

7 Oct 2022 at St Andrew's Church

A talk with images, video clips & piano demo

by composer/artistic director

Ho Wai-On aka Ann-Kay Lin

on her background & Hong Kong, UK & US,

Professional training at the Royal Academy of Music

Cross-cultural combined arts creation/performance

Electro-acoustics influences

Cantonese opera & Cantonese opera gospel

Projects & PhD inspired by cancer survivals... & more

As I cough easily, a BIG thank you to Rev'd Jonathan Evens for reading my prepared material so that I could save my voice for relevant supplementary info ad hoc during the talk.



1

I HAD A DREAM

**As a small child I dreamt I
was on the cross.**

I asked to be taken to church.

I believe in God.

**It was a miracle for me to
become a professional
musician.**

2



BACKGROUND

Grew up in British Hong Kong. I was a natural for performing on stage as a child: dance, sing, play the piano, deliver speech, and I could draw... No proper training in any of the above yet I wanted to be in the arts.

3

MIRACULOUSLY

an ill-prepared applicant

won a UK Scholarship to study

at the

Royal Academy of Music, London

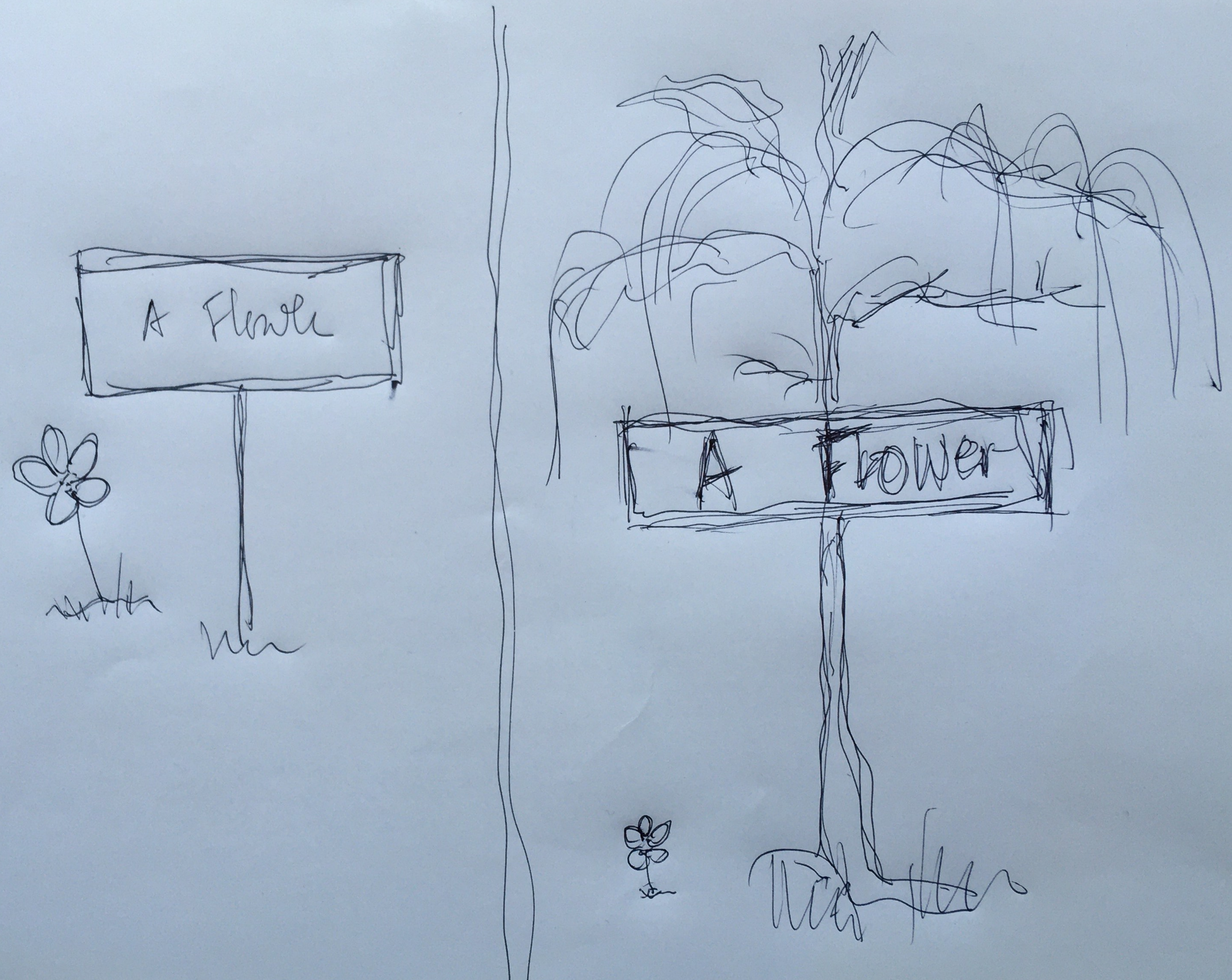
4a

NEVER THE ACHIEVER

**Works have been performed
in Britain & abroad since 1974.
Feel privileged to have worked
with many talented professionals.
Yet all through my career
it's like the following drawing...**

