

THE LONG ARRIVAL OF TAKEMITSU'S LATE STYLE

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Dedication

This paper is dedicated to Rui Li, the man who introduced me to contemporary, “weird” music in the autumn of 2012. Though he is now far away, I think of him often, particularly when I *sing*.

Treatment of Japanese Phrases

Japanese names are presented in the Western fashion, with the given name followed by the family name. Japanese words and phrases are italicized, followed by their translation in brackets, except where their meaning is discussed more extensively.

Opening

“The end of all method is to seem to have no method.”
 - Lu Ch'ai, *Manual of the Mustard Seed Garden* (1679-1701)¹

All over the world, artists (or: labourers) toil to create new, exciting work. They gather techniques, tools, and approaches, and like any other worker, their methodology can become part of who they are. As these elements meld together and evolve, they lose their individual definition, becoming something new which can only be found within the labourer. By this process, the artist-labourer's work gains a mystical quality and the methods seem to disappear.

It seems obvious that an artist's environment can have a tremendous effect on their work. For Japanese artists in the twentieth century, however, the environment around them has been shifting endlessly. The beautiful landscapes and long artistic tradition of Japan seem alien to the manufacturing efficiency, technology, and entertainment culture present in modern Japanese society. Assuredly, the country has changed significantly since Commander Perry's arrival in 1853, an occasion still invoked in everyday Japanese conversation.² Art was no exception to this; when Japan opened its borders, the word 'art' did not even exist in the Japanese language. Their new word for art, *geijutsu*, essentially means “techniques to create something cultural, decorative, or entertaining,” because during that time, there was no separation between “craft” and “art” as there was in the West.³

¹ Mai-mai Sze, *The Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting: Chieh Tzû Yüan Hua Chuan*, 1679-1701 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

² Richard Francis, “Your Bag of Thrills,” *A Cabinet of Signs: Contemporary Art From Post-Modern Japan* (Liverpool: Tate Gallery, 1991), 10.

³ Fumio Nanjo, “Afterword: Nature and Culture in Japan,” *A Cabinet of Signs: Contemporary Art From Post-Modern Japan* (Liverpool: Tate Gallery, 1991), 13.

Though these elements have now achieved some level of reconciliation, during the postwar years the relationship between Japanese culture and that of the West remained uncertain. Italian musicologist Luciana Galliano described Japan as “an Eastern country far removed from [its] own reality”⁴ and, though exaggerated, her statement illuminates some of the cultural challenges artists would confront.

By 1985, Japanese composer Tōru Takemitsu (武満徹, 1930-1996) imagined “a universal music of the world’s peoples,” a future musical amalgamation of all the earth’s cultures. After forty years of cultural assimilation in his home country, a global music synthesis must have felt inevitable. But Takemitsu and his generation were not so much victims as instigators of this transition, seeking to escape the oppressive Japanese authoritarianism of the prewar Shōwa period. Takemitsu’s career, spanning from the end of World War II to his death in 1996, would delve into most of the major international musical movements and spearhead Japanese experimental music during the 1950s and 1960s, one of the most transformative cultural periods in East Asian history.⁵

Takemitsu was fascinated with the interplay of Eastern and Western aesthetics, but was cautious to avoid superficial syntheses of Orient and Occident. Instead, he articulated their differences without judgement, preferring to distance himself and adopt a broader (and more objective) perspective. As Takemitsu sought to cultivate a global musical language, however, he ironically became the quintessential Japanese composer. This surprising outcome was the combined result of (1) Takemitsu’s fluid exploration of technique within the context of the speed

⁴ Luciana Galliano, *Yōgaku: Japanese Music in the Twentieth Century*, translated by Martin Mayes (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2002), xii.

⁵ Thomas R.H. Havens, *Radicals and Realists in the Japanese Nonverbal Arts: the Avant-Garde Rejection of Modernism* (Hawai’i: University of Hawai’i Press, 2006), ix.

and sensibility of the Japanese integration of Western musical methods, (2) the advent of the postmodern era, and (3) Takemitsu's lifelong search for his own unique musical voice. These elements developed throughout the entirety of Takemitsu's career, coalescing during the 1970s into his late style and continuing to evolve until his death in 1996.

The inimitable mystical quality of Tōru Takemitsu's work regularly draws the attention of scholars, critics, and patrons. Lauded by the West as "Japan's greatest composer,"⁶ Takemitsu was the first Japanese composer to be widely known in America. Perhaps aided by Takemitsu's unusual appearance, many Westerners are drawn to his music's "alien" tonality and its rich orchestration.⁷ Others disregard his work, calling it thin, decorative, and imitative.⁸ Neither assessment considers the context in which the music was created. These popular commentators regularly describe Takemitsu's music in simple terms such as "beautiful," "unstructured," and "East-meets-West."⁹ More nuanced commentary, such as that by Alex Ross or Peter Burt, takes into consideration Takemitsu's exploration of nature and Japanese spirituality, but even their assessments are prone to intensely florid descriptions that lack critical insight. Critics are quick to rely on such banal language because Takemitsu's music and writings are inscrutable and equivocal.

⁶ Mark Swed, "20 years after his death, Toru Takemitsu still sending signals in his music," *Los Angeles Times*, October 16, 2016, accessed February 18, 2017, <http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/la-et-cm-takemitsu-appreciation-notebook-20161016-snap-story.html>.

⁷ Based off of statistics on play.spotify.com as of March 8, 2017, Takemitsu has more than 4,000 followers on Spotify, whereas most contemporary Japanese composers have fewer than 100. He is only bested by the 120,000 followers of lyrical film composer Ryuichi Sakamoto.

⁸ Alex Ross, "Toward Silence," *The New Yorker*, February 5, 2007, accessed February 20, 2017, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2007/02/05/toward-silence>.

⁹ John Von Rhein, "Quiet Pleasure," *Chicago Tribune*, April 01, 2000, , accessed March 09, 2017, http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2000-04-01/news/0004010040_1_toru-takemitsu-canadian-percussion-group-nexus-temple-bowls.

In *The Music of Tōru Takemitsu*, Burt points out that “Takemitsu’s theoretical writings about music abound in striking metaphors that have proved a fertile resource for commentators in search of an evocative title or handy descriptive phrase.”¹⁰ Takemitsu’s essays tend to discuss music more philosophically than analytically, their argument unclear and vulnerable to critical misconstruction. The ambiguity of these quotations leads writers to make conceptual leaps, regarding Takemitsu’s intentions, that would otherwise be impossible. Unfortunately, this superficial approach keeps commentators from discussing Takemitsu’s life and work in more meaningful ways.

Burt, however, sets out in his book to create the first in-depth theoretical analysis of Takemitsu’s music in English, using rigorous and theoretical techniques to uncover Takemitsu’s compositional style. Burt’s approach contributes to a better understanding of Takemitsu, but as he acknowledges, the depth of its critical insight is limited by Takemitsu’s intuitive approach to composition. Takemitsu collected many influences throughout his life, from Debussy to *gagaku* [traditional court music] to Cage to Webern, to name but a few. The farther one follows through Takemitsu’s career, the more his ideas fluidly intermix, and the more difficult it is to isolate consistent techniques and influences. Just as Lu Ch’ai described, where Takemitsu’s techniques mature, they seem to no longer exist, blending into a single, personalized style.

Burt’s focus on Takemitsu’s orchestral music is consistent with the theoretical biases of musicologists during the early twentieth-century and postwar periods. These practices, which still dominate Western pedagogy, are chiefly concerned with primary material, usually engaging with musical work through technical analysis. Fundamentally, these methods are predicated on

¹⁰ Peter Burt, *The Music of Tōru Takemitsu* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 73.

the Romantic and modernist assumption that musical innovation proceeds linearly, with each successive breakthrough surpassing the harmonic limits of its predecessor. This view of musical scholarship is aligned with the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century modernist idea that music is autonomous, pure, and self-sufficient, where a work is valued independently, without reference to its historical or social context. From this standpoint the progress of art is self-affirming.

The focus on progress and the view of music as autonomous were closely aligned with the dominant philosophy of Western art music composers during the first half of the twentieth century. The advent of the postmodern epoch in the 1970s, however, was founded on the rejection of musical autonomy. The old tools were not useful for decoding the works of this new age, reacting with confusion or rejecting new movements altogether because they did not “progress” in the way that musicologists expected. This disparity has led musicologists and theorists to have to devise new methods and return to old methods that consider the work within a broader context. Even though writers such as Burt and Galliano see well beyond the limits of the modernist viewpoint, the latent positivist biases of the art music world are essential to recognize when examining commentaries on Takemitsu’s later works.

These considerations must inform any meaningful discussion of Takemitsu’s work. Of primary concern is the context and overall trajectory of his career, along with the music itself. This broader perspective will elucidate factors in Takemitsu’s development that are not dealt with by other commentators. In addition to his art music (orchestral, chamber, and electro-acoustic works), his popular (vocal and film) compositions will also be taken into consideration. Further, the argument that Takemitsu’s late style developed over a period of

decades challenges the old musicological tendency to divide composers' careers into sections and value them collectively by their level of creativity. It follows that, whereas many scholars focus primarily on his first (c.1945-1960) and second (c. 1958-1974) periods, Takemitsu's third period (c.1974-1996) should be seen as a culmination of his long career.

This discussion contains three sections. The first, "Experimentation: Assimilation Without Capitulation," discusses the speed with which the postwar Japanese avant-garde learned Western techniques. With the acceptance of these methods, however, a sense of their own artistic tradition still remained, just as it has through previous waves of cultural dominance. The conjunction of the assimilation of Western culture and development of Japanese culture contextualizes Takemitsu's resistance to the technical strictures of musical movements and trends. Like many of his Japanese peers, Takemitsu experimented with many of the Western trends, not loyal to any of them. Unlike other composers, however, he would often disengage from the techniques and make personal, aesthetic adjustments to the results. Though Takemitsu became part of the international avant-garde, his music never truly departed from his homeland. Whether fully intentional or not, his work contributed to the search for a truly "Japanese" Western music.

The second section, "The New Age," explores the movements and tensions within the Japanese and international artistic communities that impacted Takemitsu and his critics. The discussion will examine the notion of the "avant-garde," the relationship between Takemitsu's generation and those that followed them, and the effect of postmodern thought. In many ways, Takemitsu can be viewed as part of a postmodern return to the past, though there is no evidence that he purposefully changed to a more "postmodern" style. Rather, his late style is the result of

many of the same conditions which led to the turn of postmodernism in 1968-1972. Takemitsu's tonal music, created throughout all stages of his long career, also informed the trends which make up the foundation of his postmodern late style.

The third and final section, "A Single, Personal Sound," examines the impact of Takemitsu's search for a personal voice and "a single sound" on the arrival of his late style. The influence of Japanese tradition on Takemitsu's work is well-documented, but to write "Japanese" music was not his intention. In this section I argue that the influence of Japanese aesthetics was somewhat unconscious and that, as he aged, Takemitsu's traditions and culture became part of his personal voice, giving his work an indelible "Japanese" quality. The forces already at work, discussed in the previous three sections, matured during the final third of Takemitsu's life and became part of his compositional framework. It was through this framework, combined with his international philosophy, that Takemitsu's quintessentially Japanese late style arrived.

