

Music and Water

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She took passionate joy in listening to the purling of the weir. Like the first music that sounded in the human ear, the eddies contained every note and every composition, and nothing excited Liza as much as this constant, glorious, delicately shaded polyphonic purling of abundant water.

— Růžena Svobodová,
The Impervious Meluzina

What are the analogies between water and music? Both deal with time, with the rhythm of movement, and both are perceived by senses more closely connected with the body than that of sight, namely touch and hearing.¹ In spite of the fact that hearing is considered one of the two aesthetic senses because of the effect of distancing, it is more connected to the body of the hearer: the sound is located inside as well as outside the body. It is similar to the feeling aroused when inside and outside merge in water. Maria Cvetajeva describes the feeling when playing the piano in the following way:

Because one can strike on them (on the keys), one does that, and at that moment one begins to sink. One sinks when playing on them, but also when not playing. And because they are also smooth, there is depth hidden under that smoothness. It is like beside the water, with the only difference that they are smoother and deeper. And because the smoothness of the piano keys is treacherous, playing the first tone, you begin to sink.²

Music is an art using non-transparent signs, signs that cannot be determined by their literary meaning. Thus, by means of music it is easy to send a person into a condition where he/she is motivated to use his/her imagination to cope with uncertain signs, to play on the border between the real and the imagined world.

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¹ The same analogy brings woman into play, as Richard Leppert showed in his book *The Sight of Sound: Music, Representation, and the History of the Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

² Werner Hofmann, "Wasser der Stille. 'Es war Gewühl, es war unten'", *Wasser und Wein* (Wien & Köln: HG von Werner Hofmann, 1995), 112.

Seduction, Water and Music

*The seducer is the one who is interested
in the very process, not in its final step.*

— Søren Kierkegaard,
Diary of a Seducer

It is not by chance that Sirens, among the most seductive creatures of Greek mythology, use music to seduce. Music, by its very non-representational nature, meets Baudrillard's requirement to function seductively.³ The Greek *Muses* from whom the word *music* is derived were originally the nymphs of mountain torrents, streams and creeks. "Because they were the nymphs of sacred mountain torrents, their music and singing certainly imitated the hurried flowing of water, and through this power their connection with Dionysus arose."⁴

A body of water can be seen as an "empty sign" in Baudrillard's sense of the word. In his theory of seduction he states that it is precisely these "empty signs" that are the most seductive, because the human mind is irrevocably bewitched by void areas, spaces not filled by any meaning. According to Baudrillard, there cannot be any seduction where "transparent" signs occur. He makes a close connection between seduction and woman, stating that seduction and femininity are inseparable. He approves of this connection, a connection based on indeterminacy, ambiguity, non-transparency, ungraspability, blurred boundaries between surface and depth, between reality and fiction, between the natural and the cultural as principles of both femininity and seduction. And — I would add — between both music and water.

To look for some archetypal connections between water, woman and seduction we can refer for example to the ancient legend of Pan trying to grasp one of the nymphs in order to satisfy his sexual desire. The nymph (not by chance living on the bank of the river) rejects his attempt, his overtly direct and transparent sign of sexual desire, his attempt to use power to get what he wants. Because she is not able to reach the water before he catches her, she sacrifices herself by transforming herself into reeds. Pan later constructs his famous flute from the reeds, the nymph, and with that flute he seduces other nymphs, now successfully. By her sacrifice, the nymph taught Pan that in trying to satisfy his sexual desire he would be better off not to use force, not to aim directly by using the transparent signs of his desire, but indirectly, by hiding his desire under the sounds of his flute, involving both sides in the play of seduction. Only after this lesson was Pan able to satisfy his desire, making other nymphs desire him by using music as a device. As Bachelard puts it: "Charm is conquered by charm, music by music", when explaining the fact that in poetry "there are so many sunken bells, so

³ Jean Baudrillard, *De la séduction* (Paris: Galilée, 1998).