4b

**I planted a
flower...
yet it's the
plant label
that
flourishes
into a tree**



5

IT SEEMED TO BE THE END

**My dream was to become
a concert pianist.**

**While working on a recital
program I hurt my wrist
and was not able to play
the piano.**



6

UNEXPECTED COMPOSER

**I wrote some music as a child.
My music teacher was amazed.
I didn't think much of it –
I wanted to perform.
After hurting my wrist
I retrained as a composer on a
Ralph Vaughan Williams grant.**

7a

FIRST PERFORMANCE

The Waves

**Written for the London Saxophone Quartet
during my first year of retraining,
based on a tune I kept hearing in my head.**

**Later, I wrote a piano version for HK
performances.**

Hear this tune in the following video...

7b

THE WAVES music video

Images from videos by me & Ben Rector

(for 7b: “The Waves” from 0:15 to 0:46 - the tune I kept hearing in my head.)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KVqcsevD2lw>



8a

FIRST COMMISSION

“Sakura (Cherry Blossoms) Variations”

for cello & harpsichord

on the traditional Japanese folk song

Commissioned by harpsichordist Yuriko Ota who was the 1979 winner of the Raymond Russell Harpsichord Competition. Russell was an expert on early keyboard instruments. The piece is in quasi Japanese-Baroque style and has been performed at many London venues.

8b

SAKURA VARIATIONS clip 1

Theme & Variation 1

(Explain briefly differences between piano and harpsichord)



Example of baroque music played on a 2-manual harpsichord:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KQiBlb_kIT8

Play “Sakura Variations” video from 0:00 to 4:17:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ArJMfPjk-L0>

8c

SAKURA VARIATIONS clip 2

Using Japanese pentatonic

(for 8c: SKR Var 5 from 11:29)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ArJMfPJK-L0>



Pentatonic = 5 notes. The harpsichord keeps playing the notes of the 5-note scale in steps in Variation 5.

**Reason for making this video:
See end re Helena**



9a

CHINESE PENTATONIC “Pentatonic Study” for 2 pianos for Helen & Eleanor Wong (from HK and fellow RAM alumni) to perform in Guangdong China

Demo (on the piano) of Chinese and Japanese pentatonic scales and the common major scale with well-known tunes. The English composer Vaughan Williams also used pentatonic scale.

An example is his “Larks Ascending” (0:00 to 1:05):
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yU-1zqUo80U>

9b

SWAN BEAUTY clip 1

based on “Pentatonic Study”

(for 9b clip 1: SB - 0:15 to 1:26 - Chinese pentatonic & graceful swans)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d8eNKvA8AIQ>



The photographer, Andrew, is a world-renown wildlife photographer. He lives half of the year in the US and half in China.

The pianists: Julian Jacobson was a child prodigy and a professor at the Royal College of Music; Eri Yamamoto is a 2021 finalist of the Liszt International Piano Competition.

9c

SWAN BEAUTY clip 2

Swans, beautiful, graceful... yet with surprises

(for 9c clip 2: SB - 4:40 to 5:56 - the fight)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d8eNKvA8AIQ>



**At the end: a nice photo of
the photographer Andrew**

PROFESSIONAL TRAINING KILLS INSTINCT

**I love Western Classical music,
yet with what I heard as a child and
my lack of proper training before the RAM
I felt the professional training did not help
me find my own voice in composition.**

11a

YOU HEAR NO HO WAI-ON IN THIS PIECE

I promised to write my goddaughter a piano piece for her birthday. She demanded “Classical” music. What she meant was music that sounded like Mozart, music that she had heard before. When I wrote this I was thinking more about Handel (Baroque) but she wouldn’t have known! She loved what I wrote because it sounded familiar and unchallenging. Then on my birthday she treated me to the Chelsea Flower Show.

The following video is about this.

11b

BIRTHDAY WITH CHELSEA FLOWER SHOW

The music my goddaughter wanted me to write :

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ciPGzIAuNuA>



At the end of this video the score is shown. It is in Classical music notation. Take note of this score to compare with my later music using my own invented notation, as in my latest music video “3:10AM”.