I. Assimilation Without Capitulation

“Explanation is not necessary, since the music is there and speaks for itself.”
- Tōru Takemitsu, *Confronting Silence* (1984)¹¹

In the postwar era, Japanese artists navigated a quickly-changing cultural and political landscape, often feeling the need to “catch up” with their Western contemporaries. Throughout its history, Japan has regularly been the receptor of cultural influence, whether from China, the West, or the Korean Peninsula. Takemitsu and his contemporaries handled the impetus of Western domination as deftly as their ancestors, speedily learning the methods and ideas of the European and American avant-garde. While the country worked to overcome the economic challenges remaining after the war, artists and intellectuals focused on cultural challenges, working to provide Japan with “a radical spiritual renewal.”¹² This renewal, which culminated in the 1960s, preserved many of Japan’s aesthetic principles, seeking an answer to the question of modern “Japanese” Western music.

Takemitsu’s participation in this renewal would contribute to his designation as Japan’s flagship contemporary composer. Though his use of Japanese instruments was fleeting and he avoided nationalism throughout his career, the effect of his methodological ambiguity was the creation of a mystical aura around his music, particularly from the Western perspective. Regardless of the listener, the noncommittal way in which Takemitsu explored technique was not all that different from his Japanese contemporaries.

¹¹ Tōru Takemitsu, *Confronting Silence: Selected Writings*, translated and edited by Yoshiko Kakudo and Glenn Glasow (Berkeley: Fallen Leaf, 1995), 97.

¹² Galliano, *Yōgaku*, 132.

Background

From the beginning Takemitsu was self-driven and self-taught, and while he found inspiration in the work of a few senior Japanese composers after the war, he never had a true composition teacher. Like many Japanese teenagers during the Second World War, Takemitsu had been conscripted before he graduated high school, and his experience in the military, oddly, is what led him to music. While holed up in the mountains west of Tōkyō, an officer used an illegal jimmy-rigged gramophone to play a French chanson for the youth.¹³ Takemitsu was astounded by the power of the music, made more impactful by its bleak surroundings. Impulsively, Takemitsu in that moment dedicated his life to composition, even though he had no experience with music.

During the 1930s and early 1940s, composers had worked under the authority of the imperial government, encouraged by state policy to write Japanese “nationalist” music¹⁴—a forced and insincere synthesis of triumphant European flashiness and Japanese traditional melody which carried the strengths of neither. While these prewar artists are often disregarded for their cooperation with the authorities, their musical experimentation, accomplished without external influence, was valuable in that it explored the idea of what “Japanese” Western music (*yōgaku*) was supposed to be.¹⁵

At the end of World War II, the Japanese music world was in turmoil, with wartime composers facing accusations of propaganda-creation and compliance with the government. In

¹³ Ross, "Toward Silence."

¹⁴ Yoshio Sugimoto, *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Japanese Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 276.

¹⁵ Alison Tokita and David W. Hughes, *The Ashgate Research Companion to Japanese Music* (Aldershot, Hampshire, England: Ashgate, 2008), 371.

this anti-nationalistic environment, a quasi-purge took place, opening the way for a new generation of composers—among them, Takemitsu.¹⁶

By 1945, the Japan Takemitsu had known had not only been defeated, but physically obliterated; most of its major cities had been bombed to the ground during the war. As composer Yasuji Kiyose (an intermittent tutor of Takemitsu) wrote of Tōkyō on his return, “There was nothing left of the old city but a flat, demolished landscape—no food, no houses, no men had yet returned from the war front. Only women were walking around [amid the rubble]. It was like one vast field.”¹⁷ Japanese self-confidence was battered and bruised by defeat, breeding a (self-inflicted) widespread Japanese feeling that Allied victory signaled the preeminence of Western culture. The century-old shadow of European-American cultural and technological dominance hung over the entire country, aggravated by the recent Allied victory in the Pacific.

The surrender of the imperial government left an empty space in Japanese life. The riddle of, in novelist Seiji Tsutsumi’s words, “how to grapple with modernism in a partially modernized society,”¹⁸ represented a formidable challenge to Japanese art and culture. Artists and intellectuals felt obligated to reexamine their own culture, its modernization and Westernization, and its relation to traditional Japanese custom. Without forced modernization from above, Takemitsu’s generation now had to create their own, personal justification for the forgone assimilation of Western industrialization.¹⁹

¹⁶ Judith Ann Herd, “Change and Continuity in Contemporary Japanese Music: A Search for a National Identity” (PhD diss., Brown University, 1987), 95.

¹⁷ Satō Toshinao, “Kiyose Yasuji: Sakkyoku suru no ga tanoshikute shigoto ga nai,” *Sakkyoku-ka to no taiwa: Nihon no sakkyoku zemināru 1975-1978*, ed. Nihon Ongaku Buyō Kaigi (Tōkyō: Shin Nihon Shuppan-sha, 1982), 199.

¹⁸ Havens, *Radicals and Realists in the Japanese Nonverbal Arts*, 1.

¹⁹ Galliano, *Yōgaku*, 149-150.

In those early postwar years, the administrative void left by imperial surrender was temporarily (and artificially) filled by the American occupation (1945-1952), a period which set the experimental foundation for Takemitsu's generation. Contact with Western ideas provided an opportunity to explore new worlds of music and culture, quite different from the wartime government's hyper-nationalist propaganda. Soon, many forward-thinking artists would come to have a desire to create a new Japanese cultural sensibility,²⁰ but first Takemitsu and his generation endeavored to learn the techniques and ideas of the West.

Unfortunately, the American occupation largely impeded their efforts during the early postwar era. Between 1945 and 1950, Americans systematically cleared Tokyo bookshops of their Western-language books, bringing them back to the United States.²¹ These books would have a huge impact on the American avant-garde, with whom the Japanese would later cross paths, but for the young avant-garde it was a major challenge. Additionally, the American government restricted travel during this period. The few young composers who were able to leave the country during the occupation years understood that they were messengers, sent to bring knowledge of the current Euro-American trends and techniques back to their colleagues. Most young artists, however, were unable to make contact with the international music scene until the end of the occupation in 1952.

While most scholars recognize the United States' good intentions, the legacy of this somewhat neocolonial period of American administration and hegemony has hung over Japanese artists and intellectuals ever since, and was immensely impactful for Takemitsu's generation.²²

²⁰ Ibid., 128-130.

²¹ Kay Larson, *Where the Heart Beats: John Cage, Zen Buddhism, and the Inner Life of Artists* (New York: Penguin Books, 2013), 150.

²² Havens, *Radicals and Realists in the Japanese Nonverbal Arts*, 2 and 40-42.

The dearth of information on other cultures available to them in Japan and the travel limitations imposed by the American administration combined to extend Japan's prewar cultural isolation into the 1950s.

A Tradition of Assimilation

The way in which Japan has integrated Western culture is a testament to its ability, as an island nation, to preserve its unique traditions. Galliano observes that Japan, having endured waves and waves of foreign cultural influence, "has always managed to preserve clear-cut distinctions between styles and genres without feeling the need to make dramatic and definitive choices between old and new."²³ Examples of this are everywhere. The packaging of modern Japanese products is covered with Western text, not for utility but for decoration. The Japanese language fundamentally differentiates everyday Japanese words from new, foreign ones. Perhaps Chipperfield describes this phenomenon best when he suggests that

... the war was just another upheaval in a country that has gone through many transformations, both in structure and belief. A country that seems to accommodate new gods without throwing away the old ones. A country so confident in its racial identity that it sees Western influence as a necessary element of its confrontation with modernity. The West, its products, artefacts and technologies are treated like another material, something to be used, a technology.

²⁴

As Chipperfield quips, Japan has a way of "borrowing without absorbing."²⁵ Accounting for the country's long history of cultural integration, the accommodation of the modern (i.e., Western) world in modern Japan may not be nearly so drastic as the drama at the end of the war suggests.

²³ Galliano, *Yōgaku*, 3.

²⁴ David Chipperfield, "Ghosts of the...House," *A Cabinet of Signs: Contemporary Art From Post-Modern Japan* (Liverpool: Tate Gallery, 1991), 25.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.

In her discussion of Japanese cultural assimilation, Galliano argues that “assimilating cultural models from other countries is often a form of culture in itself.”²⁶ Though Japanese artists ostensibly faced a cultural crisis in the short term, with a long view of their history the quickness of their recovery is hardly surprising. From this perspective, the exploration of Western art music by Takemitsu reaffirms the adaptability of Japanese culture.

After the war, Japan’s most palpable musical influence was European modernist music. Internationally, modernism and its derivatives (particularly high modernism and, later, anti-modernism) had dominated music of the first half of the twentieth century. After the war, modernist ideas had a tremendous influence on Takemitsu and his peers. Modernism, as a philosophy, is marked by a certain self-conscious, technocratic focus on progress, rejecting tradition and continually exploring new processes. In music, modernism’s arrival as a full-fledged movement began with Schoenberg’s leap to atonality in 1908. This denial of the traditional harmonic system, which he claimed would “assure the supremacy of German music for the next 100 years,”²⁷ created a progressive aura around his music. By the end of World War II, the serial techniques he and his students developed, based on highly structured mathematical techniques, were the most widely accepted method for contemporary composition.

Collecting Techniques

Although Japanese composers would eventually turn toward the creation of a new non-imperial, non-American culture, the young avant-garde was first focused on the collection of Western techniques. During these early postwar years, for example, Takemitsu was deeply

²⁶ Galliano, *Yōgaku*, 3.

²⁷ Dika Newlin, "Arnold Schoenberg," Encyclopædia Britannica, January 6, 2017, accessed February 20, 2017, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Arnold-Schoenberg>.

engrossed in experimentation with Western contemporary music, taking influence from European composers such as Messiaen and Debussy. One aspect that differentiates the Japanese from their Western counterparts, however, is that they had no allegiance to one methodology or another, to one approach or another. Japanese ideas and personal style, according to Havens, while “cerebral,” were “quite nonacademic when contrasted with the modernism that still prevailed in the Western-style curricula of Japan’s major conservatories.”²⁸ Though Schoenberg and Igor Stravinsky feuded over serialism and neoclassicism, for Takemitsu these opposing methods were equally valid—equally Western—and available for use in his music.

Takemitsu’s use of multiple, sometimes opposing musical philosophies runs throughout his full career; in the 1950s, however, he explored the widest variety of techniques. In 1948, he created a form of electroacoustic *musique concrète*, mirroring work in Europe by Pierre Schaeffer.²⁹ During this period he also began experimenting with a mathematical form of composition called serialism, though he would quickly find that it was too stiff and formulaic. He criticized this “technique of constructing sounds through mathematical formulas,” calling it “trivial”—a critique he would trot out many times throughout his career as a foil for his own compositional philosophy.³⁰

Though Takemitsu professed his wish “to free sounds from the trite rules of music, rules that are in turn stifled by formulas and calculations,”³¹ he simultaneously and consistently employed serial techniques during the 1950s and 1960s. In each of these many examples, Takemitsu begins with a serial idea but then leaves it incomplete. The timbral and harmonic

²⁸ Havens, *Radicals and Realists in the Japanese Nonverbal Arts*, 42.