⁴ S. Augusta-Boularot, *Slovník řecké a římské mytologie* (Praha, 1993), 137.

many belfries disappeared under the water, and still ringing, so many golden harps, giving the crystal voices their depths!”⁵

It is difficult to build anything stable from hearing (and water). Therefore European classical music tended to connect music with the notion of space, using tools to enact something like building in the hearer’s memory: recognizable returns of motifs, repetitions, thematic similarities, formal principles of contrast, harmony based on tonality, all of which supported a notion of musical space. With Claude Debussy, however, a great composer of water themes, this was gone. Debussy’s idea was as follows: “I would like to see, and I will succeed myself in producing, music which is entirely free from ‘motifs’ or rather consisting of one continuous ‘motif’ which nothing interrupts and which never turns back on itself.”⁶

His inspiration was the Javanese music accompanying the sacred dances, *Bedaya Semang* and *Bedaya Ketawang*, that he saw and heard at the Paris Exposition Universelle in 1889. *Bedaya Semang* and *Bedaya Ketawang* are ancient sacred court dances from Jogjakarta and Surakarta, based on stories about the underwater realm. The first is a story about a sultan who goes to live with an unearthly queen in her palace at the bottom of the sea. The second has a similar theme: Sultan Agung sees a performance in the underwater palace of the goddess of the South Sea and converts his inspiration into a terrestrial dance. According to Toop, all bedaya music and dances are based on watery themes.⁷ Though these details were not known to Debussy in 1889, this kind of music appealed to his intuitions and thoughts about music, as manifested in his previous rebellious attempts to disconnect himself from the European music of his time, and helped him to free himself from the spell of Wagner. Soon after 1889, he composed many liquid works such as *La Mer*, *Reflets dans l’eau*, *Jardins sous la pluie*, *Poissons d’or*, vocal-instrumental pieces on the texts of Paul Verlaine *La mer est plus belle que les cathédrales*, *L’échelonnement des haies*, and many others. Debussy’s music suggests his strong attraction to liquidity, the floating world, the ungraspable emergence of reflections, waveforms, and the abyssal darkness, endowing his music with much seductive power.

Debussy once said that “music is a free, openly floating art, an art of scenery, an art similar to the elements — the wind, sky, and sea”.⁸ He announced: “music does not only imitate nature in a more or less close way, but it is able to release hidden connections between nature and imagination.”⁹ Jankélévitch describes Debussy’s music as follows: “No music was

⁵ Gaston Bachelard, *Voda a sny. Esej o obraznosti hmoty* (Praha: Mladá fronta, 1997), 219. Eng. translation of French orig., *Water and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Water*, trans. Edith R. Farrell (Dallas: Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture, 1993).

⁶ David Toop, *Ocean of Sound* (New York: Serpent & Tail, 1995), 19.

⁷ Toop, *Ocean of Sound*, 21.

⁸ S. Jarocinski, *Debussy. Impresionizmus a symbolizmus* (Bratislava: Opus, 1989), 22. Eng. translation of French orig., *Debussy: Impressionism and Symbolism*, trans. Rollo Mayers (London: Eulenburg, 1976).

⁹ Jarocinski, *Debussy. Impresionizmus a symbolizmus*, 123.

able in the same degree to capture in a short moment ungraspable analogies between things, and to write down the consonance of souls. No one else was able to suggest something which is at the same time close and far, something which exists and does not exist, and all of that not by the use of motifs but by the tremolos of melodies and fleeting reminiscences."¹⁰ Debussy loved the sea, calling it "the mother of all of us".¹¹ He wrote in a letter to Jacques Durand: "Thus I am again with my old friend the sea, it is still infinite and beautiful. It is really the natural phenomenon which can serve human beings the best. However, we do not respect the sea enough . . . It should not be allowed to put into it bodies distorted by everyday life; all those arms and legs moving in ridiculous rhythms can only make the fishes weep. In the sea only Sirens should dwell, but how you can make those respectful creatures come back to the waters to be with such bad company?"¹² How Debussy imagined such a creature we can induce from his small piano piece *Undine*.