12a

ELECTRO-ACOUSTICS (1)

Seeing Stockhausen in Concerts & Talks

I felt disturbed by what I heard but wanted to find out more. I ventured into the new sound world of electro-acoustic music in the hope this would free me from my training and help me find my own voice in composition. I spent 10 years working in this field: at West Square (London), Stanford University and Cardiff University etc.. Apart from creating electro-acoustic music, the exposure affected my written music.

(Talk briefly about Stockhausen, this important and controversial composer. Show photos of Stockhausen and his electro-acoustic equipment.)

12b

ELECTRO-ACOUSTICS (2)

At Dartington & Stanford U

Followed by an electro-acoustic music video



**Performing Ivan Tcherepnin's music
with digital delay at Dartington Hall**



**At Stanford University's Artificial Intelligence Lab
with the director, John Chowning**

12c

ELECTRO-ACOUSTICS (3)

“ RADIOTHERAPY FUN ” music video

A video to express my experience:

“ In this cool and big room

Alone with the big machine

A voice from the speaker tells me to keep still

I wait for the ray gun

to deliver the magic bullets...

Praying they will hit the target ”

12d

ELECTRO-ACOUSTICS (4)

about “RADIOTHERAPY FUN” music video

**I used numbers to generate all the sound
then enriched with analogue music equipment**

I animated computer graphics:

Round images to signify cancer cells;

Polygonal images to signify the radiotherapy

(My “Music is Happiness” CD book P. 7, the middle photo shows numbers used to generate the music; P. 23 shows a sound wave I used to create instrument.)

12e

ELECTRO-ACOUSTICS (5)

“ RADIOTHERAPY FUN ” music video

(for 12e: Radio Fun – 0:20 to 2:00)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fNI3-cuTzvs>



AD LIB

GUITARIST L.H. GLISS BETWEEN 16th & 36th FRET ACCORDING TO THE CURVE LINE WHILE R.H. PLUCKS RAPIDLY, LOUDER WHEN THE NOTES GETTING HIGHER AND SOFTER WHEN THE NOTES GETTING LOWER

REHEARSALS: GUITARIST COUNTS ALOUD BEFORE PLAYING EACH CURVE

ARCO PIZZ & SULD

PIZZ & SULD

GUITAR AD LIB: TEMPO COMODO (NOT SLOWLY)

OVERHIT WITH THUMB

VIOLA

♩ = 60

CON SORDINO, SEMPRE PP

bliss

12f

ELECTRO-ACOUSTICS (6)

Affecting my written music

An example of using my own notation to express unusual sound I heard in my head:

“3:10AM” score

The following video is what this sounds like:

Compare this with the score of the Birthday piece (11b)

12g

ELECTRO-ACOUSTICS (7)

“ 3:10AM ” music video clip

(for 12g: 3:10AM video from “with distorted imagery like barriers”)

<https://youtu.be/TeTXnTxTFHk>



Nearly all my electro-acoustic music can no longer be played due to obsolete equipment, deterioration of master tape and vast advancement of technology - a waste of 10 years' efforts. I didn't make a mark in this field but my written music grew into something different.

13a

CANTONESE OPERA INFLUENCE (1)

As a small child in Hong Kong, my first love was Cantonese opera that reached the lower classes, including those shunned by society – the poor, the illiterate, beggars, prostitutes, gangsters... bringing them enjoyment and culture, and I lived among these people as a child. Performers had diehard fans but were also looked down upon because of their profession. At the time, Cantonese opera was at its most cross-cultural and multimedia – anything goes for survival, and could be vulgar.

13b CANTONESE OPERA INFLUENCE (2)

When I was about ten, while roaming free on the streets I befriended a beggar boy about my age. He sometimes put his hand into my jacket pocket to see if there was anything there for him. He was unusual because he was Eurasian. In colonial Hong Kong, ethnic Europeans were usually well off and occupied good positions. They did not mix with local Chinese much, let alone beggars... I sometimes saw a pregnant woman begging on a nearby street. The beggar boy told me that she was his mother. He told me that all his relatives were beggars, though they never acknowledged one other on the street... He never mentioned his father. Perhaps his mother worked as a prostitute, and the boy was the issue of a drunken GI or marine, commonly seen on the streets when their ship visited Hong Kong. To be the son of a beggar woman who also prostituted to “devil men” – the Cantonese term for Westerners – would make my friend the lowest of those shunned by society. Yet he knew Cantonese opera via the omnipresent radio broadcasts, the open-air and other street performances accessible to all.