²⁹ Thom Holmes, *Electronic and Experimental Music: Technology, Music, and Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

³⁰ Takemitsu, *Confronting Silence*, 14.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

influences the French and his personal expression regularly intercede into the strict technical process. Since these excerpts are covered in great detail in Burt's *The Music of Tōru Takemitsu*, here only one example needs discussion. In the second movement of *Uninterrupted Rest* (written 1959) there are "fleeting, inconsequential allusions to serial method." The twelve-tone (i.e., serial) collection of notes is stated in the first two measures and mathematically manipulated during the next three bars. Already, however, Takemitsu begins to make adjustments, interrupting the "integrity" of the twelve-tone series in the third measure. Beyond the tenth measure or so, a serial analysis of the work is pointless. According to Burt, Takemitsu "leaves any expectation that such a discourse will ensue almost provocatively unfulfilled, and instead uses his basic material simply as a partial resource for a very free study in timbre and texture."³² As Burt can attest, Takemitsu treated all strict technical processes with a similar disregard.

Although Takemitsu often criticized the stifling logic of serial techniques, his compositional style owed much to some of the most prominent European composers within the modernist movement. The timbre and orchestration of Webern, one of the most influential serialists of the twentieth century, is palpable in even Takemitsu's latest works,³³ and Takemitsu's ideas about music fell much in line with the post-Webernian desire for an international, post-national music.

³² Burt, *The Music of Tōru Takemitsu*, 65-67.

³³ Havens, *Radicals and Realists in the Japanese Nonverbal Arts*, 113-114.

Freedom and the 1950s

Once free of the American occupation in 1952, the question of how to reconcile the contrast between Western and Japanese art would stimulate one of the most exciting and creative periods of Japanese avant-garde art, paralleling similar developments in the West.³⁴ The speed with which young Japanese composers caught up to their Euramerican contemporaries during this period owes much to the communal artistic environment that matured organically during the 1950s. Driving forward together in their search for new ideas, young Japanese composers developed into many different formal artist groups and composers associations—more groups than had ever existed before in Japan.³⁵ They researched and discussed Western philosophy, art, music, and literature, seeking answers and learning from their own Japanese role models such as surrealist poet Shuzo Takiguchi.

The most famous and influential of the composer groups set up in the 1950s was a group called Jikkenkōbō, or “Experimental Workshop.” The twenty-one year-old Tōru Takemitsu was a founding member of the group. Like Takemitsu, the majority of composers involved in Jikkenkōbō were autodidacts who had little or no connection to the established music community. The group was also special in that it was made up of artists spread across the spectrum of artistic media, including visual art, dance, film, and poetry. This diversity cultivated a “synthesis of audiovisual elements and the constant cross-fertilization of genres,” and the group was one of the first to host performances of European serialists. Galliano argues that these avant-garde events, though extremely contemporary, avoided the European modernists’ “extremes of an excess of rationality and an excess of subjective individualism” which, perhaps

³⁴ Galliano, *Yōgaku*, 150-151.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 182.

because of Japanese artists' natural connection with Japanese aesthetics, "did not reflect their personal poetics."³⁶ That Takemitsu and his peers were already hesitant to accept high modernist dogma so early in their careers is a testament to the unique process of artistry that exists in Japan.

The immediate impact of Jikkenkōbō's work was such that it "almost single-handedly shaped the future of Japanese contemporary music."³⁷ In the long term, however, its work, "preoccupied with experiments in form and in representations of beauty," would come to be associated with modernism. Though they may not have been "modernists," per se, their fervor for innovation nevertheless led to their designation as "ultra-modernists," limiting their influence on Japanese contemporary music and art.³⁸ With the end of the decade the members began to go their separate ways, in part because of the individual successes of some of its core members. Takemitsu's "big break" had come in 1957: by serendipity, the famed composer Igor Stravinsky heard his *Requiem* for strings and shared it with his peers in America, launching Takemitsu's career. Regardless, the Jikkenkōbō years were extremely important for his development as a composer.

Before moving on, it is important to note that—though their confident treatment of incoming (dominant) Western culture was fundamentally Japanese—Jikkenkōbō avoided the use of traditional instruments and forms. Takemitsu and his peers were at this time opposed to the rising neonationalist movement, though they would later begin to experiment with it. Takemitsu, a Japanese composer who spent his whole life in Japan, was writing *Western* music.

³⁶ Ibid., 150-154.

³⁷ Herd, "Change and Continuity in Contemporary Japanese Music," 188.

³⁸ Havens, *Radicals and Realists in the Japanese Nonverbal Arts*, 55 and 70-71.

Ichianagi-Cage Shock

By the beginning of the 1960s, contemporary Japanese art was in step with the rest of the Western world, with almost every international movement present in Japan—their mission to catch up with the West was a success. Toshi Ichianagi, who returned from study abroad in 1961, later remarked that composers of the time “were very ambitious and very spiritually healthy. Information about contemporary European and American music had spread widely.” Takemitsu and his generation continued to deal with the challenging intersection of East and West, but were now able to begin “to set aside European and North American patterns” and create work which was, in the words of Havens, both “transcultural” (international) and “locally positioned” (Japanese).³⁹ Whether they were successful in integrating Japanese and Western aesthetics depends on one’s perspective, but the influence of neonationalism on Takemitsu, though brief, would mark him as a composer of Japanese-style music for the rest of his career.

Even as Japanese composers took separate paths, the primary motivation which they shared in the early 1960s, was, as Galliano describes, “the desire to develop a language that would be individual, innovative, and capable of freeing Japanese music from its sense of inferiority in regard to European and Western culture.”⁴⁰ This core exploration of national and international cultural ideas would manifest itself for Takemitsu’s generation primarily through the movements of anti-modernism and, later, neonationalism. They would, in some ways, leave modernism behind, reaching out instead to their new-found friends in the international music scene.

³⁹ Havens, *Radicals and Realists in the Japanese Nonverbal Arts*, 47 and 160-165.

⁴⁰ Galliano, *Yōgaku*, 222.

By the end of the 1950s, institutions such as the Sōgetsu Art Center were established to support some of the decade's most ambitious work. The first half of the new decade was rocked by the influx of a new Western movement now called anti-modernism. The principal leader of anti-modernism was the infamous John Cage, an American composer and rebellious former student of Arnold Schoenberg. Cage had long been connected with Japanese culture, arranging a *shakuhachi* (Japanese traditional wood flute) performance for forty of his friends in Seattle as early as 1935.⁴¹ By the end of World War II, Cage lived in New York where, as mentioned before, he and his peers found inspiration in the huge influx of Japanese books and ideas. He was particularly interested in the ideas of Zen Buddhism.

Beginning in the mid-fifties, Cage taught a course on experimental musical composition at the New School in New York—a course that drew heavily from Eastern ideas and teaching methods. One of his students was Toshi Ichianagi (1933-), one of the young composers who had left Japan in 1952 to study composition abroad. Ichianagi and his then-wife Yoko Ono were both deeply affected by Cage, and after a year studying with him (in 1961) they decided to travel home to disseminate these startling new ideas. Ichianagi reconnected with many of his old colleagues, including Takemitsu, and wrote many essays and articles spreading Cage-inspired ideas and principles. Although Japanese composers had already had minor contact with Cage's work,⁴² the full force of Cage's ideas overwhelmed them.

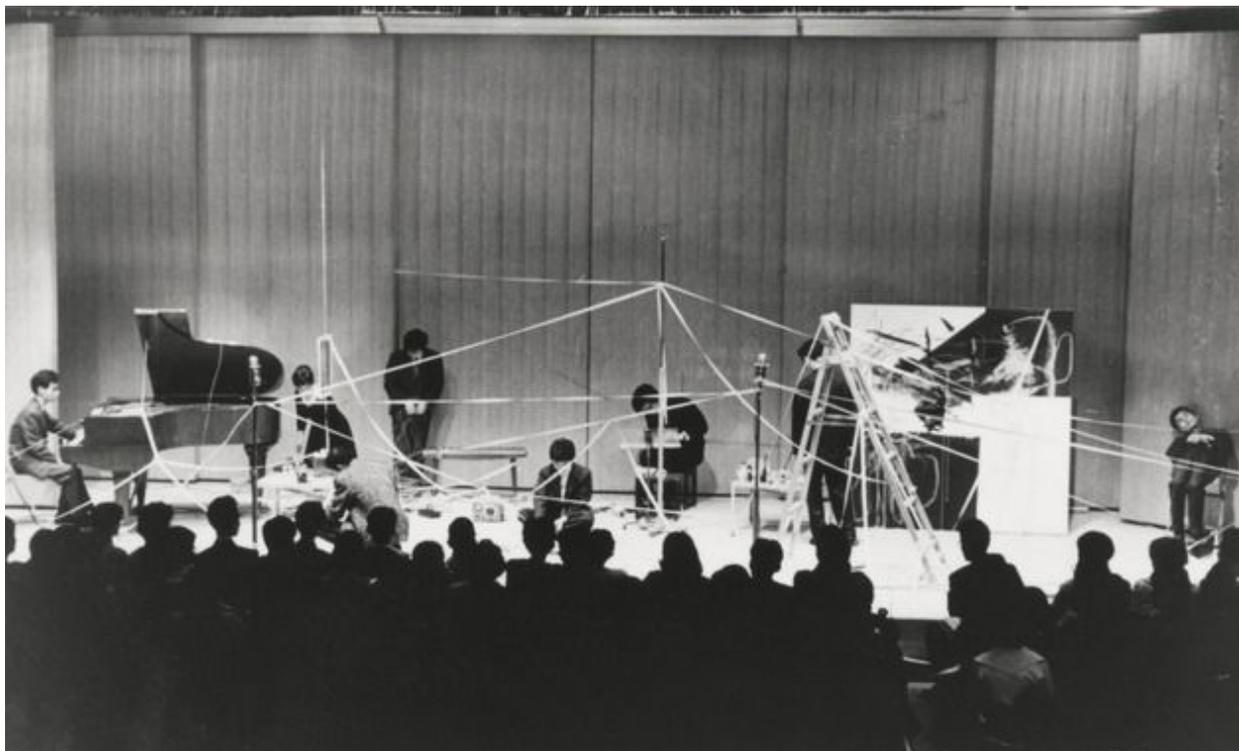
Known to scholars internationally as “Cage shock,” Japan's “John Cage-Ichianagi shock”⁴³ (to use Alexandra Munroe's term) transformed the Japanese avant-garde. The source of the shock was their recognition of themselves in Cage's music; as Galliano argues, Cage had

⁴¹ Larson, *Where the Heart Beats*, 31.

⁴² Galliano, *Yōgaku*, 151.

⁴³ Larson, *Where the Heart Beats*, 402.

“outstripped” them in their search for compositional autonomy and was miles ahead of them in his search for a unique East Asian musical language. The fact that Cage’s work and compositional philosophy borrowed greatly from Zen texts “and that his philosophy of liberty was both conceptually superior and more radical than theirs” destabilized their newfound self-confidence.⁴⁴



From left: Toru Takemitsu, Mieko Shiomi, Toshiro Mayuzumi, Takehisa Kosugi, Yasunao Tone, Mizuno Shuko, Toshi Ichianagi, and Yuji Takahashi performing "IBM: Happening and Musique Concrète" in Sōgetsu Contemporary Series 10: Works by Ichianagi Toshi on November 30, 1961 at the Sōgetsu Art Center in Tokyo, Japan. Photographer unknown. The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Archive, I. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. Accessed February 9, 2017.

