

VIOLA SONATA

“Yin and Yang”

for Viola and Piano



Kun Yan

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Based on Chinese traditional music

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(2026)

Duration: ca. 20'30”

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I

Mountains and Rivers

II

Sorrow and Joy

III

Right and Wrong

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Composer's Notes

Viola Sonata “*Yin and Yang*” brings together elements of Chinese folk tradition, poetic imagery, and theatrical expression within a contemporary chamber music framework. Inspired in part by Paul Hindemith’s imaginative transformation of German folk songs in *Der Schwanendreher*, the sonata treats several Chinese sources not as direct quotations but are developed as themes while retaining their symbolic associations with landscape, memory, culture, and human experience.

‘*Mountains and Rivers*’

The first movement, *Mountains and Rivers*, draws on folk songs from southwestern China that evoke natural landscapes and the rhythms of everyday life. One of the central ideas is adapted from the Yunnan folk song *A Small River Flows*, whose lyrical pentatonic contour suggests tender longing, memory, and the quiet persistence of nature.



月 亮 出 来 亮 汪 汪 亮 汪 汪， 想 起 我 的 阿 哥
在 深 山， 哥 像 月 亮 天 上 走 天 上 走， 哥 啊 哥 啊 哥 啊！

(Translation: *The moon rises, shining bright; I think of my beloved deep in the mountains. My love moves like the moon across the sky, across the sky. Oh my love!*)

Contrasting this fluid character is a short ascending gesture inspired by the hauling chants of Sichuan boatmen, symbolizing human effort and communal strength.



Hei-zo!

The main theme of the movement develops from *The Boxwood Shoulder Pole*, a lively folk song from Sichuan characterized by buoyant rhythm and rustic vitality.



黄 杨 扁 单 (就) 软 溜 溜 哇， 姐 哥 呀 哈 里 呀。
挑 一 挑 白 米 下 西 州 啊， 姐 呀 姐 呀， 下 西 州 哇， 哥 呀 哈 里 呀。

(Translation: *The flexible boxwood carrying pole sways; brother and sister set off together, carrying white rice down to Youzhou. Sister, dear sister, down to Youzhou, brother!*)

In the central section, the widely known *Love Song of Kangding* appears in transformed rhythms, suggesting both the geographical remoteness of the western Sichuan plateau and the vibrant song-and-dance traditions associated with its people.



跑 马 溜 溜 的 山 上， 一 多 溜 溜 的 云 哟， 端 端 溜 溜 的 照 在，
康 定 溜 溜 的 城 哟， 月 亮 弯 弯， 康 定 溜 溜 的 城 哟。

(Translation: *On the roaming horse mountain, a drifting cloud floats by; brightly it shines down upon the town of Kangding. The moon bends gently over the town of Kangding*)

'Sorrow and Joy'

The second movement, *Sorrow and Joy*, unfolds in response to the Song-dynasty poem *Immortals at the Magpie Bridge*, which tells of two lovers separated by celestial decree and reunited only once each year.

纤云弄巧，飞星传恨，银汉迢迢暗度。

Slender clouds weave their charms,

Falling stars carry longing,

Across the Milky Way's far-off shadows they meet in secret.

金风玉露一相逢，便胜却人间无数。

When autumn's golden wind and jade-pure dew bring them together once,

That single meeting surpasses countless bonds on earth.

柔情似水，佳期如梦，忍顾鹊桥归路。

Tenderness flows like water;

Their promised night feels like a dream.

How can they bear to look back toward the magpies' bridge as they part?

两情若是久长时，又岂在朝朝暮暮。

Yet if two hearts remain true over time,

Why must they cling to every dawn and dusk?

Its musical structure follows an expressive trajectory of longing, reunion, and renewed separation. Contrapuntal textures allow multiple emotional states to coexist, while subtle chromatic inflections disturb the pentatonic environment, creating a sense of fragile balance.

