

# WIRED



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Deep musical intelligence.  
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**Shih-Hui Chen**  
*Returning Souls*

New World CD

Shih-Hui Chen was born in Taiwan in 1962 and went to the US as a student – she now teaches at Rice University in Texas. Growing up in Taiwan, she mostly studied Western music, but a return study visit to Taiwan in 2010 emphasised her 'bi-cultural advantage'. Chinese and Taiwanese myths and ideas inspired the compositions here – it's often forgotten that, despite the claims of the so-called People's Republic, Taiwan has never been integrated into China, and was a Japanese colony between 1895 and 1945. Chen has explored the music of the island's non-Chinese population, including the largest native group, the Amis. Their legends inspired the plangent, virtuosic solo violin piece *Returning Souls*, here performed by Cho-Liang Lin, which began as music for a film by anthropologist Hu Taiji. Like the other pieces, a first acquaintance suggests an international modernist style, but listen more closely for characteristic Chinese double-stopping, glissandos and harsh pizzicatos in place of conventional Western bowing. *Fantasia On The Theme Of Plum Blossom* for string quartet is based on a Taiwanese nanguan song, and follows traditional Chinese variation technique, with the theme stated only at the end. *Our Names* is a political statement about the neglect of indigenous peoples in Taiwan's history. Chen applies deep musical intelligence to a subtle, refined ear for colour.