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CONTEMPORARY MUSIC IN JAPAN

Contemporary Japanese music has hardly suffered from over-exposure, either in Japan or here in Britain. Our ideas of it are normally based on what little traditional music has been played in the West. The impressions gained are hardly representative of the ways in which contemporary music is moving in Japan today, though Japanese composers are undoubtedly strongly influenced by their ethnic styles - as witnessed by their frequent use of traditional instruments. The most important characteristic of their music is the influence of a uniquely Oriental philosophy - a philosophy in which basic concepts of sound and time are very different to our own. We hear a music that may sometimes lack the purposefulness one may expect in Western music, and which is singularly lacking in allegros. While it may not be possible for a Westerner to fully understand the concepts involved, it is important to at least appreciate their existence when listening to music from Japan.

Several of the large festivals held in Tokyo during the 1960s played an important part in the musical development of Japan's younger composers. I propose to discuss these festivals briefly, and through them to introduce the reader to a wide variety of Japanese music and attempt to place it in context.

One of the first of these was the Orchestral Space festival of 1966, held in Tokyo's Nissei Theatre. It is interesting to quote the composer and critic Kuniharu Akiyama in his analysis of the festival.

"As the title indicates, the purposes of this epoch-making event were to promote the modern music in Japan in full scale by introducing prominent contemporary compositions of overseas and such excellent original ones of Japan as suggesting new directions of the modern music, and at the same time to make a strong appeal to the public for acquainting them with what modern music is. These ambitious aims of the festival attracted the keen attention of Japan's leading musicians, music critics, authors, artists of various fields, journalists and thousands of music fans. It was designed and produced by Toru Takemitsu and Toshi Ichiyanagi, both of whom are leading composers of modern music in Japan. Performances were made by Yomiuri Nippon Symphony Orchestra and other excellent solo players, and conducted by Hiroshi Wakasugi and world famous Seiji Ozawa. It must be further noted that this event was attended by Mr. Iannis Xenakis, world's greatest composer of modern music.

"Owing to the devoted efforts of the people concerned, this first attempt was a great success in giving full satisfaction to the audience and establishing the firm position of the modern music in Japan."

So much for the build-up (in the official Japanese translation), which is interesting for its free and sweeping use of superlatives -

another Japanese characteristic. The music presented was spread over three days: two orchestral concerts and a chamber concert. The programmes were as follows:

1st day

Krzysztof Penderecki:	<u>Threnody</u> (for the victims of Hiroshima)	(strings)
Georg Ligeti:	<u>Atmospheres</u>	(orchestra)
Toshi Ichiyanagi:	<u>The Field</u>	(shakuhachi and orchestra)
Iannis Xenakis:	<u>Stratégie</u>	("game for two orchestras and conductors")
Toru Takemitsu:	<u>Arc</u>	(piano and orchestra)

2nd day (To the memory of Edgar Varèse - who had died the previous year)

Motohiko Adachi:	Concerto Grosso for string orchestra	
Edgar Varèse:	<u>Déserts</u>	(orchestra and tape)
Toshi Ichiyanagi:	<u>Life Music</u>	(modulators, tape and orchestra)
Toru Takemitsu:	<u>Coral Island</u>	(soprano and orchestra)
John Cage:	<u>Atlas Borealis</u>	(orchestra)

3rd day

Joji Yuasa:	<u>Interpenetration</u>	(two flutes)
Karlheinz Stockhausen:	<u>Refrain</u>	(three players)
Toshi Ichiyanagi:	<u>Nagaoka</u>	(string quartet)
Roger Reynolds:	<u>Ambages</u>	(solo flute)
Toru Takemitsu:	<u>Eclipse</u>	(shakuhachi and biwa)
Yuji Takahashi:	<u>Chromamorphe II</u>	(piano)
John Cage:	<u>The Wonderful Widow of Eighteen Springs</u>	(voice and closed piano)
Iannis Xenakis:	<u>Eonta</u>	(piano and brass)

Certainly an ambitious programme, and a challenging one for all concerned (including the audience). Takemitsu's Arc is a large work in six movements, scored for full symphony orchestra with a fully integrated solo piano part - played on this occasion by Yuji Takahashi and in a later recorded version by Toshi Ichiyanagi. Coral Island is a slighter work by comparison, with a melodic flair that may have given the audience some little relief during the second concert. Nevertheless, the purely instrumental sections are characterised by sharpness of orchestration, with fleeting keyboard motives set against a landscape of divided strings or winds. This is a characteristic and personal feature of much of Takemitsu's music.

