

biography – Justine F. Chen, composer

A native of Brooklyn, New York, composer/violinist **Justine F. Chen** has been the recipient of numerous prestigious awards and commissions, including prizes from BMI and ASCAP. She has been commissioned and performed by New York City Opera, New York City Ballet, The Juilliard School, New York Festival of Song, New Juilliard Ensemble, Washington Ballet, Brooklyn Philharmonic, FLUX Quartet, Elements Quartet, Concertante, Long Leaf Opera, Capital Opera (Raleigh, NC), Chants Libres (Montréal) and Tapestry New Opera Works (Toronto).

She studied violin and composition in the pre-college division of The Juilliard School, and trained at the School of American Ballet. As a dancer, she performed in various productions with New York City Ballet at the New York State Theater. Her acceptance into Juilliard's College Division marked her the first violin and composition double-major in Juilliard history. Among her principal composition teachers are Robert Beaser, David Diamond, and Andrew Thomas.

Because of her unique inter-disciplinary background, Ms. Chen has a keen interest in artistic collaborations. To this end, she has written incidental music for numerous theatrical productions from a young age, including Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* and Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. In 2002, The Playwright's Theater in New Jersey produced James Glossman's award-winning adaptation of Jim Lehrer's novel, *The Special Prisoner*, with Justine's incidental music that juxtaposed soundscapes of the modern world with the musical traditions of Noh theater. Critics praised her work as "... A distinct asset is the atmospheric original score, performed by composer Justine Chen, who uses ... traditional kabuki sound effects." (Robert L. Daniels, Variety.com), "Justine F. Chen's musical motifs and sound effects add the necessary tension and her presence on the stage provides a visual third dimension that suits the stark atmosphere." (Liz Keill, Independent Press,). In 2001, she collaborated with digital artist Yewon Cho on a short animation *Trilemma*, which was selected for and screened at such prestigious festivals as the Hiroshima Animation Festival, the New York Expo, the Student Academy Awards, Anima Mundi in South America, and broadcast on PBS in "Reel New York" June 2002.

Her collaboration with choreographer Katarzyna Skarpetowska *Perpetual Flux*, premiered at Alice Tully Hall in 1998, was subsequently programmed on Juilliard's 1998 Summer Dance Tour. Other collaborations include *Of Roots and Stones*, a work with Alvin Ailey's Iyun Harrison, performed in the Juilliard Spring Dance Concert, by the Juilliard Dance Ensemble and Orchestra at The Juilliard Theater in 2000. The New York Times said of this piece, "Justine Fang Chen...

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blended popular dance rhythms into the kind of propulsive, emotionally resonant score that choreographers tend to dream of.” In 2000, she held the Robert and Lilian Turchin Chair as Composer-in-Residence of the Appalachian Summer Festival in North Carolina, where she collaborated with up-and-coming choreographer Adam Houglan, members of the Juilliard Dance Ensemble, and the Broyhill Chamber Ensemble in the creation of a chamber work, *Stand Nine*. In 2004, she collaborated again with choreographer Adam Houglan for commission from the New York Choreographic Institute, in conjunction with New York City Ballet and The Juilliard School,

As a violinist, she has performed worldwide and specializes in the performance and interpretation of contemporary music. As a scholar, she has lectured on electronic music, and Mario Davidovsky and his *Synchronisms* series. Since 1999, she has been actively studying the intricacies of interactive computer music program MAX/MSP. Her studies, guided by Mari Kimura, cutting-edge violinist and MAX/MSP programmer, has resulted in the composition and performance of several interactive pieces, including a computer-enhanced chamber opera for The Juilliard School. This chamber opera, *The Maiden Tower*, was also presented as a part of New York City Opera’s VOX: Showcasing American Composers in May 2006. Scenes from *The Maiden Tower* were presented by Chants Libres, the cutting-edge contemporary opera company in Montréal, December 2008.

As composer-in-residence for Long Leaf Opera 2007-2008, she was commissioned to write a youth opera. On her youth opera, an adaptation of *Macbeth*, Ken Hoover of the Classical Voice of North Carolina wrote, “It is often heard from the history and political pundits that the youth of today are the future. If they are right, then the event of this evening at the ArtsCenter was a promise of outstanding hope for the musical and theatrical future of America and the world. *Three, Two, One - Bang!*, a short teen-lingo opera by Justine Chen, was performed by teenagers from all around the Triangle ...for a show that was both charming and provocative... The very talented Chen... was commissioned by LLO to compose a half-hour opera in a format accessible to teens both as performers and as audience... Chen's approach to teen opera is both practical and entrancing.”

May 2008, scenes from her second opera, *Jeanne*, based on the life of Joan of Arc, were performed by New York City Opera in their VOX 2008 Showcase, and was described by Vivien

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Schweitzer (New York Times) as “lyrical, atmospheric... striking... Throughout, Ms. Chen balances despair and humor.”

Recent projects include a song cycle *Philomel* for soprano Jennifer Zetlan, premiered at her Marilyn Horne Foundation recital in March 2009, a song with text by Anna Akhmatova for Elizabeth Futral for New York City Opera, performances of *Philomel* by Lucy Shelton and Beta Collide in April 2009, miniatures for the Machine Project at the Hammer Museum’s Little William Theater at UCLA, and a children’s opera based on Ryunosuke Akutagawa’s short story *The Dragon* for North Carolina Opera in their inaugural 2010-2011 season. Spring 2011, Laura Usiskin will premiere a cello solo work at the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts, a work for guzheng and string quartet will be premiered at the SpringAutumnMusic Festival in Taipei, Taiwan, and a chamber opera will be premiered by American Lyric Theater at Symphony Space.

In 2005, she completed her doctoral studies in composition at The Juilliard School, where she also earned her Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees in violin and composition. Recent studies include computer music workshops with the team at IRCAM and Bharatanatyam with Malini Srinivasan. She currently teaches advanced music theory, ear training and music history classes at the Pierrepont School in Westport, Connecticut, where she has taught since 2004.