

Professor Bright Zong-Liang SHENG

Citation

For Prof Bright Zong-Liang Sheng, world-renowned composer, conductor and pianist, the illuminating power of music is an astonishing and unceasing joy, a transformational ascent to a realm beyond, an experience that lifts away the present and opens up sparkling avenues of new thought through which the imagination can freely roam. Best of all, through music, these inspirational peaks can be shared in shimmering, ephemeral moments of truth and revelation between composer and performer, and with those who listen.

Indeed, infusing and enthusing others with fresh insight has been a lifetime mission for this pioneering artist and enlightened educator. Born in 1955 in Shanghai, raised in the tumultuous times of the Cultural Revolution, later a top composition student at the Shanghai Conservatory before a move to New York and more than 30 years in the US, Prof Sheng has sought to bring together east and west, tradition and innovation, history and contemporaneity within his constantly unfolding musical vision.

To Prof Sheng, composing is always a way forward to the next piece, the next performance. It is not a chapter or a full stop but the opening of a door through which to advance. With works spanning stage, orchestral, chamber and vocal works, his prestigious accomplishments show how successful he has been in striding through such portals to innovative new soundscapes.

The list of his commissions and performances stretches for pages, reaching from North America to Europe to Asia, and involving the world's greatest orchestras and ensembles. Some of the foremost musicians of our time – Yo-Yo Ma, Leonard Slatkin, Kurt Masur, and his late, great mentor and friend Leonard Bernstein – have asked him to compose or played his works.

In the late 1990s, he performed a work he had been specially commissioned by the White House to create for a state dinner to honor the visit of Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji. In 2008, he composed for the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony. His talents have also brought him elite recognition as the recipient of a highly prized MacArthur Foundation “genius” grant as well as numerous other prizes and awards.

His teaching is based on the premise that learning never stops, either for students or those who guide them. Over the past 20 years, he has guided a whole generation, including teaching at the University of Michigan as the Leonard Bernstein Distinguished University Professor of Composition.

For Prof Sheng, learning is an exchange, not a one-way street, and this continual search to know more is all part of the journey of an artist. Meanwhile, the willingness to take risks is a constant companion along the way.

At HKUST, we have been the beneficiary of such courage in Prof Sheng's guidance on music-based courses offered by our School of Humanities and Social Science. He has done so as the Y K Pao Distinguished Visiting Professor of Cultural Studies, a HKUST Named Professorship supported by Dr Helmut and Mrs Anna Sohmen and named after the late leading Hong Kong industrialist and arts benefactor Sir Yue-Kong Pao.

Prof Sheng has also made an outstanding contribution in this regard through his realization of the internationally acclaimed Intimacy of Creativity, held annually on our campus for the past three years. As Founder and Artistic Director of the remarkable two-week partnership that promotes dialogue between young composers and eminent performers, he has helped to rewrite the score on the idea that a science and technology university is no place for an artistic mindset. It has been hailed by the *Financial Times* as "the city's most innovative musical experience".

The word "intimacy" has not been lightly chosen. What is imparted during these workshops is the wonderful togetherness that the creative process inspires. That is why there are open rehearsals for students and the public to attend. For artists illustrate why creativity and imagination should always be with you. And that is why, according to Prof Sheng, it is even more important to hold this event at HKUST rather than a conservatory, where students are already committed to the arts.

For Prof Sheng, the leaps and bounds of the imagination that great art makes possible are important to every profession and to each and

every one of us. In his life's work, he has given us all a great gift in opening so many doors through which to reach beyond the here and now and into that amazing realm of creativity.

Mr Council Chairman, on behalf of the Council of the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, I have the high honor of presenting to you, Prof Bright Zong-Liang Sheng, Leonard Bernstein Distinguished University Professor of Composition at the University of Michigan, for the award of Doctor of Humanities *honoris causa*.