13c

CANTONESE OPERA INFLUENCE (3)

Video clips of a performance

The is the story of a general and the princess. Male sings in a voice like speaking voice; while female sings in a falsetto voice. I'll refer to the princess (in the clip on R) later, as it is relevant to the Christian church and Cantonese opera gospel.



13d

CANTONESE OPERA INFLUENCE (4)

Characteristic big leaps in the melody in the above Cantonese opera performance clips influenced the melody of “Heroine Song” I wrote to express my cancer experience:

**“ I sustain a smile in company,
my demeanour is courageous,
my condition, not contagious,
yet you who spoke of love have flown,
I am left to groan and moan,
alone, all alone...”**

13e

CANTONESE OPERA INFLUENCE (5)

Audio of “Heroine Song”

**Melodic shape influenced by what I heard
in the previous Cantonese opera performance clips**

In 13c, the performer of the princess, during the Cultural Revolution, denounced her mother who was a beauty and top performer. She later escaped to Taiwan and became a Christian. She now lives in Canada and is an advocate of Cantonese Opera Gospel.

An example of Cantonese Opera Gospel: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ANE4YfqFTxl>

13f

CANTONESE OPERA INFLUENCE (6)

**I was fascinated by the percussion in Cantonese opera
I like to use percussion in my music (when affordable)**

“ BUDDHA SONG ” music video is an example

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6wyX9rAxoLE>



13g

CANTONESE OPERA INFLUENCE (7)

What I saw influenced my stage & costume design and direction when staging Handel's "Acis & Galatea" as a dance-opera for HKAPA

See the following examples

If you are not familia with the music, the following is Acis & Galatea Overture

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SVzMBUjbEIY>

13h

CANTONESE OPERA INFLUENCE (8)

“ACIS & GALATEA” as a dance-opera

Long colourful ribbons on costumes for the nymphs and Galatea are reminiscent of a type of Cantonese opera costume (image L) that looks good with dance movements.





13h

CANTONESE OPERA INFLUENCE (8)

**I staged Handel's
“ACIS & GALATEA” as
colourful ‘big drama’ – this
is what Cantonese opera
is literally called in
Cantonese.**

