtures His Well-balanced Band,” *The Globe and Mail* (Canada) November 22, 2004, R5.

121 This concert was held in San Francisco as a part of Toronto Symphony Orchestra’s Pacific Rim Tour, and Mansouri further expressed his desire to commission an opera from Alexina Louie; William Littler, “Sounds Just Like Home in ‘Frisco,” *The Toronto Star* (Toronto) May 3, 1990, F5.


The sound of the work is important to me … rather than the process of working out a compositional problem. Of course that is part of it. But one can tend to overshadow the other. For me it is the sound that is important.¹²⁷

As a result, Louie intrinsically communicates her visceral experience of composing music through an array of inspiring musical colors.

An increased use of timbral effects that create eerie atmospheres in certain parts of Louie’s music seems to resemble the haunting and avant-garde elements of George Crumb. Indeed, crediting Crumb as an “absolute master” who exhibits his own unique musical language, Louie appreciates the expressive and profound quality of his music.¹²⁸ A recording review by Allen Gimbel even suggests that both Demon Gate (1987),¹²⁹ a three movement work for twelve performers, and Music from Night’s Edge “emulate dark George Crumb-ian ritualism.”¹³⁰ In the first movement of Music from Night’s Edge, Louie gives a hint of limited graphic notations, one of the components that Crumb fully exploits in his compositions. In this piece, Louie writes a sul pont section with squiggly lines that resemble rolling hills producing a mysterious metallic effect. (Example 3.8)

Furthermore, employing unconventional performance techniques to enhance delicate timbral effects relates to Crumb’s trademark style. For example, in the second movement of Music from Night’s Edge, Louie provides performance instructions in the music such as “bounce the bow” and “bow on side of bridge creating a non-pitched white noise effect” for the string instruments. Most notably, near the end of the second movement of her orchestral piece, The

¹²⁷ Kaptainis, “Composer ‘Didn’t Set Out to Light Big Fires’.”

¹²⁸ Louie, interview by Kruja.

¹²⁹ Louie uses some of the music from Demon Gate later in her opera The Scarlet Princess, adapted from a Japanese ghost story by Tony-award winning American playwright David Henry Hwang.

Eternal Earth (1987), Louie uses cello “seagull glissandos” similar to Crumb’s glissandos in *Vox balaenae* (1971) written for amplified flute, cello, and piano. In this chamber music, Crumb instructs the cellist to play glissandos of artificial harmonics to mimic the cries of seagulls. However, Crumb’s subtleties of nuance and coloration with an overall introspective, static, and mysterious impression differentiate his work from Louie’s, which tends to deploy enormous contrasts in loudness, mood, sound and emotion. Also, in contrast with Crumb, who mainly focuses on writing smaller forms and has only one significantly large-scale work, *Star-Child* (1977), Louie’s scope of musical genres is vast with a wide range of prolific orchestral writings, operas, and film music.

**Example 3.8: Influence of Avant-garde Experimental Music**

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Another composer whose music is associated with Louie’s compositional style is Olivier Messiaen, who is also categorized as a colorist. Messiaen, himself, spoke of visualizing colors internally when hearing or imagining sounds. It is not only the strong emphasis given to colors, but also the integration of natural phenomena, the inspiration from jazz, and the revelation of spiritualism that seem to contribute to the similarity in their styles. In addition, Messiaen’s exploration of Asian music perhaps gives an impression of further augmenting the connection between their music. After hearing Balinese music at the Exposition Coloniale in Paris, Messiaen began to include the sound of the gamelan in his orchestral pieces. He started this from *Trois petites liturgies* (1943-4) with the incorporation of tuned percussion ensembles. Messiaen also has a “Gagaku” movement in *Sept haïkai* which, as illustrated from the title, is Asian inspired. Nevertheless, although the inspirations of Louie and Messiaen may contain similar elements, Louie broadens the features of Asian and experimental components to a much greater extent, especially in her earlier works.

Louie’s coloristic approach contains contemporary compositional devices that assimilate both Asian and experimental music in a significant amount. One of Louie’s experimentations in timbres embraces the manipulation of individual tones by incorporating bent-pitched concepts into her compositions as mentioned earlier in this chapter. A Chinese music scholar interprets this strong emphasis on individual tones as a technique of capturing the importance of timbre

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132 A number of performance and recording reviews often relate Louie’s music with Messiaen’s. For example, a review in the American Record Guide comments that the last section of *Music for Heaven and Earth* exhibits an awareness of Messiaen’s Turangalila Symphony; De Jong, “Collections,” *American Record Guide* 59, no. 3 (May 1996): 227. *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed January 20, 2009)


134 Ibid.
over melody and harmony. Louie skillfully combines this exotic Asian quality with the striking colors of contemporary experimental music. For instance, in *Distant Thunder* (1992) written for oboe and percussionist, Louie develops unusual devices for the percussionist, such as having a tubular bell lowered into a basin of water and tossing stones onto the top of a bass drum. The ghost-like sound produced by the percussionist is then joined by the oboe’s performance of “a kind of sonic sorcery” in which the instrument is “transformed into a reed pipe full of bent pitches and exotic flavors.” Louie also creates an appealing sound effect with resonating timbres through water-filled glasses at the end of the second movement of *The Eternal Earth*. In this passage, a set of four different crystal wine glasses delivers pitches that construct an F-sharp/minor “blues” chord, which then dissolves into an F-sharp major chord.

In *Nightfall* (1999), a piece for fourteen divisi strings written for I Musici de Montréal, Louie combines exotic resonances with atmospheric experimental approaches by assimilating layers of microtonal sound. Louie continues to broaden the resources of sound through the principle of *yin-yang* in this piece: the sinister ambience produced through an extensive use of sliding pitches inter-relates with the “late-afternoon humming bees” and “melodic fragments in the lower voices

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139 The Canada Council for the Arts announced Louie as the first woman to win the Jules Léger Prize for her chamber work *Nightfall*; [http://www.canadacouncil.ca/news/releases/1999/mm127243804587187500.htm](http://www.canadacouncil.ca/news/releases/1999/mm127243804587187500.htm) (accessed February 1, 2009)
that sang the world asleep and then ascended heavenward.” Consequently, by harmonizing the elements of the East and the West, Louie lucidly creates her trademark timbres and colors in her compositions.

Louie’s coloristic resourcefulness often causes critics to appreciate her compositions as ingenious and imaginative. For instance, Ronald Hambleton upholds Louie’s *O Magnum Mysterium: In Memoriam Glenn Gould* (1982), an orchestral score for forty-four divisi strings that integrates quotations of Bach and Mahler’s music, as a “collage of musical fragments imbedded in a score of imaginative originality.” Through her personally-stamped “explosive originality,” Louie is able to communicate her “auditory imagination” to the audience. After hearing *Music for Heaven and Earth*, a critic in Sydney remarks of Louie’s “well-developed techniques to support a number of passages of striking imagination.”

Creating vivid images through her use of breathtaking effects and sound resources, Louie articulates coherent compositional skills to explore innovative colors in music.

Alexina Louie’s exploration of Asian and experimental coloristic resources is also fused with an impressionistic atmosphere in her music. Many parallel traits and influences can be drawn between Louie and the impressionists, most notably Ravel and Debussy. For example,

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140 John Lehr exerts full of imaginary descriptions regarding *Nightfall* in his review, “Canada Music Prevails.”

141 “Canadian Heroes,” *The Globe and Mail* (Canada) June 29, 1991. When 42 Canadian artists were asked about their Canadian cultural heroes on Canada Day, Louie responded with Glenn Gould: “One of the greatest musicians this country produced, was ardently Canadian and spoke very poetically of his vision of the North. Rather than seeing it as a detriment, he helped others see it as he did, isolation as an inspiration.”


both Ravel and Debussy had a lasting impression of Asian music, especially the Javanese
gamelan, at the 1889 Paris Exhibition. As a result, partiality for modality and ornamentation
become clear in their compositions. Furthermore, they were both great orchestrators who
exhibited an astounding array of instrumental colors in their orchestral music. Utilizing the
elements of mutes, doublings, harmonics, and different bowing techniques, they were able to
create the so-called “impressionistic” orchestral sound.\textsuperscript{145} In the same way, Louie is primarily
regarded as an imaginative orchestrator who uses innovative colors in her orchestral
compositions. Most importantly for the impressionists, instead of generating dissonant tension,
they were able to “make multiple resonances vibrate” with the concept of distant overtones by
retaining ninth, eleventh, and other added-note chords.\textsuperscript{146} Although Louie may not use similar
harmonic constructions, it is this resonant and ringing quality of the impressionists that Louie
identifies with in her individual musical expression. For this reason, many music critics consider
Louie’s music as “well-crafted pieces” that “recall the impressionism of Ravel and Debussy.”\textsuperscript{147}
Louie states:

I was also influenced by the sound of the impressionists, particularly Ravel … I like that
music very much … Most of my music has a resonance to it that is different. It’s not dry
music. It’s very resonant. It’s built into the harmonies.\textsuperscript{148}

Louie’s affection for resonating sounds has an impact on the vast use of the sustaining
pedal on the piano. \textit{Music for Piano} illustrates this preeminently. Here, Louie includes


\textsuperscript{146}Jann Pasler. “Impressionism.” In \textit{Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online},
9, 2009).


\textsuperscript{148}Louie, interview by author, April 1, 2008.
connected damper or sustaining pedal signs from the beginning to the end without any break for all four pieces in the set. A student of Debussy, Maurice Dumesnil, highlighted that Debussy’s music should never be dry but performed with the element of “tonal warmth” without “blurring” excessively.\textsuperscript{149} Likewise, performers ought to perceive Louie’s pieces primarily as resonating music that captures her distinctive timbric effects yet still retains a sense of clarity.

Another characteristic that Louie shares with the impressionists is the extensive use of descriptive titles. Although she uses titles associated with Asian heritage, many of her works receive poetic titles connected with nature or heavenly realms such as sky and stars. The following exemplary titles, such as \textit{Love Songs for a Small Planet}, \textit{Songs of Paradise}, \textit{The Distant Shore}, \textit{Shattered Night Shivering Stars}, \textit{Starstruck} and \textit{Star-filled Night} illustrate Louie’s expression of picturesque imageries. Louie comments that her preference for these kinds of titles is to make a vital statement about our soulful existence:

\begin{quote}
I have written a lot of music about nature or about the heavens. I’m not exactly sure why, except that the sounds that I choose, my musical language, evokes this kind of crystalline sound that reminds me of the heavens and stars. The inspiration might be the darkness of the night and then its exact opposite which is brightly shining heavenly bodies … It has to do with the expression of that which is inside human beings, which is darkness and light; it is love and violence. Again, music really is an expression of being.\textsuperscript{150}
\end{quote}

Louie’s descriptive titles pique moods and visual impressions. For example, the inspiration for her more recent orchestral piece \textit{Infinite Sky with Birds} (2006) emanates from “a sight that always lifts Louie’s heart, the sight of a flock of birds taking off.”\textsuperscript{151} The eternal sequence of birds sweeping through the air is the imagery that Louie delivers through this


\textsuperscript{150}Louie, interview by author, April 1, 2008.

music. The picturesque atmosphere also emerges through the way Louie describes performance effects and instructions in her scores. For instance, Louie writes *teneramente*, meaning tenderly, for the last movement of *Afterimages*, “Homage,” and directs performers to play the movement “as from a dream.”

In order to logically communicate this atmospheric experience, Louie strives to construct her musical compositions with coherent forms and structures. Favouring contrasts in an organized fashion, she frequently utilizes the concept of departure and return through “arch-shaped forms” within a movement, such as the ABA form. More traditional usage of this ternary form is demonstrated in her celebratory orchestral work composed for the opening of Expo 86 in Vancouver, *The Ringing Earth*. The piece consists of two jovial and buoyant outer sections, an introspective middle section, and a coda of fanfares. However, for many of her works, the treatment of the ABA form may not adhere to the conventional design and usually receives altered or a partial return to the A material. Nonetheless, Louie generally restores the ambience and the mood of the beginning and reconciles the first two contrasting sections. Louie also applies the contrasting structural plan for the overall organization of multi-movement compositions. The retrospective fast-slow-fast format of *The Eternal Earth* where two rather energetic outer movements enfold a more relaxed second movement illustrates Louie’s superimposing tendency of traditional structural designs onto contemporary musical languages.

Especially in her newer works, Louie blends the arch-shaped arrangements with continuous variation techniques to further unify her compositions as a whole. Such continuous variation techniques had been previously executed masterfully by Brahms. Schoenberg admired

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152 Ibid.

Brahms’ skill of revolving themes, sections and even entire pieces from a number of little motifs. Schoenberg also believed that the process of what he coined “developing variation” led to an “unrestricted musical language” of the 20th century.154 This is unquestionably true for Louie as well as she has been inspired by the continuous variations in the music of both Brahms and Schoenberg:

The Brahms’ late piano pieces are really beautiful and opus 118 and 119 have such distillations of Brahms’ thoughts and his music over all of his life … There are continuous variations … constant ebb and flow … they move ever so smoothly and so beautifully in and out of different sections … The Schoenberg’s opus 19, similarly, has a continuous variation quality to them as well, and each one of them is perfect, small, and makes a statement that is succinct.155

Inspired by the concisely organized continuous variations of Brahms and Schoenberg, Louie incorporates the same technique to seamlessly interweave and unify her compositions.

The compact structure demonstrated in the music of Brahms and Schoenberg is another feature that Louie shares in communicating her music. Louie avoids prolonging her pieces to great lengths that exceeds more than fifteen to twenty minutes in duration. Furthermore, in substantially larger works, she simply separates these pieces into multi-movement structures.156 For example, performing seventeen minutes of *Music for a Thousand Autumns* allows the instrumentalists to experience a series of concisely separated sections. Divided by *ritardandos*, *accelerandos*, and *fermatas*, each section articulates independent character and atmosphere with distinctive tempo, rhythm, instrumentation, and timbre.157 Creating a diverse musical sound


155Louie, interview by author, April 1, 2008.

156Parker, “The Solo Piano Music of Alexina Louie,” 44.

world with succinctly outlined sections is further substantiated in *Neon* written for clarinet, cello, and piano: “It comprises of six brief and atmospheric movements whose contents range in mood from skittering to terse and tense to painful soul-searching to floating to darting to a final reconciliation of all the preceding ideas.”

Regardless of the duration or the characteristics of the music, Louie adds the element of tension and release that always directs it to the climactic point of the piece. Louie recommends performers to play even her “quasi-minimalistic” pieces with driving impetus and with a sense of direction. In addition, the destination-oriented nature of Louie’s musical language causes even her individual melodic lines to “sing” towards the goal of each phrase. This is mostly illustrated in her extensive use of hairpin signs for crescendos and decrescendos. During a National Arts Center masterclass in June 2003, Louie mentions that her extensive use of hairpin dynamic markings are not just for controlling volumes but to create a sense of phrasing and direction. (Example 3.9) As a result, one of Louie’s most frequent comments to the young pianists performing at that masterclass is to allow her music to flow and have a clear sense of direction.

Louie also reveals that the significance of her goal-oriented phrasings stems from her compositional process of singing the lines that she writes. It is then without surprise that, upon hearing *Dénouement*, one reviewer credits Louie for highlighting “the string family’s


159 This masterclass was held in both Ottawa and Vancouver on June 4, 2003 via broadband networks. Nine students participated in this masterclass, ranging in age from nine to sixteen, and they played short piano pieces from *Music for Piano* and *Starlight Starbright* composed by Louie for young students. The DVD recording is only available to those who are interested through the National Arts Centre with special permission from the composer.

160 Ibid.
traditional singing qualities." Corroborating her propensity for climactic yet concise music, Louie also portrays this piece as a dramatic work that “condenses a wide range of emotions into its compact form” which effectively uncovers its “hyper-romantic climactic point.”

**Example 3.9: Illustrating Phrases with Dynamic Markings**

The process of creating her own musical voice and communicating through her compositions is a visceral and tactile experience for Louie. Writing everything at the piano with pencil significantly contributes to this. She explains:

> Music is very visceral. My body feels and I respond. That’s one of the reasons why I write with pencil … I only took Chinese when I was a child, but I had to use a brush and I remember enjoying the feel of the way the line would move and there is that energy.

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163 This was the exact section that Louie used to explain the phrasings at the masterclass.
When I look back, I like the way that the dot is wider at the one end, with a tail, and that you write a different line at different speeds … That has a connection with me.\textsuperscript{164}

In an era when most composers are utilizing computer software programs, Louie does not even consider writing with a mechanical pencil because she can never experience the “change in the depths of the line.”\textsuperscript{165} Louie’s responsibility and aspiration as a composer to convey and transmit the totality of her artistic experience manifests itself right down to her physical writing style.

As a creative and ever-aspiring artist, Louie is not afraid to enter into unreached musical territory and encounter new compositional experiences. For such an accomplished composer, taking new musical directions means risking a very public failure. However, the desire to advance her artistic prowess becomes a generating factor that overcomes the obstacles when trying new musical styles.\textsuperscript{166} Indeed, Louie frequently challenges young composers to take risks in order to achieve their compositional dreams.\textsuperscript{167} Nevertheless, Louie still maintains similar compositional techniques to those discussed in this chapter; techniques which are her unique musical language when formulating even this new musical approach.

If her earlier style is primarily known for its coloristic effects, Louie’s new style is distinguished by rhythmic vitality that exhibits fast and humorous characteristics. As a matter of fact, Louie had never written anything funny prior to her mini-comic opera \textit{Toothpaste} (2001).\textsuperscript{168}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{164}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{165}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{166}Louie, interview by author, February 23, 2009, recorded telephone conversation.
\textsuperscript{167}Louie, lecture, University of Victoria (Victoria, BC) November 1, 2008, audiotape; this was one of the compositional lectures Louie gave to young composers and musicians when she travelled on a number of tours with the NAC Orchestra.
\textsuperscript{168}This short 6-7 minute opera is about a couple in their mid thirties who cannot resolve an argument about the cap being left off the toothpaste. The world premiere of the concert performance was given by Esprit in
\end{flushright}
Since then, she has written numerous humorous works including three recent piano works, *Put on Your Running Shoes* (2003), *In a Flash* (2006), and *Fastforward* (2008), eight made-for-TV mini-comic operas *Burnt Toast* (2005), and an instrumental suite called *Take the Dog Sled* (2008). These works are the result of Louie’s conviction that humor is an essential ingredient in this dangerous, difficult, and troubling time. Furthermore, although incorporating humor into art music is not an easy task, Louie takes this as a challenge to further her artistic development.

Accepting predominantly challenging commissions that can expand her musical horizons, Louie intentionally instigates opportunities that demand her creative mind. For instance, when Louie accepted to write an instrumental work with two Inuit throat singers, *Take the Dog Sled*, for the Montreal Symphony Orchestra’s music director Kent Nagano, the challenges were vast. First of all, the Inuit singers were not trained to read conventional musical notations. Furthermore, travelling with a small Air Inuit plane to three of the most remote northernmost communities of Canada limited Louie’s ability to use certain percussion instruments due to the logistical inability to transport large instruments. In addition, the enquired instrumentation for the commission, which is identical to Stravinsky’s *Histoire du Soldat*, seemed to have an imbalanced register combination with three low instruments (the bassoon, trombone, and

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169 *Burnt Toast* is about 50 minutes long and consists of eight comedic mini-operas that depict different stages of a romantic relationship.


171 Louie, lecture, November 1, 2008.

172 Arthur Kaptainis, “MSO Heads North for Three Concerts,” *The Globe and Mail* (Canada) September 11, 2008, D4; Kent Nagano took seven MSO musicians to visit three northernmost communities, performing in the school gymnasium of Inukjuak, the community centre of Kangiqsujuaq and the town hall of Kuujjuak. He commented, “The idea is to appreciate Canada as an entire geographical space … not just a ribbon of populated areas.”
contrabass) out of a total of seven instruments. Nevertheless, this was an inspiring opportunity for Louie to bring western music to the Inuit community.

Musically capturing snapshots of the Inuit lifestyle, *Take the Dog Sled* is a successful experience of harmonizing Western classical music with Native cultures. For instance, Louie’s dedicated exploration of Inuit culture, history, and throat singing through this piece overwhelmingly impressed the Natives. Hundreds were rhythmic chanting along with the throat singers. They laughed and cheered in an atmosphere reflective of a rock concert especially in a movement called “Mosquito” as they recognized Louie’s appreciation of their mosquito condition. As a result, combining humor and rhythmical vitality with the excitement of Inuit culture and music, Louie effectively provides a cultural exchange through her composition.

Musically, Louie treats the throat singers’ part rhythmically which functions almost as percussion section that “blends” with the other instruments. Thus, broadening her capability through challenging commissions compels Louie to originate creative musical solutions.

Moreover, as exemplified in this instrumental suite, *Take the Dog Sled*, the fun and propulsive nature of Louie’s new style generates another dimension to her compositional palette.

As a full time composer making her living through commissions, another challenge for Louie is to write tailored compositions to fulfill the requirements of various projects. For this reason, Louie amalgamates the new propulsive rhythmical style with her previous Asian atmospheric colors for her newest commissioned work *Pursuit*, a concerto for string quartet.

