



Chou Wen-Chung: The Life and Work of a Contemporary Chinese-Born American Composer (Composers of North America)

Peter M. Chang

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Despite his original training as a civil engineer, Chou Wen-Chung came to America in 1946 to pursue music. He became a protégé of Edgard Varèse and spent several decades teaching, composing, and advancing modern concepts in contemporary compositions. Incorporating the teachings of his mentor, yet retaining his own identity, Chou is one of the few composers to successfully integrate images and ideas from both Eastern and Western culture. His unique synthesis of the two cultures has challenged the American musical community to recognize and celebrate cultural differences, setting Chou apart in contemporary American music as an exemplar of the Chinese musical idiom. His founding of the Center for United States-China Arts Exchange has furthered his exploration of cross-cultural pollination.

This book examines the composer's life and music, including biographic material, an in-depth cultural and musical analysis of his works, and receptions of his music. An assessment of Chou's unique contribution to contemporary musical synthesis, a hallmark in twentieth-century music, draws a direct link between his cross-cultural approach to composition and his family history and upbringing. His quest for an original style by widening his musical and cultural experiences - including consulting ancient Chinese sources on music and philosophy - helped to solidify his place in the musical patchwork of contemporary America. Also drawing a comparison between Chou's approach to musical synthesis and that of his Chinese colleagues, author Peter Chang's discussion generates interest in cross-cultural studies in contemporary music, promoting multicultural awareness in America and abroad, and enabling readers to understand different reactions to the Western impact on Chinese music and culture. The book's appendixes list Chou's compositions and recordings, and a chronology of performances.

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