

**Tsang's musical poetry (2018-2020) for *Twisting Ways*
(Winnipeg Jazz Orchestra, 2020)**

A guide through the materials

by Lee Tsang

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ABSTRACT

Tsang's musical poetry (2018-2020) for *Twisting Ways* (Winnipeg Jazz Orchestra, 2020)

Tsang produces musical poetry by improvising vowels to match melodic-harmonic sonorities, taking into account the timbral salience potential and the timbral rhythms of composer source materials, as well as physiological matters relating to vocal resonance. He then improvises images, metaphors and narratives, while continuously evaluating sonority-matching decisions and the consistencies, differences and conflicts that arise between media.

Tsang's work 'The Hand' instigated responses from a) Braid, who improvised accompaniment to Tsang's vocal, and b) Côté, who wrote a piano sketch for which Tsang in turn wrote 'Hope Shadow'. Taken together, Tsang's texts outline 'twisting' path and reflexivity concepts where classical-jazz improvisation processes align with ideas about direction and mutual interdependence from Western Christian religion, Confucian philosophy, and psychoanalysis. A jazz orchestra treatment bears out these concepts as process.

Creating text on the basis of resonance potential offers a 'blueprint' for stimulating response, but a jazz-classical context where creative batons are passed from one to another extends the range of possible divergences in execution. Different singers produce idiosyncratic timbral patterns that must be effectively stitched into the musical fabric, with surrounding fabric reassessed. The performances see shifts in vocal practices from British classical to North American popular; priority resonances are retained and inflections are ornamental to the resonance blueprint; collective re-evaluation of vocal line break points is stimulated by individual performer attributes leading to prioritising the characteristics of timbral registration and narrative above theoretical phonology and original sketch contours.

Whereas traditionally the issue of how words and music relate may appear relatively fixed, in fluid collaborative crossover contexts the nature of the relationship shifts as a result of apparently innocuous impromptu creative decisions. These require interventions in order to mitigate the effects of distorting methodological craft.

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RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research relates to my role as musical poet in the album *Twisting Ways*. It addresses through practice the following questions:

- 1) What kind of appropriate creative methods might a musical poet develop when working in fluid collaborative crossover contexts involving more than one composer?
- 2) How might a musical poet's text and processes simultaneously a) influence composer response, b) develop structural and conceptual coherence and c) convey ideas about classical-jazz improvisation processes?
- 3) In a jazz-classical crossover context, what kinds of creative responses may be stimulated by vocal realisation of musico-poetic texts based on idealised resonance potential?
- 4) How might such creative responses affect a) the relationship between words and music within a work, and b) a musical poet's methodological craft?

Insights from these investigations are summarised in the abstract.

NAVIGATING THE MATERIALS

The purpose of this section is first and foremost to assist readers and listeners through the key materials that go some way to addressing the questions raised above.

The output of the research is a recording of a piece that bears the same name as its album (file 00 *Twisting Ways*). In the following summary account, I provide supporting information, highlighting relationships between documents that contribute to the recording and its context; these documents are supplied as uploaded appendices and grouped accordingly. Appendices A-E show materials from five developmental stages: the two pillars of the work 'The Hand' (2018-2019) and 'Hope Shadow' (2019-20), the orchestrated first complete full version of the work *Alliance* (2019-20), the renamed work *Twisting Ways* with 'poet's cut' assignment of titles to mastertracks of the complete recording, and then contextually-relevant work in *Beyond Twisting Ways* (2020). These lead to the finalised tracks of the full album recording, as shown in Appendix F.

Appendix A focuses on my collaboration with David Braid on the development of a new vocal work which I entitled 'The Hand'. In response to a piano sketch supplied by Braid (A1), I wrote a strophic text (A2) which we performed together with accompaniment improvisations on two different occasions, first at the premiere for which I have supplied the recording (A3) and later in a trio version for which I have supplied the additional cello part (A4).

Appendix B focuses primarily on my collaboration with the composer-conductor Philippe Côté. A new commission by the Winnipeg Jazz Orchestra (WJO) led to a collaboration between Côté and Braid, which was supported by a grant from the Canada Council for the Arts. Braid recommended our song 'The Hand' as a possible basis for the new work and in response Côté suggested a sketch that could form the basis of his contribution (B1). I was invited to write words for this second piece with the challenge of finding a way to make the two composers' contributions cohere as a whole. I responded with 'Hope Shadow' (B2), provided an annotation of my word-setting (B3-1) and corresponded with detailed notes about: (i) word-setting and process in 'Hope Shadow'; (ii) narrative in both 'The Hand' and 'Hope Shadow'; (iii) performance guidance for singers of 'Hope Shadow'; (iv) ordering of texts and possible differences with poetry performance contexts (B3-2). All of these notes were intended to be instructive from a performance perspective and they serve to clarify the complementarity of the texts/pieces. My notes on process, particularly where I describe my approach of 'phonetic anchoring', had a significant role in inspiring approaches to the scoring development of the work.