The image of a creature living in the water which is half-fish (or snake) and half-woman is a very old one. We can find descriptions of such figures in the ancient mythologies of many different cultures. The Egyptian goddess Isis was portrayed with her lower half as that of a snake, and the Semitic goddess Atargatis with the lower half of a fish. During Medieval times, the image was further developed in the form of the complex symbol of a mermaid with her huge seductive power. This creature was described as follows: the upper half of a woman and the lower half of a fish (sometimes with two tails), long curled hair, a comb and a mirror, a beautiful figure with a marvelous voice. The predecessors of the mermaid are to be found in a large family of water nymphs in Greek mythology: the Nereons (sea nymphs), Oceans (their sisters from the oceans), Naiads (river nymphs, or freshwater nymphs in general), and also the Sirens. In the imagery of the common people, and also in Medieval bestiaries, Sirens were often mixed up with or identified as mermaids. There is also a close connection between mermaids and the image of Melusina, also called Undine or Ondine (from *unde* - water).¹³

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¹⁰ Jarocinski, *Debussy. Impresionizmus a symbolizmus*, 205.

¹¹ Jarocinski, *Debussy. Impresionizmus a symbolizmus*, 205.

¹² S. Laichterová, *Claude Debussy. Bary a rytmus* (Praha: Státní hudební vydavatelství, 1989), 78.

¹³ *Mythical and Fabulous Creatures: A Source Book and Research Guide*, Malcolm South, ed. (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987), *Melusina: An Edition of the Sixteenth-Century Czech Version of the Mélusine Romance*, prepared by S. I. Kanikova with the assistance of Robert B. Pynsent (London & Prague: KLP, 1996).

Sublime, Sea and Music

Nature, which our aesthetic judgment contemplates as not having any power over us, is dynamically sublime.

— Immanuel Kant
The Critique of Judgment

According to Kant, the sea, especially as a “infinite stormy ocean”,¹⁴ is a case of the sublime in nature. In this case, nature overwhelms us because of its capacity to destroy us as physical beings, to show us how helpless we are faced with its power. However nature’s danger has not to be real — real fear does not allow an aesthetic attitude to emerge. This confrontation initiates the process, during which — on one hand — we feel very impotent as sensuous beings, but — on the other hand — our mental capacities are highlighted, as we come to the understanding that we are able — as a rational beings — to withstand that confrontation. The essence of the sublime is explained by Kant as follows: “In our aesthetic judgement, nature is apprehended as sublime not because it causes our fear but because it calls for our power (which is not that of nature) to understand the fact that everything we care for (property, health and life) is small and to understand that we need not consider nature’s power superior.”¹⁵

Kant is aware of the fact that the feelings involved in the process can easily turn into something different. He explains the very fragile borders between gentle and adventurous sentiment, between indignation and despondency, between enthusiasm and madness, between wondering about that which exists beyond our physical world and silly trickery. He also stresses the difference between sublime loneliness, connected with the feeling of self-dependency, and the loneliness caused by misanthropy or anthropophobia. As part of the sublime Kant mentions an “interesting sadness”,¹⁶ somehow equating it with melancholy.

To explain the cause of the arousal of melancholy feeling, Parret¹⁷ and also Haapala and Brady¹⁸ claim that the mood consists of waves that bring the past and future, pain and pleasure, somehow into a regular exchange. The fact that the ocean is seemingly infinite brings about the melancholic mood by not fixing our mind on any definite and precise object and thus supporting the free flow between the whole and nothingness. As Panofsky points

¹⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Kritika soudnosti* (Praha: Odeon, 1973), 93. (*Critique of Judgment*, trans. J. H. Berbard, Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2000).

¹⁵ Kant, *Kritika soudnosti*, 93.

¹⁶ Kant, *Kritika soudnosti*, 103.

¹⁷ H. Parret, *The Aesthetics of Communication* (Dodrecht & Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1993).