Ichiyanagi's Life Music was among the most radical works heard at the festival. The sounds of tearing cotton, crumpled paper, objects bouncing across piano strings etc., are picked up by contact microphones

and, together with sounds of electronic origin, are modulated or subjected to the effect of a contact breaker. These sounds are set against harsh spasmodic orchestral interjections to produce a collage of considerable impact. Ichiyanagi (b. 1933) studied with Cage and spent a total of eight years working in America. Motohiko Adachi's modestly titled Concerto Grosso turns out to be one which explores a full range of string-playing techniques: rasping quarter-tone clusters, the tapping of various parts of the instruments and wild glissandi. All are skilfully blended into a mature and powerful composition.

The young American composer Roger Reynolds' period of residence in Tokyo, and his enthusiastic and energetic cooperation with the leading figures of Japan's avantgarde, resulted in the Cross Talk festival of 1967-68. This was organised by Joji Yuasa, Kuniharu Akiyama and Roger Reynolds and was again spread over three days as follows:

Cross Talk 1 (November 1967)

Charles Ives:	<u>Chromatimelodtune</u>	(chamber orchestra)
Yuji Takahashi:	<u>Chromamorphe I</u>	(chamber orchestra)
Shuko Mizuno:	<u>Provisional Colour</u>	(piano)
Joji Yuasa:	<u>Icon</u>	(white noise - five channel tape)
Morton Subotnick:	<u>Play! No. 1</u>	(quintet, film and tape)
Charles Ives:	<u>Over the Pavements</u>	(chamber orchestra)

Cross Talk 2 (January 1968)

Salvatore Martirano:	<u>Ballad</u>	(chamber orchestra and singer)
Robert Ashley:	<u>In Memoriam .. Esteban Gomez</u>	(quartet)
Toshi Ichiyanagi:	<u>Appearance</u>	(three instruments, two oscillators, two ring modulators)
Roger Reynolds:	<u>Quick are the Mouths of Earth</u>	(chamber orchestra)

Cross Talk 3 (March 1968)

Larry Austin:	<u>Brass</u>	(brass quintet, film, projections)
Paul Chihara:	<u>Branches</u>	(two bassoons, percussion)
Robert Morris:	<u>Notes from the Underground</u>	(instruments and electronics)
Akimichi Takeda:	<u>A Field</u>	(two string instruments)
Milton Babbitt:	<u>Composition for Four Instruments</u>	
Yori-Aki Matsudaira:	<u>Distributions</u>	(string quartet, filters, ring modulator)
Alvin Lucier:	<u>Shelter 9999</u>	(film and electronics)

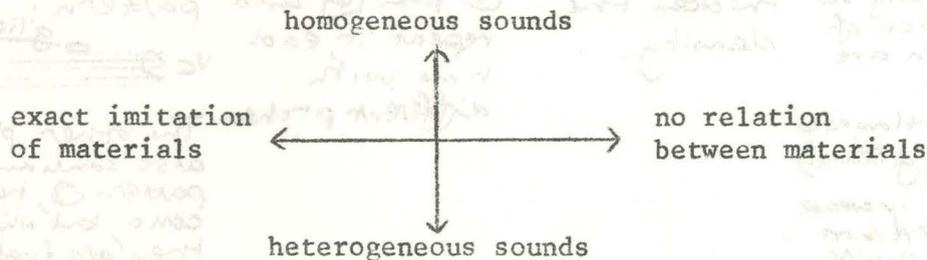
The fact that the festival was sponsored by the American Cultural Center may explain the preponderance of American music in the programmes. The opportunity was taken of presenting the world premieres of all the Japanese works, and of exposing some relatively unknown composers to the public.

Yuji Takahashi (b. 1938) is known primarily in Britain as a pianist. As a composer, he studied from 1963-66 in West Berlin with Xenakis and the influence of this composer has been profound. In Chromamorphe I two mathematical lattices define, respectively, the structure of timbres and the intensity registers. The choice of pitches was made with the aid of stochastic laws and computed manually. The result is a terse piece which one would be forgiven for confusing with Xenakis.

Shuko Mizuno (b. 1934) has been active as a composer and as a member of the Group Ongaku - one of Japan's original new music groups. (The other members were Mieko Shiomi, Yasunao Tone and Takehisa Kosugi). Mizuno's compositional style is typified by a page from his Orchestra 1966. (See Ex. 1).

Mizuno defines his method of scoring as follows: "I have constructed a simple graph which defines a field of 'response patterns'.