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174 Louie, lecture, November 1, 2008.
175 Ibid.
Since the premier of this piece shared the stage with Chinese composer Tan Dun,\textsuperscript{178} Louie was compelled to coalesce her music with Asian elements. This is especially apparent with the utilization of gongs. However, Louie’s new brisk and rhythmically pulsated traits prominently differentiate this piece from any of her previous compositions of Asian heritage. Rapid, virtuosic notes encompass 150 pages of music for twenty minutes in this propulsive work.\textsuperscript{179} As illustrated by \textit{Pursuit}, the nature of the commissions often influences the conception of Louie’s musical styles. As a result, striving to meet the conditions of the commissions explicates the eclectic and versatile nature of Louie’s compositional approaches.

Although diverse in musical styles, Louie takes possession of her own distinctive musical language in all of her compositions. The foundation of this “Louie-esque” sound world is a unique synthesis of various influences. The mixture of the exotic Asian heritage, the avant-garde experimental resources, the resonating sound of Impressionism, and improvisational procedures all have impacted shaping Louie’s personal compositional voice. Most importantly, Louie’s musical aesthetic is primarily represented by the quintessence of effusive expressiveness. Exploring every possibility of expressive paradigms, Louie crafts her own artistic colors and stamps her personal musical identity.

\textsuperscript{177}This piece is written for Tokyo String Quartet and Toronto Symphony Orchestra.

\textsuperscript{178}The concert was held at Roy Thomson Hall as a part of the New Creations Festival on March 7, 2009. At the concert, Tan Dun commented, “One plus one equals one” signifying that the mixture of East and West cultures equals one nation as his music clearly represents the fusion of the two cultures; Robert Everett-Green, “What Cultural Politics Sounds Like,” \textit{The Globe and Mail} (Canada) March 9, 2009, R2.

\textsuperscript{179}Louie, interview by author, February 23, 2009.
CHAPTER FOUR

STYLISTIC CHANGES IN LOUIE’S PIANO MUSIC

Following my own musical language, developing it in my own way, following through with excellence in the best way possible and continuing to grow … that’s what I feel is a challenge.¹⁸⁰

In the beginning of her life as a composer, Alexina Louie consciously strived to find her own unique musical language. Firmly believing in the eternal nature of arts, her goal was to create music that spoke her honest personal expression at the highest level she was capable of. One of the areas that she deliberately started exploring was the Asian musical traditions.¹⁸¹ She attempted to “fashion” her musical language “with a very specific oriental flavor.”¹⁸² This seemed logical to her since her musical philosophy was to reflect her life “as a human being on this earth” which was “a strange mixture of East and West.”¹⁸³

Nonetheless, Louie’s investigation into the Eastern musical traditions was not just to write some generic Asian-inspired music that sounded pentatonic.¹⁸⁴ Although she used various scales and techniques that imitated Asian sounds, the most prevalent concept that she acquired was the yin-yang principle, which is basically a notion of employing extreme contrasts to balance the piece as a whole. Undertaking the concept of contrasts has not been limited to just musical forms for Louie. She has taken the concept even further and has produced an eclectic and

¹⁸⁰Louie, interview by author, April 1, 2008.

¹⁸¹Ibid.

¹⁸²Ulla Colgrass, “It was the best of years for Alexina Louie,” The Globe and Mail (Canada) December 23, 1999, R5.


¹⁸⁴Louie, interview by author, April 1, 2008.
diverse body of musical compositions. As a result, Louie is not afraid to explore many different and contrasting styles in speaking her musical voice. However, whichever style she incorporates, each seems to have a common distinctive ground that has become Louie’s own musical language. From “quasi-minimalistic” pieces to complex intervallic compositions, from non-measured impressionistic music to a rhythmical avant-garde “boogie-woogie” style, her mission stays the same – “projecting [her] own voice in the creation of sonority.”\(^{185}\)

**EARLY PERIOD**

Searching for her voice from Asian music is undoubtedly apparent from her early pieces. Pursuing to imitate the timbres of exotic Asian instruments, Louie wrote her first piano work *Dragon Bells* (1978) written for two prepared pianos. This piece involves wood screws, dimes, corks, erasers and bolts placed on the strings of the piano. The experimental spirit of this piece can be explained by her avant-garde musical training at the University of California in San Diego. However, for Louie, the unique sound construction from these prepared pianos was to emulate ancient Chinese bronze bells, as indicated by the title itself.\(^{186}\) This piece clearly illustrates Louie’s early inclination towards Asian music for her musical exploration. Thus, it was one of the tools in shaping her musical voice and is especially prominent in her early piano works.

The most representative piano piece that embodies the characteristics of Louie’s early period is a three movement work, *Scenes from a Jade Terrace* (1988). Louie seeks to convey the

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\(^{185}\)Louie, interview by author, August 11, 2001.

reflections of images of the past in Asia that she finds imaginary and inspiring in this piece.\textsuperscript{187}

For example the first two movements are “reminiscences of an imaginary lone figure seated on a terrace in ancient China.”\textsuperscript{188} This terrace peeks over “a fragrant garden set against the backdrop of a valley.”\textsuperscript{189} Also, since many of Louie’s pieces have a connection to eternity, \textit{Scenes from a Jade Terrace} also addresses this characteristic. According to Louie, her intention is to communicate the “timeless quality” of the images of the past that continues on even after the last note disappears.\textsuperscript{190}

This piece exhibits many of Louie’s distinct musical traits including exaggerated musical contrasts in registers and dynamics, simultaneous mixtures of black and white keys, and parallel and mirror writing. The extremeness in registers generates a significant utilization of 8va and 15va indications in both hands. In addition, Louie systematically integrates other recurring patterns such as quartal harmonies, intervals of the tritone, minor second, and open fifth, along with modal and synthetic scales that are characterized by minor thirds or augmented seconds. Furthermore, the exotic timbres, impressionistic atmosphere, and minimalistic rhythmic designs all contribute in shaping this work. As expected, Louie employs a conventional macro-structure, forming a fast-slow-fast three movement construction. Furthermore, the third movement “Southern Sky” uses a conventional modified ternary form. Another characteristic of this music is the free shifting of meters, either through changing time signatures or extended \textit{senza misura} sections.

The first movement “Warrior” is a systematically integrated intervallic composition that

\textsuperscript{187}Louie, interview by author, April 1, 2008.

\textsuperscript{188}Louie, program notes to \textit{Scenes from a Jade Terrace}, Toronto: Gordon V. Thompson Music, 1996.

\textsuperscript{189}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{190}Louie, interview by author, April 1, 2008.
displays the fullness of the flamboyancy of the performer. The appearance of the ghost of an ancient warrior in this movement causes Louie to demonstrate the aggressive and virtuosic temperament of the yang principle with “fanfare-like” sound.\textsuperscript{191} She also exposes an impression of vulnerability in the middle section, representing the yin principle. Louie further employs the yin-yang concept to reveal “the artist in a dual role of champion and poet” in this movement.\textsuperscript{192} Applying the formal structure of \textit{yang-yin-yang}, Louie creates an “arch-shaped” form with fast-slow-fast sections.

The first page of the first movement, “Warrior” alone manifests numerous features of Louie’s unique musical language. Louie begins this movement with a loud and explosive section which is marked \textit{Con fuoco}, and this virtuosic, rhythmical, and turbulent passage encompasses five octaves. The opening motive is comprised of quartal harmonies, which is frequently used as an important means of expression in the music of Maurice Ravel and Claude Debussy. In this passage the quartal harmonies are rearranged with major seconds and perfect fourths creating a pentatonic sound. The constant tritone interval relationship between the right and left hand exemplify the significance of tritones in her writing. In addition, the parallel writing along with the juxtaposition of black and white keys between hands is clearly noticeable in this passage. Louie creates a great deal of rhythmic interest through changing meters. The first page alone, which has only 6 bars, changes from 2/4 to 7/8 to 3/4 to 5/8 and finally back to 2/4. At the same time, this whole page is outlined by a D flat pedal tone in the bass. (Example 4.1)

\textsuperscript{191}Louie, program notes to \textit{Scenes from a Jade Terrace}.

\textsuperscript{192}Ibid.
Example 4.1: First Page of “Warrior”

Warrior

Alexina Louie

M2  P4: Quartal Harmonies Re-arranged

Tritone Relationship

D Pedal Bass

RH: White Keys

P4–M2

Parallel Writing

LH: Black Keys

TT

TT

TT
The juxtaposition of the black and white keys between two hands is more apparent particularly in the next section. Here, Louie also writes chords and arpeggios that move in both mirror patterns and parallel motion. In this passage, the left hand outlines G flat and E flat open fifth and arpeggios, while the right hand has F major and D minor. (Example 4.2) This simultaneous usage of black and white keys in parallel and mirror directions happens throughout the movement, although this is the most explicit presentation of this material.

Example 4.2: “Black and White Key” Writing in Mirror and Parallel Motions

The D flat bass pedal in the beginning of the piece continues to outline the entire first two sections. It passes through B flat, to A, and descends to G flat during the next six subsequent pages. There is then a return back to D flat right before the middle section, thus organizing the movement with relating tonal areas. Sharply contrasting from the rhythmical and thunderous beginning, Louie’s marking for this section is Molto calmo e misterioso, and the dynamic level
does not exceed m}\textit{p}\textsuperscript{p} for the next three pages. This contrasting middle section starts with the notes that move again in mirror directions, but this time, in a narrow octave range. Instead of writing white keys for the right hand and black keys for the left, the hands alternate black and white keys on almost every eighth note. (Example 4.3)

**Example 4.3: Contrasting Middle Section**

Louie widens this narrow range of the octave and also relaxes the dissonance as she later brings this section to the climactic point of the whole piece. At this quasi-cadenza climax, Louie introduces all white keys for the first time, C major with an added second, in both hands, which then immediately goes back to the juxtaposition of black and white keys again. In preparation to the return back to the aggressive nature of the movement, the extremeness in range and dynamic is clearly contrasted in this climactic point from the beginning of the tranquil middle section. (Example 4.4)
Another important feature of the composition is the extensive usage of original or synthetic scales. Vincent Persichetti explains in his book *Twentieth-Century Harmony: Creative Aspects and Practice* that synthetic scales are “constructed by placing any number of major, minor, and augmented seconds in any order.” These scales are also described as “semi-chromatic” or “gapped-scales” in Jon Kimura Parker’s article “East and West in the Music of Alexina Louie.” Some original scales are applied more frequently than others, and the more familiar ones often have names that coincide with folk scales. Louie systematically utilizes a synthetic scale called “Indian” in this movement. (Example 4.5) It is identical to Middle Eastern scale forms such as Makam Huzzam and Maqam Saba Zamzam. Its prime form is the

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same as a Harmonic minor inverse and Dharmavati Scale. In terms of a conventional modal scale, it can also be viewed as Phrygian scale with a flat fourth. In whichever way this scale is named or interpreted, the minor third gap in the scale, which exemplifies Louie’s favourite recurring interval A and C, provides an exotic impression. As illustrated in Example 4.5, Louie frequently uses scales with flattened degree two in many of her works.

**Example 4.5: Louie’s Use of Exotic Synthetic Scale: Phrygian Flat 4\textsuperscript{th}**

![Lowered 2\textsuperscript{nd} Scale Degree](image)

**A-C Minor 3\textsuperscript{rd} Gap**

**Example 4.6: Use of the Exotic Synthetic Scale in Senza Misura**

![“Swelling” Scalar Phrasings with Hair-pin Dynamic Markings](image)

While Louie’s systematic exploitation of open fifths and quartal harmonies represent the rhythmical sections, the synthetic or original scale is often featured in the non-measured passages of this movement. (Example 4.6) The free-flowing *senza misura* that features this scale also
illustrates Louie’s usage of hairpin dynamic markings to articulate the swelling phrases within the scalar passage.

Although the musical style of the next movement, “Memories in an Ancient Garden,” is considerably different, Louie still employs similar compositional techniques. In this movement, she explores the coloristic possibilities of the instrument by using pedals and overtones, together with extended inside-the-piano techniques, to create unique, mysterious timbres and sonorities. Music critic William Littler describes this movement as “an Eastern-flavored page of 1980s impressionism.”\(^{195}\) A critic in Sydney remarks on the “impressionistic manner with harmonies reminiscent of Messiaen” in this music.\(^{196}\) Furthermore, as in coloristic impressionistic works, the performance instruction in the score appeals for a picturesque atmosphere. Louie instructs pianists “to play as if intoxicated by the scent of a thousand blossoms.” She also uses inside the piano techniques, such as striking lowest strings with open palm, to imitate the sounds of gongs and wind chimes.

The movement begins with black-key and white-key clusters in the lowest possible register of the piano, and the opening bars clearly show the influence of impressionism. The whole first phrase that begins with the tone clusters is sustained without changing pedal, despite the changing harmony. (Example 4.7) The phrase begins with soft dynamics in a free rubato tempo and ends with an inside the piano string glissando.


Example 4.7: Influence of Impressionism

Example 4.8: Utilization of Overtones through Extended Performance Technique
The idea of this extended piano technique is carried further at the conclusion of the movement when the pianist reaches inside the piano with the right hand to dampen the strings creating varied overtones as different resonating points are touched. (Example 4.8) Employing extended performance techniques and graphic notations to enhance the delicate timbral effects demonstrate Louie’s experimental spirit. However, this avant-garde technique is not written just as an attention capturing tactic, but as an integral part of the piece. It creates a haunting and eerie sound, while at the same time expressing an internalized quality of the “memories” that will stay even after the resonating final note is gone as foreshadowed from the title of the movement.

Example 4.9: Use of Trills for Tonal Inflection in Hexatonic Scale

![Example 4.9: Use of Trills for Tonal Inflection in Hexatonic Scale](image)

Louie’s use of synthetic scales is accomplished in a more elaborate fashion in this second movement. Unlike in the first movement where only one type of synthetic scale dominates, Louie introduces various modal and synthetic scales that are characterized by minor thirds or augmented seconds. One of the synthetic or “original” scales that Louie develops is the “Double Harmonic” scale, consisting of two augmented seconds. Favouring an augmented second or a minor third gap, Louie also employs a hexatonic mode, a six-note collection consisting of alternating minor thirds and semitones. (Example 4.9) This hexatonic scale is developed in conjunction with the extensive use of trills that alludes to tonal inflection in Louie’s music. Highlighting these trills as dominant features of the melodic line, not as auxiliary
embellishments, emulates the insistent bent-pitch trills of Asian instruments.

The third movement “Southern Sky,” represents a “solitary soul glancing up at the night sky to see a myriad of stars.” 197 This quick, brisk, and rhythmical movement presents rapid chords that brightly resonate in the upper register of the piano. In fact, out of nine pages of music, only fifteen bars consist of bass clef in the left hand. The rest is written in the higher register in treble clefs for both hands epitomizing the sparkling crystalline view of the stars in the night sky. This movement illustrates Louie’s preference for the bright and delicate resonance of the upper registers. (Example 4.10)

From the beginning, this rhythmical piece, characterized by syncopations, illustrates the influence of Balinese gamelan music where off-set rhythms with shifting accents create constant inner propulsion. The treatment of pulsating rhythmical drive is accomplished by Louie’s use of grouping dissonance against the meter. Not only does the grouping dissonance contravene the time signature, Louie frequently changes the meter to further enhance the intricacy of the rhythmical aspect of the piece. (Example 4.10) Here, the dissonance of the quartal chords comprising of a tritone and perfect fourth in the right hand is aligned with consonant second position major triads of the left hand. 198 This combination creates clear tonal grounds and harmonic directions and at the same time provides contemporary harmonies and gestures. The tritone and the perfect fourth chords in the right hand construct a major seventh interval, which is one of Louie’s frequently used intervals. This major seventh, categorized as an interval class one with semitone relationship, becomes a guiding force throughout the piece along with the left hand’s triadic chords.

197 Louie, program notes to Scenes from a Jade Terrace.

198 Louie comments during her interview with author that the second inversion left hand triads are partially due to the convenient nature of the hand position that lies easily under the hand.
The opening passage in Example 4.10 also illustrates Louie’s preference for creating forward momentum with a sense of direction through a propelling driving force. For example, the left hand chords in measure six outline a harmonic progression, moving from a D major to G major triad, and thus establishing a primary goal point of the phrase. Repeatedly introducing this triadic progression of D-G in second inversions to construct goal points throughout the movement conveys the significance of these chords. Indeed, the piece itself ends with a D-G-D harmonic progression. (Example 4.11) This ending, illustrated in Example 4.11, fully establishes the D major chord in a root position for the first time with the D octave in the left hand which is also the lowest note of the whole piece. Placing this D octave in the second beat seems to obscure the tonic, as in the music of Scriabin who usually “suggests” and does not fully arrive in the tonic but utilizes extensive ambiguous dominants. However, Louie confirms that she
considers the low D as the tonic and the last two measures as the coloring devise.¹⁹⁹

Example 4.11: Ending of “Southern Sky”

Louie introduces some minimalistic ideas in the middle section of this movement. The same intervallic combinations as introduced in the beginning are applied and continue until the end as a unifying factor. The right hand ostinato figure consisting of perfect fourths and tritones accompanies the left hand triadic melodic lines in 6/4 positions. (Example 4.12) However, as expected, Louie does not stay in this static rhythmical mode for a lengthy duration. After fifteen measures, she crafts forward momentum with a long crescendo marking that unshackles the immobile nature of the minimalistic writing. It is then evident that Louie’s minimalistic components are primarily influenced by Balinese gamelan music which is highly characterized by syncopated contents often juxtaposing three-beat groupings against duple rhythms combined with sudden shifts of tempo and dynamics and short ostinati.²⁰⁰

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¹⁹⁹Louie, interview by author, April 1, 2008.

Example 4.12: Minimalistic Passage

In summary, Louie accumulates a variety of styles in this representative work, *Scenes from a Jade Terrace*, to demonstrate the fullness of her palette of musical colors and characters. Completely manifesting abundance in styles of music yet exhibiting her unique distinct musical traits, Louie proves to effectively harmonize the concept of contrasts to balance and unify the work as a whole. As a result, starting from her journey to consciously imitate Asian music, Louie was eventually led to effusively assimilate various styles to form a unique personal voice.

**THE NEW STYLE**

Louie’s latest piano pieces give an entirely different impression from her earlier works. Although she still utilizes similar compositional techniques that have become her own unique voice, the musical patterns, sound materials, and organizational approaches are completely different. The intense and passionate nature of Louie’s music is still apparent in all of her music.
However, different types of intensity levels are revealed through these new piano works. If the intensity was achieved through a mysterious, eerie, surreal and exotic atmosphere in Louie’s earlier works, the “New Style” accomplishes this from the exuberant rhythmic drive and colourful chord tensions from jazz music. Furthermore, unlike the titles of earlier works that describe the heavens, stars, and nature, the new works receive distinctive programmatic labels that relate to speed and swiftness: *Put on Your Running Shoes* (2003), *In a Flash* (2006), and *Fastforward* (2008).

Diverging from her earlier style of writing stems from Louie’s conscious determination to challenge herself and to provide new and enlightening works for pianists. In order to provide something new and “to develop her talent in a different way,” Louie had to “stop and figure out how to do this.” Indeed, the abrupt change in styles took place after a lengthy break from writing piano music. She waited seven years before composing her first set of virtuosic avant-garde boogie-woogie pieces. In the meantime, Louie continuously explored and studied a variety of scores, recordings, literature, poetry and visual arts. One of the inspirations that influenced Louie’s new style of piano music was Ligeti’s piano etudes. Although his musical language was entirely distinct from Louie’s, the relentless rhythmic drive that resulted in perpetual motion and propulsion was what appealed to Louie. Another feature that fascinated Louie was the humorous and fun aspect of Ligeti’s music. As a result, at this stage of her life, Louie seemed to prefer writing music that represented a more exciting and fun style.

The exploration of blues and jazz music is the most apparent feature in the new piano

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201 Louie, interview by author, April 1, 2008.
202 Ibid.
203 Ibid.
works. Louie’s ability to construct creative and intriguing harmonic sounds in jazz partly originates from her early career as a cocktail musician. Furthermore, growing up listening to the rhythm and blues of “Motown music” contributed to the fondness of jazz and blues in Louie’s life. Consequently, by blending the sound of jazz with contemporary pianistic writing, Louie has been able to establish a completely different stylistic genre in her piano music.

Jazz and blues elements are merged with the continuous variation concept in Louie’s new works. This combination allows these new pieces to convey the freedom and improvisational impression of jazz in a succinct, coherent, and intellectual way. All of Louie’s new free improvisational pieces start with perpetually running rhythmical ostinato passages in the left hand, combined with right-hand melodic fragments that undergo continual development. These fragments, or motives, evolve throughout the piece by means of expansion and alteration formulating diverse mood and character changes in different sections.

