

# FIVE FORMOSA SONGS - PROGRAM

WORLD PREMIERE ONLINE

December 22 @ 7:30p.m. AST

December 23 @ 7:30a.m. TST

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## FIVE FORMOSA SONGS

五首美麗島之歌



MAUREEN BATT • TARA SCOTT

CHIA YIN WU 吳佳音 • CHEN MO LIN 林沈默



WORLD PREMIÈRE ONLINE • 線上世界首演

DECEMBER 22, 7:30PM AST • 大西洋時區：12月22日晚上7:30

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CROSSING  
BORDERS

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Conseil des arts  
du Canada

Canada Council  
for the Arts



Maureen Batt, soprano

Tara Scott, piano

Chia Yin Wu, composer

Chen Mo Lin, poet

Jeremy VanSlyke, producer, post-production

Ally Cribb, assistant recording engineer

Luke Fraser, director

Chin Yi Lin, poster artwork

Chia Yin Wu, English poetic translations

Phín-tsì Kí, lyric diction coach, copy editing, translation

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## PROGRAM NOTES

In the 16th century, Portuguese sailors spotted Taiwan, back then an uncharted island, and dubbed it “Ilha Formosa”, which means “beautiful island”. *Five Formosa Songs* is an exploration into the sound world of the traditional music of Taiwanese Hokkien, delving into its idiomatic phrasings and use of intervals, among others. It is also an artistic exchange with the art song tradition in the West, probing possibilities on how the two traditions might influence and enrich one another.

Through the penetrating texts by celebrated Taiwanese poet Chen Mo Lin, this song cycle seeks to portray ordinary scenes of everyday life, and to unveil pressing social/political issues in Taiwan’s past and present, from the long colonial shadow cast upon the island nation to environmentalism.

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## BIOGRAPHIES

### **Maureen Batt, soprano**

Maureen Batt, soprano, is a recording artist, artistic director, and educator. Maureen’s career focuses on celebrating music by living composers through her opera company Essential Opera co-founded in 2010, her concert series Crossing Borders founded in 2015, and her award-winning discography which includes two-time ECMA-winning *Lighthouse* (with Grej); JUNO-nominated *Breathing in the Shadows; Durme, Durme: Four Ladino Folk Songs; Aunt Helen; Mirror, Mirror; and Lady of the Lake*. Her latest releases with Essential Opera are *Etiquette* and *December*. She has performed throughout Canada, and in the United States, Italy, and Colombia. She has a Master of Music from the University of Toronto, a Bachelor of Music from Dalhousie University, and a Bachelor of Arts in languages from St. Thomas University. She serves on the national board for the Canadian Music Centre. As an educator, Maureen specializes in embodied voice and gender affirming voice work. In her various leadership positions, she is an advocate of accessibility and inclusion.

### **Tara Scott, piano**

Tara Scott is one of Atlantic Canada’s most renowned collaborative pianists. Her love of teaching and performing has led her to pursue collaborative pianist positions at Dalhousie, Western, Acadia, and Mount Allison. Tara is co-artistic director of OperAtlantic, co-founder of Halifax Summer Opera Festival and primary music director/pianist of Maritime Concert Opera. She has performed with Essential Opera, Eastern Front/Neptune, DalOpera and Opera Nova Scotia. “Tara Scott is a consummate artist and her dependably flawless piano accompaniments of full-length operas is inspiring” (Opera Canada). She received a Merritt Award for music direction of KAMP. Tara is featured on the 2022 JUNO-nominated album *Breathing in the Shadows*, and *Durme, Durme: Four Ladino Folk Songs* with soprano Maureen Batt. Her discography also includes Essential Opera’s recordings of *Etiquette* and *December*. She is on faculty at the Maritime Conservatory of Performing Arts and has adjudicated music festivals throughout the Maritimes.

## Chia Yin Wu 吳佳音, composer

Chia Yin Wu is a Taiwanese-Canadian composer whose musical journey began in the sanctuary of a rural Presbyterian church in Kaohsiung, Taiwan, where she was immersed in the Protestant tradition of congregational and choral singing and attempted her earliest musical compositions. She studied piano and voice at the National Taiwan Academy of Arts under Jin Man Lin and Mewas Lin, composition at McGill University where her mentors were Brian Cherney, Jean Lesage and Christoph Neidhöfer, and theology at Knox College, University of Toronto. Her music is performed in Canada, Taiwan, and Malaysia.