Ex. 2



"In a simple example

Ex.1 Shuko Mizuno: page from Orchestra 1966

7 Solo Instruments (Vn1, Vn2, Vn3, Vn4, Vla, Vc, Cb)

Clockwise Conducting

$0 - \frac{1}{4}$ $\frac{1}{4} - \frac{2}{4}$ $\frac{3}{4} - \frac{4}{4}$
 Vn1 → Vn2 ditto ditto Vn1 → Vla
 Vn3 → Vn4 ditto ditto Vn2 → Vn3
 Vla → Vc ditto ditto Vn3 → Vn4
 Cb ditto ditto Cb

(mutual response) (mutual response) (mutual response) (centripetal response)

ff *ff*

Free form patterns indicated in [4]. Short notes only. Long notes only. (Focus)

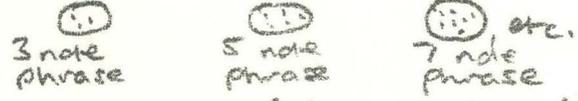
"Irregular Groups" Rests as long as the duration of one breath are permitted. Gradually increase the number of short notes and shorten the length of rests, so that the whole density is thickened. Play only pattern ② from [4] and repeat it each time with different pitches.

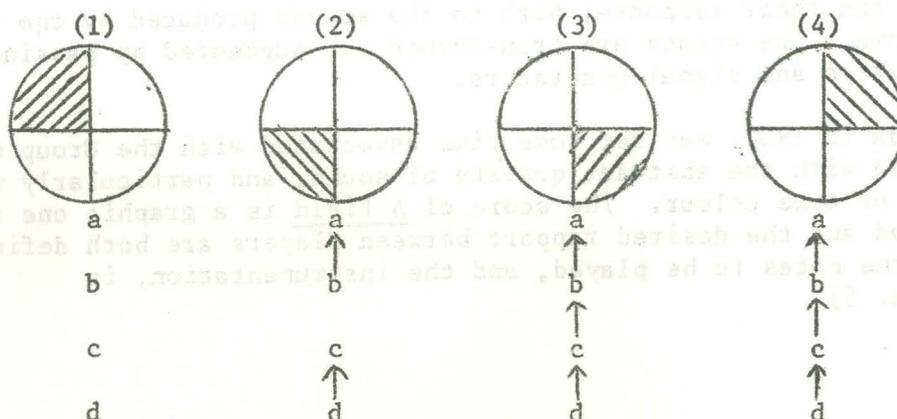
VC *gliss.*

The other players must also continue to repeat pattern ①, hearing the cello, but while repeating they gradually approach the pitch of the cello's pattern. When the above focal point has been reached, repeat until conductor's cut-off.

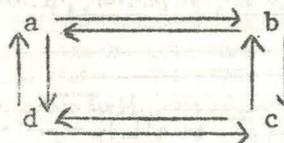
Make various phrases freely using one to seven notes in "Irregular Groups". Pitches are indeterminate.

EX.



Ex. 3

"The shaded quadrant indicates time as signalled by the conductor. In (1) four instrumentalists, a,b,c,d, each realise individual projects without reference to each other. As the second quadrant of time begins (2), b begins to imitate a according to some response pattern taken from the graph above (Ex.2). A position in the upper left hand corner represents the closest form of imitation, where sound and materials match. In the lower right hand corner, both the materials and the sound of the imitating instrument must be diametrically opposed to that of the model instrument. The relationships can, of course, be far more complex, as:

Ex. 4

"These types of response patterns are not possible in a solo piece such as Provisional Colour for piano. The graphical techniques are used to direct changing relationships based on pitch and rhythm."

In Joji Yuasa's Icon the only sound source is white noise. The process of producing individual sounds is one of reduction from a total sound spectrum using sound filters. In technique it is thus the direct opposite of the composition of electronic music by the integration of individual elements (sine waves, square waves, etc.)

Ichiyanagi's Appearance represents one of his live electronic pieces. The three performers (on this occasion playing ocarina, trumpet and double bass) interpret a graphic score which gives indications of the type of

sound to be played and their response, both to the sounds produced by the other players and their own. The sounds are transformed and augmented by passing them through ring modulators and signal generators.

Akimichi Takeda (b.1937) was for some time associated with the Group Ongaku. He is very concerned with the abstract quality of sound, and particularly with his own perception of tone colour. The score of *A Field* is a graphic one in which playing method and the desired rapport between players are both defined. Information as to the notes to be played, and the instrumentation, is ambiguous. (see Ex. 5).

Ex. 5

The image displays two musical notations side-by-side. On the left is a traditional musical score with multiple staves, likely representing different instruments or voices. On the right is a graphic notation consisting of vertical bars and lines on a staff, which is a visual representation of sound relationships and playing methods. The graphic notation includes numbered elements (1, 2, 3, 4) and various vertical bars of different heights and widths, indicating specific sound events or durations.

left: page from *Distributions* by Yori-Aki Matsudaira (composer's copyright)
 above: pages from *A Field* by Akimichi Takeda (composer's copyright)

Yori-Aki Matsudaira (b.1931) graduated from Tokyo University in biology and teaches biophysics in Japan. His orchestral piece Configuration and his flute piece Rhymes for Gazzelloni have both been broadcast by the BBC. Distributions, in contrast to the other Japanese works performed at the Cross Talk festival, is for the most part meticulously scored, as shown above. The electronic section results from the modulation of two portions of the quartet's live sound. The piece represents a crescendo of complexity in compositional and playing techniques (see Ex. 5).

