Research Grant – Spring 2009

Title or Proposal: Research Funding for Fulbright Residency in Asia
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Unit: School of Music

Abstract:
The application is to request additional funds for my Fulbright Residency in Taiwan. While the foundation provides partial living/relocation funding for the grantee and family, funds needed for conducting research are not provided, (short of a small incidental allowance.) Since my research is for the creation of a “multimedia” book, it is necessary to purchase audio/video recording technology for my field recordings of the interviews and instrument demonstrations.

Proposal: The primary purpose of my Fulbright Taiwan residence would be to conduct research for the foundation of my intended book, "Writing for Chinese Instruments: orchestral and philosophical approaches for western composers"; this book will also include an interactive DVD-ROM. In order to prepare this book, I will need to conduct in-depth interviews with performers on every major Chinese instrument and make video recordings of them demonstrating many of the instrument’s technical and timbral capabilities. In addition, I will also conduct a literature review of available scores and recordings that could be also used as musical (both notational and aural) examples for the book and DVD-ROM. One other element of my research will be to interview several composers, conductors, and performers on the aspects of contemporary music for Chinese instruments and the collaboration Chinese and western instruments. My desire is to create a book that will guide western composers on the challenge of writing for instruments with very different mechanics and philosophical aspects than western instruments. It would comparatively demonstrate the similarities, parallelisms and vast differences western instrumental techniques have with eastern instruments. Philosophical understanding and context will be a central discussion in the book. While not a textbook, my handbook will borrow some of the format consideration from known western orchestration books, to make it easier for self-study. An important element that to be included with the text will be an interactive DVD-ROM which contains video recordings of each instrument, with comprehensive techniques and musical examples so the western composer can have both an aural and visual understanding of the instrument. The inclusion of multimedia material with an orchestration book is a very successful technique in western instrumentation texts; this is most notable in Samuel Adler’s “The Study of Orchestration”. However, unlike western texts, where most composers typically have a strong
prior acquaintance with the instruments, the interactive DVD-ROM will valuable in my text in introducing most western composers to instruments that they have no direct live experience. Unlike Ethnomusicological texts and multimedia, whose primary role is to introduce the instrument and discuss its historical and cultural aspects, my text’s role is to show how to compose for these instruments, demonstrating the full technical and timbral potential and limits. However, the text will also continuously emphasize the unique philosophical outlook of the performer, tied to Chinese musical tradition.

While there are many current texts in available in Chinese on the subject of Chinese instrument orchestration, there are few available in English (and none which utilize an interactive DVD-ROM.) Also pertinent, is that the Chinese texts address the subject primarily to readers whom already understand the philosophical aspects of Chinese music; whereas my text will be geared at an audience that primarily understands 3 western music only, and will then contrast Chinese philosophical approaches to western approaches. This project fulfills the global and technological initiatives of the University, and has a specialization on new music compositions, fulfilling the College’s focus on “the contemporary.”