## Chen Mo Lin 林沈默, poet

Acclaimed by critics as “the new summit of Taiwanese literature” and a forerunner of Taiwan’s New Social Realism school, poet and novelist Chen Mo Lin is a co-founder of BaZhang River Periodical and author of more than 10 poetry collections. Chen Mo’s long career in the media has seen him in roles such as former chief editor of Han Guang Periodical and China Times Weekly. He is a strong advocate for Taiwanese literature and since the 80s has dedicated himself to cultivating its growth through creating contemporary poetry, folk rhymes and children’s poetry in Taiwanese (tâi-gí). His distinctions include the ROC Young Poet Award, Chinese Literature Narrative Poetry Award, and Wu Zhuoliu Literature Award.

## Phín-tsì Kí, lyric diction coach

Phín-tsì Kí is a Taiwanese-Canadian linguist, translator-interpreter, and educator. He holds an MA in Linguistics from Leiden University in the Netherlands. He is an ATIO-certified English-Chinese translator and an affiliated member of the Canadian Translators, Terminologists, and Interpreters Council. He also works as a community interpreter, assisting people in communicating and accessing social, legal, and healthcare services in Toronto's multicultural society. While he speaks multiple languages, Taiwanese holds a special place in his work. He is a lecturer at the Toronto Taiwan Language Centre and the co-founder of *Bite-size Taiwanese*, a podcast and independent publisher of Taiwanese language materials. He authored *Short Takes: A Scene-based Taiwanese Vocabulary Builder*, co-translated *Featured Cases of Sherlock Holmes* (from English into Taiwanese), and co-edited Yang Chian-Ho's *The Season When Flowers Bloom*, a Taiwanese-English-Chinese-Japanese quadrilingual edition.

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## ARTISTIC DIRECTOR NOTE

Crossing Borders is a concert series founded by Maureen Batt that features contemporary music by living Canadian composers and musical artists from around the world. With themes of compassion, contemplation, beauty, loneliness, darkness, healing, and warmth, the pieces presented in this series mirror both modern societal views and ancient cultural contexts through the lenses of humour, hope, and nostalgia. Its mission is to celebrate new, Canadian works, while also honouring people and voices from our past, connecting the past-present-future through shifting lenses and layers.

Art song is a featured genre on this recital series, but programs also often include opera, musical theatre, and electronics. So far, Crossing Borders has given 18 world premières. We gratefully acknowledge the support of the Canada Council for the Arts and Arts Nova Scotia for the commissioning and creation of this video performance.

### **A personal note:**

This collaboration began in 2021 with a conversation about a new song cycle. Years later, I have developed new friendships and deepened existing ones. I am indebted to the entire team for trusting me with this collaboration and for supporting me throughout its stages. Thank you, Chen Mo, for giving us permission to use your beautiful and evocative poetry. It has been an immense privilege to spend time with your words. I am grateful to have been a part of an artistic collaboration that celebrates Taiwan, its people, culture, and language. A special thank-you to Victor Tung for language coaching in 2023-2024 and for introducing me to the soundscape of this language. Phín-tsì, thank you for the extensive work you have put into this project as a lyric diction coach, linguistics consultant, and translator. Your dedication to this song cycle and to making the material accessible to me has been monumental. Tara, thank you for saying yes to this project, and for your lustrous and extraordinary talent; I always feel like I can do anything when you're by my side.

Chia Yin, thank you for asking me to interpret and perform this rich and intricate piece.

Thank you for inviting me into such a monumental journey and exchange. Your generosity, patience, and compassion have made this one of the most meaningful creative collaborations in my career.

Thank you to Jeremy VanSlyke and Leaf Music for this video performance and our upcoming studio release of the song cycle as an EP. We wanted to be able to share this music with everyone. Thank you for giving this a home with Leaf Music.

~Maureen Batt

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## TEXTS AND TRANSLATIONS

**Chia Yin:** Taiwanese art songs and song cycles have always been a product of fusion between the East and the West because it is not a local art form. So, this habit of absorbing new things from the West, and merging them with our own is not uncommon. What I find fascinating musically—and this has more to do with Western classical music in general than with classical art songs specifically—is to play with two prominent musical features from two cultures: melody from the Taiwanese side and harmony from Western classical music. It is fascinating because traditional Taiwanese music with Chinese origin, such as the music of Taiwanese Hokkien, which we explored in the score, doesn't technically have a concept of harmony. So, the fun for me was to explore how I could incorporate harmony in a way that does not clash, but support and maybe even spark new possibilities within Taiwanese melodies and Western harmony. Another thing that I find very enjoyable about classical art song is its versatility. It could do pretty much everything: it could be poetic, it could be narrative, it could be thematic in all kinds of ways. You could use it to highlight a singular moment, or you could use it to tell a story, maybe even an extensive story if you are writing a song cycle. So this versatility and flexibility have definitely influenced how I approach song writing.