The so-called knockout blow came when Ichianagi performed Cage’s *Concert for Piano and Orchestra* at the 1961 Festival of Contemporary Music in Osaka. Takemitsu was astounded by the whole performance, writing in a 1992 obituary notice for Cage that he still felt “the shock

⁴⁴ Galliano, *Yōgaku*, 222.

of hearing that piece.”⁴⁵ The concert’s impact was so large that several of Ichiyanagi’s fellow composers gave up composition for a couple years while searching for a way to surmount Cage’s challenge.⁴⁶

The influence of Cage-Ichiyanagi shock was not universal, however. Western commentaries tend to overlook the Cage-like trends in Japan that preceded Cage’s arrival. Group Ongaku, in particular, was exploring many concepts which we now refer to as Cageian during the late 1950s, and were well known to artists after their 1961 concert at the Sōgetsu Art Center. Years later, former Ongaku member Tone Yasunao called the Cage shock claim as “hogwash,” claiming “the whole notion of ‘John Cage shock’ was a fiction!”⁴⁷ Perhaps Yasunao and Group Ongaku were more prepared than their peers, but the disturbance Cage caused did not last long.

The Cage shock of 1960-61 serves as the true divider between the 1950s and the 1960s for the Japanese avant-garde. Cage would visit Japan himself in 1962 and again in 1964, serving as an inspiration for many Japanese composers. In that pivotal moment he changed the future of Japanese composition. Takemitsu has written extensively about the influence of Cage on his work, especially in the early 1960s when he experimented with many Cageian techniques, including graphic scores, indeterminacy, and the prepared piano. Before long, however, his fascination with them wore off. Takemitsu was dissatisfied with the results of Cage’s aleatory techniques, saying in 1989 that, taken to an extreme, Cage’s randomness becomes “just the

⁴⁵ Takemitsu, *Confronting Silence*, 137.

⁴⁶ Galliano, *Yōgaku*, 222-223.

⁴⁷ Miki Kaneda and Tone Yasunao, “The ‘John Cage Shock’ Is a Fiction! Interview with Tone Yasunao, 1,” *Post: Notes on Modern & Contemporary Art Around the Globe*, published March 8, 2013, accessed February 09, 2017. http://post.at.moma.org/content_items/178-the-john-cage-shock-is-a-fiction-interview-with-tone-yasunao-1.

opposite—it seems terribly logical.”⁴⁸ In Takemitsu’s view, the extremes of chance and control, of modernism and anti-modernism, can result in aesthetically similar compositions.

Takemitsu would move on quickly from Cageian techniques, but the philosophical influence of Cage would have an impact on his core conception of Japanese aesthetics. The third section of this paper will discuss how his understanding of Japanese philosophy was heavily influenced by a Westerner, and its impact on his standing in the halls of Japanese Western music.

Neonationalism and Traditional Japanese Music

In the years immediately following Cage’s influence, composers moved from play with his indeterminate and aleatory (chance) techniques to a broader trial of his ideas. In the opinion of Ichiyanagi, during this period they began “to understand the importance of traditional Japanese and Asian arts” and started to use “Western logic and analytical approaches to identify the concepts behind [their] indigenous arts.” Ichiyanagi believed that because Eastern teaching methods focused on copying the teacher, the Western analytical method was needed to give them “the words with which to understand East Asian concepts.”⁴⁹ By applying these Western methods of analysis, the avant-garde of Takemitsu’s generation would tackle traditional Japanese music in an entirely new way.

Initially, attention to Japanese aesthetics was stimulated by interest from Western idols such as Olivier Messiaen, Karlheinz Stockhausen, and Lou Harrison, and especially from Cage. Cage opened doors for Japanese composers by denouncing the boundaries between art and life, arguing that all sounds are music and, in a broader sense, giving them permission to use sounds

⁴⁸ Havens, *Radicals and Realists in the Japanese Nonverbal Arts*, 113-114.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 165.

that were traditionally outside of the Western idiom. The most prominent way this manifested itself was through the appropriation of traditional Japanese instruments, melodies, and ideas (*hōgaku*). The boom in exploration of traditional Japanese instruments and ideas by the avant-garde (referred to as the *hōgakki-boom*) was part of a larger postwar “neonationalist” movement in the Japanese arts, which was at its height during the 1960s and early 1970s.

Unlike the superficial mixture of Japanese and European music seen in the 1930s, neonationalist music used Western analytical practices to understand traditional aesthetics. The movement was a continuation of the “Japanese quest for independence from foreign influence,” founded in what Tokita and Hughes describe as “a fragile juxtaposition of individualism and cultural readjustment.”⁵⁰ Some composers tried to create a fundamental synthesis between Japanese and Western aesthetics. Takemitsu, however, highlighted the difference between the two traditions by juxtaposing them within a single composition, *November Steps* (1967).

Havens notes that many of the neonationalist compositions occupy critics to this day,⁵¹ and *November Steps* is among the most famous of the era. It has received a particularly large amount of attention from Western commentators, probably because of its inclusion as the fourth side of an LP recording of Messiaen’s *Turangalila Symphony*.⁵² For many listeners, it was the first contemporary Japanese composition they had ever heard, and it exhibited, through its use of Japanese instruments, the exotic orientalism they would likely associate with Japanese music. Because of the worldwide distribution of that recording, which was undeniably helpful for Takemitsu’s career, he is largely misunderstood as a composer who was concerned with bridging Eastern and Western music. He showed little interest in incorporating Japanese instruments into

⁵⁰ Tokita and Hughes, *The Ashgate Research Companion to Japanese Music*, 371-372.

⁵¹ Havens, *Radicals and Realists in the Japanese Nonverbal Arts*, 166

⁵² Burt, *The Music of Tōru Takemitsu*, 111.

his work and would write art music using *hōgaku* instruments only a few more times outside of historical film compositions. For Takemitsu, the use of traditional instruments was no more than a minor excursion.

Takemitsu's neonationalist music is useful, however, in that its rejection of modernism can be seen as some of the first "postmodern" (or at least anti-modern and post-Western) music produced in Japan. These early manifestations of a return to the past and to traditional tonality and philosophy set the tone for the final period of Takemitsu's output a decade later. By grounding their music in "the specific musical culture of their everyday environment,"⁵³ the avant-garde's neonationalist compositions represented a major step toward independence from the modernist paradigm.

Many Methods

In surveys of Japanese religion, "the number of believers of the various religions is generally twice the actual population of Japan," with respondents participating in more than one religious practice.⁵⁴ Citizens will celebrate Christmas, visit a Buddhist temple, and take part in Shinto ritual—perhaps all in one week. Takemitsu's lack of "loyalty" to any one technique follows this pattern. This pragmatic syncretism that Takemitsu displays can be astounding, and even intimidating for the scholar. Because of this, it is easy for the musicologist to focus solely on Takemitsu's film work or orchestral work, in order to construct an argument. An argument that makes a statement about his life, such as this one, should take into account as wide a variety of music as is possible.

⁵³ Havens, *Radicals and Realists in the Japanese Nonverbal Arts*, 166.

⁵⁴ Sugimoto, *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Japanese Culture*, 149.

Takemitsu's songs for voice and accompanying piano prove to be one of the biggest challenges to the established narrative of his career. He wrote beautiful, luscious songs and jazz tunes almost every year of his life,⁵⁵ especially beginning with his movie soundtrack career in the 1960s. Later, in the 1970s, he would even arrange Beatles hits for classical guitar (their quality has yet to be matched). He was a prolific film composer, composing for more than ninety movies over the course of his career, and would watch hundreds of films on his own every year. He also wrote incidental music for Japanese theater, and even composed a few school songs.

Cage, after returning to Japan, opined that the “emphasis on film music is a major factor in distinguishing modern Japanese music from the musics of America and Europe” because composers are affected by the systems which support their work. In America, contemporary music is supported by universities, and in Europe by government radio stations, but in Japan, composers had to write for film in order to support themselves.⁵⁶ It follows, then, that the strictures of writing for the movies influenced Takemitsu's style. This argument falters, however, because Takemitsu wrote primarily for art films whose directors gave him significant control over the sound of the film (Kurosawa was a notable exception to this). The range of styles exhibited in his film music stretches from the prettiest of songs to some of his most extreme experiments.

This broad array of film music coincided with Takemitsu's exploration of avant-garde technique. At the same time that he was writing for film and for voice, Takemitsu was writing some of the most interesting experimental orchestral and chamber music of the period. He was

⁵⁵ Incomplete list of years he published tonal music: 1958, 1960-63, 1965-66, 1968, 1970, 1972, 1974-79, 1983, 1985-86.

⁵⁶ Yayoi Uno Everett and Frederick Lau, eds., *Locating East Asia in Western Art Music* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2004), 194-195.

II. The New Age

*“The wild geese do not intend to cast their reflection.
The water has no mind to receive their image.”
- from Zenrin Kushū, translated by Alan Watts⁵⁷*

Internationally, as artists reached the second half of the twentieth century, the idea of what progress really was—and therefore how the avant-garde was defined—became unclear. As it split into different factions in the 1970s, the “international” avant-garde imploded, losing the sense of unified progress which defined the first half of the century. Some, pushed forward by the avant-garde mission, became even more radical in their work, such as those of the Fluxus movement, while Takemitsu was part of an emerging “postmodernism of reaction.”

Toward the end of the 1960s, Takemitsu’s compositional style was continuing to change. The first flashes of what scholars call his final period appeared in compositions such as *Dorian Horizon* (1964) and *Green* (1967). Outside events, however, would form the true milestones and pivot points in this era of his career. A new generation was emerging—a new avant-garde which would take the torch from Takemitsu and his generation, and the Osaka World Exposition in 1970 would form a wedge between them.

Now that they had caught up with the Western avant-garde and made contact with Cage, the Japanese avant-garde began to question the central tenets of modernism itself. During the 1960s and 1970s they moved away from the “ultra-modernism” of Jikkenkōbō and the high modernism of Western Europe, skeptical of the Western musical dogma. Artists and intellectuals instead searched for alternate modernities and new ways of seeing the world, looking inward and including their experience of everyday life.

⁵⁷ Alan Watts, *The Way of Zen* (New York: Penguin Books, 1962).

The New Avant-Garde

Although the 1960s was a time of self-exploration for the Japanese avant-garde, the first half of the decade was also a period of rebuilding. While most of the world began recovering culturally from the war in 1945, the American occupation extended cultural “wartime” for the Japanese. Consequently, the postwar period for Japanese artists ended not in the late-1950s but in the mid-1960s, marked by the 1964 Tokyo Olympics and the first postwar trade surplus with the United States in 1965.⁵⁸ By the end of the postwar period the many artist groups and composers associations of the 1950s had broken apart, with composers following their own individual paths. This artistic decampment was even more prominent along generational lines. Because of political differences with the new generation of the avant-garde and his prominence within the Japanese musical world, Takemitsu was viewed as the establishment—someone to react against.