**L: Love scene, Acis and
Galatea inside heart-
within-heart.**

14a

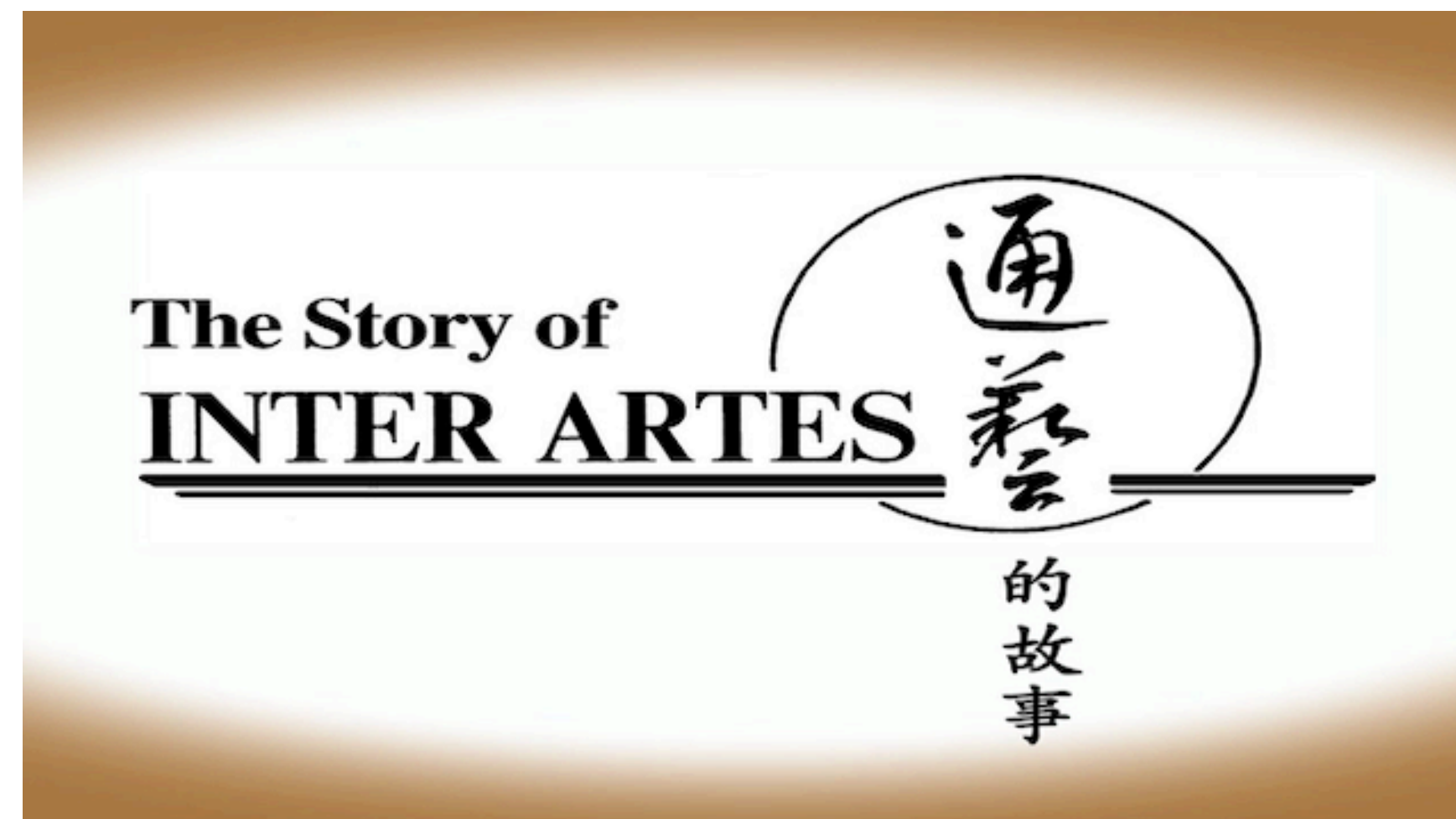
INTER ARTES

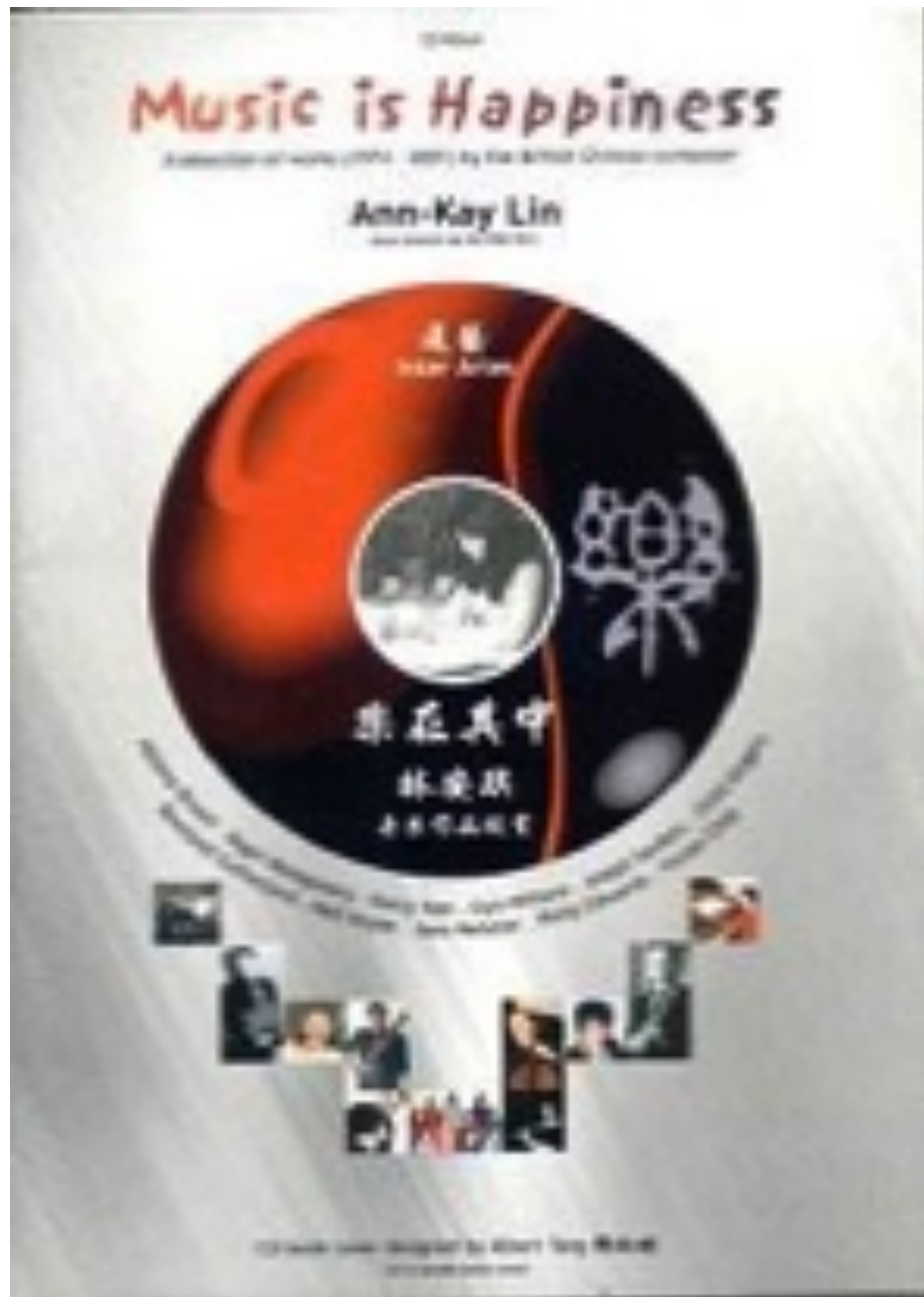
Living most of my life in the UK, I have come across all sorts of assumptions about ethnic Chinese people, and not necessarily from English people. Assumptions are more difficult to tackle than prejudice, as racial prejudice would stand out and be recognised as a personality flaw, while assumptions are so widespread and unnoticed that most people are not even aware that they have them. I also noticed some unnecessary barriers between art forms. I formed Inter Artes as a flexible force to create and performed works/projects that combined music, dance, drama & visual arts across different cultures to promote greater understanding between people and the arts, with initial funding from the Gulbenkian Foundation.