The idea of using ostinato passages is not uncommon in Louie’s music even in her earlier pieces. For instance, in Touch (1996), she introduces an ostinato figure characterized by major seventh intervals. (Example 4.13) However, in contrast to the constantly running fast, scalar ostinatos in the left hand from the new works, this ostinato comprises of tranquil, chordal elements in the right hand. Unlike the new pieces where the repetitive pattern is the foundational framework, the ostinato in Touch only lasts for nineteen measures and then reappears two more times, continuing for four and six measures respectively. Another example is from the “Berceuse des étoiles” movement in Starstruck written in 1995 (Example 4.14). In this piece, Louie employs a tetrachord ostinato figure that sometimes expands to scalar passages as in the new pieces. However, the effects produced by the ostinato in “Berceuse des étoiles” create a

\[\text{Example 4.13}\]

\[\text{Example 4.14}\]

\[\text{Ibid.}\]
completely different, more exotic atmosphere primarily from the usage of a minor third interval in the tetrachord. Furthermore, as illustrated from the title itself, the serene and subdued sound of a lullaby with both hands playing only in the treble clef throughout the whole movement further denotes the difference from the propulsive and rhythmical vitality of the new pieces. As a result, Louie’s utilization of ostinatos in her newer works represents a “metamorphosis” from her earlier works, transforming an idea in a drastic stylistic turn.

Example 4.13: Tranquil Chordal Right Hand Ostinato Passage in *Touch*

Example 4.14: Exotic Lullaby Ostinato in “Berceuse des étoiles”

*Put on Your Running Shoes*, commissioned for the Honens International Piano Competition’s first laureate Katherine Chi, is the first piece that diverges from Louie’s early piano style. The title of this music is derived from one of Louie’s frequently used phrases in her
everyday life. As a very busy composer who is always in demand and who has to constantly
write music to meet deadlines, Louie often states, “I had to put on my running shoes for this
one,” whenever people ask her how she is doing.\textsuperscript{205} She continues to deliver music that is a
reflection of her life. As the title so aptly describes, this “urban funky, quirky piece” is
accentuated with “quasi-jazz lick punctuations” and therefore moves like “blazes.”\textsuperscript{206}

While the left hand repeats a low ostinato pattern for pages, the right hand motive in \textit{Put
on Your Running Shoes} develops right from the beginning, establishing the continuous
development of the fragments. (Example 4.15) The right hand “X” motive in measure three
expands in the next bar with an additional tail that moves upward as illustrated in Example 4.15.
The same fragment then comes back in measure six. However, this time the expanded tail moves
in the opposite direction with a varied syncopated rhythmical structure. In measure eleven,
Louie alters the tail of the X motive by inserting an interval of a third, and now this idea of thirds
becomes the generating device for the next two measures. She then introduces a motive that has
the same rhythmical figure as the X motive but with wider intervals. This kind of continuous
development takes place throughout the music.

\textsuperscript{205}Louie, interview by author, April 1, 2008.

\textsuperscript{206}Louie, interview by Kruja.
Example 4.15: Utilization of Continuous Development Technique

RH: Filling F-A Gap with F# & G#
LH: F-A Gap in the Ostinato

Tail - Upward

Tail - Downward

Tail – Introduces 3rd

Wider Intervals

Tail – Introduces 3rd

Wider Intervals
The importance of the synthetic scale is apparent in this piece when the five note ostinato figure in the left hand that stays constant throughout the A section for five pages expands into a synthetic scale ostinato in the next section. (Example 4.16) As illustrated in Example 4.15, the major third gap F-A in the left hand can be explained by the insistent appearance of F# and G# in the right hand. Persistently filling the right hand motive that starts and ends with F and A with those two notes extrapolates that F# and G# are the part of the scale mode. Even in the next section where the five note ostinato expands into a synthetic scale, Louie consistently introduces F# and G# in the right hand melodic line as exemplified in Example 4.16.

Example 4.16: Expansion of the Five-Note-Ostinato into a Synthetic-Scale-Ostinato

When F# and G# is added to the left hand ostinato, the scale develops into a Spanish Phrygian which is also known as a Spanish Gypsy scale. This scale can also be perceived as a Phrygian scale with an added major third. Similar to the scale developed in “Warrior” from Scenes from a Jade Terrace, this scale also consists of a lowered second scale degree. (Example 4.17) Although related in the appearances, the utilization of the Spanish Gypsy scale in this new piece produces a completely different effect from Louie’s early work as the A-C minor third gap is filled with Bb. The exotic nature of the scale in “Warrior” is transformed into a foundational
framework for this new avant-garde boogie-woogie piece with an addition of one note Bb.

Example 4.17: Comparison of Phrygian Related Scales

4.17a: Scale from “Warrior” – Exotic Phrygian Flat 4th

4.17b: Scale from Put on Your Running Shoes – Boogie-woogie Phrygian Added Major 3rd

4.18: Rapid Swelling Scalar Passage with Minor Third Gaps

The traces of the compositional techniques presented in earlier works become more
palpable when Louie briefly deviates from the insistent ostinato figures in this piece. For instance, after the constantly running scalar ostinato passage, Louie introduces rapid wave-like swelling scales reinforced with hair-pin dynamic markings that recall the free-flowing *senza misura* section in “Warrior.” Along with the swelling effects, Louie also brings back the minor third gaps in the scales, notably A-C and D-F. (Example 4.18) However, the strict tempo primarily understood and notated by the bar lines generates a more rhythmically organized adaptation of the techniques, thus producing a different character suitable for a boogie-woogie piece.

Another of Louie’s distinctive compositional techniques that appears in this work is the mirror and parallel writing, which mostly occurs in transitional passages that diverge from the ostinato figures. (Example 4.19) While Example 4.19a represents a mirroring passage that connects two different right-hand ostinato figures, the parallel motion in Example 4.19b acts as a transitional passage before the return of the opening materials in its original form. Comprised of a tritone and perfect fourth that outlines a major seventh interval, the dissonant right-hand quartal harmonies travelling down together with the consonant second inversion triadic left-hand in Example 4.19b evokes the chordal outlines in “Southern Sky,” further augmenting the correlation between the old and new styles.
Example 4.19: Mirror and Parallel Writing

4.19a: Transitional Mirroring Passage

4.19b: Transitional Parallel Passage before Returning Home

RH: Dissonant M7 Interval (Tritone + P4)

LH: Consonant 2nd Inversion Triads

Sense of Return: Restatement of the Opening Materials
In a Flash is another one of Louie’s energetic, fast boogie-woogie pieces that displays insistent bass patterns accompanied by sharp jazzy accents. This piece was premiered by an eminent Canadian pianist, Jamie Parker, and commissioned for celebrating the Centennial of the Vancouver Women's Musical Society, an organization known for presenting such legendary artists as Paderewski, Josef Hofmann, Sergei Rachmaninoff, and Eugene Ysaye. Once again, another lowered second degree scale, Locrian, plays the most significant role in this piece. A perpetual four-note ostinato morphs into the full Locrian scale, which is remarkable for its diminished fifth, or tritone, interval between the first and fifth scale degrees. Manifesting the exploration of the thematic development possibilities, this work also employs motivic ideas that continuously evolve and develop throughout the piece. Louie conveys both In a Flash and Fastforward as a coherent whole when the collection of compact thematic materials undergoes a series of continuous variations and constructs harmonic and motivic connections between different contrasting sections. An in-depth analysis of In a Flash including the development of the motivic structures will be thoroughly examined in Chapter Five.

Commissioned by the Montreal International Music Competition, Louie’s most recent piano piece Fastforward skilfully displays pianistic bravura techniques. Referring to the fast forward mode in DVD players and reel-to-reel recording tape machines, the title itself reveals the

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209 Different interpretations of Alexina Louie’s Fastforward which was recorded in Montreal International Musical Competition can be heard through Canadian Broadcasting Corporation’s Radio-Canada website http://www.radio-canada.ca/radio2/cmim2008/index.asp?lang=en (accessed February 2, 2009)
swiftness of the music.\textsuperscript{210} Louie calls this piece “tongue-in-cheek” and “sassy” as the jazz-like riffs distinguished by sharp accents and syncopated rhythms depict humorous and light-hearted themes.\textsuperscript{211} When performing, Louie emphasizes the importance of maintaining the rhythmical vitality and pronouncing these sharp accents, and instructs pianists to play these accents “in an emphatic manner reminiscent of certain jazz idioms.”\textsuperscript{212}

The piece begins with a short introduction where the left hand ascending octaves outlining a Leading Whole-tone scale mirror the chromatic descending right hand until they unite in the middle register. Along with the mirror writing, this demonstrates the extremeness in the register as the passage begins with both hands exploring the opposite ends of the piano. (Example 4.20a) The slow introduction with rhythmic flexibility explicitly presented from the rubato indication together with numerous ritardando signs sharply contrasts the fast energetic nature of the piece characterized by an insistent tetrachord ostinato pattern. While the introduction is distinguished by the mirroring image, Louie wraps up the whole piece utilizing parallel traits throughout the entire last section. (Example 4.20b)

\textsuperscript{210}Louie, interview by author, April 1, 2008.

\textsuperscript{211}Louie, program notes to \textit{Fastforward}, unpublished, 2008.

\textsuperscript{212}Ibid. Pianist Ricker Choi also posted an insightful summary of his lesson with Alexina Louie on \textit{Fastforward} on his website, www.rickerchoi.com/?p=738, together with a short interview about the piece.
Example 4.20: Mirror and Parallel Writing

4.20a: Mirror Writing in the Slow Introduction

The first four notes of the Leading Whole-tone scale that shapes the left hand of the introduction becomes the basis of the ascending ostinato pattern which is a Lydian tetrachord

4.20b: Parallel Writing in the Final Section

The first four notes of the Leading Whole-tone scale that shapes the left hand of the introduction becomes the basis of the ascending ostinato pattern which is a Lydian tetrachord
spanning an augmented fourth. The importance of the tritone is again illustrated when the syncopated accents in the right hand starting from the note D also forms a Lydian tetrachord. (Example 4.21) While the left hand utilizes the whole tone relationship, the descending Lydian tetrachord in the right hand further extends to outline a Locrian scale which demonstrates, once again, the significant usage of the flattened scale degree two in many of Louie’s pieces.

**Example 4.21: Lydian Tetrachord Extending to Locrian Scale**

As a result, the musical style displayed in these new avant-garde boogie-woogie pieces encapsulates numerous “transformed” compositional techniques developed from Louie’s early piano music. The rhythmical vitality enlivened by the sharp syncopated accents in Louie’s recent pieces is an expansion of the Balinese influenced quasi-minimalistic sections from her early works. The momentary static pulsations that unravel with forward momentum now become the generating basis for the whole piece. Similarly, Louie’s previous short ostinato passages develop into various foundationally insistent patterns that constantly run throughout the
entire compositions. Furthermore, by filling the minor third gaps extensively used in scalar passages previously, Louie replaces exotic character with a modern boogie-woogie atmosphere. On top of all these modifications, Louie combines the spirit of jazz and blues together with tightly woven motivic structures. Consequently, as an artist who constantly pushes her boundaries to grow and produce new, refreshing, and challenging works, Louie creates a unique synthesis of jazz and contemporary pianistic writing to produce a radically different sound world yet still maintains her own distinct compositional aesthetics. In other words, Louie has further expanded her musical palette with the addition of these new works where divergent compositional styles encounter Louie’s highly original musical language.
CHAPTER FIVE

IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS OF IN A FLASH

Most importantly, the music should express who I am and it should touch the hearts and the intellect of both audience and performer.\(^{213}\)

Alexina Louie’s recent boogie-woogie piano piece *In a Flash* employs the compositional technique of continual development combined with prominent left hand ostinato figures similar to *Put on Your Running Shoes* and *Fastforward*. The whole piece grows out of a motive which continually alters and expands toward new ideas. Louie further combines this developmental procedure with a theme and variation concept. The transformed materials are combined and repeated with variation, flowing from section to section seamlessly. In other words, the developed ideas from previous sections operate as the foundation for subsequent ones. The formal plan and key salient features for each section can be seen in Figure 5.1.

**Figure 5.1: Formal Plan for In a Flash**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Key Salient Features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>mm. 1-24 Static: C-F tetrachord ostinato pattern in the left hand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Syncopated rhythms in the right hand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Introduces different variation material</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>mm. 25-44 Modulatory: Gb tonality moves chromatically to C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Variation on black and white key motive in 16th notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>mm. 45-68 The C-F Locrian scalar ostinato expands to three octaves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Variation on the two opening dyads (C-Ab, A-F)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mm. 69-74 Cadential passage: chromaticism from Section B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inverted, falling scalar ostinato hinting at a blues scale</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{213}\)Alexina Louie, interview by author, April 1, 2008.
D  mm. 75-88  Variation of Locrian ostinato: falling & rising pattern
Ostinato transforms to six octave scalar passage
Development of quasi-blues scale from Locrian scale

E  mm. 89-95  Contrasting transitional section
Short, subdued and narrow range
C-F motivic implication in the low bass

F  mm. 95-156  Culmination of variations: triplet, tetrachord, chromaticism
Quasi-blues scale with syncopations

G  mm. 157-175  Return of C-F tetrachord ostinato and beginning dyads
Back to locrian scale mirroring between hands
Ends with F major sonority with A natural

The piece begins with a tetrachord ostinato (C-Db-Eb-F) in the left hand which continues throughout the first section. Only two measures (m. 18, m. 24) deviate from the pattern and expand into Locrian scalar passages that also start and end with C and F (Example 5.1). These Locrian scalar passages, which consist of a lowered second scale degree, can be interpreted as a Lydian scale if Gb is considered the first note of the scale. This foreshadows the next section where Gb becomes more prominent. The whole first section itself begins and concludes with C and F and it further exemplifies the importance of the C-F motivic implication. Furthermore, when the right hand first comes in, it starts with two minor 6th dyads containing C and F, and these notes align themselves with the C and F of the left hand tetrachord ostinato. The emphasis of these two notes is fully manifested when the whole piece begins and ends with C and F.
The repeated usage of the C-F motivic implication combined with the left-hand ostinato conveys a harmonically static gesture in the A section. Furthermore, the perpetual usage of syncopated rhythms in the right hand, which have less melodically oriented phrases and disjointed hand crossings, further augments the continual rhythmic nature of this section. These static yet rhythmically syncopated dyads in the right hand receive considerable tension and
relaxation when Louie introduces Ab and A simultaneously which continues throughout the whole piece. This creates a constant duality in the piece since the C-F motivic implication transforms back and forth repeatedly into F major or minor depending on the alternation of Ab-A. In fact, the very first dyads that Louie introduces are the combination of C-F and Ab-A. (Example 5.1) Furthermore, this duality of two tonalities is explicitly displayed when the same rhythmic idea in F major is reiterated with only one modification of A to Ab. (Example 5.2) Towards the end of the first section, the Ab-A and C-F motivic ideas all integrate together to form a chord that characterizes a major 7th, an interval that the composer extensively uses even in her earlier pieces. (Example 5.3)

**Example 5.2: Duality of F Major and Minor Triads**

5.2a: Presentation of Similar Passage in F Major

5.2b: Presentation of Similar Passage in F minor: Modification of A to Ab
Example 5.3: Combination of the Opening Two Dyads: C-F & A-Ab (Interval of Major 7th)

The four descending 16th notes which alternate between black and white keys in the first section (Example 5.4a) play a key role throughout this composition as the motive continuously transforms and further develops into new ideas in later sections. Again, the white keys in this descending motive include the C-F motivic implication and also form an F major triad. The notes for the black keys outline an Eb minor 7th chord (Eb-Gb-Bb-Db), which alludes to the B section where not only the Gb major triad becomes a prominent feature but the section itself also opens with an Eb minor 7th chord. Furthermore, the descending black and white motive quickly transforms into a triplet figure when it reappears for the second time (Example 5.4b), and the triplet becomes more elaborately treated throughout the A section.

Example 5.4: Descending Black and White Keys

5.4a: First Presentation of Descending Black and White Keys
5.4b: Transformation to Triplet Figures

The descending black and white keys motive becomes elongated as illustrated in Example 5.5, and develops into a more prominent feature in the B section. In this section, chromaticism and modulatory elements prevail distinctively and contrast the previous static section. Although the texture suddenly changes here, mainly from the omission of the ostinato in the left hand, the section highly integrates the beginning dyads (C, Ab, A, F). For example, the first chord in Example 5.6 consists of all four notes from the opening dyads, and the top melodic line of the subsequent chords also exhibits the same dyads. Furthermore, the continuous use of the Gb second inversion major chord in the left hand conveys a tonal reference that centers on Gb (Example 5.6). Suggesting the Gb tonal reference in this section does not come as a surprise, but rather grows out of a logical and natural progression. The C Locrian scale that expanded from the opening tetrachord ostinato in the A section shares the exact same notes with the Gb Lydian scale. Constantly introducing Eb minor 7\textsuperscript{th} chords, which includes the notes of the Gb major chord found in the alternating black and white keys motive of the opening section, also foreshadows the basis of the B section.
Example 5.5: Elongated Black and White Keys Motive

Example 5.6: Integrated Opening Dyads & Gb Tonal Reference

The rhythm used in Example 5.6 now becomes the basis for the second half of the B section. Here, the modulatory element becomes more prevalent as the prominent Gb left hand triads in the first half move downward chromatically. While the left hand widens, the right hand stays in the same place and repeats C in every other chord like an ostinato until it aligns with the left hand in a unison octave C. (Example 5.7) The strong arrival of a unison octave C at the end of the B section emphasizes the C-F motivic implication; the F was the concluding note in the A section and now the composer returns back to C even more powerfully and fervently.
Example 5.7: Chromatic Arrival to Unison C

The right hand of Section C starts with the chromaticism introduced in the previous B section, but this time in a more connected and legato manner. The chromatic figures ascend until the opening dyads (C, Ab, A, F) return and allude back to the A section. Reiterating the opening dyads four times emphasizes the importance of the highly integrated characteristics of this motive. The dyads then continually develop with variations. However, the syncopated rhythm of the dyads remains and becomes the foundation of this section. The opening C-F tetrachord ostinato is also varied in the left hand in this section, as the range of the ostinato is expanded by an octave to span an interval of an 11th, again forming a Locrian scale. (Example 5.8) The C-F ostinato then transforms and expands to two octaves, expanding then to three octaves right before moving onto the next section. (Example 5.9)
Example 5.8: Variations of Opening Dyads and C-F Ostinato

5.9a: Expansion to Two Octaves

Example 5.9: Further Expansion of C-F Ostinato

5.9a: Expansion to Two Octaves
The last Locrian ascending ostinato in the left hand pauses on Eb (m. 68) and delays the resolution to F that leads into the cadential passage of Section C (mm. 69-74). Now, in the right hand, Louie introduces an inverted descending scalar gesture, consisting of both an A natural and an Ab. The consistent use of 6/4 position chords in the cadential passage which moves upward chromatically relates to Section B and also links the next section where 6/4 position triads become the basis of the left hand. The section ends with a prolonged note on A with a fermata, which functions as a leading tone or a dominant and also connects to Bb, the opening note of the right hand ostinato in the next section. This concluding note is also significant since the two previous sections end with C and F respectively, and now, with the addition of A, an F major
Example 5.10: Varied Ostinato in Section D – Descending and Ascending

The right hand scalar ostinato in Section D is a variation of the already transformed descending ostinato previously introduced in the cadential passage of Section C. (Example 5.10) The ostinato spanning an interval of a minor 9th indicates the significance of the interval class 1 as demonstrated from the beginning with the frequent utilization of the major 7th interval. The newly formed descending and ascending scalar ostinato now pauses on A natural, which creates a more palpable tension with Ab in the scale. Additionally, when the second inversion Gb triad aligns with A, the tonal tension between Gb and A major triads further heightens the duality of the keys, an element that is presented from the beginning. The highest and the lowest use of register in this section also narrates the tightly interwoven aspect of this piece. For example, the highest point of the section consists of a second inversion Gb triad with a high Bb in the right hand which ultimately descends down to the piano's lowest possible note A with a sf at the end of the section, again demonstrating the duality of the keys of Gb-A. (Example 5.11)

Example 5.11: Transformation of Locrian Scale into a Quasi-Blues Scale

5.11a: Blues Notes in Gb Scale
When Louie explores the full range of the piano, from the highest Bb to the lowest A, the Locrian based scalar ostinato now expands to six octaves. Furthermore, what started as a locrian scale in the beginning of the piece now transforms into a quasi-blues scale with the addition of notes A and E to the scale. As shown in Example 5.11a, these additional notes, A and E, function as blues notes, flattened third and seventh scale degrees, with Gb as a tonic. Therefore, Louie completely blends the conflicting juxtaposition of an A major against Gb major chord to generate one harmonious quasi-blues scale. At the same time, Louie embeds her distinctiveness with the appearance of the minor third gaps with the exclusion of the B natural or C flat from the
Gb scale. The impression of the blues is even more prominent with the use of syncopated rhythms commonly found in blues and jazz.