By the end of his career in the 1990s, Takemitsu was sometimes even no longer considered an “avant-garde” composer,⁵⁹ leading to the question: what *is* the avant-garde? The term literally translates from the french to “fore-guard,” or vanguard, a military term for the foremost division of an army. In the West, the word is used casually to refer to anything that is experimental, radical, cutting edge, or “weird.” The avant-garde questions the status quo, running against the grain of the conventional thinking. For the Japanese it is a more difficult notion, usually referring to any artist who is progressive.⁶⁰ In Japan, because the traditional arts were learned by repetition (*kata*), modern avant-garde art is especially subversive and dangerous because its existence fundamentally challenges these ritualized traditions.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Havens, *Radicals and Realists in the Japanese Nonverbal Arts*, 121.

⁵⁹ Burt, *The Music of Tōru Takemitsu*, 219.

⁶⁰ Francis, “Your Bag of Thrills,” 10; Havens, *Radicals and Realists in the Japanese Nonverbal Arts*, 4.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

The term is quite problematic for scholars as well, and has been discussed extensively by writers such as Burger, Cameron, Kroeber, Meyer, and Poggioli. The exact purpose and constitution of the avant-garde can be constructed many different ways. Certainly, the avant-garde often exhibits dogmatic aspects, self-asserting ideological concepts, purging dissent, and proceeding teleologically in service to perceived “progress.”⁶² From one perspective, these artists can be perceived as “change agents” who attempt to redefine stylistic change and invest energy in changing the dominant culture. Alternatively, avant-garde artists are simply rebels, “pattern-wreckers” who subvert the norm. Burger puts forth the most restrictive and modernist of these definitions, where avant-garde artists are those who challenge the bourgeois institutions and autonomy of art.⁶³

These ideals of nonconformity and progress go back to nineteenth-century discussions of music. While Schoenberg and his followers claimed to be rejecting the tonal paradigm, they were concurrently carrying on the Romantic tradition of harmonic progress since, by 1908, the trajectory of musical composition meant that the only way to progress within the dominant Austro-German tradition was to leave the rules of the harmonic system behind. This Romantic expectation that composers would continue along this single line of expansion, according to Eduardo De La Fuente, “led to the various aesthetic and communicative dead-ends” composers experienced in the modern period. By his account, the imperative to destroy old ways of thinking and create entirely new ones was “pure Romanticism.”⁶⁴ As a result of this modern condition, composers constantly competed with one another. Only two years after Cage’s arrival in Japan,

⁶² G. Douglas Barrett, *After Sound: Toward a Critical Music* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 46.

⁶³ Eduardo De La Fuente, *Twentieth Century Music and the Question of Modernity* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 138-140.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 8 and 86.

Tone Yasunao of Group Ongaku recalls George Maciunas of Fluxus telling Yasunao not to publish with Cage's publisher because "the Cage school" was going to be over soon.⁶⁵ Artists sought to move past the work of their predecessors with intense speed.

Political Unrest

The avant-garde's progressive nature has regularly associated it with progressive political causes, as proven by the historical opposition of authoritarian governments such as the USSR, German National Socialists, Chinese Communist Government, and numerous others. Japan was no exception to this trend, and artists were heavily involved in political protests during this middle part of the twentieth century. Major student protests rocked the country in 1967, 1968, and 1969, which have been compared to political uprisings across the globe in the late 60s. Eiji Oguma argues, however, that Japan's situation differed from the Chinese, European, and American ones in that Japan was in the midst of "historically unprecedented economic growth."⁶⁶

The decade began with protests against the 1960 Japan-United States Mutual Security Treaty (abbreviated in Japanese as "Anpo"). The young Japanese, stirred by the Korean War and their memories of World War Two, believed the treaty would initiate another conflict.⁶⁷ The political atmosphere of the Cold War had made Japan an indispensable link in the US's chain of defense, purged of militarists in 1947 and then communists in 1949-50. The Security Treaty

⁶⁵ Miki Kaneda and Tone Yasunao, "Sound Is Merely a Result: Interview with Tone Yasunao, 2," *Post: Notes on Modern & Contemporary Art Around the Globe*, published August 5, 2013, accessed February 09, 2017, http://post.at.moma.org/content_items/476-sound-is-merely-a-result-interview-with-tone-yasunao-2.

⁶⁶ Eiji Oguma, "Japan 1968: A Collective Reaction to Rapid Economic Growth in an Age of Turmoil," trans. Nick Kapur, Samuel Malissa, and Stephen Poland, *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, 13, no. 12 (March 28, 2015): , accessed March 6, 2017, <http://apjif.org/2015/13/11/Oguma-Eiji/4300.html>.

⁶⁷ Keiji Hirano, "Legacy of 1960 protest movement lives on," *The Japan Times*, June 11, 2010, , accessed March 07, 2017, <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2010/06/11/national/legacy-of-1960-protest-movement-lives-on/#.WL66i5ArLEZ>.

allowed the United States to have bases in Japan, in case they were needed against the Soviets. People had demonstrated against the treaty in 1952, perhaps with Takemitsu among them, and over the course of the 1950s resistance grew, with many feeling that Japan was not a truly independent state. By 1960, the majority of Japanese people were against the renewal of the treaty, but Anpo was signed, all the same, and remains in effect to this day.⁶⁸

The protests were pivotal for Japanese society, affecting the politics of Japan even today. After the failure of the 1960 Anpo protests, Takemitsu's political activism of the 1950s faded. It was the same for many of his generation, and as the new decade began, Takemitsu and his peers left the political arena. This first generation of the postwar took a nominally apolitical stance, leaving younger artists the responsibility of resistance.⁶⁹ Takemitsu's generation of composers were apolitical not only because they had developed a distaste for politics, but also because the majority of them had elite social origins, sharing what Havens calls "an establishmentarian preference not to resist political authority."⁷⁰ For its part the neonationalist movement's inherent nationalism seemed to align it with the new government's efforts to cultivate cultural nationalism and a belief in cultural uniqueness. The young avant-garde believed this nationalism was meant to replace the prewar industrial, militarist state as a means of societal control.⁷¹ Though Takemitsu's association with neonationalism was short-lived, it may have further affected his standing within the Japanese music scene.

In the aftermath of the 1960 protests, the student movements fell apart. They split into sects, undermined by Japan's tremendous economic growth. It was not until October 1967 that

⁶⁸ Justin Jesty, "Tokyo 1960: Days of Rage and Grief," MIT Visualizing Cultures, 2012, , accessed March 07, 2017, https://ocw.mit.edu/ans7870/21f/21f.027/tokyo_1960/anp2_essay01.html.

⁶⁹ Havens, *Radicals and Realists in the Japanese Nonverbal Arts*.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁷¹ Tokita and Hughes, *The Ashgate Research Companion to Japanese Music*, 3.

the Prime Minister's visit to South Vietnam reinvigorated the student protesters. A resistance movement spread widely among students, open to anyone of any ideology. At first, they sought reform within their individual universities, but the focus shifted over time toward national political change. With such high opposition to the Security Treaty and Vietnam War across the country, the movements were not subdued by the government until 1969.⁷²

As the new generation turned from the establishment, they also turned from the work of Takemitsu. During the 1950s and early 1960s, Takemitsu's status within the avant-garde was without question. In this new period of Japanese history, however, he was no longer perceived as radical: his work had been accepted by the establishment. For the younger generations, his refusal to take a political stance was a betrayal, an endorsement of the status quo—a symptom of Takemitsu's success. The young avant-garde's position is understandable: they were concerned about the bureaucratic, homogenized, consumerist nationalism that had grown during the economic boom of 1960s, and they were resistant to the high-modernist hegemonic and apolitical tendencies that had influenced *Jikkenkōbō*.^{73,74}

The generational separation present during the 1960s is perhaps best exemplified by the work of the anti-capitalist group *Fesutivaru Funsai Kyoto Kaigi* [Joint Struggle for the Annihilation of the Festival] which shut down the Sōgetsu Art Center's 1969 Film Art Festival. As postwar-era artists grew more influential and successful, perception of the Sōgetsu Art Center for younger artists changed. The irony of their chosen target was not lost on Miki Kaneda, who points out that “these critics viewed the [Center] as an institution for legitimating avant-garde art, when in fact, it originally set out to provide a place for artists outside the world of commercial

⁷² Oguma, "Japan 1968."

⁷³ Havens, *Radicals and Realists in the Japanese Nonverbal Arts*, 6.

⁷⁴ Kenneth Gloag, *Postmodernism in Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 40.

art.”⁷⁵ The Fesutivaru Funsai Kyoto Kaigi protest was one of the final blows to an institution that had defined the 1960s scene.

Banpaku

The 1970 Osaka World Exposition marked the beginning of a new artistic environment. The Expo was a coming-out party for Japanese commerce and industry, which had been building over the course of the 1960s, exemplifying “the new ascendancy of corporate culture in a country typified until recently by farms and small businesses.” Never before in Japan had there been an exhibition of technology and culture of such scale. According to Havens, the year 1970 was a monumental “cultural threshold” on the same level as defeat in 1945—a threshold constituted by “the collapse of protest movements against the Vietnam War, treaty ties to the United States, and university-governance policies,” and representative of a critical attenuation of the avant-garde’s cultural capital.⁷⁶

The Expo was both symbolically and materially connected to this decline, creating a fissure in the artistic community. Takemitsu was firmly connected with the “establishment” side of the dispute, having received what Peter Burt calls “the most elegant of symbolic confirmations”: the leadership of the grandiose modernist music section of the Expo.⁷⁷ The new generation staged a counter-exposition in Osaka, protesting the Expo’s corporate patronage of art. They feared, perhaps correctly, that even their most radical products would be absorbed by

⁷⁵ Miki Kaneda, "A Very Brief History of the Sōgetsu Art Center," Post: Notes on Modern & Contemporary Art Around the Globe, published February 15, 2013, accessed February 09, 2017, http://post.at.moma.org/content_items/154-a-very-brief-history-of-the-sogetsu-art-center.

⁷⁶ Havens, *Radicals and Realists in the Japanese Nonverbal Arts*, 6.

⁷⁷ Peter Burt, *The Music of Tōru Takemitsu* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 132 and 159.

the capitalist system and therefore be neutralized and marked as “an accredited object of consumer desire.”⁷⁸

For the composers who took part in the Expo, however, their representation of Japan became a seal of approval—approval which seemed to completely contradict their claim to the avant-garde. Already viewed by successors as a *former* member of the avant-garde, Takemitsu’s participation in the Expo aligned him with the corporate paradigm and the “decline” of experimental music into social acceptance. The new middle-class market for “avant-garde” work created a new condition for Takemitsu’s career, lifting him into what he once viewed negatively as “the establishment.”⁷⁹ This sort of recognition for the avant-garde was an international trend. Avant-garde composers all over the world, particularly minimalists like Philip Glass and Steve Reich, began to receive recognition from the freshly-educated middle class without losing their experimental conviction, therefore challenging the avant-garde narrative.