**Chia Yin:** When I went through Chen Mo's poetry collection, I was very excited to find that it was like a kaleidoscope with colourful and floating pieces that when put together became a vibrant picture of life in Taiwan. And I felt that maybe with these poems, I could construct a musical kaleidoscope that could give the listeners a tiny glimpse of life in Taiwan, its history, its way of life, and issues that concern its people. So, I selected 5 poems in this collection that I felt personally connected to both in terms of the subject matter and the suitability of being set to music. And then I constructed an arc to create a sense of progression by building the cycle from light to heavy and then back down to light again.

**Chia Yin:** Like perhaps the majority of traditional East Asian music, Taiwanese Hokkien music is pentatonic. So pentatonic scales are the backbone of this piece. The score, especially the vocal part, is heavily pentatonic. Apart from that, some of the examples of Taiwanese musical features in this score are a subtle use of grace notes and characteristic intervallic patterns such as minor third plus a major 2nd and another minor third plus a perfect fourth. So, it sounds like this. That's a very Taiwanese melodic contour.

**Chia Yin:** During our initial conversation I shared with you my belief that genuine curiosity and appreciation toward a culture not our own and the desire to learn from it is a very beautiful thing that could empower both parties -- both artistically and humanly. So, what drives me to want to do this project is really a desire to share, to welcome musicians and listeners who are not from my culture into my culture. And I would like it to be immersive, which means a mix of Taiwanese and non-Taiwanese musicians working together, letting their respective musical cultural practices influence and enrich one another.

I am so blessed to have you, Maureen and Tara, who have such an extensive experience practicing and performing culturally very diverse repertoire. Maureen, you have spent countless hours in learning Taiwanese from scratch, which was really heroic. And we are fortunate to have Victor and Phín-tsì, two excellent diction coaches, who were able to help us a lot in this project. And we've had spirited discussions about the poems, about the culture, the history, the diction, etc. This has definitely been one of the most satisfying collaborative experiences I have ever had.

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**Chen Mo:** This poetry collection has 19 poems in total. I was actually taking The Nineteen Old Poems from classical Chinese literature as a kind of model. The Nineteen Old Poems are very much grounded in ordinary people, the land and everyday life. What I put in this collection more or less comes from those same things.

**Chen Mo:** The poems I write are not meant to make you forget. It's the opposite. Some people write in a way that helps you forget a lot of pain and suffering, to comfort you and make you feel more at ease. But my poems are not. They work the other way around. I want you to remember. Not to forget, but to remember. To remember what has happened on this land, and the signals it has been sending you. To remember the people, the vulnerable and marginalized people, and how much pain they've gone through in their lives, and to approach them with empathy. That's why I write poetry.

**Chen Mo:** I've always wanted to give a voice to this land, because the land can't speak for itself.

**Chen Mo:** When I first started, I was writing in Mandarin. Yes, in Chinese. But even back then, my Chinese was already very close to Taiwanese. Why? Because my writing in Chinese was full of rebellion. By rebellion, I mean I was already thinking about revolution. I had reached a breaking point. At that time in Taiwan, Taiwanese was like...often described as a language "with sounds but no characters", in other words, with no real writing system. There were hardly any dictionaries. And beyond that, there was no space. If you wanted to publish, say, in a newspaper, there was simply no room. Every outlet was blocked. If you wrote in Taiwanese and submitted it, the answer was always no. In the end, everything was shut out. Under those circumstances, you wouldn't really want to write something knowing that no one would publish it or give it a platform. You wouldn't choose to do that. It wasn't until after the Native Literature Debate that things began to change. From roughly the '70s into the '80s, Taiwan went through a series of debates, and a strong sense of local identity began to surge. After that surge, a small group of us—I was one of the earlier ones, about seven or eight poets—began to write in our mother tongue, just to experiment. At the time, there were only a few magazines, like Taiwan Literature, that offered some space. And among newspapers, only the Independence Evening Post had a literary supplement called Local Literature that was willing to publish this kind of work. Little by little, things started to accumulate. That's when we finally dared to begin creating.

**Chen Mo:** I'm definitely very curious. What people know is that Taiwanese has 8 tones. For example, we have this mnemonic chant: "sai hóo pà pih kâu káu tshiūnn lók" ("lion, tiger, leopard, softshell turtle, monkey, dog, elephant, deer") to illustrate the 8 tones, like do-re-mi-fa-sol... Anyways, there are 8 tones, and they are really lively. So this is different from Mandarin. Mandarin has only 4 tones, like in "jiā tíng zhǔ fù" ("housewife"). Just these four. When it comes to Taiwanese, I feel it can express things more vividly than Mandarin.