**Example 5.12: Bass Pedal in the Transitional Passage Outlining F Major**

The following Section E, which is contrastingly quiet and subdued, acts as a transitional passage yet still contains variations which relate to the beginning sections of the piece. (Example 5.12) The section starts with major 3rds in black and white keys, Gb and C, for left and right hands respectively in a narrow range. This confined range between hands broadens as the dyads chromatically mirror each other; this mirroring gesture indicates the influence of Section B. Furthermore, these major 3rds allude to the opening minor 6th dyads as an inversion. Therefore, both the range between hands and the interval of the dyads begin more confined and contracted. Most evidently, the last note from the previous section, the lowest note on the piano (A), is held through this section using the sostenuto pedal, and then leads to the low C and F pedals, therefore outlining an F major triad. The F pedal continues for two more measures in the upper
register, which acts like a dominant pedal and provides an effortless link to the left hand Gb triad, again in a second inversion, of the next section. (Example 5.13)

The next Section F is a culmination of all the variations where the quasi-blues scale receives the most prominent significance. The triplet figures, syncopations, and chromaticism which are all previously introduced individually in the earlier variations are further developed simultaneously in this section, therefore amplifying the impression of the boogie-woogie style of this piece. For example, the beginning right hand of this section exemplifies the combined development of the C-F tetrachord, triplet figures, and the syncopations, all presented individually in Section A. (Example 5.13) As in the opening C-F tetrachord ostinato, the motivic figure in the melodic line of this section starts with four notes. However, the tetrachord used here is a major 3rd, not a perfect 4th. Also, the main feature of this tetrachord becomes triplet figures coupled with an extensive use of syncopations. Although the beginning of this section recaptures the memory of the opening left hand tetrachord, the motivic figure here soon develops and expands into repeating triplets that outlines a major 7th, the combined interval of the opening two dyads in the right hand. Furthermore, the apparent chromaticism mingled with the alteration of F and Gb major in the left hand is a prominent element of this section that recalls the duality of the black and white key triads of the section B.
Heightened by highly developing materials, the culmination of all variations in Section F ultimately leads into the climactic moment of the whole piece. For instance, the continuous use of the crescendo dynamic markings throughout this Section F naturally points to the concluding quasi-blues scalar passage which has the loudest dynamic marking of the whole piece, fortississimo. This concluding passage punctuates a significant climax and completes this driven and intensified Section F. It also prepares for the arrival of the original opening tetrachord material (C-Db-Eb-F) in the next section, wrapping up the whole piece with a sense of returning home. This concluding passage consists of the same quasi-blues scalar passage that ended Section D. However, by changing the starting and ending notes of Section D’s concluding quasi-
blues scalar passage (Bb-A) to C-F in this passage, Louie again utilizes the C-F motivic implication and further enhances a sense of return. (Example 5.14)

**Example 5.14: Climactic Moment before Returning Home**

Louie also elides the final two sections when the concluding note (a low F in the left hand) of this section becomes the downbeat of the next final section. It is then joined by the repetitive opening tetrachord ostinato of the right hand in its original form. Therefore Louie continues to maintain the seamless interweaving technique that she exploits throughout the whole piece to interconnect the sections. Even though the initial tetrachord ostinato lasts for only two measures, the use of the descending and ascending locrian scalar ostinato that outlines C-F instead of the later developed quasi-blues scale undoubtedly brings this piece to a close with a sense of return. (Example 5.15) In addition, the simultaneous use of A and Ab to form a quasi-blues scale now goes back to creating A-Ab tension as in Section A. Furthermore, the beginning two dyads outlining an interval of a major 7th also return together with the static C-F tetrachord ostinato.
The return of the beginning two dyads consisting of an A-Ab tension recommences the constant conflict between F major and F minor tonalities. Also, the ambiguity of the tonalities increases when the majority of the downbeats of the dialoguing Locrian scales that mirror each other only provide C and F, omitting the third. Indeed, an impression of an F minor tonality prevails more convincingly with the incorporation of Ab in the Locrian scales. However, the prolonged tonal tension and ambiguity that successfully maintains the suspense throughout the piece finally comes to an end in the very last measure where the F major sonority ultimately wins the battle. (Example 5.16) At last, a clear and marked triumph of the F major sonority, with the addition of a fortississimo dynamic and hammering martelé along with accents, ultimately establishes a decisive victory after a long journey of tension, clashes, and a momentary perfect harmony hinted in the quasi-blues scale.
Example 5.16: Union of C-F Between Hands & F Major Sonority Ending

With the continuous development of the motives integrated in a theme and variation technique, Alexina Louie clearly crafts each section to flow and merge seamlessly in this carefully constructed composition, *In a Flash*. She develops what seems to be a straightforward repeating C-F tetrachord and simple minor 6th dyads to become a most significant foundation, occurring throughout the whole piece in different variations and transformations. The motivic and harmonic developments are meticulously outlined even to the first and last notes of each section confirming the tightly interwoven characteristic of the music. Therefore, Louie coherently blends the variations into one another and demonstrates a sense of great intellectual power. However, Louie still considers the process of composing a “mystery.” This is because Louie’s “combination of intellect” must meet the “natural path” of music in order to discover the truth of that piece.\(^\text{214}\) For that reason, Alexina Louie always strives for excellence, not only

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\(^{214}\)Louie, interview by author, April 1, 2008.
intellectually but in pursuit of the natural path of music, for music is virtually regarded as sacred in her life,\textsuperscript{215} a belief that evidently prevails in this piece.
CONCLUSION

While I could go into detail about the techniques that I explore (strong form and structure are essential in most well-written compositions) or the influences one might hear, or my musical language and choices of harmony, it is the expressive, communicative, and emotional power of my music that supersedes (yet is dependent upon) the technique.216

Firmly believing in the powers of self-expression, Alexina Louie constantly strives to articulate her identity through her compositions. She first endeavors to discover the eternal truth in art and seeks to express her musical passion with transparency. In this way she allows both audiences and performers to experience and encounter her unique world. Her prime motivation of her musical creation is then to express and communicate with people around her. With a perfect combination of her musical and intellectual instincts, she conveys a natural sound that interweaves freedom and elasticity with highly unifying elements. In other words, she crafts music that speaks to both the “heart” and the “head.”217 Uniting expressiveness and sensuousness with coherency, Louie communicates her personal musical language regardless of the different styles of music that she explores.

Louie’s musical language is primarily distinguished by the exploitation of various coloristic effects and exaggerated musical contrasts in registers and dynamics. In essence, timbre is not merely a layer to be added to the musical texture, but becomes a fundamental element of her musical language along with the extremeness in her writing. Other recurrent features include simultaneous mixtures of black and white keys, and parallel and mirror writing. She also favors quartal harmonies, intervals of the tritone, the minor second, and open fifth, along with modal and synthetic scales that are characterized by minor thirds or augmented

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The free shifting of meters, either through changing time signatures or extended *senza misura* sections, in addition to syncopated off-set rhythms further characterizes Louie’s musical sound. Most importantly, having adopted contemporary tonal grounds, Louie organizes her pieces with tonal centers and harmonic directions, thereby creating clear inner structures.

The establishment of Louie’s unique sound world stems from various influences. The Eastern tradition, modern experimental resources, the resonating and coloristic quality of Impressionism, and improvising compositional processes all have inspired the development of Louie’s musical language. With the blending of these diverse influences, Louie produces an eclectic body of musical compositions. From minimalistic pieces to complex intervallic compositions, from non-measured free-flowing music to the latest rhythmical avant-garde “boogie-woogie” style, she is not afraid to explore many different techniques in speaking her musical voice.

Louie’s eclectic musical style is a logical development of Louie’s status as an extremely sought-after full-time composer who constantly challenges herself to create something new and refreshing. Striving to accommodate and fulfill the requirements of different commissions with tailored compositions, the need to employ a wide range of sonorities, effects and styles is an essential component to Louie’s musical establishment. Ongoing investigation into a variety of recordings, scores literature, poetry, and visual arts also directs Louie to continuously generate different techniques and create new musical idioms. Furthermore, always striving to present music as honest as possible, the change in her curiosities and the circumstances of her existence as a composer in the course of time naturally produces an eclectic and versatile body of works. However, the eclecticism in Louie’s music does not emerge as a mere cluttering collage of sounds. In Louie’s case, the “curiosity” of unreached musical territories meets the “mastery” of
her compositional techniques.\textsuperscript{218} Indeed, Louie is an eclectic composer who adopts and reforms divergent styles into her highly original musical aesthetics. However, although different in styles, Louie’s utilization of similar musical gestures and techniques confirms the presence of her unique musical language.

Characterized by fast, humorous, and propulsive features, the latest expansion of her musical style further supports the versatile and evolving nature of Louie’s compositional approach. Fused with the continuous variation concept, this approach is combined with the sound of jazz and blues together with the constant ostinatos in her recent piano works. This combination then transmits the improvisational elements of jazz in a succinct, articulate, unifying, and intellectual manner in a new contemporary language. Diverging from her previous exotic style of writing, this new artistic development again illustrates Louie’s deliberate motivation to further challenge herself and to constantly develop her talent.

In sum, the eclectic and evolving styles of Louie’s music do not fit the previously typified term, a fusion of Eastern and Western music. Without doubt, Louie’s exposure to both cultures and musical styles has inspired and influenced her musical language. However, as the life-long journey of expanding her musical palette continues, the Asian-influenced element becomes only one of the many integral parts of Louie’s personal voice. As a result, Louie has evolved to proficiently produce a wide range of various genres, styles, and techniques allowing both performers and audience to enjoy an extensive measure of valuable compositions.

\textsuperscript{218}Louie, interview by author, 23 February 2009.
The meeting began informally, discussing different performances of Alexina Louie’s piano pieces, and with the author thanking the composer for the interview.

YK Whenever I read your biographies, it seems like you were led to the right teachers at the right time. Reading the articles about your teachers certainly inspires me to become a teacher like them myself. Would you say that you believe in fate or destiny? Could you also briefly share your experiences with your formal teachers?

AL I guess that in some regard fate and destiny have something to do with life, but you also have to be ready when the opportunity comes. And you also have to be able to make decisions about whether or not those opportunities are the right ones. I find that lately I’m able to make decisions less easily than I used to be able to! (Both laughing) But, yes, I think some people come into your life, and the thing is, you have to be wise enough to recognize it when they come into your life. And of course, you have to work hard because much of one’s success has to do with just…sweat!

I had a couple of teachers who were very remarkable. One was a compositional teacher and one was a piano teacher. They were completely different from each other. Jean Lyons was my really first fine piano teacher and was very nurturing. She was a tough teacher. She was a demanding teacher. She demanded that things be right, but it was always done with a sense of
humor and support. Just in the way that she would teach, you would want to accomplish a great amount during the week before having your next lesson. She was very nurturing and she made you feel good about yourself. She taught you how to express yourself with music, how to walk across the stage, and all of those things that when you’re little and you do that for the first time, are important to feel comfortable with. She was a really important teacher, and continued to teach many young pianists. She had her own studio, and she taught us how to teach as well. She led us through the way to teach well. I actually started teaching for her when I was 16 years old.

YK So you would teach younger kids?

AL Yes, and my other teacher, Cortland Hultberg, was a compositional teacher and he was quite a different kind of person. Both of them were very much fun-loving people. This was in Vancouver. They both had terrific senses of humor which I think is important to have. He was very funny and she was very proper. She came from an English background, so she was very proper. He was exactly the opposite. He was from America and he, you know, would occasionally use…umm…interesting language. (Both laughing) He would be funny and mocking, but he was very clever and wise. So I was lucky to have him as my teacher.

If I had never met her (Jean Lyons), I wouldn’t be the person that I am today. If I didn’t meet him (Cortland Hultberg), I would certainly NOT be a composer.

YK I guess he encouraged you to be a composer?

AL It wasn’t that he encouraged me…well, he did, I guess. He just loved music so much that he “infected” you with this curiosity. I was already curious, but it was…lively! It wasn’t like a studied, boring thing; it was lively, and we had fun. He introduced me to a lot of great music. So, it was rather a non-academic way, I guess, that suited me. If I had gone to an Ivy League school where they write the kind of music that I’m not interested in, I wouldn’t have continued in
music. When I graduated from UBC, he suggested that I apply for composition…even though my major was not composition.

**YK** It was music history?

**AL** Yes, it was history. He was the one who told me it’s more interesting to go into composition. NOW, if I had to do it over again, I would probably not go into composition because the field is so difficult. I just didn’t know anything then.

**YK** But you are so successful now in what you’re doing.

**AL** Well, successful…Thank you. I’m successful in what I’m doing, but I’m not successful in terms of earning a decent living for the amount of time and effort I put in. It never works out the same. If you were in a different profession, you had as much talent, developed this much of a way, and put in this amount of time, you would have had a more easy life. My life is not easy. The commissions are sometimes favorable… and sometimes turned down at the Arts Councils. So I don’t know if I have an income or not. Each one of the pieces I write is a very small amount of money compared to the amount of time. So, if you think about it that way, it’s not good. But if you think about it in terms of success in that people play my music and they have success as performers, then, yes, that’s very successful.

I mean I’m proud of the way my music has developed because it’s not simplistic music. It’s not music that panders to people. It’s music that I feel is artistic. I try to make an artistic statement. I’m not trying to make people love my music. I’m not trying to write pleasant music that sounds like Czerny. I’m not trying to do that. There are many composers who try to make music that sounds like Rachmaninoff because they think people will like it. Of course, Rachmaninoff’s music is much better than any music that anybody could ever copy! To me, that does not work; to me, that’s cheap. What I had to do was to find my own language. Following
my own musical language, developing it in my own way, following through with excellence in
the best way possible and continuing to grow…that’s what I feel is a challenge. I think that’s also
what people recognize in the music; that it actually says something. It’s not written as an
exercise, and it’s not just written to earn a living. It’s more meaningful, to me, and hopefully
the music expresses that meaning. I think people are touched by the music. Even if they don’t
know anything about music, when they hear it, there is something about it that…at least that’s
what I feel about music…of course I’m a composer, so… (Both laughing)

YK    It is obvious that Canadian concert-going audiences identify you as one of the most
recognized living composers in Canada. Was your musical journey always a successful one?
Could you please describe your early experiences as a musician?

AL    Definitely not! I mean, successful, yes, in the fact that first I was a pianist. Right from a
very early age, I knew that I could communicate. That was very odd since I was a very shy
person as a kid, and really, I only found myself and my voice in music. I taught piano full time
since I was 14. So from that, I knew that I could communicate, and people enjoyed studying
with me. I also played cocktail music for many years, and people enjoyed that part of me as
well. So, I learned to improvise and play standard pieces. It was a good thing to do, but I hated
doing it. I thought it was much beneath what I should be doing. Meanwhile, I was able to
graduate in a music program with no debt because I taught piano during the weekends and
played cocktail music for 4 nights a week. From early on, I was earning my living as a
composer. When I went to graduate school, I also taught piano because I had my ARCT by the
time I was 17 years old. There was a structure involved. When I went to California, they didn’t
have anything like that. They did not have required techniques, studies and pieces, so I was quite
in demand as a piano teacher.
YK  At the school?

AL  Yes. But I did not teach formally at the school since UC San Diego did not have a performance department. But for those who wanted to study piano, the school would give my name to those people. So, I had many private students and drove around from house to house in Southern California…and it was interesting. From very early on, that was a part of my development as a person. I mean when you think about teaching from when you are 14, you’re still a young child. And yet, you have to have enough information and patience to be able to communicate without frustration.

YK  When you came to Toronto, did you have any connections?

AL  None, zero!

YK  How did you cultivate your career?

AL  First of all, I went to the Conservatory (Royal Conservatory of Music) and tried to get a job. I did manage to get a little bit of teaching.

YK  Was it composition or piano?

AL  No, it was theory first, and then I did teach some piano, and then it became composition after that. The other thing was that I got a little bit of teaching at York University, and I laugh about it because it was the first year theory class that I taught in the evenings. Those are fairly big classes! I had taught theory and electronic music in California as well.

YK  Which school was this?

AL  It was Los Angeles City College and Pasadena City College. I drove from one school to the other. Anyway, when you teach first year theory there are many people there – especially at York University – who are really not interested in theory. I don’t even know why they are taking theory. I made it as entertaining as I could. But they had to know how to utilize the information,
and, of course, at that time, they didn’t have electronic piano labs. When I was teaching at California – they finally got an electronic piano lab, but before that – they had ten acoustic pianos back to back in a room, and I would be teaching, say, Beethoven. They would all play at the same time and I would lose my voice because I would be counting out loud over 10 acoustic pianos! It was really quite bad, and I would teach for 4 hours in a row – two 2 hour classes, a beginning class and a more advanced class. I would just laugh because it was so humorous…but very endearing. I think those are all experiences that I think keep you humble.

YK Were you married back then?

AL No. So that was sort of an early year story. When I came here and taught at York, they also didn’t have an electronic music lab. So, in order to get the students to understand what chords were and what melody was…because if you’re just a beginner, you would have to know notes on the staff, or whatever, but you don’t really have a connection between what that is…

YK …and how it sounds.

AL Right. So, you can teach singing, but at the program there, we decided to use recorders, which I hadn’t played since I was little. So I had to teach myself how to play the recorder again. We also used the ukulele, which I had never picked up. So, there I was, having to learn how to play a stringed instrument for the first time in my life. I had to learn how to tune the instrument and learn how to play these chords. I had my little instruction booklet and for 2 hours before each class, I would teach myself the chords that I would have to teach that night. It turned out to be fine because I had a sense of humour about doing it.

So that was my early transition. I was born in Vancouver, then went to university in San Diego and then I went to Los Angeles to teach for maybe 8 years, and then I came here to Toronto.
YK And then I guess you began to have commissions from people.

AL Right. That’s how I began to earn a living. But it’s never been easy. It’s always been challenging. I do not encourage people to become composers unless they really have to, or unless they have a tremendous gift. It’s very hard! Canada has no publishers and no agents, so you can’t really have a profession as you can if you were at my level in the United States.

YK Have you ever thought about going back to the States?

AL No. Now would be very, very hard. In America they have their stars and they promote their stars. It’s the same with European countries. They have their stars and they promote them. But here, you just go in the wire at the same level every time and you have to prove yourself every single time.

YK Why did you choose Toronto?

AL For many reasons. One, it’s really a centre of music making. Now the whole classical music situation is disintegrating because the CBC is about to abandon classical music from its radio station. Actually, we all have to write a letter to CBC to oppose what they are doing. Anyway, it’s now going to be much harder to be a professional because that’s the only outlet that we have for classical music… So, Toronto was a music centre. My husband – who was not my husband then – we were already in touch with each other and he lived here. So, he encouraged me to come here. There was quite a bit of activity compared to, for instance, Vancouver in contemporary music. There was more interest here. It’s different now, it’s less fertile. The atmosphere is different.

YK In the book Reflection in a Dancing Eye: Investigating the Artist’s Role in Canadian History, you mentioned that you were very quiet and shy as a child and that you credit music for helping you to express yourself freely in life. Could you share with me the importance of this
We are all born with whatever gifts that we have or whatever personalities we have; but every single person on this earth, in order to be fulfilled, has to know something about themselves. They have to be able to make their own contribution, whatever it may be, and they have to feel good about that or else they will end up with a dead-end job and a dead-end life. It was because of my teachers again. By playing a piece of music well, you can really feel something that you don’t ordinarily feel. And as you “mine” that feeling, it’s very positive. If, for instance - and there are many children like this who don’t have an outlet for their self-expression ...they get very frustrated, get angry, or they might do something violent, throw something or scream or have a temper tantrum. But if there is a way that they can channel that energy to do something positive that reflects who they are, there is a sense of satisfaction. Maybe if more people got to develop their artistic natures or be exposed to art there might be fewer frustrated people around. There might be less road rage incidents, or less violence. The other thing I tried to do in California was that I tried to teach some of the kids who came from black ghettos. I would try to teach them, without actually lecturing them, about the fact that there is intrinsic value in something that doesn’t have anything to do with how much money you spend on, say a car, or what kinds of possessions you have…that there is intrinsic value in human life that goes beyond an item to have. So I would play music of the great masters and I would always talk with them about how they felt about the piece. As you begin to learn that about yourself, and if it is not just the most basic of pop music which is very simple…pop music also has its value, but it is very simple and it doesn’t mine anything deeper than superficial emotions…where as great art changes you if you’re responsive to it. So, is it important? Yes, I feel it’s of utmost importance.
YK  Do you think it’s because you were so shy and quiet that you were able to express
yourself better in music?

AL  Maybe. I don’t know if that change would have happened if I hadn’t gone into music.
Surely, I felt accomplished...that I could do something very well, and that it was within my
control. If there was a passage of music that I was determined to learn well, even if it was very
difficult, I might have worked on that passage for a month.

In the end, success did not have anything to do with a teacher or a boss. That feeling of
success had to do with how much effort I put into learning. It was under my control and I think
that’s another thing that people feel alienated about – that things are out of their control – where
as I think that for the artist, it’s within your own realm.

YK  Do you have music that you like to listen to and is it the same as music that you like to
play or express?

AL  No, it is different. There is some music that I cannot ignore. I have to pay attention to
them. Say if I am cooking, I would not put on Stravinsky’s Symphony of Psalms because I
would start to listen to something in there and I would be distracted because the music would be
drawing me in.

YK  Do you have any genres of music, other than classical music, that you find interesting?

AL  Jazz. I listen to some world music.

YK  What kind of salient features do you find interesting?