'Right and Wrong'

The finale, *Right and Wrong*, introduces dramatic material inspired by the Peking opera *The Case of Chen Shimei*, whose narrative centers on justice, accusation, and moral conflict.

驸 马 爷 近 前 看 端 详， 上 写 着 秦 香 莲 她 三 十 二 岁， 她 状 告
当 朝 驸 马 郎。 他 欺 君 王 啊， 藐 皇 上 啊， 悔 婚 男 儿 招 东 床。 他 杀 妻 灭 子 良
心 丧 呢， 逼 死 韩 琪 在 庙 堂。 将 状 纸 押 至 了 爷 的 大 堂 上。

(Translation: *Prince Consort, step forward and examine this carefully: it states that Qin Xianglian, thirty-two years of age, brings a charge against the current imperial son-in-law for deceiving the emperor and showing contempt for the throne, for breaking his marriage vows in pursuit of another bride, for attempting to kill his wife and eliminate his heirs without conscience, and for driving Han Qi to death in the court; this written petition is now presented before this tribunal.*)

Recurring refrain passages suggest the persistence of judgment, while contrasting episodes evoke reflection and transformation through references to ritual sound worlds. Resonant piano sonorities imitate Chinese temple bells, chant-like lines recall Buddhist recitation, and extended viola techniques draw inspiration from the timbres of traditional Chinese instruments such as the *sheng* and *guqin*.

Earlier musical ideas return cyclically in transformed forms, linking the three movements into a continuous expressive journey. Rather than resolving opposition, the sonata allows contrasting energies to interact and evolve, creating a dialogue between tradition and invention, memory and imagination.

Viola Sonata 'Yin and Yang'

for Viola and Piano

Based on Chinese traditional music

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I. Mountains and Rivers

Largo ♩ = c. 50

Viola

mp *expressivo cantabile*

p *mp*

Piano

This system shows the beginning of the 'Largo' section. The Viola part is in 2/4 time, starting with a series of chords and moving to a triplet of eighth notes. The Piano part is in 2/4 time and remains silent. Dynamics include *mp*, *p*, and *mp*.

Rubato

9

pp *f*

This system continues the Viola part with triplets and a dynamic shift from *pp* to *f*. The Piano part remains silent.

13

ff *gliss.* *tremolo*

8

25

This system features a complex piano accompaniment. The right hand has a tremolo effect and a glissando. The left hand has a series of chords and a tremolo. Dynamics include *ff*. Measure numbers 8 and 25 are indicated.

Andante pesante ♩ = c. 65

15

A *mf* *mf* *tremolo* *f*

This system begins the 'Andante pesante' section. The Viola part is in 2/4 time with a series of chords. The Piano part is in 3/4 time with a tremolo effect and a series of chords. Dynamics include *mf* and *f*.

17

Musical score for measures 17-19. The top staff is a single melodic line in bass clef with a key signature of two flats. The bottom two staves are a grand staff in bass clef. Measure 17 has a piano dynamic. Measure 18 has a piano dynamic. Measure 19 has a piano dynamic.

20

Musical score for measures 20-21. The top staff is a single melodic line in bass clef. The bottom two staves are a grand staff in bass clef. Measure 20 has a piano dynamic. Measure 21 has a piano dynamic. The tempo marking *molto rit.* appears at the end of measure 21. The dynamic *ff* is marked at the end of measure 21.

B Andantino ♩ = c. 80

22

Musical score for measures 22-24. The top staff is a single melodic line in treble clef. The bottom two staves are a grand staff in treble clef. Measure 22 has a piano dynamic and the marking *mp giocoso*. Measure 23 has a piano dynamic and the marking *sub. f*. Measure 24 has a piano dynamic and the marking *mp*. The dynamic *pp* is marked at the beginning of measure 22, *sub. mp* at the beginning of measure 23, and *pp* at the beginning of measure 24.

25

Musical score for measures 25-28. The top staff is a single melodic line in treble clef. The bottom two staves are a grand staff in treble clef. Measure 25 has a piano dynamic and the marking *sub. f*. Measure 26 has a piano dynamic and the marking *mp*. Measure 27 has a piano dynamic. Measure 28 has a piano dynamic.