14b INTER ARTES – INTER ARTES YUENLIN

Inter Artes was meant to be like a family of like-minded artists to create and perform cross-cultural combined arts works/projects. Unexpectedly I was looked upon as “ethnic” and a promoter, rather than an artist in my own right. The following video is about Inter Artes becoming Inter Artes Yuenlin - using Chinese landscape gardening as an inspiration to build an artistic environment in England. After surviving cancer for the first time, I went to China for the research of this project - on an Arts Council award.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1d0TFMDHdPU&t=50s>





15

MUSIC IS HAPPINESS

Please take a free copy

After surviving cancer for the 2nd time I produced this CD of my music, with a 64-page book written and designed by me containing related stories, poems and more than 200 illustrations (book cover designed by Albert Tang).

16a

SONG & DANCE OF A 3-TIME CANCER SURVIVOR (1)

After surviving cancer for the 3rd time, I felt too unwell to stage performances. I obtained an MBF award to work on a creative PhD about using the concept of Cantonese opera to create multi-venue performances. The creative core is a libretto-cum-script called “*Song & Dance of a 3-Time Cancer Survivor*”, with production ideas.

16b

SONG & DANCE OF A 3-TIME CANCER SURVIVOR (2)

My PhD poster

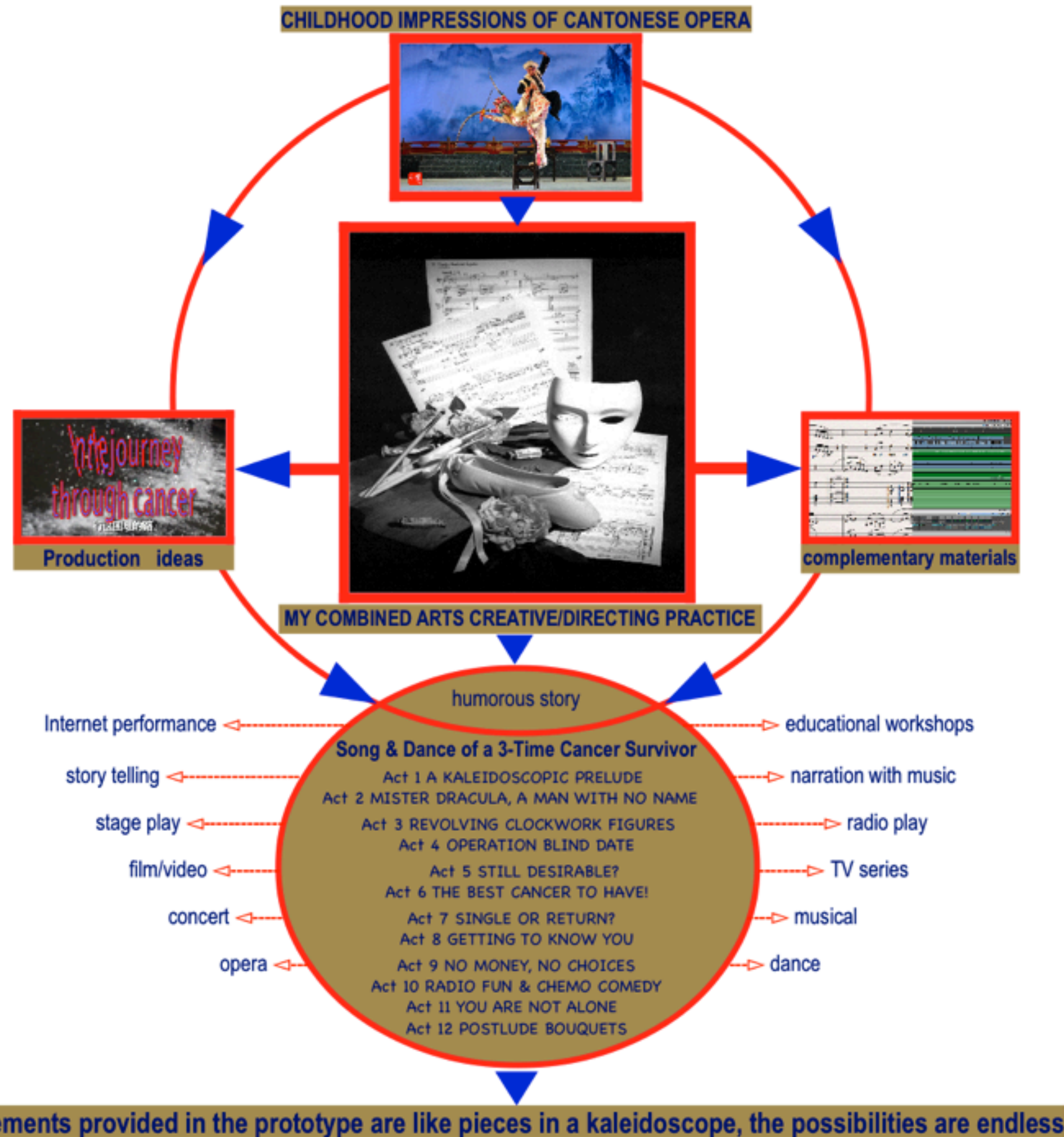
Showing:

1. Elements involved

**2. The 12 acts of libretto-
-cum-script**

**3. The potential multi-venue
performances**

(Explain)



16c SONG & DANCE OF A 3-TIME CANCER SURVIVOR (3)

Years before the Hong Kong upheavals, I wrote in my thesis: During my childhood, Hong Kong was divided into three main areas: the city – Hong Kong Island and Kowloon Peninsula; the villages – the New Territories with old world charm, where villagers still cultivated fields in primitive ways; and many less populated or uninhabited offshore islands. From time to time I stayed in a village for short periods. In the early evenings, elderly villagers relaxed in a small open-air flat area surrounded by stones, telling stories of the past. An old and illiterate village woman once told me a legend about a tiny turtle crawling slowly on the seabed around the outer circumference of Hong Kong: when it finally completed the full circle, Hong Kong would sink to the bottom of the sea. Perhaps the legend could be interpreted as a metaphor for the fast change and disappearance of many aspects of Hong Kong culture, in the absence of an oral tradition to pass them on. This PhD thesis is a narrative of things disappearing, and a creative intervention that enables them to continue in a new form rather than sinking to the bottom of the sea.

17a

MAKING MUSIC VIDEOS FOR THE INTERNET (1)

**All my videos are experiments and preparation for realizing
SONG & DANCE OF A 3-TIME CANCER SURVIVOR for the Internet**

My 1st music video

“ MAGIC BANYAN TREE ”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dX4ipdb-3Qw>

About a village boy asking the banyan tree to save their ancestral home from developers



17b

Making MUSIC VIDEOS FOR THE INTERNET (2)

With no funding, making videos is like the “Red Tomato & Green Pepper” TV show, but very time-consuming.

I use photos and video clips given to me that have nothing to do with my music or my project as raw material. It is very time-consuming to select so many unrelated images and modify them into what can be related to my music and project, and to form a compositional structure.

I HAVE A REGRET

I usually only write music when commissioned, as that guarantees at least one performance. I have not had commission of large scale work though I have written a few. E.g., while waiting for a major cancer operation I wrote two works for symphony orchestra to take my mind off. On the left is one page of a 72-page orchestral work and will take a lot of time to make a convincing synthesized performance. “SONG & DANCE OF A 3-TIME CANCER SURVIVOR” and “INTER ARTES YUENLIN” are not commissioned.

4 (♩ = 60)

6

Picc.

Fl.

Ob.

C. A.

Cl.

B. Cl.

Bsn.

Cbn.

Hn.

Tpt.

Tbn.

B. Tbn.

Tba.

Timp.

S. D.

T. D.

B. D.

Vln. I.