¹⁸ Arto Haapala & Emily Brady, “Melancholy as an Aesthetic Emotion”, unpublished manuscript, 1996.

out, melancholy arises through the comparison of one's mortality with the background of infinity (which can be represented by the sea).¹⁹ If in this comparative play of reflection and imagination the reflective side prevails and you appreciate the infinity, you can reach the experience of the sublime as described by Kant. If you keep to meaninglessness and the pain of loss, connected with the mortality of human beings, you will be more inclined to feel melancholic. To dwell on that feeling for a long time may even cause depression, as Kristeva explains.²⁰ And if both sides represent "real substance" for you, to the extent that you are not able to decide between them, you may be called mad, in Hegel's sense of the word as elaborated in his *Phenomenology of Mind*.²¹

The piano etude composed by Bedřich Smetana called *On the Seashore* can serve as a musical example of what was said before. Smetana guides us through the very process of what we experience when a sublime feeling arises as a result of our aesthetic experience. The music starts by imaginatively placing us on the seashore to observe the waves moving before our eyes. But very soon the situation changes — instead of being the disinterested observer, we find ourselves within our mental space, immersed into a melancholic mood drawing us into the realm of reminiscences and dreams. The mental space expressed by the melodic line is accompanied by the permanent movement of the seawater, expressing an analogy between the human and natural — an analogy, or rather interplay, in which each of the counterparts wins the composer's attention for a while, changing places in a wavelike rhythm. After our melancholic meditation caused by the moving sea, the situation changes again. The sea begins to swell up, to roar, to show its power to such an extent that we feel overwhelmed by the storm, experiencing fear and distress. Nevertheless, after the climax of the horror, the next change occurs and our previous feelings are transformed into ones of astonishment and respect. At the end of the composition, we can hear music expressing our acceptance and welcoming of the fact that we are part of that huge and infinite universe. This revelation makes us feel moved, conciliated, and touched.

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¹⁹ Erwin Panofsky, "Symbolism and Durer's 'Melencolia I'", *Problems in Aesthetics: An Introductory Book of Readings*, Morris Weitz, ed. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1959).

²⁰ Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, translated by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989).

²¹ G. W. F. Hegel, *Fenomenologie ducaha* (Praha: ČSAV, 1960). (*The Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. J. B. Ballie, London: Allen & Unwin, 1961).

Tao, Water and Passion

Nothing in the world is as soft and weak as water. Yet in corroding the firm and strong, there is nothing which can surpass it. This is because of its being without anything which can substitute for it.

— Lao Tzu
Tao-te-t'ing

According to Toop, Debussy's world of sounds seems more inspirational in our times, since an "increasing number of musicians are creating works which grasp at the transparency of water".²² However, water and music have been in contact for a long time. The three main types of relationship between water and music can be identified: water as direct material for music, as a mediating environment in musical performances, and as a bearer of different symbolic meanings in music.

Though it might seem that using water as a material to create artworks is a new phenomenon, we can find such cases in the past, both in Europe and East Asia. In Renaissance and Baroque Europe, villas were built with caves and gardens inhabited by nymphs, fauns and animals. Those villas, and especially their caves, were supplied by sophisticated water devices producing "water music".²³ In the mid-Eighteenth century, the first sultan of Jogjakarta built a water castle of artificial lakes, tropical gardens and ornate architecture called *Taman Sari* where he used the sound of water to create musical effects.²⁴ In those times, water was also used as an environment for musical performances, as it was usual to play music on boats during cruises — for example Handel's *Water Music* was composed for such an occasion.

However, especially in the 20th century, we can find an increased interest among musicians in using water as a medium and environment for music, which means using water (and other elements such as earth, fire and air) as a natural element.²⁵ For example, some musicians are inspired directly by the sounds of water, such as Pete Namlook (a pseudonym for Peter Kuhlmann) who described his way of producing music as follows: "I . . . sat near to the water and 'played' along with it. I tried to pick up the noises and give back my feelings to the

²² Toop, *Ocean of Sound*, 21.

