



COMFORT GIRL

COMMISSIONED BY THE
AMERICAN COMPOSERS
FORUM

CREATOR/COMPOSER
Stephanie Chou

PREMIERE

March 29, 2019, Joe's Pub at
the Public, NYC

QUOTES

"It is a stunning work that not
only shines light on a dark
chapter of history but also
feels inspirational for
contemporary listeners."
— *DownBeat*

"A Mighty, Harrowing New
Suite... a phantasmagorical
song cycle"
— *New York Music Daily*

SUPPORT

American Composers Forum,
JFund 2016 (commission,
premiere)

Lower Manhattan Cultural
Council, Creative Engagement
2018 (previews)

Puffin Cultural Foundation 2020
(some recording fees)

Jerome Hill Artist Fellowship
Finalist 2021 (some recording
fees)

OPERA America New Works
Exploration Grant 2021 (video
trailer)

SYNOPSIS

Comfort Girl is a musical exploration—in song and story—of the lives of Chinese 'comfort women', a cruel euphemism for the women who were abducted into sexual slavery by the Japanese army during WWII. The work is a tribute to these young women's incandescent courage and indomitable spirit, not only while in captivity during the War but also—in a cruel irony—when they returned home to their families, who didn't always welcome them back with open arms. Of the 400,000+ victims, more than half were Chinese girls, imprisoned in their own homeland for months or years, as war raged throughout Japanese-occupied China. Most died or were killed during the war. The few who survived stayed silent about their horrifying ordeal, because it was seen as shameful, even treasonous. This song-cycle/jazz-opera highlights an often-overlooked, dark chapter in history that still has echoes today, as survivors continue to seek justice, historical revisionism threatens progress, and human trafficking remains a global issue. Based on survivor testimony, the libretto explores themes of trauma, invisibility, perpetration, and resilience.

No shoes, no name, no face, no freedom,
No pride, no future, no hope.
No life.

I never was a comfort woman.
I never was your comfort girl.

SCORE AND PRODUCTION INFORMATION

DURATION

80 minutes

VOCAL FORCES

Lian (soprano): Manchurian peasant girl, local beauty, kidnapped during her wedding, forced into sexual slavery
Ming (tenor): Farmhand, neighbor/fiancé of Lian, devoted, tries to rescue Lian
Commandante (bass): Japanese army official, ringleader/enforcer at Jade Star Hotel

Additional roles, at least one/up to four each, may be double-cast

Comfort Women (alto, soprano): Captives at the "comfort station" before Lian arrives
Japanese Soldiers (baritone/tenor): Impatiently wait on line to use the "comfort station"

Originally performed by 2 vocalists and
Narrator
Unstaged

Language: English, 2 songs in Mandarin (optional English translations)

INSTRUMENTAL FORCES

Alto Saxophone, Erhu, Viola, Violin, Piano, Drumset, Percussion.

This was originally performed by 4 musicians who double, can be reduced or expanded depending on ensemble.

STYLE

Equal parts instrumental music, songs for female voice, songs for male voice.
Unique blend of jazz, classical, pop, and Chinese traditional music.

DEVELOPMENT and PRESENTATIONS

Previews: the cell, January 2019. Rockwood Music Hall, December 2018, NYC

Masterclass: Horace Mann School, May 2019, NY

Webinar: STAND at Yale, "Representation of 'Comfort Women' in Media and Art, September 2020

Streaming: Joe's Pub LIVE! From the Archives, May 2020

Activism: Comfort Women Justice Coalition "Standing Tall" 3rd Anniversary of "Comfort Women" Memorial Statue in San Francisco, September 2020

<http://www.stephaniechoumusic.com/about-comfort-girl>

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT COMFORT GIRL PLEASE CONTACT STEPHANIE CHOU AT
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