

John Patrick Thomas

LOST
LANDSCAPES

Piano Music 1964–1996

Pi-hsien Chen, piano

Composer's Note

All music comes from somewhere. My first musical experiences were centered around singing and playing the piano. My maternal great-grandfather was a professional band director in Berlin before becoming a farmer in North Dakota, one of my aunts was a talented pianist, and my mother was encouraged to pursue a singing career before she became my mother. The first instrument I remember is the large upright player piano at my grandparents' farm near Emrick, North Dakota, where, at the age of three, with my hands, I pedaled my way through piano rolls of early 20th-century popular songs, opera transcriptions, and also an original roll of Gershwin playing "Whispering".

As a student, I was always more interested in improvisation than practicing. Because of this, my own piano technique is limited, but I think those hours of exploration and experimentation developed my passion for the sound of the instrument. This recording, suggested by Pi-hsien Chen, to whom I'm profoundly grateful, contains the larger pieces I've written for the instrument since the mid-1960s. Each of them seems to represent the distillation of a particular moment in my life. I note there is an elegiac quality to all these pieces, but, given that, I think they still contain a fairly broad spectrum of expressive and technical intentions. I like music with a physical impulse, an awareness of the past, and hope for music of the future. I've written other solo piano pieces and works for two pianos and piano four-hands, but I've saved them for another day.

145 West 85th Street

Two things affected this work: my friendship with David Del Tredici, whom I have known since I was 17, and the death in 1964 from a drug overdose of a friend at Stanford University. The title is taken from an address I visited in New York during the early 1960s. 85th Street then had the highest crime rate of any one street in the nation, and as I was writing a kind of "urban" music, the title seemed to evoke the mixture of poetry and danger which the street suggested. I began the piece in Berkeley, California, in the fall of 1964, worked on it later in Buffalo, New York, and finished it in London in 1971. Then 28 years passed before it was performed.

Lost Landscapes

I wrote these pieces in the summer of 1993 in Harvey, North Dakota, after having attended a reunion at the American Boychoir School in Princeton, New Jersey. I found this return to school days' scenes profoundly moving and energizing. The pieces come not only out of the colors and contours of a place I remember, but also from the rediscovery of old friends and the unexpected loss of another.

Hafenlieder

In 1989, the city of Hamburg, Germany, where I live, celebrated the 800th anniversary of its harbor. These five pieces were written at that time. They are first of all about different ways of playing the piano, but some of their character comes from the idea of destinations sought, struggled toward, achieved, and at times abandoned.

Dream Music

These three pieces (also written in Harvey, North Dakota) date from the summer of 1995. The conditions of sleep suggested certain alternations of tension and rhythm; these in turn became the musical ideas and events which appear here. I don't remember most of the dreams that led me to this music, but then, the music was not written to illustrate them.

Emrick Variations

Emrick, North Dakota, is a very small town in the center of the state. In 1902, my grandfather established a farm one mile to the east of the town. My mother and her two brothers and two sisters were born there. The Emrick school and train depot have now been taken away, the grain elevator is gone, and the general store is only used for storage. Every summer for many years, I visited my mother, who had retired to the nearby town of Harvey. It was there I wrote this piece in 1996. I was unaware at the time that those were to be the last months of my mother's life. I didn't know it, but it's as if the music did.



John Patrick Thomas was born in Denver, Colorado, in 1941. His music studies began as a member of the American Boychoir in Princeton, New Jersey. At the age of 16, he became a composition student of Darius Milhaud and Charles Jones at the Aspen Music School and later studied with Andrew Imbrie and Seymour Shifrin at the University of California at Berkeley.

After teaching at the State University of New York in Buffalo, he began a concert and opera career as a singer with a special interest in new music which brought him into contact with composers such as David Del Tredici, Lukas Foss, Betsy Jolas, Mauricio Kagel, Michael Finnissy, Elisabeth Lutyens, and Krzysztof Penderecki. He was also a founding member of The Five Centuries Ensemble, which became known for its innovative programming. He has taught in Germany at the Stage School and the Schule für Schauspiel, both in Hamburg, and at the Folkwang University for the Arts, in Essen.

John Patrick Thomas currently lives in Hamburg, where he divides his time between composing and teaching singing.

www.johnpatrickthomas-composer.com

Pi-hsien Chen was born in 1950 in Taiwan. At the age of nine she moved to Cologne, Germany, where, a year later, she joined the piano class of Hans-Otto Schmidt-Neuhaus. She won the first prize at the international ARD competition in Munich when she was 21. Later she won the Schoenberg competition in Rotterdam and the Bach competition in Washington, D.C.

She has performed in the major concert halls and with the major orchestras of Europe, Asia, and America. Her dedication to new piano music evolved out of her engagement with composers such as Pierre Boulez, Karlheinz Stockhausen, György Kurtág, John Cage, and Elliott Carter. Her recordings include music by J.S. Bach (the Goldberg Variations, the Art of the Fugue, and the Partitas), the complete sonatas of Mozart and Boulez, as well as a CD that alternates works by Stockhausen and Beethoven, and one that combines sonatas by Domenico Scarlatti with John Cage's Music of Changes.

Pi-hsien Chen has been a professor of piano at the music universities in Cologne (from 1981 to 2004) and in Freiburg (from 2004 until her retirement). She currently devotes herself to giving concerts and masterclasses in Europe, Asia, and America.



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Pi-hsien Chen, piano

1 **145 West 85th Street** (1964–71) 19:08

Lost Landscapes (1993) 12:22

2 I a, I b

3 II

4 III

5 IV

Hafenlieder (1990) 19:56

6 I

7 II

8 III

9 IV

10 V

Dream Music (1995) 8:12

11 I

12 II

13 III

14 **Emrick Variations** (1996) 13:53

Total time 73:31

Recording

Sven Treeß

March 25 and 26, 2000

Attenbach, Germany

Microphones: Soundelux U95

Piano

Steinway D concert grand 1982

Photos

Maurya Wickstrom (John Patrick Thomas)

Ann-yi Eötvös (Pi-hsien Chen)

Graphics

Ann Holyoke Lehmann