The Cross Talk festival was particularly important to Japanese musicians, for Japan had been culturally remote from the West since the Second World War. It perhaps puts the American contribution to the programmes in perspective to note that not even Charles Ives had ever been heard in live performance there before.

The second Orchestral Space programme followed in June 1968. The music played was as follows:

1st day

Iannis Xenakis:	<u>Polla ta Dhina</u>	(chorus and chamber orchestra)
Toru Takemitsu:	<u>November Steps</u>	(shakuhachi, biwa and orchestra)
Toshi Ichihyanagi:	<u>Up to Date Applause</u>	(rock band, tape and orchestra)
Krzysztof Penderecki:	<u>Fluorescences</u>	(orchestra)

2nd day

Yuji Takahashi:	<u>Six Elements for Four Violins</u>	
David Behrman:	<u>Players with Circuit</u>	(live electronics)
Roger Reynolds:	<u>Ping</u>	(piano, flute, harmonium, bowed cymbals and tam tam, 16mm. film, visuals, two-channel tape, photocell sound distributor, electronics, 14-channel sound system)
Toru Takemitsu:	<u>Cross Talk for Sam Francis</u>	(two Argentinian bandoneons and tape)
Aaron Copland:	<u>Violin Sonata</u>	
Toshi Ichihyanagi:	<u>The Third Fashion</u>	(film and tape)
Steve Reich:	<u>Piano Phase</u>	(two pianos)
Takehisa Kosugi:	<u>Catch Wave</u>	(transistor radios and frequency transmitters)
Krzysztof Penderecki:	<u>String Quartet</u>	

3rd day

- Earle Brown: Modules I & II (two orchestras)
 Joji Yuasa: Projections for kotos and orchestra
 John Cage: Concerto for prepared piano and orchestra
 Roger Reynolds: Threshold (orchestra)

From the Japanese point of view this festival started in lower gear, for Takemitsu's November Steps (now well-known in this country) is a comparatively quiet and reflective piece, with an extended dialogue between shakuhachi (a vertical end-blown bamboo flute) and biwa (a Japanese lute). These two traditional Japanese instruments thus find themselves in a contemporary setting and their parts look decidedly graphic in notation (see Ex. 6).

Ex. 6 Takemitsu: November Steps.

The image displays musical notation for Takemitsu's "November Steps". It includes several systems of notation:

- Staff Notation:** At the top, there are two systems of staff notation. The first system shows a sequence of notes with stems and flags, labeled with Roman numerals I₁, I₂, II₁, II₂, III₁, III₂. Above the notes are boxes containing the numbers 3, 4, 2, 4, 3. The second system shows a similar sequence of notes, also labeled with Roman numerals and boxes containing numbers 4, 3, 2, 4, 3.
- Graphic Notation:** Below the staff notation, there are several graphic elements:
 - A vertical axis with a double-headed arrow, labeled with numbers 1, 2, 3, 2, 1.
 - A series of horizontal lines with dots, labeled with numbers 3, 2, 1.
 - A series of horizontal lines with dots, labeled with Roman numerals II₁, I₁, 0.
 - A series of horizontal lines with dots, labeled with Roman numerals I₁, III₁.
 - A series of horizontal lines with dots, labeled with Roman numerals II₁, III₁.
 - A series of horizontal lines with dots, labeled with Roman numerals II₁, III₁.
 - A series of horizontal lines with dots, labeled with Roman numerals II₁, III₁.
 - A series of horizontal lines with dots, labeled with Roman numerals II₁, III₁.
- Other Elements:** There are several vertical lines and arrows, some labeled with Roman numerals I, II, III. There are also some numbers in boxes, such as 3, 2, 1, 4, 3, 2, 1.

