DARWIN’S THOUGHT

A THESIS IN
Music Composition

Presented to the Faculty of the University
of Missouri-Kansas City in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree

MASTER OF MUSIC

by
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B.A., Hong Kong Baptist University, 2013

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ABSTRACT

It is difficult to describe accurately the bond between humans and society. Our current society is morphing at such a gradual pace that no one seems to notice many changes. Those changes, however, accumulate and in fact exert great pressure on our lives. Humans are pushed to take action when pressures reach a threshold, and this creates conflicts that can tear society apart. 2014 was a harsh year for my home city, Hong Kong. The people launched a series of political movements, asking the unpopular government to restore and respect their civil rights. While the people were demonstrating on the streets, the government replied with violent actions, which left me angry and disappointed. From these events, I realized that our social environment has the power to greatly influence individuals to conform to societal norms. On the positive side of this, we continue to learn to understand the world throughout our lives. On the darker side, our ever-changing society can force us to modify our standards and our behavior, so that we can avoid losing our place in the society in which we live.

As a result, most humans find themselves situated in a passive condition, with
little choice but to reshape their lives according to an acceptable social standard in order to continue to exist. This notion is similar to Darwin’s idea of Natural Selection, which is disturbingly accurate in pointing out current social trends and issues. I was inspired by these books to compose a set of songs that satirizes our current condition. The piece has eight movements: a prelude, six songs and a postlude. The text of the first four songs uses nature as a metaphor to depict the human world; that of last two songs directly describes human nature. The piece has a dark and disturbing quality, which creates an ironic effect.
APPROVAL PAGE

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the Conservatory of Music and Dance have examined a thesis titled “Darwin’s Thought,” presented by Ka Shu Tam, candidate for the Master of Music degree, and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

Supervisory Committee

James Mobberley, DMA, Committee Chair
Conservatory of Music and Dance

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CHAPTER 1
DARWIN’S THOUGHT

Instrumentation: Soprano, Piano, String Quartet

Text (All text is in public domain)

II. Every being must suffer destruction during some period of its life, otherwise, its numbers would quickly become so great, so great.

III. As many more individuals of each species are produced than can possibly survive; and consequently, there is a frequently recurring struggle for existence.

IV. Birds, which are idly singing round us, mostly live on insects or seeds; and are constantly destroying life.

V. We must allow for the entire extinction of some preceding forms. As new species in the course of time are formed through natural selection, others will become rarer and rarer, and extinct!

VI. The lower animals, like man, manifestly feel pleasure and pain, happiness and misery. There is no fundamental difference between man and mammals in their mental faculties.

VII. The highest stage in moral culture at which we can arrive, is when we recognise that we ought to control our thoughts.
DARWIN'S THOUGHT

I. PRELUDE

Ka Shu Tam

Piano

\( \text{poco e poco accel.} \quad (q = 110) \)

\( \text{Pianissimo} \)

Strong, Forceful

\( \text{ff} \quad \text{fervido} \)

\( \text{Vln. I} \)

\( \text{Vln. II} \)

\( \text{Vla.} \)

\( \text{Vc.} \)

\( \text{Pno.} \)

\( \text{ff} \quad \text{fervido} \)
Darwin's Thought

II. Destruction

Saturninely

\( \frac{q}{60} \)
Darwin's Thought

would quickly become so great.
Darwin's Thought

III. Consequence

With Confidence

$\text{\textcopyright 2023}$

\begin{align*}
\text{Violin I} & : \quad \text{\textcopyright 2023} \\
\text{Violin II} & : \quad \text{\textcopyright 2023} \\
\text{Viola} & : \quad \text{\textcopyright 2023} \\
\text{Cello} & : \quad \text{\textcopyright 2023} \\
\text{Soprano} & : \quad \text{\textcopyright 2023} \\
\text{Piano} & : \quad \text{\textcopyright 2023} \\
\end{align*}
Darwin's Thought

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

S

Pno.

Darwin’s Thought

and consequently,
Darwin's Thought

there is a frequently recurring struggle for existence.
IV. Birds

Darwin’s Thought

Very Sweetly

\( \frac{q = 60}{p} \)

ten. \( \text{rit.} \) \( \text{a tempo} \)

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Cello

Soprano

Piano

\[ \text{Birds which are idly singing round us, most likely live on} \]

\( \text{cantiabile very freely} \)

\( \text{pa tempo} \)
Darwin's Thought

insects or seeds; and

are constantly, constantly,
Darwin's Thought

Sensa Misura

strike as much keys as possible! hold until fades away
Darwin's Thought

V. Extinct

Agitated

\( q = 90 \)

\( \text{pizz.} \)

\( \text{V. Extinct} \)
Darwin's Thought

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

S

Pno.

18
Darwin's Thought

We must allow for the entire extinction of some preceding forms.
As new species in the course of time are
formed through natural selection,
Darwin's Thought
Darwin's Thought

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

S

Pno.

ra - re, and ex - tint, ex - tint, ex - tint!

and
Darwin's Thought

VI. Man and Animals

Narratively

\( \text{without vibrato} \)

\( \text{without vibrato} \)

\( p \)

\( p \)
Darwin’s Thought

The lower animals, like man, manifestly feel pleasure and pain,
Darwin's Thought

is no fundamental difference

between man and man.
Darwin's Thought

Vln. I

Vln. II

subito \( p \)

Vla.

subito \( p \)

Vc.

\( a \text{ tempo} \)

P without vibrato

S

\( p \)
in their

Pno.

\( p \)

Vln. I

Vln. II

sul tasto

sul tasto

Vla.

Vc.

Pno.

men - - - tal fa - cul - ties

28
Darwin's Thought

VII and VIII. Moral and Postlude

\[ \text{q} = 50 \]

Seriously, with mild sonority

The highest stage in moral culture at which we can arrive.
Darwin's Thought

is when we

ought to control our thoughts.

rearnise that we
Darwin's Thought

With uncertainty

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

S

Pno.

pp with unstable vibrato

with uncertainty
Ka-Shu (Kenneth) Tam was born in December 19, 1991, in Hong Kong. After graduating from a local high school in 2010, Tam entered Hong Kong Baptist University to study music composition. Tam completed his Bachelor of Arts in Music Composition with first class honor in 2013. He continued his study at the University of Missouri - Kansas City in 2013, pursuing the Masters of Music degree in Music Composition. His major composition teachers include James Mobberley, Zhou Long, Chen Yi, Paul Rudy, Christopher Keyes and Christopher Coleman.

Tam’s works have been performed across the world, including Hong Kong, the USA and Greece, and have also received radio broadcasts. His work “Discussion: (Somewhat) Meaningless Sound for somewhat Profound Listeners” won the third prize in the New Generation 2012 Competition. He won the Speech Choir Young Composer Award with his “Ideal Reality”, which was commissioned by the Hong Kong Education Bureau as a set piece for the 2012/2013 Speech Choir Showcase in Hong Kong.