AL  Hmm. I’ve always liked jazz. It’s creative. Because I play cocktail music, I know all of
those standards, and I think that it’s intriguing, the harmony that is used and the way that a great
jazz artist improvises. And the music is beautiful so it is much easier for me to listen to jazz in a
superficial way than it is for me to listen to classical. If classical music is on, then I am listening
to how well the pianist is playing or the violinist is playing. It’s just a different kind of thing. I listen to all different kinds of music. I like pop music. I like Motown music. Certainly when Motown music is on I respond completely differently, but that is the music that I grew up with. So in terms of pop music I think that Motown music (rhythm and blues) is remarkable. It is so much better than, say, acid rock. There’s a kind of intrinsic value to it. Again it has to do with a certain kind of self-expression.

**YK** In my readings about you, it seems like truth in life and honesty are very important to you when composing. Could you elaborate on this, and also, would you say that the style of your music changes as your experiences in life change?

**AL** Yes, truth is of utmost importance because music is almost “sacred.” It’s not to be treated lightly. It’s of such value that you have to follow the path of excellence. There’s different value in different kinds of music that I write, but I don’t do anything cheaply or poorly. For instance, my husband and I write music for film. We’re not the most highly sought after, but we do interesting projects and we do them very well. It’s not just cranking out work, and we don’t go in and try to get a lot of work. We do projects that are just interesting. We did a film called *Ravel’s Brain* in which we had to take Ravel’s different music – orchestra music, bolero, sonata for piano and violin, and pieces for piano – and we had to orchestrate them, or we had to make transitions so that it went from one piece that didn’t have anything to do with the next piece and we had to rewrite things so that they would fit well. That was a very difficult film project.

**YK** Do you write music with your husband separately or together?

**AL** We always write together. It’s interesting because most people when they write music as a team, they divide up the musical cues. But we write everything together and use our
compositional talents together to come up with the right solutions.

**YK** Whenever you finish writing your pieces, does your husband look at your music?

**AL** No. He doesn’t look at them. Film music is different because it’s utilitarian and it doesn’t “belong” to you. You work with the director and you’re trying to help his vision. When you do your own composition, it’s truly you! So, he really does not want to comment on my pieces. But I very often want his comment on things. I often use him as a sounding board if I get into a jam. He often has good comments.

**YK** Have you ever had any political, spiritual, or cultural message in your music?

**AL** Hmm… I have written a lot of music about nature or about the heavens. I’m not exactly sure why, except that the sounds that I choose, my musical language, evokes this kind of crystalline sound that reminds me of the heavens and stars. The inspiration might be the darkness of the night and then its exact opposite which is brightly shining heavenly bodies. So there’s a lot in there. And more deeply than that, it has to do with the expression of that which is inside human beings, which is darkness and light; it is love and violence. Again, music really is an expression of being. That being said, since music is so important to me, it has to be more than just superficial. I have to be able to find something that goes beyond a pleasant sound. It has to be a statement about “something.”

My latest piano pieces are completely different from my earlier piano pieces. The reason I wrote them was because I had written so many piano pieces in a certain genre. In order to have something different to say, to develop my talent in a different way, and also to challenge myself, I had to stop and figure out how to do this. That was a big change for me; it was not easy. If you look at the earlier pieces and look at the three latest ones, they are “completely” different. I have used different patterns, different sound materials and a different attitude. Even though these
pieces are short and virtuosic, they are FUN! My husband was the one who actually pointed this out to me. At this stage of my life, I’m writing music that’s fun. I don’t know why, because the existence of an artist in this society is becoming more tragic. But my music at this stage, it’s all about FUN! “Put on your running shoes”...that’s a phrase that I often say. If I’m talking to other people on the phone and they ask me how I’m doing, I always say, “I had to put on my running shoes for this one.” Finally, I used the phrase as a title of my music.

YK  Your music is a reflection of your life!

AL  Yes, my music is a reflection of my life. So, you see I’m constantly writing music. Everyday I’m writing music. I have deadlines. Deadlines are killers. They can take the fun out of it. I have to do these things because I’m not in a financial situation where I have a teaching job that pays me lots of money. I have no security whatsoever. I have no pension or anything, so if I’m not writing music then I earn no living.

YK  Have you ever thought about teaching at a University?

AL  They don’t want me. Nobody has really come to me and…

YK  Hmmm… I would imagine…

AL  …Politics of teaching is something else that is very irksome, and perhaps I am not the kind of person that they would want to have teaching. But, if somebody came to me and said they would make up a position for me… You know, I’ve done a lot of master classes and I’ve been on tour with the National Arts Centre Orchestra, giving classes from graduate composition students to little children who are playing my piano pieces to even little kids who are writing their little 4 bar songs. I know within a certain environment, I can communicate craft and passion well. But as for a completely scholarly pursuit, I’m not sure. Again, music has to be written at the highest quality that you are capable of doing because it is meaningful. So many of
my pieces are about eternity and life going on, but also about art being eternal. If you tap into certain truth, it continues to live on. Much of my music is really about that. For instance, each movement of the *Scenes from a Jade Terrace* is a reflection of images that I find imaginary and inspiring. There’s a timeless quality to them because they are connected to a past in Asia. But there’s a timeless quality that continues even after that last note is gone which has a connection to timelessness in each of those three pieces.

**YK** Did you want those three pieces to be played together?

**AL** They can be played separately.

**YK** In the master class you gave at the National Arts Centre in Ottawa, you mentioned that you were inspired by Brahms and Schoenberg’s piano pieces. What specific elements or concepts in the music were inspiring to you?

**AL** It’s interesting because they are quite different and yet there are things that are quite similar. The Brahms late piano pieces are really very beautiful and Opus 119 and 118 have such distillations of Brahms’ thoughts and his music over all of his life. When it came to that point in his life, everything was crystallized into these very beautiful, perfect pieces. They are gems and they sound so easy to produce, to write and even to perform, but they are tricky!

**YK** Are there certain harmonic progressions or certain qualities that you admire?

**AL** Yes, also, the fact that there are continuous variations, that there is constantly ebb and flow, and that they move ever so smoothly and so beautifully in and out of different sections. They’re very beautiful. And the Schoenberg Opus 19, similarly, has a continuous variation quality to them as well, and each one of them is perfect, small and makes a statement that is succinct. So I was inspired by both of those and as a student I even did a paper in theory class about the similarity between late Brahms piano pieces and early Schoenberg pieces.
YK  It seems like you prefer colouristic approaches, and it would be an interesting parallel to
draw between you and Messiaen, who is also regarded as a colorist. I also see that when you use
triads in the left hand, especially in Southern Sky, you prefer to use them in a 6/4 position instead
of the root, a notion which was first used by Messiaen in a systematic way. Would you say that
you are influenced by Messiaen in any way?

AL  I don’t think in a specific way. Certainly I would say that my music is influenced by the
fact that I play the piano and I write everything out on the piano. I don’t write, for instance, horn
music that is pianistic. But certain things come up time and again in my music and I think it has
something to do with how I grab certain notes when I play and when I write. So certain patterns
keep coming up. Also when I wrote early on, there would be patterns of black notes and white
notes that I would choose because of the physical nature of playing the piano. And so it turned
out that what I had done without knowing it was that I was writing in octatonic scales, and that
was the harmony. That continues with me today. In fact when I find myself falling into it, I say
to myself “There it is again, that scale, I’d better change the mold.” That’s one of the reason I
did the three latest piano pieces because their basis is quite different from the other pieces.

YK  I still see some similarities because you always do a minor third gap

AL  Yes, I do. I like the minor third and I use it a lot in alternating patterns. Of course, it’s
not completely divorced but I tried to write something completely different with a different
esthetic.

YK  If it’s not octatonic, your music sounds modal.

AL  Yes. But it is also not old and not aggressively new…and yet it is new. It
sounds…different. At least that’s the response that I’ve had. People say, “You know I don’t like
contemporary music but I really like your piece.” For instance Scenes from a Jade Terrace,
many pianists have told me that when they play one of those movements, after the concert, most of the questions or comments are about that piece.

YK Especially the 2nd movement. It really does grasp people. It’s the timbre and the color that is exotic and unique.

AL I remember writing the first chords as they melded into each other – what you hear when you play is what I heard when I wrote it – and there is a progression, a melodic line and the notes just move well into each other. I think that the 2nd movement is one of my most successful creations as a composer. I would say that there is almost a haunted quality about it, that it is so internalized that people are quite moved by it even though it’s not sappy or romantic. There’s just something about it. I know it’s very special; when I had finished writing it, I had thought I had written something special…but you never know until it goes out. Jackie played that movement in his apartment in New York for his friends, used candlelight, and said that his friends were completely stunned. I use the inside of the piano. Some composers use these things as a gimmick, but if I do something like that I have to make it so that it is integral to the piece. I think that it’s not just to make people go ‘wow.’ It’s to make people feel something mysterious has happened. But then again I have all kinds of critics who dislike my music. There are some people who equate emotionalism or expression or colouristic qualities with a kind of lack of intellectual rigor. But one does not have to exclude the other and certainly to write music that is successfully finding truth, you have to use your intellect. It’s not just sitting down and playing a C minor sixth chord to a D major, it’s about finding what is true for the music and for yourself.

So, have I had a lot of criticism? Yes, I’ve had a lot.

YK I’m sure these people will find criticism in everybody. If they want to find criticism, they’ll find it! Especially Scenes from a Jade Terrace – I learned that piece from Professor Marc
Durand and he loves that piece! – He frequently suggests that piece to his students. I went to the University of Cincinnati and played it there and they loved it. Now, the professors at the University of Cincinnati are recommending that piece to many students there!

**AL** Are you kidding? Why don’t they get in touch with me so that I know?

**YK** So many people have come to me asking, “Where can I get that music?”

**AL** One is published and I am getting that publishing back. I have to send the letter to the publisher because I have a contract that says that if I decide by the end of the term to withdraw the publishing agreement that I can. I was very smart to do that because a lot of the times when your music is assigned to a publisher and they decide not to publish it anymore, then that’s it. It’s mine now because five years ago the terms of the contract ended. The publisher, interestingly enough, has sold the last score and he does not want to reprint it.

**YK** I even taught that piece to my own student too. Maybe she bought the last score.

**AL** Right now I have to get onto that because I know people want it. Right now people have to do something awful and Xerox a copy and slip me money under the table because that way I don’t hurt my tiny royalty, which is very modest. You know, at this time of the year I do my taxes and I look at my check from my publisher and it’s so modest. I just think it’s not worth it. It took me five months to write that piece. That piece was hard. It was my first major piano piece and I wanted to write a good one. The things I wrote just sounded so banal, and I just couldn’t write Jackie Parker a banal piece or write a banal piece for the piano, which is my instrument. How could I write a banal piece? I struggled with this piece. I would walk around and get stuck. I would come up with banal solutions. I would just go mad and walk around and pace. Of course, when you are working that hard, it often wouldn’t come because you’re trying to force. But I had a deadline and I had to make it work.
YK: It worked.

AL: I struggled. It took five months to write one piano piece.

YK: Yeah, but now so many people are performing that piece. It’s very popular. Now I try to get the music loaned but even the loan is not available. It’s taken by people. Fortunately, I do have my own Xeroxed copy from before.

AL: (Goes out and returns to the room with the original score of *Scenes from a Jade Terrace*)

AL: I’m happy that people are actually playing my music because it means that more people can learn it and know that it’s there.

YK: So many people from the University of Cincinnati have contacted me regarding your music. I think my professors at the university usually mention my name when they recommend your music to the students.

AL: Well, that’s good! You have a direct line to me. So, here’s my score. If you think that people can read this, I think it’s time for me to reproduce this score until I get permission to reproduce the published one.

YK: My student was able to buy the score last year. I tried to get my own but I couldn’t get it. I borrowed it from the CMC library when I performed it.

AL: So, you see, if there’s truth there is an eternal nature to art.

YK: Besides your own piano pieces, are there any contemporary 21st century piano pieces that you admire?

AL: Right, in fact, one of the inspirations for the new style, the 3 newest pieces, was the Ligeti Etudes. They are manic! Propulsion! And I thought, “There is something wonderful about these pieces!” Of course, my musical language is completely different from his. I thought that I should work up these kind of humorous and fun pieces… They are just fun pieces; that’s
what they are. They are very north American in a way because they are little bit…jazz…
boogie-woogie.

**YK** yes, the rhythm… syncopations

**AL** Yes! Syncopations; you can see some of those syncopations in the Southern Sky, but
these are written in a different way. I wrote these pieces and it’s going to be very interesting
because the score for the latest one which is called *Fastforward*…

**YK** *Fastforward*! Sounds similar to *Put on Your Running Shoes*!

**AL** Yes, it does! It’s forward. It’s the button that you push on a tape recorder, VCR or
DVD machine. It’s the test piece for the Montreal International Piano competition. Since they
have chosen the pianists – I can say that now – they have mailed the piece off. There’s going to
be 24 quarter finalists playing this in May. So, I’m going to go and hear it played. I thought, “I
have to write something that the audience is going to enjoy.” There is nothing worse than, I
think, an intellectual piano piece that is very hard, gnarled, and with little sonorous quality to it –
an intellectual play that is dry for a test piece. It’s deadly because the poor pianist has only a
short amount of time. So, *Fastforward* is very pianistic. Everything fits. There are a couple of
little awkward things about it, but there is nothing that a fine pianist can’t play. I wrote this with
all these things in mind. And you know what, I write everything on the piano; I don’t play well
anymore. My hands hurt when I play that much. To play something that fast over and over, it’s
tiring! So when I finally finished it, I thought, “This piece is very charming, fun, and shows off
the pianist very well.” And I thought to myself that the audience is really going to like this
piece. It might be my most popular piano piece!

**YK** I’m really looking forward to hearing this piece!

**AL** It’s the same kind of things, with ostinatos and hand-crossings. It’s great!
YK There are many doctorate documents that concentrate on the influence of the East and the West in your music. Would you say there are other aspects of musical influences that have contributed in the shaping of your musical language as much as the influence of the East and the West? I guess the boogie-woogie?

AL Yes. Boogie-woogie, jazz, improvisations, standards…

YK You said that you wanted to find something new, beginning with Put on Your Running Shoes. Why did you choose…

AL Poor Kathy Chu was shocked when she got the music. Kathy Chu is a fantastic pianist. I’m sure that she was expecting some coloristic, Asian-inspired piece. Instead she got a kind of crazy, wild, insane boogie-woogie piece. But she played it very well.

YK So you heard her play?

AL Yes, oh yes, she’s very good!

YK I wonder how you chose that path though.

AL I don’t really know except that I wanted something completely different. As I was looking for something new, I listened to some CDs that I have, and it was Ligeti’s Etudes that I thought, “Wow these are fantastic piano pieces.” It’s not my musical language and I don’t have any European background etc… It was just a kind of music, I guess. Of course, not all the etudes are based on the running passage. Also, there are some running passages, for instance in I Leap though Sky with Stars although those are mostly with the right hand. The running passages are with the left hand in these. It’s not that I hadn’t used that type of interval, I just hadn’t used it this way. It’s very specific, it doesn’t change, and it locks into the pattern and stays there. It was probably at the time; I just wanted to do something different! I just did not want to write again in the same genre. I had done so many pieces; each piece had its own personality, but they all had a
similar sound board. I just didn’t want to bore myself. I didn’t want to bore the audience. When they study my periods, there is going to be a really abrupt change!

**YK** You kind of waited a little bit before writing the new style.

**AL** Yes, in fact, I was so exhausted writing piano pieces that I thought that I had written my last piano piece. I really did. The little piano pieces *Star Light Star Bright* have nine or ten pieces in that collection, and each one of them is a beautiful little piece. Also I consider each one of them as separate little piano pieces. So, if you add up all those small pieces, for me these are a lot of piano pieces. So, I kept saying, “it’s my last piano piece” because you don’t want to write the same kind of piece over and over. So, when the commission came for Katherine Chu for the Honen’s Competition, I thought, “how can I find more inspiration?” But, because it was for Katherine Chu, who’s a fantastic pianist and a lovely person, and because it was for the Honen’s International Piano Competition, which is such an important competition, that’s when I had to think about how to write a new piano piece! So when I finished that one, I said to myself, that’s the last piano piece! *Put on Your Running Shoes* was the last piano piece that I was going to write! And then I was begged to write another piano piece…

**YK** *In a Flash*.

**AL** *In a Flash*!

**YK** How did that piece come by?

**AL** It was because it was for Jackie Parker’s brother, Jamie Parker, who is a fantastic pianist. When people want me to write for all of these fantastic pianists it is hard to say no, but it’s also not that easy to write. You would think that writing piano pieces is easy, but it’s not. It’s hard to write a good piano piece. So, *In a Flash*, also, was a piece that I enjoyed writing. I had a lot of fun. Technically it’s very tricky, but it has this fantastic sound world and I like it very, very
much and look forward to hearing lots more pianist playing it.

**YK** So, how was it commissioned?

**AL** It was commissioned for the Vancouver Women’s Musical Society. It was the 100th birthday for the organization.

**YK** Was it Jamie Parker who commissioned the piece?

**AL** No, “they” wanted to commission me and “they” wanted me to write this piece for Jamie Parker who was going to be performing in concert. So, there were two things. First of all, Vancouver is my home; I was born in Vancouver and so, I have a real connection to the city. And because it was their 100th birthday, I wanted to help to celebrate that. It was an honor to be asked but I had to turn down the commission because I just didn’t have the time to do it and I just don’t want to write music just for the sake of writing one.\(^\text{219}\) I knew that it would be hard for me to write another unique piece. You would think that you could write a little piano piece in a week, but it doesn’t take a week - it takes months. It’s real labour! So then, again, this new piece, *Fastforward*; I thought, oh, no. I didn’t want to write again. But then it was for the Montreal International Piano Competition which is a pretty important piano competition. So…One more piano piece!

**YK** Is that your last piano piece? (both laughing)

**AL** I keep saying that it’s my last, but people want me to write more piano music!

**YK** There are so many pianists who are playing your music, and I think it’s partially because it fits our hands so well.

**AL** Yes, I know because I write on the piano. I know that if you are not a pianist and write

\(^{219}\)She did eventually write *In a Flash* for the Vancouver Women’s Musical Society, formerly known as the Vancouver Women’s Musical Club. The society presented many famous performers including Paderewski, Josef Hofmann, Sergei Rachmaninoff, and Euguen Ysaye, among many others. They also encourage local young performers through scholarships, bursaries, and numerous performance opportunities.
piano music, sometimes there are things that theoretically should work but are awkward.

**YK** I noticed that even when you write scales that have minor thirds and combinations of black and white notes in between, it’s usually the white notes that have minor third intervals, usually A and C.

**AL** Yes, definitely. It’s true! They always come up! For sure, A and C might probably be my favorite interval.

**YK** It’s very interesting because it’s easier that way than having…

**AL** Yes, for instance, F# and A. It’s true. I think it has to do with being a pianist. But I use A and C in my orchestral music, too.

**YK** I guess it’s because you improvise on the piano?

**AL** Yes. I start all of my compositions by improvising.

**YK** I have a question. For passages like this (pointing to the clustered right hand chords near the end of “Memories in an Ancient Garden” – mm. 88-91), do you choose these clustered notes because your hand position fits these notes?

**AL** No, I choose them because of the sound. I like the chrystaline nature of the upper register. In fact, when I first began writing music, my music really focused on the upper register. It’s what connects with me the most. I love that sound. The quality and the “mud” of the lower register – I call it mud – I find less interesting. My earlier pieces are weak, as a result. I would analyze myself; the success or the failure…

**YK** Well, *Music for Piano* (one of Louie’s earlier pieces) is performed very frequently by young pianists.

**AL** Yes, I know. I wrote it with that in mind. I wanted people not to hate contemporary music. It doesn’t have to be dry, intellectual, and without any resonance. It can be beautiful and
can express something. And the pianists can express something about themselves by playing the music. So I wrote these intermediate piano pieces to teach younger pianists how to deal with the sonorities of contemporary music - how to deal with minimalism, how to deal with when the bar-lines are eliminated. When a pianist first looks at a piece that has no bar-lines in a section it would be very scary because they would have never seen anything like that, but really, what it does is give you the freedom to play it the way that you want to play it. Of course, I tell you exactly how much time, or give you the notes; I don’t just say, “Have fun for 10 seconds!” But, you get to express yourself with whatever kinds of tempo changes within a certain given parameter that I assign. Yes, I know that they love to play those pieces, and it’s also a stepping stone for kids who might better understand another contemporary piece. I feel fantastic that it’s a positive experience for pianists. I know it is for young kids. I have taught my own children some the pieces from the early books. And lots of people play “Old Moon” from Star Light Star Bright - little children. It’s very rewarding.

YK So something like this, I tried to analyze this passage (pointing at the last two pages of I Leap through the Sky with Stars which starts off with low left hand notes that gradually soar up to the high register adding more notes to the chords as they ascend) with set theory. It’s impossible to do that! (laughing)

AL I know it would be horrible for any theoretician to analyze my music because I don’t follow any rule! I don’t even know what I did there. All I know is that it sounds beautiful. After you get to the loudness - it’s like karate chops - and you just let that note hold! And then you just begin from the very bottom and walk up.

YK So you just place your hand on the piano?