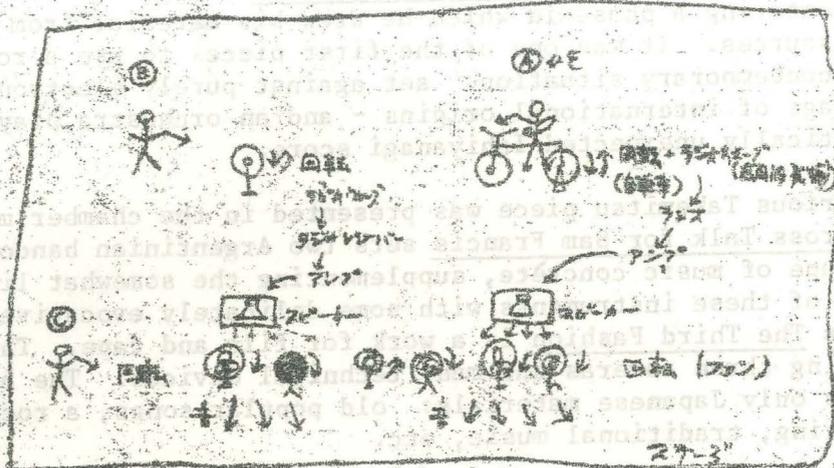
However, the audience were rapidly blasted out of any contemplative melancholia by Ichiyanagi's Up to Date Applause. Here we see Ichiyanagi entering a phase in which he drew his material from a great variety of sources. It was one of the first pieces to use a rock band in a truly contemporary situation: set against purely electronic music - a tape collage of international origins - and an orchestra playing a characteristically unexpected Ichiyanagi score.

A curious Takemitsu piece was presented in the chamber music concert. Cross Talk for Sam Francis sets two Argentinian bandoneons against a tape of music concrète, supplementing the somewhat limited tonal range of these instruments with some delicately evocative sounds. Ichiyanagi's The Third Fashion is a work for film and tape. The film was made using three cameras and many technical devices. The accompanying tape employs only Japanese materials: old popular songs, a rock band, temple chanting, traditional music, etc.

Takehisa Kosugi (b. 1938) had for some years been associated with music theatre and in particular with the Group Ongaku. Catch Wave employs small transistor radios and miniaturised radio frequency transmitters. The piece is concerned with the mode of interaction of the transmitter and the receiver and with a random modulation of the amplified signal (see Ex. 7).

In Joji Yuasa's Projections for kotos and orchestra we find an excellent solution to the problem of involving kotos in a truly contemporary situation. While the majority of Japanese Gagaku instruments have a rawness of sound that blends well into a contemporary composition, the koto has a far mellower and richer sound. For this reason it is used extensively in music of folk origin. Yuasa uses kotos to augment and highlight the extremely rich sonorities of his orchestral fresco. The result is a piece in which one first suspects a strong Western, and particularly Polish, influence. But this has been tempered by the Oriental philosophy into a truly original composition,

To the amazement of all concerned with the second Orchestral Space festival, it turned out to be a huge financial success. It also captured an audience which included the same young students and intellectuals as were normally to be found staging anti-American demonstrations. Partly to capitalise on this situation, the U.S. government, through the American Cultural Center, agreed to underwrite the Cross Talk Intermedia festival of February 1969. This was to be Japan's first real introduction to multi-media and was realised on a grandiose scale. A glance at the programme illustrates this.

Ex. 7 Kosugi: Catch Wave

Catch Wave '68 #1

1st day

Gordon Mumma: Beam (from Pontpoint)
(violin, viola, bow arm coordinate sleeves,
Cybersonic control system, computer,
four-channel distribution)

Stan Van Der Beek: Found Forms
(nine 16mm. projectors)

Toshi Ichiyanagi: Tokyo 1969
(electronic music, computer-generated
sound, rock band, pop music, 14-channel
sound system)

Toshio Matsumoto: Projections for Icon
(six 16mm. projectors, visuals, lighting,
pneumatic projection surfaces)

Joji Yuasa: Icon
(five-channel tape)

Robert Ashley: That Morning Thing
(five actors, eight actresses, male
pianist, female entertainer, visuals,
six-channel tape, lighting, electronics,
directional tweeters, 14-channel sound system.)

2nd day

- Takahiko Iimura:** Circles (multi-projections, visuals, pneumatic projection surfaces)
- Alvin Lucier:** Sound Environment Mixtures (four-channel tape, 14-channel sound system with sequencer)
- Yori-Aki Matsudaira:** Electronic Music Assemblage (two-channel tape, five voices, ring modulator)
- Roger Reynolds:** Ping (as before)
- John Cage:** Music for Carillon No. 5 (two prepared pianos, electronics, ten-channel sound system)
- Tatsumi Hijikata:** Caw-Caw Dance (dancer, ten elderly women, ten workers, six crows, giraffe, visuals, suspended objects)
- George Cacioppo:** Holy Ghost Vacuum, or America faints (two-channel tape)

3rd day

- Group Ongaku:** 441 4867; 0474 82 2603; 712 9374
(Shiomi, Mizuno, Kosugi) (five musicians, three pianists, six stereo tape decks, CDS relays, transistor radios, RF transmitters, 14-channel sound system)
- David Rosenboom:** She loves me, she loves me not (two musician actors, two percussionists, witch doctor, visuals, SCR drivers, electronics fiber optics, 14-channel sound system)
- Stan Van Der Beek:** Poem Fields (nine 16mm. projectors, nine 35mm. projectors)
- Gordon Mumma:** Digital Process (four stereo tape decks, Cybersonic control system, 14-channel sound system with sequencer)
- Toru Takemitsu:** Kwaidan (two-channel tape, visuals, 14-channel sound system)
- Salvatore Martirano:** L's G.A. (gas-masked politico, helium bomb, two 16mm. projectors, two-channel tape, 14-channel sound system).

