

Mel Zhang

no name woman

for string quartet



Inspired by Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* (1976)
for The Knights Chamber Ensemble
art by Mel Zhang

Duration ~3:50min
Instrumentation 2 Violins, 1 Viola, 1 Cello

Program Notes Inspired by Maxine Hong Kingston's book *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Amongst Ghosts* (1976), a novel about Kingston's Chinese American childhood in California, "no name woman" interrogates similar themes of generational trauma and cultural displacement. Reflecting Kingston's post-modern, splintered narrative style, "no name woman" oscillates between clarity and chaos, emulating the inherited confusion of identity characteristic to immigrant diasporas. A motif persists across passages and sections. Even in the randomness that overtakes the final part of the score, the melody appears, veiled but still there—in groups defined by adaptation and transformation, is what remains a sign of the individual or the community? Is assimilation possible—or desirable at all? How do first, second, third generations of children find themselves in the dissonance? Is the confusion a product of our culture, or has the confusion become the culture itself?

Performance Notes The glissando from m. 75-98 are mostly free in direction/pitch; unless specified by the text "[Normal] gliss to next note," the destination of the gliss is up to the performer. All that matters is that, after the gliss (duration specified by the amount of measures that the slide spans), the performer should play what is notated in the next measure. The effect should be: a familiar chord, then 1-3 measures (per what is notated by bar lines) of sliding nonsense, then another familiar chord.

In m. 97 and 101, the performer should gliss in any direction and slowly fade out. When the performer should start fading is also self-dictated. All that matters is that there's a gap of silence somewhere in the measures with rests.

Written for *The Knights*: played by Colin Jacobsen (Violin I), Christina Courtin (Violin II), Mario Gotoh (Viola), Caitlin Sullivan (Cello) in 2025.

Link to recording: <https://tinyurl.com/3wa9dhhb6>

no name woman

for The Knights

Mel Zhang

$\bullet = 88$ First measure: messy, in pitch but not rhythm $\bullet = 60$

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Violoncello

ff *mf* *fp* *mf* *mf*

ff *p* *fp* *mp*

ff *mf* *fp* *mf* *mp*

ff *p* *fp* *mf* *mp*

7

11

Play as if the dissonant motif is entirely natural, even beautiful.
Try not to emphasize its oddity.

f *mp*

mf *mp*

mf *mp* *mp*

mf *mp*

Musical score for measures 17-20. The score is written for four staves: Treble 1, Treble 2, Bass 1, and Bass 2. The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat). The time signature is 4/4. The dynamics are marked as *mp* (mezzo-piano) for measures 17-18 and *p* (piano) for measures 19-20. The notation includes various note values, rests, and slurs. The Bass 1 staff has a *pizz.* (pizzicato) marking in measure 18.

Musical score for measures 21-24. The score is written for four staves: Treble 1, Treble 2, Bass 1, and Bass 2. The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat). The time signature is 4/4. The dynamics are marked as *f* (forte) for measures 21-22, *mf* (mezzo-forte) for measures 23-24, and *p* (piano) for measures 23-24. The notation includes various note values, rests, and slurs. The Bass 1 staff has an *arco* (arco) marking in measure 23.

Musical score for measures 25-28. The score is written for four staves: Treble 1, Treble 2, Bass 1, and Bass 2. The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat). The time signature is 4/4. The dynamics are marked as *mf* (mezzo-forte) for measures 25-26 and *ff* (fortissimo) for measures 27-28. The notation includes various note values, rests, and slurs.

Lift bow completely;
comfortable pause

28 *rit.* $\text{♩} = 60$ *a tempo*

mp *ff* *mp* *ff* *mp* *ff* *mp* *ff*

33 $\text{♩} = 80$

p *fp* *p* *mp* *p*

40

pp *f* *fp* *pp* *f* *pp* *f*

47

ff *ff* *pizz.* *ff* *ff*

Narratives splinter

♩. = 80 ♩ = ♩

pizz.

56

Some coherency

sfpp *sf* *mp* *sf* *mf* arco
sf *mp* *sf* *mf*
sfpp *sf* *sf* *mf* arco
sf *mp* *mf*

62

p *ff* *gliss* *p* *ff* *p* *ff*

68

pp *pp* *pp* *pp* *mf* *No tremolo*

75

$\text{♩} = 60$
sul pont. Freely gliss out of tune, return to note at the end of the slant

mf

sul pont. Freely gliss out of tune, return to note at the end of the slant

mf

sul pont. Normal gliss to next note

mf

sul pont. Normal gliss to next note

mf

80

sul tasto

mf 2 2 *pp*

85

Ord. *sul pont.*

f *Ord.* *sul pont.*

f *Ord.* *Gliss to next note* *sul pont.*

f *Ord.* *Gliss to next note* *sul pont.*

91

96

97

98

99

100

Ord.

n

mf

Ord.

n

mf

Ord.

n

mf

Ord.

n

mf

101

The musical score for Example 101 consists of four staves, all in a key signature of three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat). The first staff is in treble clef, and the other three are in bass clef. The first staff begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic, marked with a hairpin that tapers to a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic by the end of the first measure. The second staff begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic, marked with a hairpin that tapers to a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic by the end of the first measure. The third staff begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic, marked with a hairpin that tapers to a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic by the end of the first measure. The fourth staff begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic, marked with a hairpin that tapers to a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic by the end of the first measure. The score is divided into four measures by vertical bar lines. The first measure of each staff contains a half note, followed by a quarter rest in the second measure, a quarter rest in the third measure, and a quarter note in the fourth measure. The notes are G3, F3, E3, and D3 in the first staff; G3, F3, E3, and D3 in the second staff; G3, F3, E3, and D3 in the third staff; and G3, F3, E3, and D3 in the fourth staff. The notes are connected by a slur in the first measure of each staff. The dynamics are indicated by the text *p* and *mf* in italics.