Vln. II.

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

mf

f

sfz

fp

p

poco a poco cresc.

pizz.

con sord. sul pont. non vib.

sczza sord.

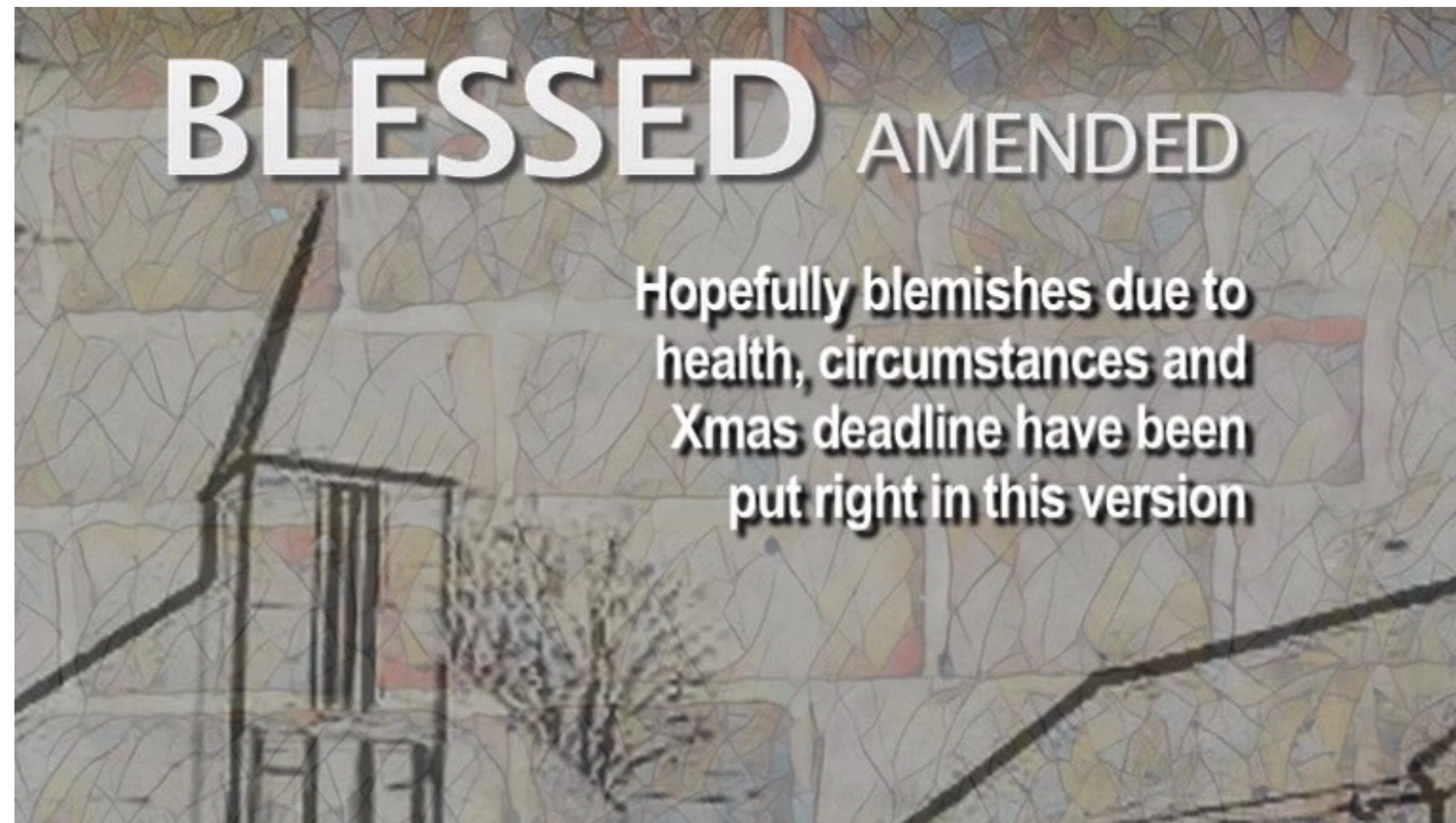
E to D

19

**I WANT TO HEAR “BLESSED” FOR ST ANDREW'S
AS IF IN A CATHEDRAL**

(for 19 – BLESSED Amended)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ARxhVkZhcDs&t=21s>



THANK YOU

website

<https://www.howaion.co.uk/>

Where you can find more info of this talk and many other interesting stories and images

YouTube Channel

<https://www.youtube.com/user/AKLHWO>

Where you can find all the videos in this talk and many more

Please take a free copy of Music is Happiness