Unfortunately the Japanese contributors to the festival were not quite prepared for the event and several last-minute changes in the programme had to be made, including, to everyone's dismay, the withdrawal by Hijikata of his Caw-Caw Dance five days before the festival, when he realised that its quality was not up to that of the other items on the programme (as he saw them).

To some extent Cross Talk Intermedia saw out the birth pangs and teething troubles of Japan's aspiring multi-media composers. Once it had happened they nurtured a belief in the concept that had perhaps been previously lacking. This led logically to the preparation for Expo '70 on a cultural scale that had no precedent.

It would require too much space to present the full programme of music at Expo '70; mention of a few highlights will have to suffice. Toru Takemitsu designed the Japan Steel Federation Pavilion as a concert hall: "an organ to metamorphose the volume of space, previously divided into stage and audience area, simply into the space of combined qualities" (in Takemitsu's own words). Over a thousand speakers were used in an elaborate system involving twelve signal sources. The works played through this system were Takemitsu's Crossing for chorus and orchestra, Xenakis' Hibiki Hana Ma for solo Japanese instruments and orchestra and Yuji Takahashi's Yeguen for wind instruments and sculpture. All three works are among their respective composer's most powerfully expressive.

Joji Yuasa made a significant contribution to the Textile Pavilion with his accompaniment to the film Ako. Multi-projections covered the inner surface of the dome. Once the audience had been thoroughly immersed in this, they were subjected to the effects of clusters of wind instruments, and strings in glissando and pizzicato as the sound filled and traversed the pavilion. Yuasa's Telephonopathy, which used the voices of telephone operators and other telephone effects from all over the world as raw materials for a display through an eight-channel sound system, was heard in the same pavilion.

The festival plaza boasted among its technological wonders a live electronic synthesizer, and this was used for performances of works by Kosugi, Ichihyanagi, Matsudaira and Akiyama. Twelve "environmental musical works" were written using the technology of the plaza by Kosugi, Ichihyanagi, Matsudaira and Shinichi Matsushita.

Having attempted an introduction to contemporary Japanese music by way of a review of the major festivals during the period 1966-70, I took the opportunity of discussing the article with Toru Takemitsu, who was in London to direct a concert of his music at the Round House (see Reviews). Takemitsu was born in 1930 and is today the best known and probably the most appreciated of contemporary Japanese composers. (By the way the May festival referred to here has, of course, now taken place.)

Having read the article, would you consider that it gave a balanced representation of the musical scene in Japan up to 1970?

I would say so. The composers presented at those concerts include many of the leading figures from our culture. Unfortunately the situation at present is not so very different. There have been concerts, of course, but always on a smaller scale. Always, Toshi (Ichiyanagi), Joji (Yuasa), Kosugi, Takahashi - and I must say, Toru Takemitsu - are composing new pieces. So is Akira Miyoshi, but he is much more Western influenced. And Michio Mamiya; I like him, but his attitude is very much like Bela Bartok. I must say nowadays, after November Steps, after Eclipse and Makoto Moroi's piece Five Dialogues for shakuhachi, there is a greater interest amongst our contemporary composers in the use of traditional Japanese instruments.

And how was Ichiyanagi's The Field received in 1966?

By the orchestra - very badly. They did not like the improvisational elements in it; they had to do some very strange things. But we had more of a revolt on our hands with Up to Date Applause. The idea of playing alongside a rock band - The Mops - did not appeal to the orchestral players at all, who were playing Debussy and Beethoven elements.

I asked Ozawa if he thought that the piece worked. He thought that it did. Did Toshi think so?

Oh, yes. He said "It's O.K." smiling. But always I am very grateful for Seiji. He is a great supporter for Orchestral Space and will be in Tokyo for our next Orchestral Space festival in 1974. He is always saying to me "You should have Orchestral Space". He has a very good understanding for new music and his attitude is just right.

You mentioned a festival to be held in Tokyo at the end of this month.