AL No, I choose. I mean I choose the notes. I write music every day and because every
choice is made for a specific reason - and I would have tried many other things – you have to
decide how loud it is going to be, what the pitch is, what the tempo marking is going to be, what
instruments are going to play a note, what the purpose of the note is in that particular phrase, and
they always play from before to where I am now. That’s what I mean by truth. I seek the truth
in an intellectual way. I might say, “That note should be such and such note because it’s the next
note in the scale.” But, if that note doesn’t work there, I don’t keep that note because the music
seeks its own truth. And so, I play it over and over and I choose the right note, but sometimes it
takes forever to choose the right note; sometimes I can’t find the right note. So, if you can figure
out what system I used there…I don’t know what it is. It just sounds right. The harmony sounds
right. The ending of this piece is really important because the piece is about death and eternity
again. So, if I chose a sappy sound at the end, it's not the same as what I did which was to give
you the loudest crushing note and then out of that note is drawn a resonance. But I had to find
what that resonance was. And so from the bottom it begins to creep up slowly and then I just
add an extra note each time until there are chords and they are very beautiful. So when you
finally get to the end and there is a major 6th that is the final resolution…

**YK**  It’s interesting looking at your music because I recognize some kind of frame usually in
the left hand with low bass notes. So if you follow the bass line, we can have some sense of
where your music is going.

**AL**  That’s interesting because I don’t think that way. I think of the sonority that I need at
that point. I don’t say there is a B flat and it has to go to A…sometimes, I do because there are
pitches that lead. I use semitone movement to lead to resolutions, for instance. And that’s both
an intellectual decision…but it’s always, ALWAYS finally determined by how it sounds. If it
doesn’t sound right, then I can’t go there.
YK  I think that’s the best way to compose music because the audience is listening to the sound. Second movement of *Scenes from a Jade Terrace*, “Memories in an Ancient Garden”… it seems like you are abruptly using a D ostinato that continues to the end. But somehow it sounds just right in my ear, so I studied your score, and I can see so many places that show the tendency of wanting to go to D which hints and sets up the D very well! (YK pointing out all the places in the music)

AL  It’s all very interesting because I don’t do it…

YK  (point out all the places again)…really emphasizes D and then really emphasizes D and then it becomes really obvious when the phrase goes to A and then D which repeats again. It really leads to the next section where the left hand has this constant D ostinato.

AL  Yes, it’s my ear that carries me. I don’t usually write in D, so I don’t know how that really happened. But, when I find the solution, it’s just like a light goes on and you just know that it’s the right choice.

YK  I have a question about the third movement. Again, you hint at what is going to come next. You prepare our ear to listen for that in the next section.

AL  Yes, that’s where my ear is going. It’s not so different, I mean of course it is different, but Beethoven has certain patterns, and his music, you just know where he is headed because he knows. You’re in the hands of somebody who is skillful. In a funny way, it’s a mystery. As I said, it’s a combination of intellect but it’s also the natural path that the music must take in order for you to find the truth of that piece. I think that is one of the reasons why I get so exhausted. I can’t just leave a choice to be haphazard. I have to find the right choice. I feel like I’m cheating if I don’t find the right choice. So, in finding the choice, you go through many, many solutions. So by the end of writing, I’m very tired.
YK   A lot of concentration.

AL   Yes, it’s a lot of concentration. But I’m happy to hear what you find in that because I
don’t approach the music that way. So, I find it refreshing.

YK   And for instance, everything is in the 6/4 position right here (pointing at the left hand
chords in “Southern Sky”)

AL   But it feels so nice, doesn’t it? (shaping her hand position to 6/4 position)

YK   You seem to use the triadic progression of D-G in the left hand in 6/4 positions
throughout the movement, “Southern Sky,” and finally come to a low D bass note in the root
position 3 bars before the end. Could you say that D is the tonic of the piece? Or are you
emphasizing D as a dominant with a little resolution as in Scriabin’s music?

AL   I would probably think D as the tonic. I think so. You might want to ask Jackie how he
feels.

YK   Although this (D) is the most obvious low bass note, it’s a second beat and I was
wondering if you wanted to obscure the tonic this way as in Scriabin where he uses a lot of
dominant without fully arriving in the tonic, but just hints the tonic. I wasn’t sure if you wanted
that kind of approach or if you really wanted the tonic.

AL   (pointing at the last two measures) this end colours it, doesn’t it? This (the low left hand
octave in D in m. 116) is ringing through. This is the tonic (the low D) and this is the colour of
the tonic (the last two measures). But it is powerful. It is a big cluster sound.

YK   It is so interesting to hear from the composer because as performers we’re always looking
for the composer’s intention. We can’t ask Mozart or Beethoven, we just speculate, but with
living composers it is a privilege to ask you and see.

AL   Sometimes I don’t have an answer. That’s why anyone who is trying to do a theoretical
study of my music, I would make them crazy. I don’t start in a mode, stay in the mode, and then transpose the mode…it’s logical but it’s also feeling my way through the logic too

YK  But it completely makes sense, from a sound point of view…

AL  See I don’t usually write in D.

YK  …Because this piece is very tightly knit.

AL  It was an earlier piano piece and it was written for a monster guy.

YK  You said that you really liked his playing.

AL  He takes liberties.

YK  Is that what you like?

AL  I like his personality. It’s not particularly metric. He changes things in a very musical way. It doesn’t sound superimposed. It’s very natural. The first time he played it was very stiff but fantastic.

YK  When was this?

AL  He premiered in the Prairies on tour. But I must have heard it here in Toronto and I was absolutely flabbergasted at how well he played. I find it amazing that when I wrote the piece for him, he was a formidable pianist, and I thought that this piece was so strange and so hard that it would never be played again it would only be his piece. But now I’m finding that a lot of people play this. In fact, in competitions in Canada, this piece comes up many times.

YK  Because it is refreshing and unique.

AL  So you asked me what other pieces inspired me. Well, I’ve always loved late Beethoven sonatas. The Opus 109 is one of my favorite piano sonatas. It’s just adored.

YK  A lot of people talk about your yin-yang principle. Is it because you can see the extremeness in Beethoven’s music as in the yin-yang principle?
When I first started writing music after graduating, I really first concentrated on composing and not composing for clients. I had to find out about myself because the music that I was going to write would only be interesting if it was a personal expression of some sort. If it was just generic music, there would be no reason to play my generic music instead of someone else’s. So that’s when I started to look more seriously at Asian art, poetry, music, and visual paintings. So part of that was my yin-yang principle. I did not want to bring Asian inspired music that sounded like some pentatonic…

I do hear a lot of pentatonic and octatonic scales in your early pieces though. It seems like they’re all there. Later on, it seems like you began to explore more synthetic scales which are quite similar to the Oriental scale notated by Persichetti in his book. In the book, he named different synthetic scales, and the Oriental synthetic scale was quite similar to yours which is characterized by the minor third gap.

Well I’ll have to look at Persichetti’s synthetic scale book.

It’s very interesting because you, without knowing and trying to put out that color, really came to that scale.

Yes. When I first started, it was an effort for me to do it. I had to consciously do it. Those initial pieces with Asian influences and trying to find my own voice were so obvious, but you have to start somewhere. Even the ones that were obvious were intriguing. There was something about the sound that people found interesting, so as I became more sophisticated I didn’t have to think so hard about what scale to use, if it was pentatonic, or what instruments or ornamentations to use. Yin-yang is a question of balance, and also conflict and contrast. But it’s in Western art music anyway. It’s just that it was a different point of view to get to the same place. It inspired me in a way because there are bristling parts in my pieces that are just so loud.
and there are things that are so intimate. I wanted this distance. Early on I had to train people to play it because they did not want to go to the extreme, and I had to tell them that I wanted it to be really loud!

**YK** In your interview with Jackie Parker for his DMA document, you said that you don’t like pianists playing in a nice way but that you wanted them to sometimes produce harsh sounds. Is that true with your newer pieces, because your newer ones are less in terms of the *yin-yang* principle?

**AL** They’re still there. I say brutal assets. Syncopation is a lot of fun, but there is also syncopation in hand crossing and you have to get down and put an accent. If I ask for a sforzando, I really mean it to be that. But it’s like jazz. You really feel a jazz pianist’s accent.

**YK** These newer pieces, are they less tailored to a specific individual and more for the competitions?

**AL** Yes, they are less tailored to a specific individual and more my own creative ends. I was also influenced by the sound of the impressionists, particularly Ravel.

**YK** Esther Chu wrote about that in her DMA document. The titles and the way you use pedals were impressionistic.

**AL** And also it was because I used to play that music as well, and I liked that music very much.

**YK** The ringing quality?

**AL** Yes. Most of my music has a resonance to it that is different. It’s not dry music. It’s very resonant. It’s built into the harmonies, and also the kinds of instruments I use.

**YK** Would you say that your hand positions affect pitch selections?

**AL** Yes. You’ll notice that I’ve never had a tenth for the pianist to play.
YK  When I play your piano pieces, it seems like all of the compositions are just the right length. When composing, are you conscious of the duration of a composition?

AL  The musical information, the musical motifs, they play themselves out. I felt that *Put on Your Running Shoes* was the one piece that was a little too long, so I edited it. I felt that it repeated, not the musical material, but the gesture.

YK  Still sounded great. I played this for my lecture recital. This was my last piece. They were actually impressed that I played this from memory.

AL  I would be impressed if you played this from memory! I can’t even remember what I edited out of the piece. What I did was that I removed some of the phrases that were repeated. It was a little bit too long, and I felt that it would be more successful if I removed a few bars.

YK  Actually I thought about putting on my running shoes when performing this piece.

AL  She (Katherine Chu) did that. You should have done that because people went crazy.

YK  It’s because I didn’t have your permission. I did want to make it fun.

AL  She came out with a breaker, a cap, and running shoes. I loved that because music doesn’t have to be stuffy or boring.

YK  This is such a fun piece.

AL  It’s more fun that I cut out a few bars.

YK  You told me that you revised *In a Flash*. Was it in the same way?

AL  I might have taken out a couple of bars. But, you know, they’re fine in their original ways. I just made it tighter, that’s all. So you had success with this piece and they liked it! It is a unique piece. There are not too many pieces that sound like this one.

YK  I should let more people play this piece. It looks like most of your pieces are ternary modified and usually the last section is more contracted than the beginning part.
In *Scenes from a Jade Terrace*, “Memories of an Ancient Garden,” as you play those chords it’s a distillation that comes into the tonic. That’s true of many of my pieces. It’s a rounding for me for the first part of the piece.

**YK** Do you still write in pencil?

**AL** Yes.

**YK** You write everything so neat.

**AL** No, my first drafts are totally illegible. But, I keep them all.

**YK** Can I take a look at some first drafts? Because it would be good to see them included in the document.

**AL** I’d have to find them for you. Which one would you like?

**YK** Maybe a page from *Scenes from a Jade Terrace* and *Put on Your Running Shoes*?

**AL** Yes, but they are illegible. My first drafts are horrible. I try to save paper. If I have a little bit of space, I’ll try to use that space. And I have x’s, crosses and arrows. The instructions from my copyist from *Fastforward* said this one was a hard one to copy because it was so messy.

**YK** You have many trills in your earlier works. Is it because of some kind of Asian instrumentation that you wanted to follow?

**AL** Somewhat. Early on I tried to use some of the techniques on a *ch’in* on the piano. But now, for the same reason that Bach used trills, you want to continue the sound and the resonance of the harmony for instance. My music is not so far away from traditional music. I see it as an extension of traditional music and not breaking away from traditional music. I love the music and repertoire so much, it seems a logical extension of it, and it seems so natural to me.

**YK** Are there any instruments that you think inspire you to write, for instance the 2nd movement of …
AL  No it’s just the sound. And for me, I feel that resonance. Music is very visceral. My body feels and I respond. That’s one of the reasons why I write with pencil. When I write that line it’s very visceral. I only took Chinese when I was a child, but I had to use a brush and I remember enjoying the feel of the way the line would move and there is that energy. When I look back, I like the way that the dot is wider at the one end, with a tail, and that you write a different line at different speeds. That has a connection with me or maybe I was just destined to be a composer and I enjoyed the cursive. Writing in pencil is very similar. I don’t like ever sharp pencils because you never get a change in the depths of the line. It’s always the same. My children like to use those mechanical pencils.

YK  In your interview with Jon Kimura Parker…

AL  He used to call me at odd hours. Rome, London. He was busy concertizing and trying to do his DMA at the same time. We would do these long-distance analyses over the phone. It was really funny.

YK  It said you were undergoing extensive revisions of your piece Concerto for Piano and Orchestra

AL  Yeah, I haven’t done it yet. I have to write a piano concerto. Maybe you’ll ask me write a piano concerto and that will be my last piano piece.

YK  Is there a different challenge writing concertos versus solo pieces?

AL  Oh, yes. Balance. Horrible. That’s why it needs to be revised. I think the piano is huge, 9 foot, brilliant, but you know it could be misleading.

YK  Who was this for?

AL  The CBC commissioned it and it was for Robert Silverman. But it’s been played by Christina Petrowska a couple of times. I should write another one… You were asking about
instruments. Another favorite instrument of mine is the harp. I love the harp. So, probably, it inspires something too. Or it cross references each other.

**YK** *Starstruck* and *Touch* are marvelous and effective pieces written in 1995 and 1996, but it seems like they are not performed as much as your other piano music.

**AL** They don’t know that they are really there. *Starstruck* is a beautiful piece. *Touch* is like a Toccata. It’s the closest thing that I came to writing a study. It’s not really a study but it’s very quick and it’s very light. And I wrote it for a Honens Laureate. I asked to listen to his playing and they sent me a CD of his music and he played Scarlatti, which I adore. So, *Touch*, there’s a certain lightness to it that’s different. There’s no big crashing things. I don’t remember the guy but he did not end up playing. It was played by an American pianist of Armenian background. His name is Babayan (Sergei Babayan) and he lives in Cleveland. Babayan had completely the wrong attitude for this piece. I had written it for this Chinese pianist who had played Scarlatti. So it didn’t have the effect that I was looking for. And the other thing about *Touch* is that it hasn’t been put into the music centre, so nobody knows about it. I have to go over and correct it. I have very little time to do it.

**YK** But I do have it here. I got it from the CMC. I had special permission from you. I paid for this and picked it up from the CMC.

**AL** (drawing attention to the second page of *Touch*) Here’s the little bits in the beginning, syncopated. I think this is a very good piece.

**YK** Would you say that these are transition pieces to later pieces?

**AL** Maybe. But this is a very good piece. Very effective. (looking at the repeating right hand ostinato that starts from m. 59) See, this kind of repetitive thing…

**YK** You do a lot of rhythm dissonance. You write groups of three notes but then your rhythm
is different.

**AL** Right. To make it more different and more challenging. The ending of my new piece is very similar to this. I think it’s a very good piece. *Starstruck* is in the CMC. But not enough people play it. It’s not a long piece.

**YK** Is there anything else that you want to talk about regarding the performance of your piano music? For instance, how would you want your music to be performed in terms of pedaling, and are there any specific comments or suggestions when performing your music?

**AL** I don’t like listening to performances that are played mechanically. There is a philosophy in some pianist circles that for contemporary keyboard music, it should be militaristic and very cold. This is not how I want my music to be played. I really want it to be played as if it were played as part of a logical and historical outgrowth of the canon of keyboard literature. So, I don’t want it to be played in a clinical, cold fashion. It doesn’t sound like that. But there are certain people who play like that. It just does not resonate with me. It’s okay to stretch a little bit here and there. I don’t mind a bit of rubatos. I don’t’ want the music to be contorted, but musical rubatos are fine with me.

**YK** Basically, you want the pianists to feel.

**AL** Yes, and convey. As I said, it’s a visceral experience for me. It’s also intellectual activity, but certainly it is a visceral one, and if it does not communicate, something is missing.

**YK** On a personal level, as a mother of 2 boys, I was wondering how you balance your family life with your extremely busy schedule of musical activities?

**AL** Very hard. If you are a contemporary composer, it’s very tough! I would prefer to have fewer commissions, take more time, and enjoy writing. Right now, I have 3 very big commissions that are high profile.
Can I ask you what those are?

I’m writing a piece for the Montreal Symphony. Kent Nagano is the conductor who’s very important. But it’s a strange commission. It’s a commission for *L’histoire du soldat* ensemble. It has instrumentations that I would never choose on my own volition. But they are taking the ensemble for tour. I’m also writing for two Inuit throat singers, so I have to integrate Native music into an ensemble that is not a sonorous ensemble – trombone, bassoon, double bass. Each of those instruments sounds good but when you put them together it suddenly gets lopsided, and the Inuit throat singers don’t read music, so in order to incorporate something native and intrinsically musical with something that’s very western…to make it work and blend properly is a big challenge. Again, I try to write art at the highest level. So, to pull two things that are completely different from one another and make a successful piece is very difficult. I’m also writing a made-for-television opera right now which is a political satire, and it’s funny. It’s 90 minutes long. It’s huge. I have four works that are very big and I just gotta keep writing all the time. So right now I’m writing a quartet of two political leaders and their two wives. And they’re singing silly things and I have to make this quartet work.

Unfortunately, the author exhausted all the available video tape recording resources on that day, and was not aware of the last tape roll that ended at this point. Without knowing that the tape had ended, the interview continued on for more than 30 minutes. Therefore, the author asked Dr. Louie if she can answer at least the last question via email, which she kindly agreed.

The email interview that she corresponded on April 14th, 2008 is as follow:

Can I ask you to share your goal as a musician for the rest of your life?
Dear Yoomi, this is difficult to answer in an email but I will try:

I want to create music at the highest level that I am capable of. It should be of the highest musical level as well as the highest technical level. My art music should communicate with performers and listeners and it should move them in a deeply human way. I don't want to write formulaic music. My works should continue to be fresh and alive. I don't want to rewrite the same piece. Each one should have its own uniqueness.

I strive to have my compositions represent me in a true way – for me the act of creation is the search for musical and human truth. My works should express the various facets of the human condition and emotions. Art music should not be cheap or unoriginal.

I would like these works of mine to be new and fresh and challenging for me. Most importantly, the music should express who I am and it should touch the hearts and the intellect of both audience and performer.

Thanks for your interest in my music.
APPENDIX TWO

PHONE INTERVIEW WITH ALEXINA LOUIE

TRANSCRIBED AND EDITED

FEBRUARY 23, 2009 from 7-8 p.m. PST

Throughout the interview, author had numerous informal and personal talks with the composer which she omitted in this transcription. She included only the information that is pertinent to the study of Louie’s music. The whole interview was casual with much laughter, at the same time provided significant information regarding the evolution of Louie’s music.

**YK** Could you please describe the general stylistic evolution in your music?

**AL** One of the ways that you learn how to write music is to study other composers’ styles. There’s the school of teaching composition where you learn a composer’s style and then you write a composition in the style of that composer. Or you study a form and then you have to write a piece of music in the form that you’ve studied. I basically did that. It was partly in composition and partly in theory lessons. That was the outset of writing music for me. At the same time, I was studying with a composition teacher who was introducing me to find my own style and my own sense of harmony. That was a very difficult period for me. I wrote music slowly and I didn’t feel that I had anything significant to say, although I really did enjoy writing music.

So, it really wasn’t until I went away to graduate school where I was exposed to a lot more different styles of music and a real sense of a writing community. I really began to feel the energy around composing. So I went to UC San Diego which had mostly composers. Almost all the faculty members were composers, or they wrote music. There was a very high regard for
composition at that time at that school. Almost all the grad students were composition students. So it was a unique situation at the school. I was immersed in ideas and the sound that is a west coast philosophy of sound. So, that was my basic composition education at that time. But it wasn’t until I graduated from UC San Diego and I had to actually stop writing for a good many years – because I did not feel that competent as a composer and I did not have a burning desire necessarily to write music – that I realized over a period of time while teaching that if someone was going to play my music it would not be because I was bigger at marketing myself but it was because my music would have a unique voice. I did not know what that unique voice was going to be but what I decided was that it had to express who I was, so I had to find out who I was. At the same time I had to amass a certain quality of excellence of execution in composing. So that period of time was that of searching and that period of time was when I studied Asian music, particularly Japanese music, such as the gagaku, and Chinese music. I did listen to Indian raga music as well but it did not resonate with me as much. I also listened to Korean dramatic music called the pansori. From all of these studies I spent a lot of time listening, reading, and even studied a Chinese instrument called the ch’in. During the last year of my graduate work I spent a lot of time studying the ch’in. In that regard I really immersed myself in the workings of Asian music from an inside point of view, especially with learning the Chinese instrument. If I had continued I would have been able to really get to the heart of that instrument – the ch’in. I couldn’t continue that because I was busy trying to earn a living and commuting between San Diego and Los Angeles; I finally moved to LA. During that time when I moved to LA and really began teaching at the colleges I realized that I really wanted to write music.

So, the Asian influence became really strong. But I didn’t know how to use it in my music. The first few pieces that I tried were obvious uses of pentatonic harmony. I wrote an
early piece for piano.

YK  Dragon Bells?

AL  Yes, Dragon Bells. It was really quite beautiful but I feel that it was really Asian. Then I wrote a number of instrumental pieces based on the Asian influence. From there the pieces began to amalgamate. The techniques that I learned, the way that woodwinds bend, the quarter bending, transferred itself to the pieces that I wrote for harp. So this style gradually came into my music.