²³ Brigitte Borchhardt – Birbaumer, "Wasser und Wein – Element und Elixier", *Wasser und Wein*, 149-164.

²⁴ Toop, *Ocean of Sound*, 21.

²⁵ This can be seen as a part of wider phenomenon called "elements return" by Krystyna Wilkoszewska. Wilkoszewska finds this tendency not only in the domain of art, but also in philosophy, aesthetics and ecology. Krystyna Wilkoszewska, "Elements Return", *Aesthetics of the Four Elements: Earth, Water, Fire, Air* (Ostrava: Ostravská univerzita, 2001), 363 – 382.

environment through my instrument. I never stopped doing this kind of music, which for me was very emotional, and melancholic. Nature was my teacher."²⁶

Other musicians experiment with the aqueous environment as a medium for their performances. Georges Ives, for example, experimented with acoustic echoes over water. In his chamber music piece *The Pond*, he recaptured the experience of his father Charles, playing musical instruments over the pond in Danbury, Connecticut, "captivated by the tone quality the echo returned to him across the water."²⁷ At the Sydney Sound Culture festival in 1991, the American composer Alvin Curran performed a piece called *Maritime Rites*, described by Mamoru Fujieda as follows: "In this one-hour performance using all of Sydney Port and its harbor as backdrop, boats and ferries which happened to traverse the bay became the instruments. In addition to this, two boats were specially prepared with a group of musicians playing two of Australia's native instruments: the didgeridoo and the conch shell. From various directions, as the sounds of the fog horns rang out in union, a magnificent sound echoed all over the harbor."²⁸

John Cage was also interested in both ideas: in playing music over water and in using the sounds of water drops and pouring water to make musical compositions. In his autobiography he wrote: "It seems that in my life I was only moving from one lake to the other."

Another group of composers used highly developed technology to produce mixes, like Jimi Hendrix *1983... (a merman I should turn to be)* or *Live and Unreleased: The Radio Show*, where "the chords underpinned an improvisation depicting the abyssal movement of unidentified submarine objects, the cries of seagulls, a descent into the maelstrom."²⁹

Many other examples from the history of music as well as from contemporary music can be collected. However, the composition by Tan Dun *Water Passion after St. Matthew* is exceptional in many respects. The composition combines two of the previously mentioned possibilities of using water in music: as a medium to produce sound and as an extensive and significant symbol, which is stressed even by the title of the work *Water Passion*. Moreover, Tan Dun understands water as a complex symbol with many associations and aspects used differently in different contexts of the work. As Elsom's description of the performance in London shows,³⁰ when staging *Water Passion*, Tan Dun creates also visual symbols from water:

²⁶ *Aesthetics of the Four Elements*, 216.

²⁷ *Aesthetics of the Four Elements*, 245. As Arnold Berleant argues, the characteristics of sound change when played across water. It is more difficult to determine the source and the direction of the sound, and peculiar echo phenomena emerge. Arnold Berleant, "The World from the Water", unpublished manuscript, 2000.

²⁸ *Aesthetics of the Four Elements*, 247.

²⁹ *Aesthetics of the Four Elements*, 104.

³⁰ The premiere of *Water Passion* took place in Stuttgart in 2000 during the festival in memory of the 250th anniversary of Johann Sebastian Bach's death.

“On the stage was a cross formed from glass bowls, like Christian baptismal fonts, full of water.”³¹ The choir was sitting in the space between — at the top right men’s voices, and at the top left women’s voices. The three groups of percussion players sat at three ends of the cross, while Tan Dun, conducting, was at the fourth end of the cross. The violin player and baritone were in the quarter to his left, and the soprano and cellist to his right. The performance took place with the auditorium and often the stage was in darkness except for spotlights on the water bowls. By doing that, Tan Dun deepened the contrast between the transparency of water and the darkness around, alluding to the depths of the waters. However, as Elsom describes, “at the end, the choir, instrumentalists and conductor moved gradually to the fonts and run the water through their hands as the lights died away, with breathtaking effect”.³² Alongside the bowls, Tan Dun also uses instruments called “water-phones” — metal bottles filled with the liquid. These bottles are used especially at the beginning of the performance when two players come onto the scene with them and make sounds by pulling bows over them or tapping on them, causing the soft purring of their content. Stolyarova, describing the rehearsal in St. Petersburg in June 2001, wrote: “Tan Dun gives musicians *carte blanche* for their behavior with the water exercises. ‘You can play with it, and whatever you like’, he told musicians.”³³