Yes, Yuji Takahashi and I organised that one. We will perform Toshi's very old piece Music for Electric Metronomes as well as two of his new pieces. And he will take part as the pianist. The festival includes five concerts within the period 23rd - 27th May, and occasions the opening of a new theatre in Tokyo. For it I invited Peter Serkin from America, Cathy Berberian, Roger Reynolds and Maurice Fleuret, the French critic who organises SMIP in Paris. On the 26th we have a marathon concert from 6.00 p.m. to 2.00 a.m. Roger Reynolds will supervise one and a half hours of it, when he will perform his piece I/O. He will bring films, tapes and slide projections and present a Don Davis piece called One Man Band. There will also be new films by Harry Partch - Dreamer and The Remains. Maurice Fleuret has one and a half hours in which he will include a performance of Ligeti's Chamber Concerto, and Xenakis' Anaktoria. Both Reynolds and Fleuret will give their opinions of how Western music is developing now. Then we have the TransSonic Group which

includes Toshi, Yuji, Joji, Yori-Aki Matsudaira, Minao Shibata, Hikaru Hayashi and myself. We will present a programme for one and a half hours. After that there will be a symposium between Roger Reynolds, Maurice Fleuret, TransSonic Group and the audience. At another concert we have a new Lukas Foss piece - Ni Bruit, Ni Vitesse. That is a very Japanese influenced piece. I invited Lukas Foss over to Expo '70, together with Vinko Globokar and Peter Sculthorpe. We had an interesting symposium at that time.

Do you like traditional Gagaku performances?

Oh, yes. I like them very much. But I prefer Noh theatre.

Could you categorise Stomu Yamash'ta's The Man From the East?

That is very much influence by Western music. Rock music, jazz, and so on. But it is the music of his generation. Many Japanese newspapers criticise The Man from the East. "Terrible piece - if you are Japanese you cannot see more than a few minutes of it." But in London it was very well received - large audiences each time it was played.

In spite of the strong Western influence, the piece was obviously written by a Japanese musician. And he had conceived a production that was popular, so the large London audiences were at least being introduced to Japanese culture, even if it was only in small doses.

I do not know the Red Buddha players too well, but I am sure they must be good. And Yamash'ta must have brought a Japanese conception to the performance. He is very honest; he lived in America for a long time, and I met him there. He was not so well known at that time. When he came to my apartment he asked me to listen to his playing. He played a Darius Milhaud piece and a Shostakovich piece. It was very good, and I thought he had an excellent feeling for Japanese culture.

Roger Reynolds made an observation after watching a Gagaku performance that I think you reinforced in your programme note to the Round House concert: that it is the event of making a sound that is at least as important as the sound itself. For the biwa player, for example, the action of striking the instrument has as much significance as the sound produced. I think Yamash'ta's style reflects this influence.

Oh, yes, that is right. But his development was initially through American jazz musicians. He played with many of them, and with new rock groups. I listened to that, and then I played him several of my pieces - Kwaidan, for example. He hadn't heard these pieces before and liked them very much. But for him, Kwaidan and rock music had the same quality, the same values. Then he came back to Japan and I introduced him to many composers,

and several of them came to concerts of his. He wrote a number of pieces, like Red Buddha. In these pieces he used techniques from all the styles in which he was interested.

And now in Japan there is more interest in our traditional styles from the young people. We have the National Theatre which always presents very beautiful programmes: Kabuki - not so popular - good Noh Theatre and very old Japanese Buddhist chanting. I think in this context that Yamash'ta shows very honestly himself. I hope so. I saw Red Buddha in Kyoto - sometimes it gave me some funny feelings, but it was the way Yamash'ta felt, so it's O.K.

(Takemitsu subsequently wrote Cassiopeia, for solo percussionist and orchestra, for Yamash'ta).

How is Japanese rock music developing these days? Very little permeates to London, although John Peel played a couple of pieces by the Flowering travelling Band on the radio last week.

Ah, yes, they are friends of Yamash'ta. He cooperates with them sometimes when he is in Tokyo.

Are they entirely Western influenced, as they sounded in the brief excerpts that I heard? Their style was heavier than early Led Zeppelin, but with the finesse that one expects from the Grateful Dead or Can.

When they started they were very much like the Rolling Stones. But now one of them is learning biwa, and another the Noh flute. They want to inject a Japanese feeling into their music. Kosugi's group, the Taj Mahal Travellers, also play rock music sometimes.

Would you ever think of using rock music in one of your own compositions?

For me? No. I love to hear it. I have many records - not just Japanese rock music. I would love to use it, but my musical mentality does not allow it. But for Toshi Ichiyangi it is quite different. I like him very much - we live in the same apartment block, together with Joji Yuasa. My musical aesthetics are closer to those of Joji, and we started the Experimental Workshop in 1951. Toshi studied with John Cage, and his first wife, Yoko Ono, had a strong personality. Toshi did several pieces for her. So we are quite different - I find him very, very interesting.

Turning to some composers that we have not discussed so far, could you say anything about the work of Teruyuki Noda, Shinichi Matsushita or Maki Ishii?