What I'm most curious about is how these sounds can be expressed by people from other cultures, and how far the flower of our local voice can blossom. That's what I'm really curious about. Of course, I also have big hopes. I hope that Taiwanese culture, and even Taiwanese poetry, can be shared with the whole world. That's my hope. Thank you.

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## POEMS AND TRANSLATIONS

### I. Spring. After Rain

*Wind returns.  
Orchid tree blossoms  
Weep pitifully through the night.*

*Morning comes,  
Magenta petals,  
Sticky and wet,  
Cover the road full like a bedsheet.*

*A street dog,  
Passing by, sniffing along...*

### I. 春日雨後

*風轉來。  
羊蹄甲花，  
慘感哭歸暝。*

*早起時，  
桃紅花瓣，  
黏黏濕濕，  
貼滿道路的床巾。*

*一隻流浪狗，  
沿路鼻，沿路行過...*

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## II. Tea. Pondering

*Brewing a cup of tea,  
As I ponder the trees, the  
Flowers,  
The verdant mountains, Snow-  
capped,  
The spring flowers, faded,  
The prime of youth, departed,  
Returning no more.*

*Brewing a cup of tea,  
As I ponder the sky,  
And the earth,  
The rustling wind and rain,  
The cascading clouds,  
The ebb and flow of one's  
Days rushing by,  
At the blink of an eye.*

*Brewing a cup of tea,  
As I ponder the time before,  
And after,  
The world mundane at the  
Bottom of the pot,  
The simmering water and fire,  
And the crimson brew steeped  
Thins  
From yellow to pale.*

## II. 看茶

泡一杯茶，  
看樹，看花，  
看青山崁雪，  
看春花謝落，  
看青春一去不再回。

泡一杯茶，  
看天，看地，  
看風雨吵過，  
看雲煙流過，  
看風雲雙雙轉眼過。

泡一杯茶，  
看前，看尾，  
看紅塵鼎底，  
看水火煎洗，  
看紅水三杯黃反白。

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## III. Tshiah-khàm Tower. Autumn Moon

*The sound of ginger-haired builders laying bricks,  
The sound of Koxinga's battle drums,  
The sound of the Duck King sharpening knives,  
The sound of the Qing Dynasty Magistrate,  
Settling a case,  
The sound of Japanese soldiers wailing in pain,  
The sound of Kuomintang running for dear life.*

*Autumn, 2009,  
Lady Moon, golden and plump,  
With her gentle, motherly face,  
Kisses this flash point in history—the tower.*

## III. 赤崁秋月

聽過紅毛師疊磚的聲，  
聽過鄭國姓戰鼓的聲，  
聽過鴨母王磨刀的聲，  
聽過清知縣斷案的聲，

聽過日本兵病疼的聲，  
聽過國民黨走路的聲。

二〇〇九年，中秋，  
黃金，豐滿的月娘，  
用母親溫純的面龐，

漫著歷史的風火頭。

*Tshiah-khàm, at night,  
One hears only the gentle swishing of the leaves  
From the banyan trees.*

赤崁的暗夜，  
只聽著一陣一陣，  
沙沙沙沙—  
榕仔葉摩擦的聲。

*On the red wall  
Is a black cat,  
Soundlessly  
Tiptoeing by...*

紅牆頂懸，  
一隻烏貓，  
無聲無說，  
站•腳•行•過...

#### IV. My Poetry—for You to See

*My poetry is not  
Written on the clouds.  
My name  
Dwells on soil with humankind.*

#### IV. 我詩予你看

我的詩，  
母是寫在雲端。  
我的名，  
寄佇土地人間。

*My poetry—for you to see,  
Like a street cat  
Lurking in dark alleys,  
It sees—  
The rich, red-faced from too many drinks,  
The poor, stripped to the bone,*

我詩予你看—  
親像野貓彼一般，  
我的詩覩佇暗巷：

*The paper granny, scavenging broken dreams,  
The city life, human devouring human,  
Money biting money.*

看著有錢吶甲面紅紅，  
看著無錢褪甲身空空，  
看著撊紙婆仔收破夢，  
看著都市世界錢咬錢人食人。

*My poetry—for you to see,  
Like a hoe  
Resting upon the edge of the field,  
It sees—  
Twenty four drops of sweat for a grain of rice,  
Three dollars and fifty cents for a pound of oranges,  
Fresh produce laid rotten on the field,  
Farm life crumbling, one step at a time.*