From Macronarrative to Micronarrative

The twentieth-century narrative of the Western avant-garde had been built around an idea that techniques and trends shifted more quickly than ever before, progressing through more and more extreme methods of abstraction. The creation of a single musical narrative meant that each stylistic change, though largely out of anyone’s control, had to be placed within the narrative structure. This self-affirming process imparted upon each new artistic movement great importance in the history of music. In the 1970s, however, this structure began to break apart. As De La Fuente argues, it no longer made sense to “see the future of music in terms of one

⁷⁸ Havens, *Radicals and Realists in the Japanese Nonverbal Arts*, 122-123

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 122-127.

trajectory, one future to the exclusion of others.” Stylistic changes were regarded as changes in fashion rather than major movements in the cultural scene, and “the moral and intellectual weight of any given stylistic code [was] lessened.”⁸⁰ The international avant-garde was entering a new age that would change how everyone engaged with their art.

Postmodernism, an overused and under-defined term resistant to definition, was the new condition of art-making. Not really part of a *movement*, but of a *period*, postmodern works share an “incredulity”⁸¹ toward the modernist and high-modernist metanarratives. In his overview of postmodernism in music, Kenneth Gloag synthesizes the work of numerous scholars into a relatively simple timeline of the emergence of postmodernism. While he acknowledges that this may be “too neat”—that any such model implicitly oversimplifies and excludes—this sort of structure is useful for the purposes of comparison to and criticism of “the norm.” In the first period of this emergence, according to his argument, composers rejected modernism throughout the 1950s. Cage and his fellow experimentalists of the New York School championed this anti-modernist movement most clearly, though others fit into the category. During the second period, from the late 1950s to the early 1960s, Gloag describes a “radical break” between modernism and the new postmodern condition. Then, between 1968 and 1972, postmodernism finally emerged as a new era in the arts.⁸²

Many discussions of Takemitsu have avoided labelling him as postmodern, perhaps because postmodernism is so widely defined. But Takemitsu’s work exhibits several traits associated with the postmodern era, marking him in broad terms as a postmodern composer and a member of the postmodern-era avant-garde. His “postmodern” works, sometimes referred to as

⁸⁰ De La Fuente, *Twentieth Century Music and the Question of Modernity*, 5 and 152-153.

⁸¹ Gloag, *Postmodernism in Music*, 3.

⁸² Gloag, *Postmodernism in Music*, 10.

post-avant-garde or post-experimental, constituted his response to the decline of modernism and the multiple new movements of the avant-garde. Whereas from a modernist perspective his later works are part of a recession from the avant-garde mission, from a postmodern perspective his late style's return to romanticism and expression is artistically innovative.

Postmodernism of Reaction

By 1972 several movements within postmodernism had emerged. Some were more “radical,” such as those connected with the Fluxus movement. These sections continued the modernist pursuit of progress, but rejected modernism's concepts of media and authorship (among other issues). Others like Takemitsu, taking part in a “postmodernism of reaction,” challenged the assumption that old ideas were dead, making music that returned to ideas of the past. This music, exemplified most clearly by neoromantic composers, “escapes modernism in order to construct itself in relation to the premodern moment that was romanticism.” Gloag posits that what attracted artists to the romantic period was its “heightened subjectivity and intensity of expression,” particularly in contrast with the perceived intense asceticism of the high modernists.⁸³ Because of its return to the past, the postmodernism of reaction was generally more tonal, and for the average listener therefore more communicative. According to Hutcheon, where modernists were concerned with creating unheard-of sounds, these works make connections with the audience using familiar sounds, often through allusions to historical music.⁸⁴

The sharpest example of a postmodernism of reaction is the work of George Rochberg. Rochberg's string quartets, particularly his third from 1972, appropriated eighteenth-century and

⁸³ Gloag, *Postmodernism in Music*, 23 and 70.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

nineteenth-century techniques and structures. As Lance Brunner notes, however, Rochberg's quartets are "anything but traditional;" by blatantly applying such traditional language Rochberg dealt with contemporary issues and expectations.⁸⁵ Rochberg's old-sounding work provoked negative and sometimes hostile reactions in the music world. Gloag argues that these negative critical responses "may simply suggest that many of the individuals who responded did so through interpretive frameworks conditioned by the experiences and assumptions of modernism." In fact, the postmodernism-of-reaction's retrospective music may be "singular in its repudiation of modernism,"⁸⁶ where it challenges even their notion of progress.

Internationally, Gloag argues that the economic decline which began in 1973 "can be seen as the moment at which the utopian optimism of the 1960s finally disappeared," allowing "nostalgia for a romanticized past" to become a prominent cultural mode, highlighted by composers such as Rochberg and Del Tredici.⁸⁷ De La Fuente, alternatively, posits that the blurring of present and future that was constant within the avant-garde confused any sense of the "present" and allowed for returns to repressed techniques and concepts such as traditional tonality.⁸⁸

Discussions of Takemitsu such as those by Burt, Galliano, and Havens tend to spend less time with his later works compared with those of the 1950s and 1960s. Other writers have referred to his final period as "conservative" or "stoic."⁸⁹ In general, these commentators take for granted the purity of the high-modernist and radical-postmodernist avant-garde's motivations,

⁸⁵ Lance W. Brunner, review of *The Concord Quartets*, by George Rochberg, *Music Library Association Notes* 38, no. 2 (Dec. 1981): 424.

⁸⁶ Gloag, *Postmodernism in Music*, 96-97.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁸⁸ De La Fuente, *Twentieth Century Music and the Question of Modernity*, 152.

⁸⁹ Burt, *The Music of Tōru Takemitsu*, 1.

applying a modernist view of art to Takemitsu's postmodern works. This "modernist agenda that conceives and constricts the musical work as an essentially autonomous object," according to Gloag, can lead to an interpretation that does not take into account the "forms of critical engagement and interpretation that are symptomatic of postmodernism"⁹⁰—in this case, a return to the traditions and ideas of the past.

A return to the past, however, raises questions as to how these works should be critically assessed. In Brunner's review of Rochberg's *Concord Quartets*, which followed the third quartet stylistically and chronologically, he raises some of the questions musicologists faced with the advent of postmodernism:

How are we to assess the artistic achievement—the meaning and value—of music written ostensibly in the stylistic conventions of past eras without attempts to renew or transform those conventions? ... Should we attempt to judge and understand such works in terms of some past context? Could we even possibly do this?⁹¹

Perhaps unlike Rochberg, Takemitsu attempts to renew and transform stylistic conventions of past eras, and his employment of traditional musical language is not nearly as audacious.

These questions, however, are useful for a discussion of Takemitsu's late style. Should we attempt to judge such works within some past context? To do so may truly be impossible, and is not what Rochberg (or Takemitsu) would have wanted. But how are we to assess the artistic achievement of music in this new era? That is part of the challenge of postmodernism: many of the rules have disappeared. Ian Buruma argues that "when there are no more aesthetic standards by which to judge the quality of a work of art, when all is arbitrary, then it ceases to matter what the artist intended. It is indeed a matter of indifference whether he or she intended anything in

⁹⁰ Gloag, *Postmodernism in Music*, 17.

⁹¹ Brunner, *The Concord Quartets*, 425.

particular. Or, in the case of conceptual art, the meaning, as in Haiku poems, is often beyond words.”⁹² The postmodern era, begun in the early 1970s, freed Takemitsu of the strictures of the modernist avant-garde, allowing him to be judged by purely aesthetic, expressive terms.

Tonal Harmony

This freedom manifested itself primarily through Takemitsu’s use of tonal harmony. Takemitsu’s stance on traditional harmony had always been unique, as discussed in section one with his modifications of serial materials. Early in his career, he argued that “for sounds to come into being they must reverberate through the composer, becoming one with him.” In 1984 he felt the same way, concerned with “an approach that is closely related to [his] feelings” rather than a “perfect composition.”⁹³ During the mid- to late-seventies, it became clear that Takemitsu was taking a different course from what many people expected of him. The lyricism and relatively simple (compared to modernist works) harmony of this “late style” would solidify him as both the preeminent voice in contemporary Japanese music and, simultaneously, an imposter among the avant-garde.

Takemitsu’s version of postmodern neoromanticism was different from that of his Western contemporaries because the past he returned to was never experienced in Japan. Ichiyanagi opined about postmodernism in Japan that composers “moved to the next stage, beyond modernism, without deeply experiencing modernism as in Europe or America.”⁹⁴ Because of this lack of connection and the condition of postmodernism, Takemitsu’s

⁹² Ian Buruma, “Japanese Avant Garde,” *A Cabinet of Signs: Contemporary Art From Post-Modern Japan* (Liverpool: Tate Gallery, 1991), 15.

⁹³ Takemitsu, *Confronting Silence*, 14 and 114.

⁹⁴ Havens, *Radicals and Realists in the Japanese Nonverbal Arts*, 2.

romanticism totally ignored the nineteenth-century Romantic progressive imperative. Rather than rejecting progress or retreating from the avant-garde, Galliano argues, Takemitsu was “changing his control over the way the parts relate and converge” in his music, “working with points” rather than “working with lines” in his melodies and structures.⁹⁵ He was changing the forms and processes of his music in search of something new. This process epitomizes many of the traits of postmodern music.

Takemitsu’s works of the 1970s exhibited many of these traits, slowly developing a new sense of tonality. By 1975, with the once-unassailable international avant-garde breaking apart, Takemitsu began to develop a romantic “late style” marked by simplicity, opulence, and refinement. Again, Burt’s comprehensive musical analysis provides more than enough proof of Takemitsu’s turn toward tonal harmony. When *New York Times* critic Allen Hughes heard the sumptuousness of Takemitsu’s *Quatrain* (1974), he could hardly believe it, noting: “If Toru Takemitsu's avant-garde standing is still intact among his peers, and if his *Quatrain* represents his present compositional practice fairly, we may have to revise our notions of what constitutes avant-gardism in music in the mid-1970s.” Hughes was correct: their notion of the avant-garde would have to change, and over time the methods of criticism would adjust to the new condition of music-making. In Takemitsu’s case, the sensuous lyricism established during the final moments of *Green* (1967) for orchestra and developed in *Quatrain* would dominate his music during the postmodern period, culminating unambiguously in his well-analyzed *A Flock Descends into the Pentagonal Garden* (1977).⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Galliano, *Yōgaku*, 274.

⁹⁶ Burt, *The Music of Tōru Takemitsu*, 158-160.

Based on the evidence of Takemitsu's writings and our understanding of his compositional approach, the roots of his move toward romantic tonality are even older. In 1962, responding to Ichiyanagi's argument that "when a composer puts meaning into sound and invents fixed forms he objectifies himself through his own ego," Takemitsu said that the expression avoided by the anti-modernist movement "is not the world giving meaning to me, but me giving meaning to the world. By doing so I reassure myself of my own existence in the world."⁹⁷ His positive take on tonality separated him from the European and American avant-garde of the time, especially when it became a prominent part of his sound in the 1970s and later. Tonality was not his only creative mode, however: though he wrote in 1987, "I think music must awaken natural emotion within us, an extremely sensuous process,"⁹⁸ it was common for him to write a dissonant soundtrack, beautiful vocal arrangement, and sensuous orchestral piece in a single year. Interestingly enough, by 1981 Ichiyanagi too returned to a more traditional style of writing, facing similar criticism from the avant-garde.⁹⁹

The break between the composers of Takemitsu's generation and the younger avant-garde contributed to the perception of Takemitsu as a "has-been" nostalgic composer rather than an artist of the postmodern condition. Commentators have taken this position as well, describing his new tendencies as a decline from the zenith of experimentation in the mid-sixties.¹⁰⁰ But the act of returning to the past is itself a thoroughly postmodern one, and it is present in many of the pieces of Takemitsu's work beginning in the late 1960s.

