

Du Yun to be featured on YSU's virtual Pipino Series February 24

by Daniel Hathaway



What should viewers expect when they tune in to composer/performer/curator Du Yun's master class and presentation on the Donald Pipino Performing Arts Series from Cliffe College at Youngstown State University on February 24?

Publicist Maggie Stapelton described this fascinating artist last October in a press release for one of New York's Bang on a Can Marathons:

Du Yun has a secret life. Several secret lives, actually — she is not only a composer of socially activated opera but she is also a pop diva, an extreme improviser, a high energy new music storyteller. When she performs her own music on the Marathon, at least one of these personalities will be on display.

A native of Shanghai, China who took up the piano at the age of four, Du Yun studied composition with Randolph Coleman at the Oberlin Conservatory, going on

after graduation to study at Harvard, where she earned a master's and a doctorate in composition with Bernard Rands and Mario Davidovsky.

Northeast Ohio had its most recent look at Du Yun's work when Oberlin Winter Term Opera gave five sold-out performances of her Pulitzer Prize-winning work *Angel's Bone* in late January and early February of 2018. The opera, directed by Christopher Mirto, explores a dark topic with alluring words and music. In a [preview](#) for this publication, Jarrett Hoffman wrote,

It's hard to say what's most interesting about the new opera Angel's Bone, which will receive its second-ever performance next week in Oberlin. It could be the music of Oberlin Conservatory alum Du Yun, which incorporates punk rock, cabaret, and electronics. It could be the libretto by Royce Vavrek, which examines sexual slavery and trafficking through a prism of magical realism. Or maybe it's the challenge for performers of portraying the perpetrators of those crimes, making them human.

In his [review](#) of one of the performances, Nicholas Stevens wrote,

For its musical coherence amid stylistic variety and its conveyance of ugly truths, Angel's Bone deserves its Pulitzer.

Last Friday, I joined Olivia Fink, a student in my Oberlin Music Journalism class, for a Zoom conversation with Du Yun, who was in Ghana where the temperature was 37 degrees celsius, serving as a mentor for her Forecast Platform for Audacious Minds. She was also microcommissing, holding electronic music workshops for village kids, and meeting with traditional folk musicians, in addition to conducting virtual auditions for the Peabody Conservatory. "I believe that every kid should have access to experimentation," she said, although she admits that her teaching philosophy reflects the fact that she wasn't a perfect student herself.

"Far from perfect," she added. "I don't think I cared for good grades, which are very important in China. But I loved being in Oberlin, a very tight-knit community where my ass was always being kicked non-stop by people who were smarter than me. But Oberlin gave me the breathing space to experiment."

Even so, certain aspects of American academia were entirely foreign to her. "During my first semester, I was horrified that I had to do an assignment for Mr. Coleman. I didn't understand assignments, so I wouldn't do them."

Harvard was a radically different environment from that of Oberlin. "I hated it," she said, "but now I'm grateful. I got a free ride there and I don't have any debt. Harvard

was my first time out of a conservatory since I was four, and ICE [the International Contemporary Ensemble, founded at Oberlin but then in residence at Harvard] was my lifeline.”

During her brief residency at YSU on February 24, Du Yun said she will play one of her works and hear students perform their own compositions during a 2:00 pm master class, and share some of her recent projects and talk about Future Tradition Initiatives in an evening presentation at 7:00 pm. She looks forward to reconnecting with YSU Cello Professor Kivvie Cahn-Lipman. “I’ve known him for a long time both at Oberlin and in the ICEEnsemble.” Tune in [here](#) to the free webcasts.

For more insights into Du Yun and her artistic philosophy, visit the Oberlin Music Journalism Class [website](#) to read Olivia Fink’s account of our recent joint conversation.

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