29

mf

sub. mf

pizz.

32

arco

pizz.

(mf)

sub. pp

mp

sub. f

35

pp

mp

39

p dim.

41

mp sempre

(dim.)

pp misterioso

Red.

44

Musical score for measures 44-46. The system includes a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The piano part features a complex rhythmic pattern with eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests. The tempo is marked *Red.* (Ritardando). There are asterisks in the piano part at measures 45 and 46. A dashed line with the number 8 is positioned above the piano part.

47

Musical score for measures 47-49. The system includes a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The piano part features a complex rhythmic pattern with eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests. The tempo is marked *Red.* (Ritardando). There are asterisks in the piano part at measures 48 and 49. A dashed line with the number 8 is positioned above the piano part.

50

Musical score for measures 50-53. The system includes a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The piano part features a complex rhythmic pattern with eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests. The tempo is marked *Red.* (Ritardando). There are asterisks in the piano part at measures 52 and 53. A dashed line with the number 8 is positioned above the piano part. Fingering numbers 6 and 6 are visible in the piano part at measures 52 and 53.

E allarg. - - - - - Largo

54

Musical score for measures 54-57. The system includes a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The piano part features a complex rhythmic pattern with eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests. The tempo is marked *allarg.* (allargando) and *Largo*. The dynamic is marked *ff* (fortissimo) and *mf* (mezzo-forte). A dashed line with the number 8 is positioned above the piano part.

59 **rall.** **F Recitative** ♩ = c. 50

mf mp 8 gliss. 15 tr~ pp 15 mp

Red.

63 **accel.** **rit.** **a tempo**

gliss. mp > p < f mp 3 3 3 3 3 3 f > 6

Red.

68 **ff** sul G poco sul pont. con vibrato

8 gliss. 15 tr~ pp 15 p

Red.

G Adagio ♩ = c. 70

72 **p tranquillo**

Moderato $\text{♩} = \text{c. } 90$

80

normal

H

pizz.

mp dolce

mf animato

p

mf animato

85

arco

89

sul D G

I

f

sf

ff appassionato

f

93

sub. mf

sub. mf

97

Musical score for measures 97-100. The right hand features a melodic line with accents and slurs, while the left hand provides a steady accompaniment. Dynamics include *f* and *ff*.

101 **J** on the string

Musical score for measures 101-105. Measure 101 is marked "on the string" and *ff*. The right hand has a series of trills (*tr*) with various accidentals. The left hand has a melodic line with slurs and a triplet in measure 105.

106

Musical score for measures 106-109. The right hand features a melodic line with trills and accents. The left hand has a complex accompaniment with slurs and accents. Dynamics include *ff*.

110 **K**

Musical score for measures 110-113. The right hand has a melodic line with slurs and accents. The left hand has a complex accompaniment with slurs and accents. Dynamics include *fff*.

114

Musical score for measures 114-117. The score is in 4/4 time and features a complex rhythmic pattern with triplets and sixteenth notes. The dynamics range from *sub. ff* to *f*. The piece is marked with accents and slurs. A tempo change to 6/8 is indicated at the end of measure 117.

118

Musical score for measures 118-120. Measure 118 is marked *pizz.* and *mf*. Measure 119 is marked *p*. Measure 120 is marked *mf*. The score includes triplets and sixteenth notes. A tempo change to 4/4 is indicated at the end of measure 120. The piece is marked with accents and slurs.

121

L Andantino

Musical score for measures 121-122. Measure 121 is marked *mp* and *arco*. Measure 122 is marked *sub. f*. The score is in 4/4 time and features a complex rhythmic pattern with triplets and sixteenth notes. The piece is marked with accents and slurs.