But also from an earlier time, the sound of my music is also strongly tied to impressionistic music. Somehow over the years, both of those things coalesced and you can hear it particularly in the piano pieces that you’re studying – I Leap through the Sky with Stars – and a cello and piano piece called Bringing the Tiger down the Mountain II. My big orchestra pieces, violin and orchestra, have these elements to them and the audience seem to respond to this sound world.

Over these years, I have written a lot of piano music, and so many people love to play my piano music, and I keep being asked to write more piano music…and each time I feel like I have to make a new piece, not just rewrite the same piece. So that led me to think that I should not write any more piano music because it was so hard to find new things to say with the musical language that I’ve been working with.

YK  Is it easier to produce new elements with orchestral music than with piano music?

AL  No, I don’t think so. Orchestra music is very complex to do well. You know that I’m having a premiere on March 7 for the Tokyo String Quartet and that was an immensely complicating piece to write…

So, what I had attempted to do with my piano music Put on Your Running Shoes is… and
it was an odd choice because Katherine Chu would be the perfect pianist to write a piece in the previous style because she’s an Asian Canadian like me and she’s a fantastic pianist. But I just decided at that point that I had to write something new, because I would have ended up writing similar kinds of passages if I had gone on writing yet another piece in the old style, which I like very much and it really is me, but as a creative artist I felt had to try something else. It was not easy to come up with that change and it’s a diametrically opposed style. There are still some things that are definitely connected. The harmonies are still the same and I still use the same collection of intervals but I’m taking the material and I’m going in a completely different direction. I think that piano piece is fun, has a rhythmic vitality and is fast! I’ve written the next three piano pieces as an evolution or different take on my new style. It’s been real fun. Mind you, the first one was quite difficult to write because I was in new territory and it took me a long time to actually commit to it. Then you think what are people going to think, and is it going to be successful with the pianist? Will she enjoy playing it because it’s not what people expect from me. It turned out that it is fun and people like to play it and I’ve had young 14 year olds play this difficult piece. I’m glad I did that. In a Flash written for Jamie Parker is another one of those pieces and it is also a lot of fun. The third piece in that style is Fastforward and that one is even a little more tongue-in-cheek because it opens up like a jazz pianist might open up – in a slow rift – and then it just goes crazy right away – very fast! Technically it is tricky but I know that pianists find my music satisfying to play because it is very pianistic. Even though the patterns might be quite complex they lie well in the hands.

**YK** Would you say that these pieces are influenced by your interest in the formal plan of continual development or continuous variation? They seem to come from small motives that expand and go through different variations, especially In a Flash.
AL  Yes it’s true in that piece and some of Fastforward, although Fastforward has two slow sections in it that are motivically connected but completely divergent. Also, as I wrote these pieces I wanted to write fast music and that’s sort of been the end of me because it takes a lot of effort to write fast music with the massive number of notes to write and the many pages of music. So, I’m practically writing myself out at this point because all of my pieces, orchestra or piano, are fast. I have to write pages and pages of music! I’m at that place now in my music. I’ve decided to write fast virtuosic music that sparkles and has real lively music to it.

YK  Why do you think you wanted to write fast music? Your previous ones also do have virtuosic qualities.

AL  They do, but there are sections in earlier pieces of a static sound world with beautiful orchestral colors that are very prominent. I became quite well-known for those kinds of beautiful coloristic orchestrations. So, I felt that I needed a change.

YK  Your new piano style developed into a boogie-woogie style with extensive use of ostinatos.

AL  I found it technically demanding to write because I “play” everything. If I’m repeating these ostinatos… and I’m trying to find the right combination of intervals, I have to play fast music for a long time. It’s hard!

YK  With your instrumental music other than piano, would you say there is also one distinctive style that characterizes your recent compositions?

AL  Generally my music is expressive. There’s a group of pieces that I wrote at the same time and maybe all this was leading to a different style… I wrote a little 6-7 minute opera called Toothpaste and I’m not sure what the timeline is, but Put on Your Running Shoes is in there and another opera Burnt Toast, In a Flash, more recently Fastforward, and Take the Dog Sled. If
you look at that group of pieces – and I have just finished another satirical made-for-TV opera – and you juxtapose these pieces with the pieces that came up to that point, there’s a different liveliness to them. These ones are also very humorous. Even the piano pieces are humorous and you need to play them with a different style. This group of pieces is humorous, they’re funny!

Before I wrote *Toothpaste*, I had “never” written anything funny. How do you write music funny, this tongue-in-cheek humor? They are also technically difficult. The operas are all funny. Also, the piece *Take the Dog Sled* – for the Montreal Symphony Orchestra and 2 Inuit throat singers – was performed in Northern Quebec in Nunavut. The piece has rhythmic vitality and also has humor. When the audience heard the title for one of the movements, “Mosquito,” they laughed and smiled and cheered because I understood what the mosquito situation is like in the North. So the people heard that and they responded so warmly. The piece touched them.

So, this is a unit of music that people can see as being a different style. It’s not that I’m going to stay in this style either. The piece that I’ve finished writing, “Pursuit,” harkens back to my old style. It’s a piece for the Tokyo String Quartet and orchestra. It turns out that this piece is fast and virtuosic. I’m writing for one of the best string quartets in the world. I use the instruments in traditional ways; it’s the combination of patterns that are new, but I don’t use contemporary string techniques. It doesn’t sound like a traditional piece. It’s a piece where an intimate ensemble is set against a large orchestra. There are many technical problems to solve in writing a piece like this. There are almost no pieces for string quartet concerti because the format is like oil and water.

**YK** It seems like you always try to stretch and challenge yourself to create something new and refreshing for you and your performers. Are there any other interesting new concepts or styles that you would like to investigate and launch in the future?
AL. There is a couple of things I would say. One is I would like to revisit *Take the Dog Sled* because there are new things in that for me. It’s very rhythmic. It’s quite modal but not “retro” modal. It sounds new. I think I was able to capture something special in that piece. So I’d like to revisit those ideas. Also, I’d like to do more collaborative work. I’ve been commissioned to write one ballet.

YK. *Wolf’s Court*?

AL. Yes, *Wolf’s Court*, which is a huge project. But the National Ballet has used a piece of mine before that. It’s a thrilling spectacle. It feels wonderful to be a part of that high caliber in a larger theatrical field. So I would like to work more with dance and ballet. I haven’t done all that much there. It would give me another avenue to explore. Also, I would like to write another opera.

YK. If you write an opera, is it going to be a funny or serious one? I know that your previous opera *The Scarlet Princess* is a tragic one.

AL. Not sure, I think we need humor in this time that we are living in. It’s a troubling and dangerous time. I think that humor is necessary. But it’s difficult in art music. I’ve been able to do it and I enjoy it. I hope that *The Scarlet Princess* gets staged in the future. I think that it’s profoundly moving and it’s universal. But I don’t know. There is a possibility that I would write a humorous opera for the stage. My librettist and I have talked about a story line that we haven’t actually followed through with. But, I think that I would like to write another serious opera. I now have experience writing funny operas and the experience of writing a grand two hour opera. So, I think that I have the experience and the desire to write another serious opera. Unfortunately, this country is not big enough to take the chance to stage a real serious opera. It might be just wishful thinking on my part.
Dr. Louie, I was wondering if you incorporated any of jazz elements in *Take the Dog Sled*.

I don’t think specifically. People might find it jazzy because of the rhythmic impulse. It doesn’t really. It’s a different part of my style.

Is there anything else that you would like to mention in your stylistic changes in recent years?

Part of it has to do with my desire to advance my art. I don’t want to stay in the same place. Also, I’m curious to try new things. I don’t want to bore myself and I don’t want to bore my performers.

It looks like you always want to challenge yourself and you even advise your students to do the same.

Yes and it’s frightening to do that. It’s risky. I had a student not long ago who wrote 4 part harmonies and I knew that she was timid in what she was trying to accomplish. She wasn’t really expressing herself because it was in a style that was much closed – a lot of quarter and half notes, very square rhythms. For a person in upper level composition this was not going to help her to be a successful candidate for graduate school. In the year that she studied with me, I really forced her to free herself and that was uncomfortable for her, but it was successful for her. I encourage, especially young composers who have nothing to lose, why would they write such conservative music? I mean there are so many different ideas to try out. The young composers have to listen to a lot more music than they listen to. People tend to listen to music that they like. For a young composer they should be listening to all kinds of music and ideas of how a different person might use instruments a different way. I take on commissions that I feel will help open another creative element in my writing. So when the Montreal Symphony Orchestra asked me to
write music for two Inuit throat singers and 7 instruments that I had absolutely no feeling for as an ensemble – same instrumentation as Stravinsky’s *Histoire du Soldat Suite* – it was a wonderful challenge for me. This gave me the opportunity to stretch myself further because I had to make a piece work under all of the circumstances that were against it. So I lived to tell the tale!

**YK** You always study beforehand, such as Inuit throat singers, how they sing…

**AL** Yes, I don’t like to go into any project without having a firm grounding in it, in the sound, in the instruments. In taking that commission I had to stretch myself in order to do a good job. The same applies with the string quartet and orchestra piece. It’s a completely unlikely combination of the most intimate chamber ensemble and an extroverted orchestra. So in order to solve this problem, I would have to expand my capabilities. I risk a lot. I was very successful with *Take the Dog Sled*. The string quartet concerto *Pursuit* is a piece that I won’t know if it’s successful until I actually hear the quartet play with the orchestra.

**YK** Dr. Louie, thank you so much for your time.

**AL** You’re welcome and thank you for your time.

[The interview seemed to end at this moment and the author and Louie carried on having more informal and personal talks. However, the conversation about Louie’s music sprang up again!]

There’s another master’s student at the University of Toronto who is doing a paper on my operas and she asked me if my music was postmodern. I said, “I don’t really know!” I just write the music.

**YK** I do think your music is quite eclectic. You get all these influences – from minimalistic, impressionistic, experimental music, exotic Asian timbre, using the contrast of *yin* and *yang* – and you are adding jazz influences. I was gearing towards you being an eclectic composer.
AL   Right. I would say that it depends on the commissions that I agree to do.

YK   You have still maintained your own voice over the years.

AL   I would “expect” that to happen. My music is eclectic because I make a living writing
music and I fulfill the requirements of a commission well. I try to fashion the piece for a
particular person and a particular concept. For instance, the string quartet and orchestra piece is
on a concert called – I’m not exactly sure, but I believe – Asian Voices. And I’m on a concert
with Tan Dun. So, although they did not ask me to write a piece inspired by Asian techniques, I
felt compelled to do it because of the nature of the concert. So that’s why this piece harkens
back to a combination of where I am now and a little bit of the kind of music I wrote at an earlier
time. In that regard I’m taking the elements and going a different direction.

YK   Maybe that’s why it’s “fast” and at the same time Asian sounding!

AL   We’ll see when I get to the rehearsal. I’m very excited. I’ve been working very hard on
this piece. The premiere is March the 7th. In writing eclectic music I don’t want to be writing a
jumble of things. The music has to be coherent, it has to communicate and it has to express. So
I don’t want to write an empty vacuous jumble of contemporary or populous things, a collage of
sounds. That is not what I’m attempting to do. In eclectic, it’s a focus on a different technique
than my overall technique. You have to have a curiosity and mastery at the same time. If you
don’t have a mastery of that technique or that musical language you just end up writing
something not worthy.

YK   That’s why you always project your own voice in your music.

AL   Yes, I don’t think I have to “try” that anymore. It’s just become my voice. Earlier I had
to try, but the pieces are still expressive and quite wonderful. I’m glad that I wrote those older
pieces back then, although I would not write those pieces now. For instance, an earlier piece for
2 pianos…

**YK**  *Afterimages?*

**AL**  Yes, *Afterimages*. I would not write this piece now, but it is still an expressive, beautiful piece. I’m glad that I wrote that piece back in 1981. It’s a piece that represented me at that point. It’s a beautiful piece and I’m not embarrassed by that piece, I’m proud of it.

[After this, the author extensively thanked the composer and the conversation carried on with more personal and informal talks. This time, the phone interview ended without further discussion about Louie’s music.]
Who or what were your main compositional influences when you were a student?

I don’t think I can name one specific compositional influence. I like the whole range of music from different composers and styles. However, the first contemporary piece that was intriguing was Schonberg’s piano pieces, Op. 19.

How do you approach young composers who come to you to study musical composition?

I don’t teach much now, but when I do teach, I try to get them to understand the general and overall view of music. I then make them elaborate one basic concept. Starting with one note, we discuss what that note could do in terms of rhythm and placement; within orchestral effect, how the note would sound at a certain point. I never write a piece for them, but just allow them to make different choices. I just guide them through.

Are any of your earlier stylistic traits currently undergoing changes?

Yes, there are some changes. I have studied oriental music and have even studied a Chinese instrument. I was searching for my own voice using oriental sounds. But now I don’t have to think about intervallic relationships or anything like that. Some people say it is more surprising because my music reveals who I am and I don’t have to try to be someone else. So there is no one style and it’s versatile, but people know when they hear my music.

When I play your piece, Scenes from a Jade Terrace, it seems like the composition is just the right length. When composing, are you conscious of the duration of a composition?
Yes, I’m conscious about the duration, but I should say it is determined by the music itself. When the piece feels right, that’s where it ends.

Do you think commissions influence how and what you compose? How about when you were writing for this piece?

Definitely. But I don’t take it unless I really want to do it. For example, the piece, *Scenes from a Jade Terrace*, written for Jon Kimura Parker, I tried to make the piece tailored for him. I considered his strength of deep resounding European musicality. He is a bit quirky, fun, loving, and adventurous. I also put some oriental flavors into it. I improvise a lot and I search until I find the idea that works for the piece.

How do you personally like this music to be played in terms of spirit, length, tempo, and mood? Do you have any specific musical style or approach in your mind for this piece? Would you want performers to take more freedom or not?

I don’t want my music to be played metrically unless it is specified. I want performers to play with an extremity in spirit, like *yin* versus *yang*. When I mean forte, I really mean forte and explosive; and when I put pianissimo, I really want the performer to play very intimate and internalized. Obviously, I don’t like my music sounding too metrical. I think performers should sink into the sound since sonority is really important for me. The instrument should resonate. I don’t try to do it, but some people say my music sounds impressionistic. Not extorted, but I do want the performers to have freedom, with elastic feelings. I often notate long passages with seconds, and it is because I want the players to take freedom within the passage. I think this is one of my musical languages.

I understand that Jon Kimura Parker commissioned this work. Have you heard him play this piece? If you have, do you think he communicated what you wanted? If so, could you tell
me how and why?

AL  Yes, I’ve heard him play the piece, and he communicated it exactly the way I expected. He has deep musical basis. He takes musical freedom in my piece and captures the natural and appropriate rubatos beautifully.

YK  What do you think about your musical language and type? And how do you think you implied that in this piece?

AL  I express who I am with my own musical voice. I don’t try to think too hard before I start composing, but rather, I go where the music wants to go. I don’t start my pieces with intellectual analysis nor end with an intellectual view. I have to respect the work itself – the totality of the piece. In this piece, the whole piece is the combination of both Eastern influence and Western structure and harmony.

YK  Do you think your experiment with polytimbral synthesizers and computer-based sequencers might have influenced your composition in general or even specifically in this piece?

AL  Yes, it encouraged me to think about color of the sound. The timbre is a crucial part of the music, and it does not happen accidentally.

YK  I’m amazed by your admirable use of timbre especially in the second movement. You seem to create this sonority that tells a story itself. It makes me not merely play the piano but to produce music by exploring the coloristics of the instrument. How do you think of your use of timbre in this piece?

AL  I have to combine the sound of the notes with the timbre I want to create. Throughout this piece, I think the major aspect is the timbre. There is a huge difference between the lowest and the highest register. In the second movement, I have also exploited the overtones.

YK  Did you have any sound of other instruments in mind when you were composing this
I don’t think of a specific instrument in order to create a sound – maybe in my earlier stage, yes – but now it has become my musical language. However, since I wanted to find my own voice when I was younger, I consciously searched and listened to Oriental music including Cambodian, Korean, and Japanese.

I noticed that your daughter’s name is Jade. Is there any related story for choosing that name for the piece? Did you have any specific garden in mind? Were there any specific reasons that you chose these subjects (a ghost of an ancient warrior, garden, etc)?

Actually, there is no relation between my daughter and the title. I didn’t have any specific garden in mind; you can imagine typical oriental gardens.

What were major influences that factored into composing this piece? Were there any events or memories that were influential?

I read a lot of Chinese poetry, haiku, books of Japanese ghost stories, etc. There is no particular reason for choosing this subject, but this piece is about a ghost character from the ancient past. It provides a haunting and mystical sound that resonates throughout the piece.

Have you ever had any political, spiritual, or cultural message in your music?

Yes, only because the way I write is to express who I am in any piece. So anything that’s within me will be communicated.

I think this piece is extremely well organized in terms of pitch and form. Something that fascinates me in the first movement is your use of intervals (2nd, 4th and 5th) and the “gapped scale” or “synthetic scale” which produces Asian flavors in this music, and brings the movement together as a whole. I see this movement as 3 sections: A, B, and the last section in which you put both elements of A and B to unite everything together at the end. It seems like you have so
much freedom in the piece, yet everything seems to interweave so that the piece becomes united as a whole! Can you elaborate on how you unified this piece?

AL I think you are right since there is a contrasting section in the middle and it refers back to the beginning at the end, but I didn’t set out this way.

YK I can see a trend in your music of growing from one idea to the next, usually in a set of three or four. It seems like you elaborate and expand the last idea in order to increase the intensity and give incredible excitement to your music (e.g. first movement – the scale in m. 16, the rising chords in m. 87; second movement – m. 27, the accel. Trills in m. 34, m. 35, m. 58 mm. 64-73). What do you think about this? And how do you think you increase and sustain the excitement of the piece?

AL I usually expand three times and hardly four. The music reveals itself, and it just happens that way. The music gets boring if I stay with the same pattern exactly the way it is, and when I’ve had enough, I move on. The second movement is very introspective and timbre oriented. I wouldn’t say fragile, but it is reflective and at the same time quite intense. You have to approach this music with two extreme sides. If you don’t go to the extreme, you will not have success. This piece is fun to play since it can take you to different places within you.

YK How do you think you included your own, unique voice to the music?

AL Everything is “in” the music. Music has elasticity. You know where the music is going, and the music knows the destination of its sound. Following the instinct of music, you might want to linger on certain notes or create sonorous harmonies. I think music itself flows, which is the nature of the music. It’s not note-by-note that I find my own voice to the music.

YK What is your goal as a composer?

AL It is to write music that you feel. I need to write and to express the human being I am in
this world. Basically that is why I write.

YK Finally, could you share your thoughts on being a woman composer?

AL It is difficult to be a composer in general. The attitude of people is against anything new, and seldom embraces new music. People expect you to be a certain way that you cannot be. You have to have a lot of courage. And being a woman composer is even more difficult. The entire system is an old boy’s network; so in this system that involves men, you have to stand on your own ground and compete for your position. I’ve managed to survive. I do not want to create another intellectually composed piece. I just want to express who I am through my music. That’s what all music is about – projecting your own voice in the creation of sonority.
Canada’s acclaimed composer Jeffrey Ryan is admired by his “strong and unique voice” (Winnipeg Free Press), “masterful command of instrumental colour” (Georgia Straight), and “superb attention to rhythm” (Audio Ideas Guide). As an artist in demand, his works are commissioned and performed by every major orchestra and organization in Canada. Furthermore, Ryan’s works are frequently performed, recorded, and broadcasted around the world. One of the highlights from the 2008/09 season includes the performance of *The Linearity of Light* in China, Korea and Macau by the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra on its Asia Pacific tour. In addition, his orchestral music will be recorded by the VSO. Jeffrey Ryan has been nominated for the Juno award for Classical Composition for *Quantum Mechanics* in 2008 and *Pangaea* in 2005.

Based in Vancouver, Ryan is Composer Laureate of the Vancouver Symphony after serving as Composer-in-Residence from 2002 to 2007. He was an Affiliate Composer with the Toronto Symphony from 2000 to 2002, and since 1997, he has been Composer Advisor for Music Toronto. Dr. Ryan holds his Doctor of Musical Arts degree in composition from The Cleveland Institute of Music, where he studied with Donald Erb. As an established fellow Canadian composer who has also studied with Alexina Louie and has written a doctoral thesis on one of her compositions, Dr. Ryan’s interview will provide remarkable insight into Louie’s music. In the midst of his busy schedule, Dr. Ryan gratefully agreed to an email interview, and the corresponding interview on March 17th, 2009 is as follows:

**YK** How did you first get acquainted with Alexina Louie and her music?

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*This biography is taken from Jeffrey Ryan’s official website, www.jeffreyryan.com.*
JR  I met Alexina probably around 1985. I didn't know Alexina's music, but a composer friend of mine was a fan, and for her birthday we went to Toronto to attend a seminar Alexina gave at the Canadian Music Centre. That was when I was first introduced to her music, and I loved it.

YK  You told me in your last email that you studied with Dr. Louie for a year before pursuing your Doctorate in Composition at the Cleveland Institute of Music. How was your experience learning composition from her? Could you please elaborate on her teaching style?