Noda is a gifted composer, he has much talent and I like a lot of his music. Matsushita is living in both Osaka and Hamburg; he teaches mathematics. Of course, he is older than our generation, being in his fifties. He has just written a very big cantata - two hours, I think. A large orchestra and choir, very influenced by Penderecki, with a biblical text. Ishii was also influenced by Penderecki and one would find many tone clusters and large percussion forces in his music, such as Kyoso. He is very quick at composing, as in his piece So-Gu II for Gagaku and orchestra. For me he is becoming much more interesting. I hope he will be writing some very good music.

Has Joji Yuasa written many orchestral pieces?

Not so very many. Of course, there is his piece Projections for kotos and orchestra in which he uses the kotos in a very beautiful way. Then last year he wrote a very fine orchestral piece called Chronoplactic. A little Ligeti-influenced, but still very much Yuasa-flavoured.

Could you use the koto in your music?

I don't think so. It has a very beautiful sound, but I like a more complex sound, as with the biwa. My favourite Japanese instruments are the biwa, shakuhachi and sho (a kind of Japanese mouth organ). But I don't like to write music for them. Eclipse was my trial piece. I wanted to get to know the instruments and this type of music better. I first got to know Western music and we did not have a great opportunity to get to know biwa and shakuhachi music in Japan. Some years ago young people found Gagaku music boring, but now things are changing and the music has wider appeal. I was very moved, when I first heard a biwa and shakuhachi concert. I like to know the origin of sound - how sound is born. Some of the traditional music at that time was a little cheap, and based around koto and samisen music (the samisen is a three-stringed lute), but I was suddenly inspired by the biwa and shakuhachi, and of course Noh Theatre. Always I like to hear the origins of sound - I will listen to the bird songs, although I would not use them in the way Messiaen does.

You are composing another biwa, shakuhachi and orchestra piece at the moment?

Yes. That is for Seiji Ozawa. But I find it very difficult to write this kind of music. After November Steps I said: "That is the last piece". But Seiji persuaded me otherwise. At last I said "O.K. - one more piece". And this will be called Autumn.

What is the difficulty in using the traditional instruments that you like so much?

For me, one sound from biwa or shakuhachi is so good - perfect. I can do nothing to improve it.

Are there any difficulties in composing a purely orchestral piece?

There are some, but not the same.

Are you becoming an idealist in this respect? Are there sounds that you would like to use, but you are afraid that you will destroy their original feeling?

Maybe, but the performer has a special role for me; he must create the sounds, and I do not want to give him inflexible instructions for this. But my thoughts here are very different to those of John Cage.

You have conceived at least one happening in the shape of Blue Aurora for Toshi Ichianagi. (A piece that John Cage first performed in Tokyo that centres around events involving the colour blue). Are there other compositions of this sort?

There is Seven Hills' Events, which I wrote in San Francisco during my six month stay there with my family. That involves seven performers amongst an audience. Each one is on top of a ladder and is equipped with an electronic megaphone and a basket of flowers. I wrote a text based upon weather forecasts and the constellations. Each performer communicates his part of the text to the others with the megaphone; also a tape is used. At the end of the piece the flowers are thrown to the audience. Another piece is called Time Perspective. This involves any number of performers, amplified grandfather clocks and a judge. The performers choose from a number of locations. For example, one might say "I would like to be Fiji Island" or "I would like to be London". Then he must take the relevant card that gives him instructions from which he must evoke certain impressions. Also, certain games take place. It is a very strange piece - only one performance so far by Toshi and some of his friends, including Jasper Johns.

On the original programme for the Round House concert Blue Aurora was included. Why did it not materialise?

We had some difficulties. I wanted to do a London performance of it, but it was not to be. It is a very difficult piece to realise and I needed more correspondence with the performers.

How is Western culture received in Japan? Do you know many contemporary British composers or ensembles?

Not so many. But young people have a greater curiosity nowadays and they know Hugh Davies and Gentle Fire, Cornelius Cardew, Birtwistle, Maxwell Davies, Bennett, Bernard Rands. But British music is not well represented in Japan.

I heard that you were involved in an incident in France last year.

Yes, I have a very big piece, but it is still not performed. It is called Gemini, for two orchestras. A companion piece for Cassiopeia and Asterism. There are two conductors and oboe solo - Heinz Hollinger - and trombone solo - Vinko Globokar. We had the rehearsal: marvellous. With Michel Tabachnik and Gilbert Amy. But then the orchestra went on strike. Of course, this was partly financial when they asked for two orchestral fees, which our budget could not accommodate. Well, that's one of the hazards of writing for more than one orchestra!

ROBERT HALL.

(Music examples by kind permission of the composers and C.F. Peters Corporation - to the latter of whom we also apologise for the omission of an acknowledgement for permission to publish the extracts from Schoenberg's Violin Fantasy in CONTACT 6).