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**Ann-Kay LIN** (also known as **Ho Wai-On**)

**Music is Happiness**

**Sakura Variations** (1974 revised 2000)

Neil Heyde (cello) and Helena Brown (piano)

**Four Love Songs in Chinese** (1974 revised 2000)

Nancy Yuen (soprano) and Philip Edwards (clarinet)

**Permutation** (1996)

Joseph Sanders (oboe), Philip Edwards (clarinet), Roger Montgomery (horn), Vivian Choi (piano) directed by Roger Montgomery

**Tai Chi** (1977)

Lucy Cartledge (flute) and Nicholas Hooper (guitar)

**To You** (1977 revised 2000)

Nancy Yuen (soprano) and Vivian Choi (piano)

**Farewell, My Beloved** (1982)

Philip Edwards (clarinet) and Jane Webster (narrator)

**Bulldozers, Old House and Old Banyan** (1990 revised 1999)

Rowland Sutherland (flute), Joseph Sanders (oboe), Philip Edwards (clarinet), Roger Montgomery (horn), Glyn Williams (bassoon), Vivian Choi (piano) directed by Roger Montgomery

**Let's Sing "Magic Banyan Tree"** (2002)

● Nancy Yuen (soprano), Rowland Sutherland (flute, piccolo, alto flute), Glyn Williams (bassoon), Nathaniel Bartlett (marimba), Teddy Bergstrom (xylophone, vibraphone) Alex Brangwyn (timpani, percussion) and Child Singers/Chorus from Redbridge and Walthamstow directed by Ann-Kay Lin

Recorded at Gateway Studio, Kingston and the Royal Academy of Music, 2001

● **INTERARTES RRCD 1077** [76.14]

This is a conspectus of a quarter-century of compositions by the Anglo-Chinese composer Ann-Kay Lin, also known by her original name, Ho Wai-On. She spent her earliest years in Hong Kong but came to London to study at the Royal Academy as a pianist (with that distinguished figure Max Pirani) as well as singing and composition, on a John Swire Scholarship. But a wrist injured compelled a change of direction and she has written many compositions since, covering a range of forms, dance, ballet, chamber, instrumental and, most entertainingly, for voice. The book that comes with this CD is an attractive and quite lavish one, full of biographical and musical information about the composer and her music. There are numerous photographs, as well as examples of her scores; all texts are here. It's a tactile pleasure to peruse, full as it is of historical photographs and shots from in-concert performances of her works. There's also a checklist of compositions and a roll call of performers.

The album is called 'Music is Happiness' and explores her interest and immersion in cross-cultural projects. The music is varied and colourful, sometimes tough but always expressive and frequently pictorial. Most are prefaced by spoken texts, recited by soprano Jane Webster, and all are relatively compact. *Sakura Variations*, like many of these pieces, seems to be very much work-in-progress and exists in several versions. This 2000 version is for cello and harpsichord – full of keening string and crisp keyboard (reminiscent of the Chinese *koto* in sonority); there's a delicious instruction in one of the variations "as if entangled in a spider's web" – and that's just how it sounds. Sticky stasis. She writes for intriguing sound worlds and conjures up zestful and colourful vistas – for soprano soloist and clarinetist for instance in the *Four Love Songs*. These are melismatic, allusive, introspective, spare, desolate and lonely. They enshrine an epigrammatic stillness, though the final song has buoyancy in its loneliness; there's something of the German Romantics' motto *Frei aber einsam* about the sensibility. *Permutation* derives from her interest in computer music but is no sterile abstract statement; it's accessible, uses a "nightmare hymn" motif (as described by the composer) and has a passacaglia-like inexorability.

*To You* is a yearning vocalise with a Raga influence and encompasses trills and an

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elevated despair whereas *Tai Chi* (1977) for the ear titillatingly subtle combination of flute and guitar is warmly and delicately textured. *Farewell, My Beloved* is subtitled *Impressions of a Chinese Opera* and there are allusions a-plenty here to Peking opera though the forces are severely reduced – a single clarinet for which Lin writes with complex adroitness, the spaces between counting for much. These elements come to the fore in the last two pieces - *Bulldozers*, *Old House and Old Banyan* and *Let's Sing "Magic Banyan Tree."* The first enacts the story of an attempted demolition – full of cartoonish "heavy booted" thuggery, vaguely baroque in its tread, in the context of a ballet scenario. This is an enjoyably scary and very fluid piece of writing, full of danger and lyrical moments, and does what good ballet music should do; it makes you want to see it staged. Finally then *Let's Sing "Magic Banyan Tree"* for bigger forces with vibraphone, flute and percussion to the fore, as well as a solo soprano and a children's chorus. This is the most explicitly Chinese piece on the disc- with the soloist having a quasi-operatic role to play, enacting as she does the kind of role taken by a female singer in Cantonese opera. It's tuneful, amusing, sometimes demanding, but enjoyable.

So a welcome voice with a strong sensibility – melancholic, maybe, but only in part (for which one should read the composer's own biographical notes) but also full of pleasurable generosity and élan. Try ordering it from the address above.

*Jonathan Woolf*



Lyrta



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