

A LOST MUSIC MANUSCRIPT

By Xu Fangfang

For half a century, I have mourned the loss of a piano concerto composer Jiang Wenye (1910-1983) wrote for me when I was sixteen. The manuscript was lost during the Cultural Revolution in 1966 and only the third movement was recovered recently. Mr. Jiang's persistence in creating this work under difficult conditions has inspired me to bring this lost work to music lovers of the world.

I first met Mr. Jiang in my childhood when he came to visit my father, Xu Beihong (1895-1953), the most influential artist and art educator in 20th-century China. Jiang Wenye was an accomplished composer and faculty member of the music department at the National Beijing Arts College where my father was president. I remember his thick dark hair combed to the back and his kind smile. He sometimes came to massage my father to help him sleep better. Father gave him one of his ink brush horse paintings in appreciation of Jiang's hard work.

In 1950 when the music department was combined with other music institutions to form the prestigious Central Conservatory of Music (CCOM), Jiang Wenye became professor of composition in the newly formed CCOM in Tianjin. However, in 1957, he was branded a rightist during the Anti-Rightist campaign. He lost his professorship and the privilege to have his works published and performed.

In the same year, I was one of the only five third graders from Beijing admitted to the Preparatory Music Elementary School affiliated to CCOM. I majored in piano

performance. After my father passed away in 1953, Jiang Wenye continued to visit my family. He even donated my father's horse painting to the Xu Beihong Memorial Museum after its establishment in 1954 with Premier Zhou Enlai's recommendation. Although as a child I never talked with Jiang Wenye during his visits, I always admired his music talent, having heard from my mother about a special award that his orchestral piece *Taiwan Dance* had earned at the 1936 Berlin Olympics' art competition. It was the first Chinese work to receive a top prize in this international competition. Jiang Wenye was among the earliest to compose Chinese music for Western orchestra. He also pioneered Chinese piano music. During my third year in the Preparatory Music High School affiliated to CCOM, which had moved to Beijing, I decided to talk to Jiang Wenye in the music school. He had been relegated to the correspondence department. I told him that I wanted to learn from him. He asked me what piano works I was studying. I said: "Beethoven sonatas and *The Well-Tempered Clavier* by Bach." I did keep my communication with Jiang secret for fear of any potential political repercussions.

One day as I walked by Building No. 1 on campus, Jiang Wenye called down from a second-floor balcony, his hands gesturing as if he was playing the piano, "I almost finished the piano concerto I was writing for you." One day in autumn 1964, he delivered to my mother, Liao Jingwen, the three-movement *Piano Concerto Xu Beihong's Color-And-Ink Paintings*. I was happily surprised to see his beautifully hand-written music manuscript. The cover of each movement had an image of a

different Xu Beihong ink brush painting.

My mother was eager to hear me play this concerto. Unfortunately, I did not have an opportunity to try this piece at the time when politics abruptly changed our music school curriculum from Western classical music to Chinese music and we were frequently sent to factories and the People's Liberation Army to learn from workers, peasants, and soldiers.

This change culminated in the Cultural Revolution in 1966 when Jiang Wenye and all our music teachers as well as CCOM administrators became the target. I saw Jiang severely attacked and forced to labor on campus. Like many famous artists, my deceased father also became the target of the Cultural Revolution. Our family house was raided by Red Guards, who tore apart many paintings, books, painting albums, and phonograph records. After the Xu Beihong Memorial Museum was demolished, we were packing any surviving books and music scores before our move in early 1967. I felt sad for not finding the manuscript of the piano concerto Jiang Wenye had composed for me.

In 2016, a year after my mother passed away, while sorting out her books and other belongings, I was surprised to find the Third Movement of the *Piano Concerto Xu Beihong's Color-And-Ink Paintings: Rooster Crowing in the Rain—Recalling Past Valor*. I recognized Jiang's beautifully handwritten score of the piano and full orchestra with the image of my father's rooster painting on the cover, the color of which had turned yellow over half a century. Some tears along the edges were running through the

notation but the score was readable for the most part.

This resurfaced music manuscript brought me back to 1964. Why did Jiang Wenye choose to write this concerto for the teenage daughter of his artist friend Xu Beihong? Perhaps in his situation as a rightist, my appreciation of his music talent touched his heart. Perhaps Jiang thought that his composition based on Xu Beihong's paintings would be politically secure because Xu Beihong was at the time supported by leaders like Premier Zhou Enlai. More importantly, I thought that as a teenage piano major, I would have a long career ahead and that someday, I would be able to perform this work for him even after his passing. To him, that might be the only possibility for this major work during the latter part of his life to be known to the world.

Composer Jiang Wenye would be delighted to hear me perform the world premiere of this lost work in Alice Tully Hall in New York.