

April 6, 2021

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Alexander Wu

Between

the

Nights

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for solo cello  
Duration: c. 5'

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### Program Note

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Music usually happens as a result of negotiations between musicians, audiences, and sound. I find such negotiations more difficult when I write contemporary classical music, as I so often attempt to reinvent the wheel, inevitably fail, and in the process divorce my sound from any context. In this piece, I tried to do the opposite and embrace — even forcibly — the negotiations around “Shidaiqu.”

Originating in 1920s Shanghai, Shidaiqu, or tunes of the times, refers to a type of fusion music that mixed Chinese folk and American jazz music. Growing up in China, Shidaiqu had seemed almost foreign to me, despite the Mandarin lyrics and familiar Chinese modes. As I grew older, I became increasingly curious about the genre that seemed so abruptly cut off from the public consciousness in the decades following 1949, when the new regime took over the mainland and denounced the music as obscene and decadent.

Today’s China, though ruled by a different government, is no less capitalistic than 100 years ago. Shidaiqu is no more a taboo, and many mainland musicians have sought their roots by returning to this early modern form of Chinese pop music. In a sense, Shidaiqu is even more perfect for the 21<sup>st</sup> century than it was for the early 20<sup>th</sup> century: the cosmopolitanism, the unapologetic incorporation of musical elements from around the world, and the carefree attitude towards life can all fit right into the zeitgeist of today. But can we truly force ourselves back into a discussion that ended some seventy years ago and pretend it was a continuous thread? How would we critically approach something once so contested without making the same reductionist mistakes?

“Between the Nights” was a sonic exploration of these questions. It was, by no means, an answer, but it did make me hear Shidaiqu differently. “Jin Xi He Xi” (今夕何夕), a Shidaiqu originally sung by Bai Guang 白光 in 1948 and composed by Chen Ruizhen 陳瑞楨 and Xu Suling 徐蘇靈, inspired this piece.

## Performance Notes

Follow tempo markings strictly until the Rubato coda.

Use open strings whenever possible.



Glissandi always start immediately after the first pitch.



When a glissando is between a harmonic and a non-harmonic, include as many harmonics as possible in the slide, and only press down the string right before the second note.

+

Left-hand pizzicato.



Snap pizzicato.



The x-shaped notehead indicates a hammer-on (i.e., fingering the note on the same string as the previous note without plucking).



The note in parentheses is a ghost note that need not be articulated very clearly.

flaut.

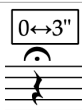
Flautando.

mm. 32–35,  
mm. 65–66

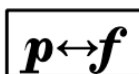
Choose between options A and B on each repeat. Alternative material should be approached and resolved just as a normal passage, with no pause before or after.

play 3 times  
—————|

Play any combination of A or B; The number of times includes the first time.



Rest for anywhere between the two numbers (e.g., 0 to 3 seconds).



Use any dynamic level between the two dynamics.

# Between the Nights

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♩ = 70

1 I ----- IV III IV ----- III

*pp* *mp* *pp* *mp* *p*

col legno arco

5 IV II IV ----- I

*f p* *mp* *p* *f* *p sub.*

col legno arco

9 I IV III IV II I -----

*mp* *p* *mp* *p* *mf* *p*

arco

13 III pizz. II arco

*mf* *p* *f* *p*

pizz. arco

♩ = 100

17 pizz. I arco

*mf* *ff* *mf* *pp* *mp*

pizz. arco

20

*f* *fp* *fp* *fp* *fp* *fp*

23 pizz. II arco pizz. II arco pizz. arco pizz.

*molto f* *mp* *f* *mp* *f* *mp* *f* *mp*

pizz. arco pizz. arco pizz. arco pizz.

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27 arco pizz. arco pizz.

*p* *f* *mp* *f* *mf*

29 arco pizz. arco

*f* *mf* *f*

A pizz. *p↔f*

B pizz. *p↔f*

0↔5" arco 0↔3"

play 3 times

A (pizz.) arco 0↔3"

B pizz. *p↔f* 0↔5"

(pizz.) arco 0↔3"

play 3 times

36 pizz. *p* *f* *p*

40 IV (•) 3 IV *p*

Between the Nights

IV

44

*f* *mf*

48

*f*

52

*p* *mp*

56

*mp* *mf* *f* *p* *mf*

60

*sub. p* *f* *mf* *f* *p* *f*

65

*f* *p* *flaut.* *f* *p*

0<->3"

0<->5"

play 5 times