An interesting question arises: why Tan Dun feels that water is an important component of the *St. Matthew Passion*, even transforming it into a metaphor for Passion? We can first try to test the etymology of the word *passion*. The word is connected with the verb *to pass*, associated with time moving while itself leaving behind something which was present a moment ago, but which is not present anymore.³⁴ The flow of time causes the feelings expressed by the word *passion*, which generally means to long for something that is not present. Though the word *Passion* in a religious context is derived from the Greek word *pascha* — suffering,³⁵ some of these associations are still present in the notion of Passions (we suffer when longing for something). Concerning the connection between passion and music, Ernst Bloch felt their closeness intensely, underlining that music starts as a passion “calling for something we miss”.³⁶

³¹ H. E. Elsom, *Dun and the riverrun* (http://www.helsom.demon.co.uk/opera/2000/09_30_00_Dun.txt)

³² Elsom, *Dun and the riverrun*.

³³ Galina Stolyarova, *tan dun makes music from water* (http://www.spimesrussia.com/secur/680/features/a_3750.htm)

³⁴ Equivalents of the verb *to pass* listed in the dictionary are: *to miss, to omit, to go by, to cross, to happen*.

³⁵ *Encyklopedie Diderot* (Praha, 1999, Volume 6), 62.

³⁶ Ernst Bloch, “Transcendence a svět nejhlubší lidské intenzity v hudbě”, *Hudební rozhledy* (Praha: Svaz českých skladatelů, 1970), Vol. XXIII, No. 7, 305 – 314. And is it not the characteristic of water which expresses the same — the water stream taking away everything which was once present and can never be present again?

In the context of our question it is significant that Tan Dun is of Chinese origin: Taoism is especially sensitive toward water phenomena. As Jones claims: "Water is often used as an image of Tao."³⁷ Taoism appreciates water particularly because of its movement (water always moves unless it is forced into containment). It stresses its capacity to float (swimmers know that water will carry them if they do not fight with it), its adaptability (it takes on the form of the things in which it is contained), its pouring down, and its transparency. Tao, as well as water, "dwells within the world, it is not some transcendental entity which makes the world possible nor is it a transcendental principle that makes the world knowable".³⁸ It is rather the way in which the world moves. And the movement of the world is similar to the movement of water. "Water moves effortlessly and accomplishes its tasks with ease and assiduity", says Lao Tzu.³⁹ Tao especially appreciates water's capacity to "nullify any obstacle in its path",⁴⁰ that is to dissolve and destroy even the hard and strong. For Taoism, water is an appropriate proof of the idea that "weakness always suppresses the strong".⁴¹ The world moves "dialectically", dialectical movement being understood as a natural process of doing, which "flows, emerges, enhances, comes back and forth without an intervention from outside".⁴² For this kind of motion Lao Tzu uses the special term *wu-wei*, which means "doing through non-doing". Tao itself is seen as *wu-wei* and it only presents itself through *wu-wei*. "Tao is non-active, and yet there is nothing it does not do".⁴³ To do *wu-wei* does not mean to do nothing but rather to act naturally, according with Tao. In the Tao vision "both water and *wu-wei* share the combination of endless submissiveness with incomparable power".⁴⁴ Water also serves as a metaphor for Lao Tzu's attempt to blend circularity and the multidirectional movement of Tao: the second supports "the myriad things without contending with them"⁴⁵ and the first is seen as an "interplay between the opposites of *yin* and *yang* and re-turning of the myriad things back to their source".⁴⁶

Keeping in mind what was said before, we can understand why Tan Dun felt the importance of water within the Passion theme much more strongly than any other composer

³⁷ D. E. Jones, "Tao's Metaphor: The Way of Water", *Asian Culture Quarterly* (Spring 1999), vol. XXVII, No. 1, 15-25, China, Taigei.

