

Program Notes for *Piano Island*

Piano Island, more correctly called *Gulangyu*, is located just offshore of the city of Xiamen, in Southern China. *Gulangyu* is more of an islet than an island, covering just 1.78 kilometers in area, and can be easily circumnavigated on foot. In deference to its peaceful setting, only pedestrian and bicycle traffic is allowed on *Gulangyu*, which is only a short ferry ride away from a vibrant and bustling city.

Gulangyu literally means 'drum-wave islet', a name derived from the beating of ocean waves on the shore. The islet was settled by Europeans during the early twentieth century, and their homes included pianos. Residents on the mainland could hear Western piano music drifting from the open windows of the European mansions on the islet and across the lapping water. This duet, then, is a kind of imaginary evening walk around the islet and through a century of time, listening to piano music that is mixed with the sound of the surging surf and the music of Chinese street musicians.

The duet begins with the music of the surging surf, which is heard in the low register of the secondo piano. This musical gesture serves as a ritornello throughout the piece, creating a big Rondo form. Mixed in with the surf music, (or in one instance, the ocean breeze in the pine trees), are fragments from well-known classical pieces, often played by amateur pianists in their homes. The fragments range from Czerny to Grieg and include the music of Chopin and Clementi. The listener is invited to identify the musical fragments 'borrowed' from the standard Western classical repertoire. It should also be noted that China's largest piano museum is currently located on *Gulangyu*.

This is the premiere performance of *Piano Island*. Written by Dr. Kenneth Nichols in 2010, Dr. Nichols has drawn on his recent experiences and studies in China where he lived and taught in Nanjing for eighteen months. The composer has dedicated this piece to this evening's performers, Claudette Caron and Yvonne Ingram.