⁹⁷ Takemitsu, *Confronting Silence*, 12.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 126.

⁹⁹ Galliano, *Yōgaku*, 282.

¹⁰⁰ Burt, *The Music of Tōru Takemitsu*, 133.

III. A Single, Personal Sound

*“We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.”*
- T.S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*¹⁰¹

Late Style

It is a very human notion, the “beginning.” That historians feel a need to choose a point of origin for everything has little to do with natural survival. In many instances, there is not a single point of arrival, but a long development where any single starting point would be arbitrary. Over the course of Takemitsu’s career there were many beginnings, from the impact of World War II to Cage and the advent of postmodernism. Now we turn our attention to the equally difficult notion of endings. Takemitsu’s oeuvre is standardly broken into three periods, the third of which lasts from *A Flock Descends* in 1977 to Takemitsu’s death in 1996. This paper, however, has articulated already a number of elements of Takemitsu’s late style which began long before 1977. In this section, the various strains of development in Takemitsu’s career mature into a cohesive style—the arrival of Takemitsu’s quintessential late style.

Edward Said, in his discussions of “late style,” notes that the notion of a final serenity and reconciliation at the end of life is widely accepted. With the decay of the body, the onset of ill health, or as we have seen with Takemitsu, the effects of commercial success, there is an expected softening or purifying of the artist’s work; the artist returns to the core forms and traditions they previously opposed. Itself an example of “late style” (it was published posthumously after Said’s death in 2003), Said’s *On Late Style* challenges this notion. Said finds

¹⁰¹ T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets* (San Diego: Harcourt, 2001).

that there is a contrasting scenario, where the artist challenges their audience—what Said calls “a sort of deliberately unproductive productiveness, a going against”—and shatters the sense of wholeness of method which they had worked so hard to create.¹⁰² For Said and Theodor Adorno, to be late is to “survive beyond what is acceptable and normal,” and this lateness cannot be surpassed or escaped, but only deepened. The prolongation of an artist’s career, such as that of Takemitsu after 1980, leads to a “late style” where the work gains freedom from the constraints of the music scene: lateness is a “self-imposed exile from what is acceptable, coming after it, and surviving beyond it.”¹⁰³

Takemitsu’s classification within Said’s definition of late style is problematic. On one hand, Takemitsu’s use of tonality and nostalgia, particularly during the final decade of his life, fits the model of the artist softening their edges and returning to a more comforting style. During the last part of his life, Takemitsu’s style was dominated by the romanticism toward which he had been trending for much of his career, and there are many similarities between these works and even early ones such as his *Requiem*. Takemitsu’s rejection of radical modernism and the avant-garde can also, however, be aligned with Said and Adorno’s definition of lateness. In a postmodern era where challenging traditions is the norm, Takemitsu’s romanticism may also be a rebellion. As Burt mentions, when looking at Takemitsu’s late style, “one has the suspicion at times, indeed, that the composer no longer cared what his critics thought...allowing the latent tendency of his music towards a certain ‘expressionism’ (and even sentimentality) to flourish

¹⁰² Edward W. Said, "Thoughts on Late Style," *London Review of Books*, August 5, 2004, accessed February 22, 2017, <https://www.lrb.co.uk/v26/n15/edward-said/thoughts-on-late-style>.

¹⁰³ Edward W. Said, *On Late Style: Music and Literature Against the Grain* (New York: Pantheon, 2006), 13-16.

unashamedly.”¹⁰⁴ Takemitsu’s late style therefore falls somewhere in between Said’s reconciliatory and rebellious conceptions of late style.

A Unique Voice

One critic has asked of Japanese art, “why is it that Japanese post-modernism matters, whereas Japanese modernism...hardly made any impact at all?”¹⁰⁵ The answer is that it was not until the postmodern era that Japanese artists “came into their own.” During the 1950s and 1960s, Japanese composers had been utilizing a foreign system. Takemitsu’s career during those years, while exemplary and highly successful, ran in tandem with the top trends in Western composition. In the early 1970s, however, the Japanese began to engage in more meaningful self-discovery,¹⁰⁶ and Takemitsu’s late style would “diverge irrevocably from that of his former Western colleagues.”¹⁰⁷ Takemitsu’s romantic style was more than just a result of his classical education, as Tokita and Hughes argue.¹⁰⁸ In fact it was the opposite: freed by postmodernism, his exploration of Eastern and Western ideas during this period was secondary to his personal voice and tastes, taking on “a kind of ecstasy” and “sense of otherworldliness.” Though his style still owed much to Debussy and Messiaen, his use of tone color and sense of the “‘tactile’ aspect of sound,” as Galliano refers to it, grew into something deeply personal over the course of his career.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁴ Burt, *The Music of Tōru Takemitsu*, 217.

¹⁰⁵ Buruma, “Japanese Avant Garde,” 15.

¹⁰⁶ Tokita and Hughes, *The Ashgate Research Companion to Japanese Music*, 378.

¹⁰⁷ Burt, *The Music of Tōru Takemitsu*, 175-176.

¹⁰⁸ Tokita and Hughes, *The Ashgate Research Companion to Japanese Music*, 378.

¹⁰⁹ Galliano, *Yōgaku*, 160 and 211.

Though Takemitsu interacted regularly with his Western contemporaries and was well-aware of international trends, his music must also be considered fundamentally Japanese, separate from that of his European peers. Tokita and Hughes argue that the West's adoption of "age-old, traditional concepts...to modern procedures" is entirely different from the forces at work in Japanese contemporary music, where music is "subject to continual change, stimulated by domestic and foreign innovations."¹¹⁰ Because of these differences, some of the concepts engaged with in this section, such as silence, sound, and harmony, must be explored in a different way from that which would be used for a contemporary Western composer.

Takemitsu, according to those who knew him, was an extremely amiable and interesting character. He liked to meditate and enjoyed the sounds of the forest and the city equally. While he was extremely sociable and could drink his peers under the table, he would also oftentimes withdraw from conversation into his own thoughts. A relatively small man, Takemitsu had a quirky side; in addition to his hundreds of compositions he wrote a detective novel and created a cookbook.¹¹¹ Like his music, he was generally somewhat quiet, and seemed to be wise and connected to the earth. Cage is often quoted as saying he could imagine "Takemitsu making a trip around Japan not to see different views of the moon, but to hear, say, the wind in different trees and then returning to the city bearing gifts." To Cage, those gifts were "the transformations of nature in art."¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Tokita and Hughes, *The Ashgate Research Companion to Japanese Music*, 381.

¹¹¹ "Enter the Garden: A Portrait of Toru Takemitsu," interview, April 22, 2007, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b007gbq2>.

¹¹² Robert Aitken, "Some Memories of Toru Takemitsu," Robert Aitken, September 2013, accessed March 09, 2017, <http://www.bobaitken.ca/styled-3/page12/index.html>.

Cage's Influence

Through Cage's influence in the early 1960s, Takemitsu had been reconnected with his own tradition. As Takemitsu wrote in the late 1960s, "John Cage profoundly influenced my music."¹¹³ Though Cage did not set out to create followers in Japan, his enthusiasm for Japanese ideas reinvigorated the interest of Takemitsu's generation. His impact on people is often described as a granting of *permission*—permission to break rules, challenge the status quo. Permission, even, to return to something from the past. Though in his early years Cage had battled against the classical tradition, over time he realized that tonal music still had value. He said of these old sounds, "I begin to hear the old sounds—the ones I had thought worn out by intellectualization—I begin to hear the old sounds as though they are not worn out. Obviously they are not worn out. They are just as audible as the new sounds. Thinking had worn them out. And if one stops thinking about them, suddenly they are fresh and new."¹¹⁴ Takemitsu's contact with Cage not only opened him to the ideas of Japanese tradition, but also Western romanticism.

The impact of Cage on Takemitsu's musical philosophy is best evidenced through Takemitsu's description of one of their encounters at a festival in Hawai'i in 1964. The two of them were composers-in-residence for an East-West festival, with Takemitsu representing the "East" and Cage representing the "West." Before returning home from the festival, the two of them left their hotel to explore the bush—their last shared experience before parting ways. Takemitsu's account of the occasion is florid: "Under the canopy of dark trees the flowering tropical orchids appeared from another world. I imagined I understood the language of the birds. Ever-changing things . . . bird songs never repeated . . . bright purple orchids . . . rain . . .

¹¹³ Takemitsu, *Confronting Silence*, 27.

¹¹⁴ Larson, *Where the Heart Beats*, 239 and 296.

wind.”¹¹⁵ He was fundamentally impacted by the nature surrounding him, relating his experience of the Hawaiian sun, “covered by cloud-like felt,” and eloquently lingering upon his description of the thick island foliage that obscured their path.

In the forest with Cage, Takemitsu experienced sound in a totally new way. Embraced by the world, far away from their hotel and the rest of society, he began, according to his account, to understand the world in a different way: “There in the forest I felt the things around me were not part of an objective world. I felt I was already part of those things. I was changing. If I leaned against a rotten tree I felt my skin would become brown, covered with villus. If I touched the leaves I would become green.” Takemitsu, no longer felt separate from the stones and plants and birds which surrounded him—he felt a deep unity that forced him to question his way of perceiving the world. He continues: “With all the changes in the world, the world never changes. It is difficult to believe the unlimited manifestation of that Power which gives us life. The human being seeks to live by setting himself apart from others. Is this as it should be?”¹¹⁶ This encounter marks the true beginning of Takemitsu’s re-assimilation of Japanese culture—a re-assimilation that in itself is quite Japanese. Now aware of traditional Japanese aesthetics, Takemitsu’s voice was greatly influenced by the combination of his understanding of Japanese openness and the influence of Cage.¹¹⁷

The impact of Cage, in the long term, was to make Takemitsu more than just an average Japanese composer of Western music. As Takemitsu has acknowledged, his sensuality owed much to the philosophical elements he learned from Cage, where according to Havens, “despite their differences and their lack of sustained interpersonal contact, Cage and Takemitsu displayed

¹¹⁵ Takemitsu, *Confronting Silence*, 29.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹¹⁷ Galliano, *Yōgaku*, 211.

a degree of momentary creolization in their shared interests in Asian philosophy, their independent discoveries of silences as compositional basics, and their mutual use of the sonorities of single sounds.”¹¹⁸ Just as he opened the door for virtually every movement of the postmodern-era avant-garde,¹¹⁹ Cage opened the door and gave “permission” for Takemitsu to develop a unique personal style, thereby contributing, perhaps ironically, to his “Japaneseness.”

From his earliest years of composition, Takemitsu was concerned with the creation of a single sound which would be able to confront silence. It would have “strength and integrity,” carved “with [his] own hands,”—a “stream of sounds” where God might dwell.¹²⁰ Commentators make much of these bold statements on sound and silence; they are quoted in virtually every essay on Takemitsu as a way of mystifying him and making him more interesting. His statements on a single sound are useful clues that lead to the three different ways that Japanese tradition impacted Takemitsu’s unique musical voice: silence, texture, and melody.

