

Jenny Xiong

Winner of 2025 Oriens Composition Competition, age group 18-25

Description of the work:

And the Remnants of a Temple, my first attempt to explore the musicality of silence, was inspired by several Asian philosophical concepts. Foremost, the Japanese concept of *ma* taught me of the power latent in the negative space between notes: I learned how such spaces were as significant, as meaningful, as notes themselves, and this prompted me to embrace silence as an indispensable part of music. Moreover, the Chinese concept of *wu wei* encouraged me to intuit the flow of sound and silence, to let sound emerge organically from silence and silence organically from sound. I composed the piece with these philosophies in mind, endeavoring also to deviate from a Western sense of drama and progression by creating a placid, dormant space in which musical gestures appeared and disappeared as if at will. The piece paints the ruins of a temple but points as well to the trauma shared by victims of Western imperialism—how we have been left to rebuild our cultures from the remnants of our temples, pagodas, and shrines. There occurs at the piece's conclusion a sudden consonance, the miraculous ringing of the ruined temple's bell, but also a gesture of hope for a more consonant future.

Biography:

Composer, writer, flutist, and pianist Jenny Xiong seeks beauty in the ephemeral. Captivated by the relationship between sound and silence, bloom and decay, color and space, death and memory, Jenny creates art to explore the evanescence of life and the four seasons, drawing special inspiration from its portrayal in East Asian art, literature, and video games. She is currently on a Berkeley Fellowship pursuing an M.A./Ph.D. in Music with a concentration in Composition at the University of California, Berkeley, where she studies composition with Ken Ueno, Carmine-Emanuele Cella, Myra Melford, and Edmund Campion, takes lessons with flutist Stacey Pelinka, and plays flute in the UC Berkeley Symphony Orchestra. A native of Bothell, Washington, Jenny has been playing the piano since she was five years old and the flute since she was ten. She received a B.A. with Distinction in Music with Honors, with a concentration in Composition, and in English with Honors, with an emphasis in Creative Writing, from Stanford University, where she studied composition with François Rose and Erik Ulman, flute with Alexandra Hawley, and piano with Laura Dahl. In addition to playing flute in the Stanford Symphony Orchestra, Stanford Philharmonia, and Stanford Summer Symphony, Jenny won Stanford's 2024 Marie Louise Rosenberg Honors Award for Outstanding Honors Thesis Writing, 2023 Friends of Music Undergraduate Composition Award, 2023 Concerto Competition, and 2021 and 2022 Humanities and Sciences Undergraduate Prize in Music. Jenny has also composed for and conducted research on traditional Chinese, Japanese, and Ainu instruments as a recipient of UC Berkeley's 2025 Mikumo Student Support Fund for Research in Japan and Stanford's 2022–2023 Major Grant and 2021–2022 Chappell Lougee Scholarship. Her compositions have been premiered in Seattle, Boston, Stanford, Kyoto, and Vienna.

Email: jsxiong@berkeley.edu