³⁸ Jones, "Tao's Metaphor: The Way of Water", 19.

³⁹ Jones, "Tao's Metaphor: The Way of Water", 18.

⁴⁰ Jones, "Tao's Metaphor: The Way of Water", 16.

⁴¹ Egon Bondy, *Čínská filozofie* (Praha: Sdružení pro podporu vydávání časopisů, 1993).

⁴² Bondy, *Čínská filozofie*, 69.

⁴³ Jones, "Tao's Metaphor: The Way of Water", 18.

⁴⁴ H. Smith, *Světová náboženství (Po stopách moudrosti předků)* (Praha: Knížní klub, 1995), 136.

⁴⁵ Jones, "Tao's Metaphor: The Way of Water", 16.

⁴⁶ Jones, "Tao's Metaphor: The Way of Water", 17.

bred and born in a Euro-American Christian culture. However, we cannot take Tan Dun as representing the Chinese heritage exclusively. He is best described as a representative of the cross-cultural and interdependent world of our times, as a composer whose “style of music blends influences from East and West, and from the past and the present, spanning the artistic realm situated between the traditional and the avant-garde”.⁴⁷

Tan Dun presents water as an omnipresent metaphor of life. Even the whole composition, consisting of eight parts, can be interpreted as an analogy of the continuous flow of water. Tan Dun once said: “Water can be a metaphor for composing, too, because the composer’s mind, like the water’s flow, knows no boundaries.”⁴⁸ Using water as a symbol of life most intensively in the first part of the performance (called *Baptism*), and in the last part (called *Water and Resurrection*), he connects the beginning and the end of the composition, forming a circle. The combination of the materiality of water and its symbolical meanings expresses the analogy of water as a necessary element of daily life and, at the same time, as an element imputed with much spirituality. In his composition, Tan Dun gives us a great opportunity to listen to the sound of water as a natural element. He once said: “But though water is all around, we do not really listen attentively to the sound of it.”⁴⁹ In the first part of the *Water Passion*, called *Baptism*, water is presented in accordance with the Bible as a source of initiation into a new (religious) life: water murmurs, purrs and pours down, alluding to the inner life contained within it.

The Christian practice of Baptism is one of a few cases in which water plays a significant role within Christian belief. “Baptism may be defined broadly as the application of water or other liquid in a ritual religious initiation”,⁵⁰ and such a phenomenon was already known in pre-Christian cultures. We can find the most extensive representation of baptismal activity in Egyptian funerary art, where rites of purification were necessary for the spirit to enter the afterlife. Here baptism was part of the funeral ceremony, and is represented in paintings as water poured by priests from jars or vases onto the dead body (often shown standing up) the jet of water forming an arch over the figure. In medieval times, baptism became one of the most important sacraments of the Christian religion, both Eastern and Western, marking one of the major events in the life of Christ and thus in the life of each Christian. The most widespread representation of this event was the figure of Christ standing in the River Jordan being baptized by St. John the Baptist. The theological aspect of baptism is drawn from several

⁴⁷ *Tan Dun on the international stage* (<http://www.taiwanheadlines.gov.tw/20010726/20010724f3.html>)

⁴⁸ Galina Stolyarova, *tan dun makes music from water* (http://www.sptimerussia.com/secur/680/features/a_3750.htm)

⁴⁹ Galina Stolyarova, *tan dun makes music from water*. Bachelard too stresses the capacity of water to make sounds in his *Water and Dreams*.