123

Musical score for measures 123-126. Measure 123 is marked *mp*. Measure 124 is marked *8*. Measure 125 is marked *sub. f*. The score is in 4/4 time and features a complex rhythmic pattern with triplets and sixteenth notes. The piece is marked with accents and slurs.

126

mp

128

M

pp sognando, tranquillo

sub. mp

Red. * *Red.* *

130

pp

Red. * *Red.* *

133

gliss. sul D 8

ppp

tremolo

ppp

Red. * *Red.* *

N Largo $\text{♩} = \text{c. } 50$
Rubato

136

8

a tempo

mp

Red.

Red. mp espressivo cantabile

140

Rubato

a tempo

Rubato

molto rit. - - -

p

ff

mf

Red.

O a tempo $\text{♩} = \text{c. } 50$

144

tremolo

mp

8

pp

mp

148

8

morendo

II. Sorrow and Joy

After "Immortals at the Magpie Bridge" (《鹊桥仙》)

Slender clouds weave their charms,

Falling stars carry longing,

Largo ♩ = c. 60 Across the Milky Way's far-off shadows they meet in secret.

Viola

p doloroso

Piano

p sotto voce

Red.

6

mp espressivo

mp sognando

Red.

11

dolce

espressivo

dolce

sognando

(mp) cantabile

Red.

16

A

p doloroso

cantabile

p sotto voce

Red.

22

(Led.) Led. Led.

B meno mosso ♩ = c. 55

27

sub. *mp* misterioso

p sotto voce

(Led.) Led. Led. Led.

32

pizz.

mf

mp misterioso

Led. Led.

When autumn's golden wind and jade-pure dew bring them together once,
36 That single meeting surpasses countless bonds on earth.

C a tempo

arco

mp amabile

f

mp

(Led.) Led.

40

mp giocoso percussivo

grazioso

(Red.)

44

(Red.)

48

(Red.)

52

D sul C

p *f affettuoso*

59

normal

ff appassionato *sff* *f*

rall. **E** a tempo, agitato

ff appassionato *sff* *mf*

trmm *trmm*

(Red.)

Tenderness flows like water;
Their promised night feels like a dream.
How can they bear to look back toward the magpies' bridge as they part?

65

F
f *flacrimoso*
mf
(Red.) * Red.

68

(Red.)

70

mf
mp
(Red.) * Red. *

72

Red. * Red. *

74

mp espressivo *p*

Red. ❄️ *Red.* ❄️

Yet if two hearts remain true over time,
Why must they cling to every dawn and dusk?

79

mp dolce *p espressivo* *p sognando*

(mp) *affettuoso* *Red.* ❄️ *Red.*

84

cantabile *sognando*

(Red.) ❄️ *Red.*

89

morendo

(Red.) ❄️

III. Right and Wrong

Presto ♩ = c. 160

Viola

Piano

f

f

sub. mf

6

f

mf

13

f

mf

molto rit. ----- Prestissimo ♩ = c. 200

20

sub. f

percussivo

f

Red.

28 **A** Allegro agitato ♩ = c. 144

Musical score for measures 28-33. The system includes a single treble clef staff and a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The tempo is marked 'Allegro agitato' with a quarter note equal to approximately 144 beats per minute. Dynamics include *mf* in the treble staff and *mf sotto voce* and *sub. f* in the grand staff.

Musical score for measures 34-39. The system includes a single treble clef staff and a grand staff. The key signature has one sharp and the time signature is 3/4. Dynamics include *f* in the treble staff and *f* in the grand staff.

Musical score for measures 40-45, starting with section **B**. The system includes a single treble clef staff and a grand staff. The key signature has one sharp and the time signature is 3/4. Dynamics include *f* in the treble staff, *f* in the grand staff, and *sub. mp* in the bass clef of the grand staff.

Musical score for measures 46-50. The system includes a single treble clef staff and a grand staff. The key signature has one sharp and the time signature is 3/4. Dynamics include *mf* in the grand staff and *sub. ff* and *f* in the bass clef of the grand staff.

