Composer YAO Chen grew up in China, surrounded by a culture that is often interpreted as either a clash between, or a fusion of, the traditional and the modern, the old and the new, and the Oriental and the Occidental. Having lived in many different places in China from the northwest to the far south, and then up north in Beijing, he was exposed to a wide variety of genres and styles within Chinese music. After arriving in the US in 2001, he immersed himself in the rich, multicultural environment around him, studying not only Western music and its languages within their original contexts, but also engaging with musics and people from unforeseen cultures. This transcultural experience of life continues to leave a profound impact on his compositional thinking, techniques, sounds, and style, leading many to view his work as a synthesis of Eastern and Western traditions. His perceptions on time, timbre, intonation, pulsation, and expressivity exist always at frontiers – between the old and the new; between the static and the rhythmic; between the descriptive and the dramatic; and between irrational mysticism and rational logic.

In this presentation, he will discuss, and play excerpts from, some of his representative pieces, in which Eastern and Western notions of time, nature and spirituality have significantly influenced his aesthetic pursuits and compositional strategies.

Bio
Cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary concepts permeate the creative inspiration and compositional output of YAO Chen. His music has been widely performed by leading orchestras, ensembles and soloists at various music festivals and concert halls. He has also received commissions and awards from prestigious organizations such as Radio France, the Leonard Bernstein Foundation, the Art Institute of Chicago & Silk Road Project, the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, the Beijing Modern Music Festival, and the Chinese Fine Arts Society. He holds a BA in composition from the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing and a Ph.D in composition from the University of Chicago. He has taught at the University of Chicago and the University of Illinois School of Music, and will join the Illinois State University School of Music as an assistant professor later in 2012.