

Stefan Tcherepnin
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Ten Tones: To Summon the Spirits

by btr

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No one noticed that there was a passenger missing when flight AF 112 from Paris landed in Shanghai. But the passenger in seat 13B did feel a sudden gust of wind. Needless to say, it didn't occur to anyone that at the moment of disappearance, the flight was flying over Lan Cui Villa (which literally translates as Green Seizing Villa). It is a housing district that is sparsely populated. That evening, however, a house within the complex radiated a kind of mysterious, blueish light.

Music, like air, is everywhere within this three-story villa. The vibration of the stairs and the sound of the different scores from far away created a harmonious chord. In this way, the music became a kind of guiding tool, leading people through the maze-like cloister and inviting them to enter that place which was previously sealed by the dusty darkness and left neglected. So the people entered into the rooms, one after another. The flash of miraculous light was just like lightning: it appeared and then disappeared instantly, as if it was never there. Yet, it is from within the fleeting flash that memories emerge.

No. 1325 on Route Lafayette. The shepherd boy's flute. Rodin. He Luting. A Mexican silver dollar. The Grand Theatre. St. John's University. The National Conservatory of Music. A graduation photo. Especially the graduation photo: the visual is both audible and physical. They curled up in the various corners in the darkness, quaveringly crossed the cloister, whirling into the depths of time. It seemed as if someone endeavored to break loose from the black-and-white group photo and in the meantime, some invisible spirits tried very hard to go back to the image and put an end to the endless journey of drifting, to settle down in a state of certainty.

What remains certain is undoubtedly the shadow. In 1934, students at the National Conservatory of Music saw the figure of Mr. Tchernin in the auditorium. Seen from across the curtain, the figure of Tchernin was magnified to be almost "great." It seemed like part of a shadow play.⁽¹⁾ From then on, an inconspicuous connection between music and the phantom was formed. In the villa that no one lives in, the same connection is further continued after a lag of more than 80 years: the misty shadows of the haze, ethereal shadows of the silk scarves, dancing shadows of the twigs, and the shadows cast from Tai Chi in the middle of the yard—such was all the music. With the duplication and company of the shadow, pentatonic scale and nonatonic musical scales all became ten tones.

No one noticed that there was an extra person in the three-storey villa. Or probably there were two extras. The piano keyboard in the basement was pressed down and then let go. The cause and effect relationship was reversed. The piano keyboard was pressed down not because Sergei Tchernin was playing it. On the contrary, he was compelled to press the key by an invisible force. The same theory applied to the tree from the past that suddenly quivered in Stefan Tchernin's hand—it screamed "I am here" in spirit.

This story by the Shanghai-based writer btr takes as its point of departure an encounter he witnessed during the work *Ten Tones: Inside and Outside the Major-Minor*. His resulting proposal to write a story speculates on ways of archiving ephemeral work.

The work was a dramatic musical installation that occupied an empty house in a newly developed gated housing community in Shanghai owned by the Ming Yuan Group, the funding corporation of the museum.

Ten Tones: Inside and Outside the Major-Minor is the last project of the exhibition *Proposals to Surrender* that was presented by McAM between December 23, 2016 and February 12, 2017. The exhibition was curated by Biljana Ciric.

(1) It's based on *Tchernin and the National Conservatory of Music* written by professor Qian Renping of Shanghai Conservatory of Music. The text can be accessed [here](#).