Appendix C focuses on the first complete version of the work written for jazz orchestra and voice. This score was initially entitled *Alliance*, which was the name attached to the original WJO commission; a revised version of the score subsequently renamed it *Twisting Ways* and that is the version supplied here (C1). As we approached the performance, I provided programme notes (C2-1) as a supplement to the programme distributed by the WJO (C2-2); the premiere was sung by jazz singer Karly Epp (C2-3) with Côté conducting. Further performances, including a smaller scale version featuring the voice of Norma Winstone (24-25 April 2020, Copenhagen) were planned, but did not take place as a result of the pandemic COVID-19. Plans for recording were also disrupted by the pandemic, so our strategy for a recording was to record the band first and to insert the voice track later. We explored a number of different solo voices during this period, each of which brought distinct qualities to – and challenges for – the work. In order to assist in the instruction, I supplied a recorded spoken recitation for 'The Hand' (C3) as an example of how the text may be read and

provided advice relating to specifics of technical and interpretative solutions in sung contexts. The result of this may be heard in a partial version of the work sung by the opera singer Jessica Strong on the soundtrack of an interview for Winnipeg Jazz Orchestra (C4). In that interview, which was led by Dr Richard Gillis, Braid and Côté discuss their collaboration and my role in the project, briefly highlighting how my contribution impacted on the work's coherence, depth and development.

Appendix D focuses on matters raised when the recording reached its mastering stage. At this time, I was invited to supply possible titles. I have indicated these with reference to where the tracks correspond with the score, along with the rationale (D1). The tracks (D2-D8) are supplied here with the titles in order to give an indication of the effect of track divisions and signalling on the listener experience. The recording as heard here features the voice of the versatile singer Sarah Slean. This version involved collective re-evaluations of vocal line break points and a prioritisation of timbral registration characteristics and narrative emerged.

Appendix E relates to other items on the album, notably *Lydian Sky* – a pre-existing composition of Braid's (E1-5) for which I wrote a text (E2) that inspired a new orchestration (E3-1, E3-2). The foreword of the text (E2) explains the relationship to the piece *Twisting Ways* and some of the ways in which my compositional process has developed since *Twisting Ways*. A recording of the new version, supplied here, features the voice of Epp (E4). By contrast, Côté's *Fleur Variation* (E5), which similarly features Epp, is a work that I did not have direct involvement in; however, it is included in the appendices for the sake of the album's contextual completeness. The balanced complementarity that is embodied within the main album work *Twisting Ways* is reflected in the provision of these supplementary pieces (one by each composer). Listeners may wish to consider the extent to which Côté's response to my text(s) in *Twisting Ways* (as I identified in C4), may have influenced Braid's response to my text of *Lydian Sky*; they may also wish to consider the extent to which phonological processes that I used in *Twisting Ways* (described by Côté as inspiring in C4) may have impacted on the non-text vocalisations and orchestrations of Côté's *Fleur Variation*.

Appendix E6 shows how the poetry on the album features also within my growing collection of musical poetry *Songs of Light and Air* which has emerged as a result of the jazz-classical collaborations associated with Braid and Côté'. The foreword and other poems in the collection provide some context to the creation of the album's poetic texts. All of the poems in the collection are to some extent the product of my compositional process, which involves: a) improvising vowels to match melodic-harmonic sonorities; b) taking into account timbral salience potential and the timbral rhythms of composer source materials; c) physiological matters relating to vocal resonance; d) improvising images, metaphors and narratives; e) continuously evaluating sonority-matching decisions as well as consistencies, differences and conflicts that arise between media.

Appendix F shows the finalised album with track titles as expected for commercial release (F1-6).

DISSEMINATION

1 'The Hand' premiere at Open Circuit, Victoria Gallery and Museum, University of Liverpool (Lee Tsang, baritone; David Braid, piano) as part of a concert featuring other texts by Tsang, including 'Air' (after Braid's *Corona Divinae Misericordiae*), 13.03.2019.

2 'The Hand' performed by Patricia O'Callaghan and David Braid. 'Sweet Stolen Hours: David Braid and Patricia O'Callaghan', Aeolian Hall, London Ontario, 14.07.2019.

3 'The Hand' at CIME (Contemporary International Music Exchange) final concert, 23rd Edition of Casalmaggiore Festival 2019 (Lee Tsang, baritone; David Braid, piano; Bo Peng, cello), Aula Magna di Santa Chiara (9.45pm), 25.7.2019.

4 Classic 107. Pianist David Braid and conductor Philippe Côté were on Morning Light! [discussing Tsang 9.33-10.27], 15.11.2019. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jh07kmx_HOg

5. *Alliance* premiere (including 'Hope Shadow' text premiere). *Alliance*, Winnipeg Jazz Orchestra, Karly Epp (voice), David Braid (piano), Philippe Côté (conductor), Seven Oaks Performing Centre, 711 Jefferson Avenue, Winnipeg, 17.11.2019.

7. *Alliance* Interview, Philippe Côté, David Braid, Winnipeg Jazz Orchestra [includes extract discussing Lee Tsang; performance with voice of Jessica Strong], 25.10.2020. <https://vimeo.com/463820003>

8. *Twisting Ways [poet's cut]* album master tracks 23.11.2020: Winnipeg Jazz Orchestra, Sarah Slean (voice), David Braid (piano) shared to University of Liverpool depository November 2020.