我詩予你看—  
親像鋤頭彼一般，  
我的詩吊佇田岸：  
看著一粒米二四點汗，  
看著柳丁一斤三箇半，  
看著青菜放佇田底爛，  
看著農村草地一步一步崩盤。

*My poetry—for you to see,  
Like a flying squirrel  
Resting upon the high mountains,  
It sees—  
Backhoes ripping open the land for hot springs,  
Rocks and soil roaring up in a thunderous rage,  
Muntjac deer crying out for companions and  
None could be found,  
Ancestral Spirits of the Indigenous Peoples  
Perched,  
Aloof and alone, in the highest place.*

*My poetry—for you to see,  
Like a lighthouse  
Shining upon the harbour,  
It sees—  
Fish farms and salt marshes abandoned,  
Fishermen coming home in empty boats,  
  
Missiles lined up by smiling faces  
Across the Strait,  
The whale-shaped country squeezed  
Like a piece of dried fish.*

*My poetry—for you to see,  
I am an assassin girded with a waist sash,  
Not a gentry wearing a laurel wreath.  
My poems are not a glowing fountain,  
Nor a flowery, dainty vase.  
No perfume, nor romance  
Flow out of my pen,  
Only the smell of dirt and the scent of sweat and toil  
Of ordinary folk.*

*Made with your ancestor's mother tongue,  
My poems are a hand drill for life, and battle,  
Ready to stir and plunge into...  
The unjust hearts of the world.*

*My poetry—for you to see.  
Eh, would you please also  
Your poetry—for me to see!*

我詩予你看—  
親像飛鼠彼一般，  
我的詩歌佇高山：  
  
看著怪手破腹開溫泉，  
看著塗石滾滾來起叛，  
看著山羌啼哭揣無伴，  
  
看著原住民祖靈高處不勝寒。

我詩予你看—  
親像燈塔彼一般，  
我的詩照佇港岸：  
  
看著飼蠻的魚塭鹽灘，  
看著討海人空船畏寒，  
  
看著對岸笑面排飛彈，

看著海翁國家變做一尾魚干。  
  
我詩予你看—  
我是一個縛腳巾的刺客，  
毋是頭戴桂冠的斯文人。  
我的詩毋是七彩噴泉，  
毋做畫山擦水的花盤。  
橫直，我的筆尾，  
無芳水，也揣無浪漫，  
只有土味，恰百姓臭酸汗。

這是用恁祖媽的母語打造，  
生活，戰鬥的扁鑽，  
準備一針刺入...  
挖醒世間不公不義的心肝。

我詩予你看—  
喂，請你嘛詩予我看！

V. A Darn Quiet Spring

*The scorching April wind  
Sweeps through that old hibiscus tree.  
A discarded empty can of Parathion  
Sings in the air...*

*Spring this year,  
No pests are in the rice crops,  
Oranges and mangoes flower early,  
But sadly, no bees are around to do  
The matchmaking.  
Nor are there any frogs,  
And one can't hear the cooing of the turtle dove.  
Butterflies, beetles, dragonflies...  
Who knows where they have  
Gone into hiding?*

*By the ditch,  
Carps, pale chubs  
Have gone belly-up for no reason.  
Eggs of apple snails, one cluster after another,  
Dot the waterway in masses of red terror.*

*Grain Rain,  
No clouds, and no rain.  
On the weedless footpath between paddy fields,  
An old man is patrolling on,  
A sprayer on his back;  
Hunched, with a hacking cough,  
This is a darn quiet spring.*

*A discarded empty can of Parathion  
Sings in the air...*

V. 天壽靜的春天

四月燒風，  
吹過彼欖老棵仔樹。  
巴拉松的空罐仔，  
佇風中唱歌...

今年春天，  
稻仔無病蟲，  
柳丁，欖仔早弄花，  
可惜揣無蜜蜂做媒人。  
四界看無水雞影，  
聽無斑鵠咕咕的聲。  
蝶仔，金龜，田嬰...  
一隻一隻毋知飛去佗藏？

圳溝仔邊，  
鯽仔，溪哥魚，  
無緣無故反了白肚。  
一葩葩福壽螺的卵，  
沿著水路滌開紅色恐怖。

穀雨，  
無雲無雨。  
發袂出雜草的田岸，  
有揹噴霧器的老人，  
隱疴，喘嗽巡過。  
這是一個天壽靜的春天。

巴拉松的空罐仔，  
佇風中唱歌...