⁵⁰ *Encyclopedia of Comparative Iconography: Themes Depicted in Works of Art*, vol. 1-2, (Chicago & London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1982), 105.

events involving water which are described in the Old Testament, such as the Flood, the story of Jonah and the whale, the crossing of the Red Sea, and Moses striking water from the rock. The most important of them was the miracle that took place at the River Jordan as described in the *Book of Joshua*. The miracle occurs as Joshua leads the Jews from the desert to the Promised Land. Arriving at the Jordan with the full trappings of their religion, they are greatly discouraged to find the river in harvest flood. After Joshua has reassured them and described how they will succeed, “the priests that carried the Ark of the Covenant, went on before them. As soon as they came into the Jordan, and their feet were dipped in part of the water . . . The waters that came down from above stood in one place . . . Swelling like a mountain . . . but those that were beneath, ran down into the sea of wilderness (which now is called the Dead Sea) until they wholly failed. And the people marched over against Jericho: and the priests that carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord, stood girded upon the dry land in the midst of the Jordan”.⁵¹ Thus, by reversing the Jordan’s flow and interrupting the natural course of things, God showed his power and presence. In the New Testament, these events were related to John the Baptist and interpreted as an appearance of God on earth. It is interesting that in Eastern Christianity there existed an almost continual tradition of baptism (as documented, for example, by the service known as Blessing of Waters, on 6 January), while in Western Christianity images of baptism are absent almost until the 14th century.

In the second part, called *The Temptation in the Desert*, water is used only at the end and may be connected with seduction by water, woman and also the snake (we can hear the sound of snakes here). In the third part, called *The Last Supper*, water appears as a counterpart to cries of horror and may represent tears, the silent marks of sadness. In the fourth part, *The Garden of Gethsemane*, water plays an important role. We can possibly explain its usage — with the help of Tao — as representing Christ’s reflections on his whole life, at that moment still “fighting with water” before his eventual reconciliation and acceptance of the final judgment and death. The next part — *The Song of Stones* — indicates the origin of the composer very vividly, while the next one, called *Give us Barrabas*, follows the Bible theme. In the first of them, *The Song of Stones*, Tan Dun plays with the opposition of water and stone as an opposition of stable and mobile, strong and weak, permanent and temporal.

In the next part, *Give us Barrabas*, stone seems to claim its superiority over water, making fun of it. The climax of “stone power” takes place in the part named *Death and Earthquake*, where death apparently prevails over life. However, in the last part, *Water and Resurrection*, the winner is — in accordance with the Tao conception — water, because of its power to destroy the stone by permanently falling on it. Thus we can interpret these last two parts, *Death and*

⁵¹ M. A. Lavin, *Piero della Francesca’s Baptism of Christ* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981), 41-42.

Earthquake and *Water and Resurrection*, as an opposition of death and life.⁵² The end of the composition, when the voices gradually join one another creating the stream of human sounds, vividly display the analogy of water and people. However, here Tan Dun works not only with metaphor: he also shows us the metamorphoses of human beings into nature, as the increasing mass of the human-made sound changes into the stream of the flowing and splashing water, calm, clear and transparent. While the stream of people follows a regular rhythm and is assembled from differences in voices, the flow of water is continuous and monotonous. All previous differences and particularities are dissolved with and merged in water. According to Thales, everything emerged from water. According to Tao, everything emerged from Tao and is going to return into it. Tan Dun has said: "For many people, water is a reminder of where they came from and where they want to go."⁵³ It is an obvious fact that a human embryo still grows in water in its mother's body. When listening to music, we can feel the gentle touch of water — our origin and possible end — and once more experience reunion with this wide natural universe for a little while. And it does not matter if we join the universe through the seductive music of Debussy, the feeling of the sublime caused by the music of Smetana, or through thinking with Tao and Tan Dun.

⁵² It is interesting to note that the *St. Matthew Passion* composed by J. S. Bach ends with the scene of Christ's death, while Tan Dun's ends with the resurrection.

⁵³ Galina Stolyarova, *tan dun makes music from water*.