9. Supporting materials and finalised album tracks for commercial release supplied to University of Liverpool repository November/December 2020,

10. Commercial release of *Twisting Ways* album, forthcoming 2021.

LIST OF APPENDICES

A Developmental Phase 1: 'The Hand' (2018-2019)

A1 'New ballad' piano sketch by David Braid (2018)

A2 'The Hand' (text) by Lee Tsang (2018, rev. 2019)

A3 Premiere performance of 'The Hand' Lee Tsang (baritone), David Braid (piano), 13.03.2019, Open Circuit, VGM, University of Liverpool

A4 'The Hand' Casalmaggiore trio version, cello part by David Braid and Lee Tsang, 25.07.2019

B Developmental Phase 2: 'Hope Shadow' (2019-20)

B1 Piano sketch response to 'The Hand' by Philippe Côté (2019)

B2 'Hope Shadow' (text) by Lee Tsang (2019)

B3-1 'Hope Shadow' sketch word setting (to Côté's original melodic contours) by Lee Tsang (2019)

B3-2 Performance notes for 'Philippe Côté by Lee Tsang (2019-20)

C Developmental Phase 3: *Alliance* (2019-20)

C1 *Alliance* [*Twisting Ways*] score by Braid, Côté, Tsang (2019)

C2-1 Programme notes for *Alliance* (2019) by Lee Tsang

C2-2 C2-2 WJO programme 17.11.2019

C2-3 Event publicity of *Alliance* premiere with Karly Epp (voice) 17.11.2019

C3 Spoken recitation of 'The Hand' by Lee Tsang 04.06.2020

C4 *Alliance* Interview, Philippe Côté, David Braid, Winnipeg Jazz Orchestra [extract discussing Lee Tsang; performance featuring voice of Jessica Strong], 25.10.2020

D Development Phase 4: *Twisting Ways* [poet's cut] (master tracks 23.11.2020)

Musical Poetry: Lee Tsang

Music: David Braid, Philippe Côté

Winnipeg Jazz Orchestra, Sarah Slean (voice), David Braid (piano), Philippe Côté (conductor)

Audio editors: Paul Johnson and Philippe Côté

Mastered by Guy Hébert of Karisma Audio

D1 Track titles and rationale by Lee Tsang (November 2020)

D2 *Twisting Ways* [poet's cut] Track 1 Oscar's Rose

D3 *Twisting Ways* [poet's cut] Track 2 Flight

D4 *Twisting Ways* [poet's cut] Track 3 Dialogues

D5 *Twisting Ways* [poet's cut] Track 4 Confucian Drift

D6 *Twisting Ways* [poet's cut] Track 5 Light Giver

D7 *Twisting Ways* [poet's cut] Track 6 Jungian Twists

D8 *Twisting Ways* [poet's cut] Track 7 Hope's Shadow

E Development Phase 5: Beyond *Twisting Ways* (2020)

E1 *Lydian Sky* source materials by David Braid

E1-1 Piano, *Lydian Sky* (2003)

E1-2 Flugel Horn, *Lydian Sky* (2003)

E1-3 Tenor Sax, *Lydian Sky* (2003)

E1-4 *Lydian Sky* from the album *Zhen--David Braid Sextet Live Vol. II* (2005)

E1-5 *Lydian Sky* leadsheet (2020) [post-consultation]

E2 *Lydian Sky* (text) by Lee Tsang (2020)

E3-1 *Lydian Sky* leadsheet (Karly's Key) by Braid and Tsang (2020)

E3-2 *Lydian Sky* score and parts by Braid, ed. Tsang (2020)

E4 *Twisting Ways* [poet's cut] album Track 8 *Lydian Sky* (master tracks 23.11.2020) - Winnipeg Jazz Orchestra, Karly Epp (voice)

E5 *Twisting Ways* [poet's cut] album Track 9 *Fleur Variation* (master tracks 23.11.2020) - Winnipeg Jazz Orchestra, Karly Epp (voice)

E6 *Songs of Light and Air* (2017-2020) by Lee Tsang

F *Twisting Ways* (2020) - finalised album tracks for commercial release

Musical Poetry: Lee Tsang

Music: David Braid, Philippe Côté

Winnipeg Jazz Orchestra, Sarah Slean (voice), David Braid (piano), Philippe Côté (conductor)

Audio editors: Paul Johnson and Philippe Côté

Mastered by Guy Hébert of Karisma Audio

F1 *Twisting Ways* Track 1 *Twisting Ways – The Hand*

F2 *Twisting Ways* Track 2 *Twisting Ways – Dialogue*

F3 *Twisting Ways* Track 3 *Twisting Ways – Opening Glimmers*

F4 *Twisting Ways* Track 4 *Twisting Ways – Hope Shadow*

F5 *Twisting Ways* Track 5 *Lydian Sky*

F6 *Twisting Ways* Track 6 *Fleur Variation*