Shui Mo 水墨

Harmony and Faded Ink • January 24th, 16.00 Arnolfini

共声而和 · 消隐之墨 • 共鳴と消えゆく墨 • 조화 담묵

-Programme-

Symbiosis • *in two movements*	XU Zhengtong (2025)
Variations of the Wandering Sound	WANG Tianyi (2025)
SPIRIT 靈・息 *breath*	Eunseog Lee (2025)
Edge Among Leaves	ZHANG Zongbohan (2025)
Misty Frost and Faded Ink	JIA Guoping (2025)

all pieces commissioned by Shui Mo and premiered here

In **Harmony and Faded Ink**, Shui Mo Ensemble introduces five new commissioned works by Beijing, Chengdu and UK/Korean composers to Bristol. Highlighting the programme is the renowned JIA Guoping's *Misty Frost and Faded Ink* 寒烟淡墨, a work drawing on the timbral delicacies of Shui Mo's traditional instrumental palette. Jia's unique background includes playing *banhu* in local Shanxi opera troupes, and founding ConTempo Beijing, one of the first ensembles in China to use traditional instruments within cutting-edge contemporary music. The 'irregular' breath sounds of Shui Mo's Shakuhachi-flute and Taegeum are also central to Eunseog Lee's chant-based SPIRIT 靈・息 *breath*, invoking the beginning of time. Wang Tianyi 王天仪's *Variations of the Wandering Sound* takes a richly scored folk tune as its basis, then 'wanders' to referencing dances of Tibet, (medieval) chant and the *honkyoku* 本曲 (Edo-period) tradition of shakuhachi. Jazz-influenced Beijing composer Zhang Bohan 张博涵 takes this further, inspired by the eastern cinematic warrior tradition (Kurosawa's *Ghost of Tsushima*) in *Edge Among Leaves*, and the Japanese *In* mode. Harmony 和 in Chinese philosophy ('not pursuing simple uniformity, rather seeking to fuse diverse elements into an organic whole while respecting their differences') is invoked by Chengdu composer Xu Zhengtong in *Symbiosis* to open the programme.

Musicians: Dasom Baek 김혜림 (*daegeum*), Richard Craig (flute/alto flute), PENG Cheng 彭程 (*èrhú*), HE Shuiqingqing 何,水清清 (*guzhēng*), Jingyu Chew 周荆玉(*shēng),* George Owen (cello) Eunseog Lee, chant, Michael Ellison, director,

All modern Shui Mo paintings by Ting Huang • Visual projection by Lia Su and Chris Heigham.
Sound by Liam O'Connell and Chris Heigham
With special thanks to Phil Owen, Jonathan Scott and Richard Craig

Notes:

徐铮彤 Xu Zhengtóng • Symbiosis 共生
The creative inspiration for Symbiosis stems from the concept of “he” (harmony) in Chinese philosophy. It does not pursue simple uniformity; rather, it seeks to fuse diverse elements into an organic whole while respecting their differences. In terms of compositional technique, the piece adopts a “central-tone system” as its structural core, unifying six distinctive instruments around shared pitch anchors. On this basis, the Chinese pentatonic scale, Korea’s *gye-myeon-jo*, Japan’s *miyako-bushi* mode, and the Western natural major are intricately interwoven. This approach is not intended to flatten the individuality of each musical tradition, but to establish a framework for dialogue in which their differences can resonate and coexist within a system. Symbiosis seeks to explore precisely this harmonious coexistence constructed through difference. It is not a monologue of a single culture, but a new and unified musical organism nurtured by multiple voices.

王天仪 Wáng Tiānyí • 游吟之声变奏曲 Variations of the Wandering Sound
Structured as a theme with four variations, the work traverses a wide spectrum of musical traditions, embodying a journey across cultures through sound. The theme is based on a poignant Chinese folk song called *“Little Cabbage / Pakchoi”* (Chinese name 《小白菜》), whose melody is deliberately fragmented and distributed among different instruments. The first variation is called “Toshey” (堆谐, ཏོ་བཤད), which means a kind of traditional Tibetan music for singing and dancing in Xizang/Tibet (西藏, བོད) Autonomous Region of China. The second variation is called “Honkyoku” (本曲 – both Chinese and Japanese), which means traditional solo piece for Shakuhachi. In this variation, Shakuhachi is the solo instrument, while other instruments are like the orchestra in a concerto. The third variation is called “Chant”, whose style is derived from religious music in medieval Europe. The fourth variation is called “Qíngē” (琴歌), which imitates the ensemble of Gǔqín (古琴), Xiāo (箫) and singing in traditional Chinese literati music. More than a collection of styles, *Variations of the Wandering Sound* is like an international dialogue, suggesting that music itself is a wandering voice: one that remembers, explores, and ultimately connects. Through this music piece, listeners are invited to embark on an auditory passage across lands and histories, discovering along the way that music from every culture is a part of larger, common harmony.

Eunseog Lee • SPIRIT 靈・息 breath
From its very first words, the Bible depicts the nature of the Spirit of God not as that of a soul or spectre, but as *ruach* (רוּחַ) or ‘breath’. This piece, with its focus on deep breaths and unhurried phrasing, is a meditation on this Spirit by which God breathed life, order and peace into the void.

张宗博涵 ZHĀNG, Zōngbóhán • 叶隙寒芒 Edge Among Leaves
Edge among Leaves draws inspiration from the rich, ink-wash visual aesthetic of Eastern martial arts cinema. Using its stark black-and-white contrasts and tension-filled silence as a foundation, the music sketches the portrait of a hero. It is the loneliness of the warrior, stretched long beneath the moon; the absolute stillness gathered at the blade's edge before the strike; the piercing whisper of wind in the instant between life and death. Like a silent streak, it darts between ink-wash mountains and the smoke of war; the blade becomes an extension of will, fighting on until the dawn of a white night. Within the confrontation of majesty and cruelty, loyalty and sacrifice, it seeks the deep core of Eastern heroism. Here, the shadows of leaves, the chant of the wind, and the glint of the blade all dissolve into flowing sound, together voicing an eternal inquiry into sacrifice, courage, and existence itself.

贾国平 JIA Guoping • 寒烟澹墨 Misty Frost and Faded Ink
The title is taken from the inscription by Xu Shichang, a famous Qing Dynasty painter, on his representative mountain painting *Flowers on the River*, which reads, "Misty frost and faded ink are like the man himself." This work will also attempt to transform the concise brushstrokes, ethereal composition, austere atmosphere, and aloof spirit of the mountain paintings of the Kuo-Shan artists into musical language, utilizing the musical beauty of the Kuo-Shan orchestra's Eastern instruments to express the aesthetic appeal of Eastern art.

https://www.shuimo.org.uk/ https://www.instagram.com/shuimoensemble/

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This event is funded by the Arts and Humanities Research council.