Musical score for measures 51-55. The system includes a single treble clef staff and a grand staff. The key signature has one sharp and the time signature is 3/4. Dynamics include *ff* in the grand staff and *sub. p* in the bass clef of the grand staff.

55 **C**

Musical score for measures 55-60. The system consists of three staves: a top staff in bass clef with a forte (*f*) dynamic, a middle grand staff with a piano (*p*) dynamic, and a bottom bass staff. The music features complex rhythmic patterns with many accents and slurs.

61 **D** poco sul pont. *ff*

Musical score for measures 61-65. The system consists of three staves: a top staff in bass clef with a fortissimo (*ff*) dynamic, a middle grand staff with a sub-fortissimo (*sub. f*) dynamic, and a bottom bass staff. The music includes a bridge section marked 'poco sul pont.' and features complex rhythmic patterns with many accents and slurs.

Musical score for measures 66-70. The system consists of three staves: a top staff in treble clef, a middle grand staff, and a bottom bass staff. The music features complex rhythmic patterns with many accents and slurs.

Musical score for measures 71-75. The system consists of three staves: a top staff in treble clef with a 'normal' dynamic, a middle grand staff with a fortissimo (*ff*) dynamic, and a bottom bass staff with a fortissimo (*ff*) dynamic. The music includes a section marked 'normal' and features complex rhythmic patterns with many accents and slurs.

E **Largo tranquillo**
76 ♩ = c. 50

constant vibrato on the lower D and A,
molto sul tasto
pizz.

F non vib.
imitate Sheng笙

mf

non vib.

arco

sub. p

mp

Imitate Chinese temple bell,
gentle attack, very soft upper notes.
Grace notes are played on the beat.

ppp

mp

mf

Red.

Red.

88

3

3

pizz.

sub. mf

Red.

Red.

Red.

Red.

Red.

Red.

G con vibrato, molto sul tasto
98 (pizz.) imitate guqin 古琴

sub. f

8 7

LH: gentle knock on the bass-side keyboard frame

p

Red.

3

107

15 7

pp

sub. mf

(Red.)

3

Red.

H Prestissimo ♩ = c. 200

Moderato ♩ = c. 120

115

percussivo

arco

mf

p *mf*

I Fugato

121

arco

f

(mf)

8

J

127

sub. mf marcato

f

(mf)

8

132

f

K

137

mf agitato

sub. mf

sub. f

142

L

f

f

146

ff

ff

ff

150

M

f subito

f

155

p

p

p

160

N

p

p

p

165

168

Tenuto

ff

172 **rit.** **O** Adagio ♩ = c. 70

mp espressivo *p compassionato*

mp *mf* *mp*

8 Red. Red. Red.

183

pp *p* *mf* *pizz.*

(Red.)

192 **Q** **accel.**

arco *p* *mp* *mf*

(Red.)

199 (accel.) **R** Allegro agitato ♩ = c. 144

Musical score for measures 199-205. The right hand features a complex rhythmic pattern with triplets and sixteenth notes, marked with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The left hand provides a steady accompaniment of eighth notes, marked *sempre p* (piano).

Musical score for measures 206-210. The right hand continues with sixteenth-note patterns, marked *sub. f* (sub-forte). The left hand accompaniment remains consistent with eighth notes.

S poco sul pont.

Musical score for measures 211-214. The right hand has a rapid sixteenth-note passage marked *f* (forte). The left hand has a similar rapid accompaniment, also marked *f*.

T subito meno mosso ♩ = c. 110

Musical score for measures 215-220. The right hand has a melodic line with a *normal* dynamic marking, followed by a *ff appassionato* section. The left hand has a similar melodic line, also marked *ff appassionato*. The piece concludes with a *Red.* (Ritardando) marking.

221 U

sub. *f. brillante*

(*ff*) *maestoso*

(*Red.*) * *Red.*

224

(*Red.*)

226 V

(*Red.*) * *Red.* * *Red.* *

228

(*ff*) *appassionato*

mp *ff*



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