JR  The year that I spent studying with Alexina was a crucial point in my own development as a composer. I had finished a Master's degree, and was preparing to apply to doctoral programs, so I had some technique, but it was with Alexina that my voice really began to emerge. Alexina is a master colourist, and her music is very sensual. She does not ignore the emotional and expressive side of music. These aspects are all important to me as well. So our philosophies are very similar, but being more advanced, she was able to articulate that better than I could.

A lot of her comments about my music had to do with practicality—how to find the easiest or clearest way to get the effect that you want. Sometimes she would bring in the music that she was working on, and she would show me how she achieved this in her own music, and also, she would talk about where the challenges were in the writing, and how she would go about working through those challenges.

Aside from making comments on the music that I was writing, Alexina would bring in scores and recordings, and get me to talk about what I heard and saw. This helped me to be more critical, to express what I thought, and to establish for myself what I thought made good music.
YK  How did you decide to write your doctorate document on Alexina Louie’s music?

JR  My doctoral document was a pitch-relationship analysis of Alexina's viola chamber concerto *Winter Music*. At the Cleveland Institute of Music, doctoral composition students had to write an analysis paper on a specific piece of music. I chose *Winter Music* because I knew Alexina and her music, and particularly loved this piece, so I had a lot of information that I could work with. The choice of piece had to be approved by my teacher, Donald Erb. When I played the recording for him and we followed the score, he enthusiastically supported my choice, saying that there is a lot of average music out there, but *Winter Music* is a work of art.

YK  In your opinion, does Alexina Louie’s music resemble any particular composers or other styles of music?

JR  I think Alexina's music is quite unique. When you hear a piece that sounds like it could be by Alexina Louie, it usually is! But I would say there are elements of French music, especially Debussy, in her music—the sensuousness, the attention to colour, the freer (non-Germanic) approach to form and structure. These are the qualities that attracted me to her music in the first place.

YK  What elements or influences do you think affect Louie’s style of music?

JR  I know that Alexina spent a lot of time at the beginning of her career studying traditional Chinese music and trying to find a place for those sounds in her voice. There is definitely an element of that in her music, especially in her use of percussion and her approach to melody. Her music also tends to go to extremes—very soft or very loud, very slow or very fast, very introverted or very extroverted, moving strongly or moving gently. I believe this is an incorporation of the yin/yang aspect of Chinese philosophy.

I know also that her studies in California included exercises like writing music for a
cardboard box. In these exercises, she had to find as many sounds as possible with that one “instrument”. I believe this helped her to be able to explore all the sound potential of the instruments that she writes for.

YK As an established composer yourself, could you tell me what you appreciate about Alexina Louie’s music?

JR I think I've touched on this already. I appreciate the sensuality of her music, her vibrant and dramatic colour sense, and a style that speaks to the heart as well the head.

YK What do you think about Alexina Louie’s musical language?

JR It's what I think of as tonal music. Not tonal in the traditional, common-practice-period sense, but tonal in a modern sense, in that it has tonal areas, and the relationships between those tonal areas are what make the underlying movement in the music. (My own music works in a similar way.) Though she usually adds colour tones into a sonority, the underlying sonority is still based in some kind of triadic harmony and on the harmonic series. Her music is also based largely on gesture and the individual moment, and less about a large-scale structure.

YK How do you think Alexina Louie’s music has evolved from before? (Since her new works seem to take a new different direction)

JR I don't know as many of her newer works, but what I've heard seems to be moving towards more structured form, more attention to rhythm and a clearer pulse, and more influence of other musics (such as jazz, and music of other non-Western cultures) besides the Chinese music that informed her early style (and still does). There also seems to be more clarity and transparency in texture in some of her newer works. I think this is not true of every new work, but I do see a recent expansion in her musical language.

YK Could you please share pertinent performance suggestions of Alexina Louie’s pieces
from a composer’s point of view?

JR The most important thing that performers get wrong in interpreting Alexina's music, I think, is being too rigid with what's on the page. If one plays too carefully, if one is strict with the rhythm and the tempo, if one is carefully playing nine equal subdivisions of the beat, and so on—this is a poor performance. Alexina's music has to be breathed by the performer. The tempi are all approximate, and no two beats should be the same. Each gesture should be shaped expressively. Also, the performer should not be shy about going to the extremes. The softs are soft, but the louds are loud!

YK Is there any other important aspect of Louie’s music that you would like to comment on?

JR I think that covers it!

YK Thank you again for your time and kindness!

JR Good luck in finishing your paper!
Internationally acclaimed concert pianist Jon Kimura Parker was born, raised, and educated in Vancouver where Alexina Louie also spent her childhood. His accolades include an Officer of The Order of Canada, his country’s highest civilian honor, and first prize in the Leeds International Piano Competition in 1984. His career has taken him from Baffin Island to Zimbabwe, and from Carnegie Hall to the Sydney Opera House. He continues to appear in recitals and with orchestras all around the world. Dr. Parker received his doctorate degree from The Juilliard School and his D.M.A. document was on Alexina Louie’s piano music, entitled, “The Solo Piano Music of Alexina Louie: A Blend of East and West.” He regularly performs Louie’s piece, *Scenes from a Jade Terrace*, which was commissioned for him and tailored to his background and musical personality according to the composer. During the intermission of Parker’s 20th anniversary performance of this piece, Louie commented to the author that “Jackie” [Parker] played it exactly the way she had imagined when she first composed this piece.

Hearing from Dr. Parker himself about *Scenes from a Jade Terrace*, which is one of her most frequently performed compositions by music students and recitalists will be valuable to performers. The author had an opportunity to interview Dr. Parker via email on March 9th, 2008 and the conversation went as follows:

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221 Taken from Jon Kimura Parker’s official website, www.kimura.com (accessed March 9, 2008).

222 Alexina Louie, composer, interview by author, August 11, 2001, Cincinnati, Ohio, telephone conversation.

223 Recital was held at St. Lawrence Centre for the Arts in Toronto, Ontario, as a part of Music Toronto’s recital and chamber music series on February 26, 2008.
YK Thank you so much for allowing me to interview you through email. I will write down the questions here.

JKP It was great to meet you as well.

YK Could you please tell me how you got to know Alexina Louie?

JKP Actually, we competed against each other in little piano festival competitions in Vancouver when we were very young, but we didn't really meet at that time. Alexina said that she was frustrated because I almost always won the competitions! The first time we met as adults was during the process of her writing *Scenes from a Jade Terrace* for me.

YK Is there any particular reason why you chose Alexina Louie to write a piece for you?

JKP I loved Alexina's music but I was only familiar with her orchestral music. I thought she created beautiful sonorities in her orchestral writing, and I remembered that she was a pianist, so it seemed logical to me that she would create beautiful and interesting sonorities on the piano.

YK Do you think Alexina Louie’s piece caters to you in terms of your style and strengths? If so, could you please tell me how?

JKP Alexina knew that I had a powerful approach to the piano, and also that I enjoyed delicate musical moments as well. There is a certain 'bigness' to this work which, she may have felt, suited me well, as she often heard me in performances of concerto repertoire.

YK Is there anything about this music, *Scenes from a Jade Terrace* that speaks to you personally?

JKP “Warrior” has a savage intensity and a harmonic simplicity that I feel at home with. “Memories in an Ancient Garden” is a special favorite of mine, and the evocative sound resonated with me at the time because I was interested in exotic sounds as a student. I feel very close to this movement, and I perform it often, sometimes on its own or in combination with
other works.

**YK** Could you please tell me briefly about Alexina Louie’s usage of timbre in this music? Are there any special piano techniques you use to create such timbres?

**JKP** I am very careful with voicing in “Southern Sky,” so that the chords have a brilliant jangling effect but still have the clarity that seems appropriate for a vision of the celestial sky. Timbre is very important in the middle movement, and the string strumming passages require special care. “Warrior” is special because of the octave and semitone combination. I use my arms to create the sound in “Warrior,” my fingers to create sound in “Memories,” and a combination of both in “Southern Sky.”

**YK** Today is the 20th Anniversary performance of this piece. Did you approach this performance any differently than from 20 years ago?

**JKP** I feel freer with the music now than I did 20 years ago. When I first learned *Scenes from a Jade Terrace*, I was more concerned with correctness, and now I am more concerned with the effect.

**YK** How did you perceive all the inside-the-piano techniques? Were there difficulties executing certain passages?

**JKP** These are great fun to play. I have a very bad habit of biting my nails, which makes performing the second movement difficult! It is surprising to me how much effort one has to make to match the strummed sound with the played sound.

**YK** Do you think all three movements are connected or related to each other musically? Or do you think each movement can be played separately?

**JKP** I once performed a suite of pieces that started with Chick Corea and ended with the

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224 The author wrote these interview questions before the recital since the original plan that was arranged with Jon Kimura Parker was to videotape a live interview on the day of the recital (February 26, 2008).
Barber “Fugue,” and had “Memories in an Ancient Garden” in the middle. I thought it worked wonderfully well. I've also performed “Memories” on its own, and even as an occasional encore after a concerto performance.

YK Could you please tell me if there is any specific reason why you put Alexina Louie’s music first in the program (for the 20th anniversary recital)?

JKP Actually, I often put her music in the second half. In this particular program, with two very heavy and lengthy works (Schumann *Carnaval* and Stravinsky *Rite of Spring*). I felt there wasn't really any choice. I do love starting with “Warrior” – it creates a special mood right from the first bar.

YK Is there any insightful comments that you want to mention in terms of playing Alexina Louie’s piano music?

JKP Her music has to be played with freedom and passion. These are musical concepts that can't be notated. It's like playing a Chopin *Mazurka*, or the Charleston rhythm in Gershwin - it needs a certain feel. Alexina's music is filled with markings that encourage personal, passionate involvement.

YK Thank you so much again for taking your time to answer these questions!

JKP My pleasure.
APPENDIX SIX

INTERVIEW WITH JAMIE PARKER

Following his first prize win at the 1984 Eckhardt Grammatte National Music Competition, Jamie (James Edward Kimura) Parker gave a coast-to-coast recital tour and has become one of the most prominent pianists in Canada. His other distinguished major prizes include CBC Radio’s 25th National Competition for Young Performers, the Juilliard Concerto Competition, and the Virginia P. Moore Award as the most promising young classical artist in Canada. Since then, Parker has appeared across Canada, the United States and Europe. He is a frequent guest on both radio and television programs including Bravo!, the CanWest Global Network, MuchMusic, and CBC Networks. Celebrated as one of Canada’s most in-demand artists, he has recorded for major national recording labels such as CBC Musica Viva, CBC SM5000, Pelleas and Analekta. He has also founded the critically acclaimed chamber group The Gryphon Trio. In 2004, Parker was awarded two JUNO Awards for his work with the Gryphon Trio and with soprano Isabel Bayrakdarian respectively. He also frequently performs with his brother, Jon Kimura Parker, as the Parker Duo. Dr. Jamie Parker studied with Marek Jablonski and Adele Marcus and received his doctorate degree from The Juilliard School in 1987. He is currently a Professor at the University of Toronto where he has been appointed the Rupert E. Edwards Chair in Piano Performance since 2003.225

One of Alexina Louie’s newer pieces, In a Flash, which is discussed in this document in depth, was written for Jamie Parker. Dr. Parker graciously agreed to an email interview regarding Louie’s piano music although he was pre-occupied with demanding concert schedules

in Europe and Western Canada. In fact, he answered the questions in one of his hotel rooms during his national tour! The email interview from May 15th, 2008 is as follows:

**YK** Thank you so much for doing this for me. I can't even express how thankful I am, that you would agree to do an email interview when you are so busy with your performances! I really appreciate your thoughtfulness and generosity.

**JP** Hi Yoomi - sorry to take so long getting back to you, but I've got a few minutes now, in case I can still meet your deadline. I'll answer your questions in order:

**YK** How do you know Alexina Louie, and how do you regard her as a composer and also as a person?

**JP** I've known Alexina for a number of years now, although not very well. I probably first met her through my brother, who commissioned a piece from her about ten years ago. In my opinion, Alexina is easily one of Canada's finest composers. She is a lovely person to work with as well.

**YK** When and where did this piece, *In a Flash*, premiere, and also, how would you describe this music?

**JP** I premiered Louie's work *In a Flash* at a concert in Vancouver celebrating the Centennial of the Vancouver Women's Musical Society. Starting out as the Vancouver Women's Musical Club, this organization presented such legendary musicians as Paderewski, Ysaye, and Rachmaninov. I was a scholarship recipient of the VWMS in my student days, so it was a real pleasure to come home and be a part of this celebration. The piece is very energetic, with insistent bass patterns, sharp accents, and forward momentum building constantly. It's a fun piece to play.

**YK** Were there any interesting or unique experiences in the course of commissioning and
learning this piece?

**JP**  As a solo pianist and a member of the Gryphon Trio, I've taken part in something like 50 or 60 premieres now, so I can tell you that each experience is similar (you get the music, you learn the music, you perform the music!), and each experience is different. The challenge is to get into the same kind of space as the composer, to try to see and hear and feel what they see and hear and feel. And then communicate that to your audience.

**YK**  Do you think Alexina Louie's piece caters to you in terms of your style and strengths? If so, could you please tell me how?

**JP**  I've always enjoyed a great sense of rhythmic pulse in music, so I really enjoyed that aspect of *In a Flash*.

**YK**  Are there any pedaling recommendations for this piece? For example, in the beginning, the left hand ostinato is marked legato but Louie also indicates performers to play this piece "energetically." Would you pedal the beginning section?

**JP**  The amount of pedalling I use always depends on two critical factors: the piano and the hall. So, in some situations I'll use much more or much less pedal, depending on those two factors. I have no set rules on the amount of pedal I use - it's always in a state of flux.

**YK**  Where would you program the piece in your recitals (beginning, middle, or end), and why?

**JP**  Again, I have no set 'place' on where I'd program *In a Flash* - it would depend on the other repertoire in the concert. For example, if it were in a new music concert situation, it may not go in the same place as if it were in a concert coupled with Beethoven and Brahms.

**YK**  Is there any insightful comments that you want to mention in terms of playing Alexina Louie's piano music?
To play Alexina's works well, one should have a fleet and fluid keyboard facility. An ear for exotic colour is important too. In her more recent keyboard works, Louie has demonstrated a sense of fun, a sense of rhythmic vitality, and a sense of forward momentum.

Thank you so much again for taking your time to answer these questions. I really appreciate your kindness. I will also attach a photo of your family that I took at the back stage.

I hope this helps. Best wishes Yoomi!
APPENDIX SEVEN

LIST OF PIANO WORKS

LIST OF PIANO SOLO MUSIC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Descriptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1978 | Dragon Bells | Originally for two prepared pianos
Performed by one prepared piano and pre-recorded piano
(same performer)
16 minutes |
| 1982 | Music for Piano | Published by Gordon V. Thompson Music, 1993
Available through Alfred Music
Pedagogical piece
Dedicated to former teacher Jean Lyons
Commissioned by the Alliance for Canadian
New Music Projects through the Ontario Arts Council
1. The Enchanted bells
2. Changes
3. Distant memories
4. Once upon a time
Intermediate difficulty, 11 minutes |
| rev. 1985 | | |
| 1984 | Concerto for Piano and Orchestra | Unpublished
Commissioned by the CBC\(^\text{\textcopyright}\) for Robert Silverman and Manitoba Chamber Orchestra
Advanced difficulty, 40 minutes |
| 1987 | Star-filled Night\(*\) | Commissioned by Christina Petrowska through The Canada Council
Advanced difficulty, 7-8 minutes |
| 1988 | Scenes From a Jade Terrace | Previously published by Gordon V. Thompson, 1996
(Currently, copyright belongs to the composer)
Commissioned by Jon Kimura Parker through the CBC\(^\text{\textcopyright}\) and the Ontario Arts Council
Written to commemorate the opening of the new Canadian Embassy in Tokyo
1. Warrior
2. Memories in an ancient garden
3. Southern sky
Highly advanced difficulty, 15 minutes |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Composition</th>
<th>Publisher/Compositional Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1991 | I Leap through the Sky with Stars | Published by Gordon V. Thompson, 1994  
Available through Alfred Music  
Commissioned by the Canadian Music Competition through the assistance of the Canada Council and the Ontario Arts Council  
Advanced difficulty, 5 minutes |
| 1994 | Star Light, Star Bright* | Published by Frederick Harris Company, 1995  
Dedicated to Alexina Louie's daughters: Jasmine and Jade  
1. Distant Star  
2. Blue Sky I  
3. Star-gazing  
4. Rings of Saturn  
5. Moonlight Toccata  
6. O Moon  
7. Shooting Stars  
8. Blue Sky II  
9. Into Forever  
Intermediate difficulty |
| 1995 | Starstruck* rev. 1996 | Commissioned by the Eckhardt-Gramatté Competition through the CBC and The Canada Council  
1. Starstruck  
2. Interlude  
3. Midnight Sky  
4. Berceuse des étoiles  
Advanced difficulty, 8 minutes |
| 1996 | Touch                | Unpublished: only available through the composer  
Commissioned by the Esther Honens Calgary International Piano Competition and Festival  
Advanced difficulty, 7 minutes |
| 2003 | Put on Your Running Shoes | Published by Honens International Piano Competition  
(Copyright still remains by Alexina Louie)  
Commissioned by CBC Radio and Honens International Piano Competition  
Written for Katherine Chi (2003)  
Highly advanced difficulty, 8-9 minutes |
| 2006 | In a Flash           | Unpublished: only available through the composer  
Commissioned by The Vancouver Women's Musical Society in celebration of its 100th Anniversary  
Advanced difficulty |
2008  Fastforward*  Commissioned by the Montreal International Piano Competition
Dedicated to Louie’s daughters: Jasmine and Jade
23 quarter finalists performed in May 2008
Highly Advanced difficulty, 5 minutes

LIST OF PIANO CHAMBER MUSIC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>Afterimages*</td>
<td>Two Pianos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dedicated to Ralph Markham and Kenneth Broadway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Through the assistance of the Canada Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.  Afterimage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.  The Ringing Earth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.  Homage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>Music for a Thousand</td>
<td>For 12 performers including piano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rev. 1985</td>
<td>Autumnns</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>Music From Night’s</td>
<td>Piano Quintet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Edge*</td>
<td>Commissioned by The Orford String Quartet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Through the assistance of The Ontario Arts Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.  Ritual On A Moonlit Plain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.  Midnight Music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.  Interlude: Heavenly Night</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4.  Quicksilver Light</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>Bringing the Tiger</td>
<td>Cello and Piano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Down from the Mountain</td>
<td>Commissioned by the Canadian Music Competition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>II*</td>
<td>Through the assistance of the Canada Council</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Title is derived from a Tai-Chi position</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Duration: ca. 5 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Neon*</td>
<td>For Clarinet, Cello, and Piano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rev. 2006</td>
<td></td>
<td>Commissioned by Amici</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Through the assistance of the Canada Council</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>And the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.  Neon Signals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.  Flashpoint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.  le visione…</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4.  First Light</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5.  Capriccio Scintillante</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6.  Illuminations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Duration: ca. 20 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Berceuse*  Arrangement for Voice and Piano
From The Scarlet Princess: a grand opera in two acts
Commissioned by The Canadian Opera Company
Libretto by David Henry Hwang
Based on a 17th Century Kabuki play
Concert premiere of full opera: April 2002 in Toronto
Duration: ca. 3:15 minutes

* Available through Canadian Music Centre
^ Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) is the country's national public radio and television broadcaster
# APPENDIX EIGHT

## LIST OF SELECTED PIANO RECORDINGS & PERFORMANCES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Titles</th>
<th>Performers</th>
<th>Descriptions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Afterimages (1981)</td>
<td>Marilyn Engle</td>
<td>Live recording*</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Charles Formeman</td>
<td>November 14, 1986 (University of Calgary)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Allen Reiser</td>
<td>Label: CBC Records, 1993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>CD: A Canadian Piano Album</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Label: Signal Hill Music Works, 2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerto for Piano (1984)</td>
<td>Robert Silverman</td>
<td>World premier recording*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Manitoba Chamber Orchestra</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Conducted by Simon Streatfield</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>February 12, 1985 (Fort Gary Hotel, Winnipeg)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Label: JLH Lasersound, 1992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>CBC broadcast: September 24, 1989*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scenes from a Jade Terrace (1988)</td>
<td>Jon Kimura Parker</td>
<td>Live recording*</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>15 May 1991 (Zurich, Switzerland)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>World premiere: 27 March 1988 at the Saskatchewan Centre for the Arts in Regina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Warrior” (1988)</td>
<td>Susan Chan</td>
<td>CD: East West Encounter</td>
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<td>Label: Disc Makers SC2018, 2001</td>
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<tr>
<td>I Leap through the Sky with Stars (1991)</td>
<td>Nari Matsuura</td>
<td>Live recording*</td>
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<td></td>
<td>CBC Montreal 1991</td>
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<tr>
<td>Starstruck (1995)</td>
<td>Elaine Keillor</td>
<td>CD: By a Canadian Lady</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Label: Carleton Sound, 1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Touch (1996)</td>
<td>Winston Choi</td>
<td>Live recording*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>March 15, 2004 (National Arts Centre, Ottawa)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Available in local Canadian Music Centre branches: Streamed version as part of the AV Trust Project
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**BOOKS**


**THESES**


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