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Cello meets multimedia in world premiere by Rice Shepherd School composer

A dynamic multimedia music experience awaits concertgoers at the Sept. 18 world premiere of a cello work by [Shih-Hui Chen](#), a professor of composition at Rice University's Shepherd School of Music.

Chen's "Guojun Is Not Coming Home To Dinner" will be directed by [Doug Fitch](#), with lighting design by [Nicholas Houfek](#) and video curation by [Tommy Nguyen](#). The performance will be held at 2 p.m. in Alice Pratt Brown Hall's [Wortham Theater](#).

Presented in four movements, the 25-minute concerto is inspired by poems from the Taiwanese writer [Chun-ming Huang](#) – including "Silvergrass," "My Vegetarian Sutra-chanting Grandmother," "Turtle Island" and "Guojun Is Not Coming Home To Dinner." The title poem tells the story of parents who keep a seat for their child, who will never return.

"While the first three poems are cheerful, even child-like, the last poem introduces a profound sadness, conveying the grief of Huang and his wife over their son's tragic death at age 30," Chen said.

The stage will feature a small triangular reflecting pool, with solo cellist [Sophie Shao](#) seated nearby on a central dais surrounded by [silvergrass](#). Behind the soloist will be a translucent projection screen on which shifting imagery plays like a still life in motion. An ensemble of 16 players will fill out the stage, with intricate lighting and a set design that adds to the visual drama while moving the storyline forward. [Jerry Hou](#), an artist teacher of orchestras and ensembles and director of the Shepherd School's new music ensemble, "Hear&Now," will conduct the performance.

Chen said the work is infused with universal themes of nostalgia and loss. She hopes the unique nature of the performance will attract a diverse audience and draw them to hear and see the imagery of changing moods and shifting times. She believes the expansion of abstract concert music to incorporate multimedia is a forward-looking artistic direction in the performing arts.

"It is especially pertinent after the pandemic," she said. "We are eager to create adventurous programming to bring audiences back to the concert hall, and it is exciting for the Shepherd School to model this example. I believe that 21st-century cross-cultural theater works like 'Guojun Is Not Coming To Dinner' are not limited to genres, cultural borders or time frames and can truly represent the world in which we live today."

More information on the performance is available online at <https://music.rice.edu/events/hearnow-new-location>.



Shih-Hui Chen



ABOUT AMY MCCAIG

Amy is a senior media relations specialist in Rice University's Office of Public Affairs.