

Xuân Thu (Springs and Autumns)

harp

Xuân Thu was composed for Jakez François and premiered at Musiques Démesurées Festival in Clermont- Ferrand (November 13, 2014) by Ghislaine Petit-Volta. Pedal registrations are her own.

The expression Springs and Autumns harks back to Ancient China. It originally designated the whole year, seen as the cycle of the seasons. More specifically, the name refers to the historical period ranging from 722 to 480 BC, i.e. the first part of the reign of the Western Zhou dynasty, a time during which Chinese culture flourished, characterized by significant intellectual developments. Three major philosophers left a durable mark on Chinese thinking and their influence is still perceptible today:

- Lao Tseu (approx. -570/-490), author of *Tao Tö King* or “The Classic of the Way and of the High Virtue”. He is the founder of philosophical Taoism.
- Confucius (approx.-555/-479) his writings set the base for the political and moral doctrines known as Confucianism. Author of *The Five Classics*.
- Mo Tzu, or Mo-Zi (approx. -468/-381) - his humanistic approach developed into the ethical doctrine of Œuniversal love or “Kiem Ai” (which is also the title of a piece by Tôn-Thất Tiêt).

Confucius *Springs and Autumns Annals* chronicle this historical period.

The title of the piece is a tribute to these great thinkers but also a reference to two distinct periods in human life:

- Xuân, Spring - the beginning of active life
- Thu, Autumn - a time of wisdom, when one is less involved in social life.

Another key to understanding the piece is the traditional Five Elements: metal, wood, water, fire and earth. Chinese philosophy recognizes correspondences, relationships and interactions between these elements, forming a complex system classifying everything in the universe and explaining all natural and

human phenomena. Spring is related to wood, to the East, to the wind, the color green, the note A. Autumn is related to metal, to the West, to cold, the color white, the note G.

The first section of the piece, *Xuân*, revolves around the note A, present at the very core of repeated rhythmical motifs. The piece gradually takes shape as light focuses on the note A, appearing slowly like the sun rising in the East. At one point (ref. B) the music changes character, becomes animated, dance-like, almost jazzy, lively, full of youthful energy. At ref. C, a more sedate style of writing sets in. A low A in the low register of the harp finally concludes the section and leads seamlessly to G.

The note G - the focal point of the more tranquil and meditative second section, *Thu* has a particularly strong symbolic meaning in Tôn-Thất Tiêt's work (notably in *Chu Ky III* for harp - 1977). It is related to Buddhism, which Vietnamese people see as Western philosophy (India is situated West of Viet Nam). An atonal harmony deriving from an Indian mode gravitates around an omnipresent G, repeated like the ringing of a pagoda bell punctuating chants and prayers with regularity or resounding deeply in the low register and calling for timeless contemplation. Like stars in the sky, far above this low G, a few high notes open to a meditation on the infinity of the universe. As the sun sets down towards the West, so do the musical lines gradually converge towards the low G. Its resonance dies away slowly until, at the very end of the piece, a high A subtly reappears like a promise of reincarnation, of rebirth, of a new life cycle...

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Translation : Billaudot