Silence

The ideal of a single sound should first be related back to Japanese artists’ long tradition of aspiring “to single, instantaneous gestures.”¹²¹ This spatial idea is relatively easy to conceptualize when discussing calligraphy and other visual arts, but with music the concept is more challenging. The idea that a temporal art such as a piece of music can happen in one instant is a challenging one. Even in Cage’s *4’33”*, the listener is provided with temporal boundaries (four minutes and thirty-three seconds) for the piece. But conceptually, for Takemitsu, there was

¹¹⁸ Havens, *Radicals and Realists in the Japanese Nonverbal Arts*, 113-114.

¹¹⁹ Larson, *Where the Heart Beats*, 414.

¹²⁰ Takemitsu, *Confronting Silence*, 6-7, 24 and 66.

¹²¹ Galliano, *Yōgaku*, 9.

no mental barrier: music should be written as if by a single stroke of the brush. Berio discusses this intrinsic duality in Japanese music in comparison to that of the West:

In European music, silence can have metric, syntactic, and rhetorical functions. The concept of silence has been ideologized; it has often become a symbol of rebellion, of absence, or of deliberate impotence. But in Japanese music, silence has no dialectical relationship with sound. More often it suggests the silent presence of sound. Silence becomes an intrinsic ontological dimension of what the composer thinks, writes, and scrupulously annotates.¹²²

Berio's discussion of silence in Japanese music here alludes to *ma*, a concept which has been elevated to near-iconic status. Takemitsu defined *ma* as the "intense silence" which immediately precedes a sound. In everyday life, *ma* can also be defined as "the relationship between people, or that moment in a person's mind between thoughts."¹²³ As defined in the *Ashgate Research Companion*, it is simply "a space or interval between two points," or, in music, "the optimum length of a pause that provides maximum effect in either sound or movement."¹²⁴ As Galliano points out, while this may seem to indicate an interruption in sound, in truth *ma* is a silent continuation of the action or the sound.¹²⁵

Takemitsu understood this concept deeply and was fascinated by this idea of a single tension or vibration, with no beginning and no end, stretching through "sound" and "silence." The idea of a continuum between the two in Japanese music, often repeated by commentators, is at least reminiscent of Cage's philosophy, and may carry some of his influence. Cage often spoke of how "each thing has not only its own life but also its center, and that this center is always the very center of the universe."¹²⁶ These ideas of oneness and universal interpenetration,

¹²² Ibid., x.

¹²³ Ibid., 14.

¹²⁴ Tokita and Hughes, *The Ashgate Research Companion to Japanese Music*, 25-27.

¹²⁵ Galliano, *Yōgaku*, 14.

¹²⁶ Larson, *Where the Heart Beats*, 367.

such as the interpenetration of sound and silence that Takemitsu describes, point to the Zen Buddhist philosophy embedded in Japanese culture. Although Takemitsu was humanitarian Christian,¹²⁷ he would still have been aware of Buddhist customs and ideas, and perhaps even participated in some of them since the practice of religion in Japan is so syncretic. This blend of religion and culture has meant that Tao, Shinto, Christian, and Buddhist ideas have developed as ritual practices and concurrently as sources for cultural norms. In particular, ideas related to silence are deeply entrenched within life in Japan, extending into social interactions, customs, and principles.

In the West, however, *ma* “has become mystified as something which cannot be explained to the outsider, especially the non-Japanese outsider, and has conversely been the object of fascination by outsiders, who invoke it as a unique aesthetic to explain otherwise inexplicable aspects of Japanese performing arts.”¹²⁸ But for Takemitsu and his peers, the inherent connections between *ma* and Cage’s music would have been obvious. Takemitsu was particularly interested in the point where sound and *ma* meet. He spoke of a paradoxical relationship between the two:

Between this complex sound—so strong that it can stand alone—and that intense silence preceding it, called *ma*, there is a metaphysical continuity that defies analysis...this *ma* and sound do not exist as a technically definable relationship. It is here that sound and silence confront each other, balancing each other in a relationship beyond any objective measurement.¹²⁹

For Takemitsu, silence and *ma* were constant considerations, affecting his music more and more as he moved into the final stage of his career. In a way, it defines “neither space nor time, but the

¹²⁷ Galliano, *Yōgaku: Japanese Music in the Twentieth Century*, 152.

¹²⁸ Tokita and Hughes, *The Ashgate Research Companion to Japanese Music*, 26-27.

¹²⁹ Takemitsu, *Confronting Silence*, 51.

tension in the silence”—a tension which Takemitsu wished to highlight throughout his music.¹³⁰ Beginning in the late 1960s, he used this *ma*-tension in his music with increasing control, incorporating sound masses and silences to introduce it into works such as *Ki no Kyoku* [*Tree Music*] where moments of sound are juxtaposed with moments of silence, and *ma* is present at the point where they meet.¹³¹

Texture and Orchestration

Ma's continuum of sound and silence is problematic for Western commentators because, though they may be convinced otherwise, it is unlikely that they understand it. The idea of a “continuum” in Japanese music, often conjured in order to mask this lack of understanding, is “so strident as to become tedious.”¹³² And yet, in the Western language, there is no better word to illustrate the conceptual continuities present in Japanese ideologies.

During the last part of his career, Takemitsu also cultivated a continuum through his ideas of a “stream of sound” which replaced the individual rhythmic and tonal units present earlier in his career. In his earlier engagement with *ma*, small fragmented bits of sound, connected by silence, were “complete in themselves” in what Takemitsu himself called “a harmony of events.” Each was like a stone, surrounded by empty space and appearing silent but, for Takemitsu, seeming to “converse with their environment.”¹³³ His ideas were aligned with Japanese tradition where, according to Galliano, “all environmental sounds are expected to be intrusive and ever present.”¹³⁴

¹³⁰ Galliano, *Yōgaku*, 14.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 211-213.

¹³² Tokita and Hughes, *The Ashgate Research Companion to Japanese Music*, 26.

¹³³ Takemitsu, *Confronting Silence*, 84 and 121.

¹³⁴ Galliano, *Yōgaku*, 8.

As Takemitsu's late style developed, however, he developed a new way of thinking about music which was related to the *shō*, a mouth organ used in traditional *gagaku*, Japanese court music. *Gagaku* does not use rhythm or beat in the same way as Western music. He was interested in the way it dealt with rhythm, and the sensual quality of the *shō*'s harmonies, in his own words the "ascending sounds and the secret of immeasurable metaphysical time." The *shō* is deeply connected with the breath, with inhaling and exhaling, "continuous and without attack." For Takemitsu this "stream of sounds" awakens the "internal latent rhythm," creating an "unbroken continuity" and "a richness of sound undivided by rigid classifications."¹³⁵ Takemitsu wrote these passages in the early 1960s, long before such ideas truly impacted his work. These dormant Japanese traditional influences in Takemitsu were awakened by his historical situation, forming an important part of his late style.

With all of this philosophical talk, it is important to remember that Takemitsu's ideas resulted in finite compositional decisions. Takemitsu's belief that the *shō*'s power was "inherent in its relationship with man's breathing" led him to make the durations of chords in *Garden Rain* (1974) a function of the performers' breath capacity. The *shō*'s harmonic limitations may also have resulted, according to Burt, in Takemitsu's "preference for verticalised modal forms, and for 'panpentatonic' chords in particular, that is such a conspicuous feature of his later work."¹³⁶ Certainly, the long, dense masses of sound present in pieces such as *A Flock Descends* (1977), *Dreamtime* (1981), *To the Edge of Dream* (1983), and many others exhibit these panpentatonic tonalities and present long sound masses that grow and fade with the breath.

¹³⁵ Takemitsu, *Confronting Silence*, 7.

¹³⁶ Burt, *The Music of Tōru Takemitsu*, 167-174.

Until his death, Takemitsu continued to refine his mastery of texture and orchestration. His renowned use of instrumental color in his orchestration, creatively doubling unusual instruments and using them imaginatively, was but one aspect of his “mastery of rapturously beautiful tone shadings that was unsurpassed amongst composers of his generation.”¹³⁷ Takemitsu’s consummate understanding of orchestral sonority was at the core of his search for a unique musical sound whose development can be traced all the way back to the impact of French impressionist music in those early years. His connection with the sensuality of French music might even have its origins in the moment he heard French chanson in the tunnels and dedicated his life to music.

Even this French connection, however, leads back to Japanese tradition. During the early 1990s, a debate raged in the Japanese art world around the urban-focused work of visual artists such as Shinro Ohtake, Emiko Kasahara, and Yasumasa Morimura in the 1988 exhibition *Against Nature*. The discussion had two basic perspectives. On one side, these artists and their proponents believed that their postmodern art successfully combined elements of Japanese and Western art, finally arriving at a synthesis. On the other, some more conservative curators and critics believe that the work misunderstood modernism, where “modernism” refers to a French-Japanese artistic aesthetic centered on nature.¹³⁸

Though Takemitsu had no involvement in this discussion, his work regularly employed the orchestral warmth and non-teleological depth of French composers such as Debussy, Satie, and, later, Messiaen. The music of Debussy, which influenced all of French music, was heavily influenced by the influx of Japanese art to Europe during the mid-nineteenth century. Debussy

¹³⁷ Ibid., 189.

¹³⁸ Francis, “Your Bag of Thrills,” 10.

took from it a sensuality and spirituality not present in Western music during that time. Those who championed the French-modernist style Japanese art felt that they were championing the *true* modern Japanese art, and on the surface Takemitsu's work seems to employ a similar overall aesthetic. Though he was primarily focused on his own personal musical voice, his work's French influences would nonetheless align him with the conservative outlook of such artists, thereby contributing to his work's palpable Japanese sensibility.

Melody

In his last interview Takemitsu asserted that “since the music of today is for some reason over-forgotten of song, learning from things of the past like Brahms—not turning back to the past, but creating new things—is, I think, very important for composers.”¹³⁹ The focus on lyricism, an idea that for so long had been derided by the avant-garde, was the final and most rebellious element of Takemitsu's late style. Beginning with *A Way A Lone* (1981), melody took on a progressively more dominant role in his music.¹⁴⁰

Part of his muse of lyricism may also have come from the influence of traditional music, since Japanese music is mostly monophonic, composed of a single melodic line, with a stress on the unfolding of that single line through time.¹⁴¹ Galliano argues that Takemitsu sought “sound in its unaltered, original quintessential state...that finds itself face to face with silence,” looking to the fundamental values of his culture.¹⁴² During the last decade of his work, however, the

¹³⁹ Burt, *The Music of Tōru Takemitsu*, 219.

¹⁴⁰ Galliano, *Yōgaku*, 274.

¹⁴¹ Tokita and Hughes, *The Ashgate Research Companion to Japanese Music*, 24.

¹⁴² Galliano, *Yōgaku*, 213.

influence of nostalgia is just as strong—he even wrote a piece in 1987 entitled *Nostalgia* in memory of Andrej Tarkovskij.

The dominance of nostalgic romanticism during these final years shows that writing “Japanese” music was not Takemitsu’s goal. After his half-hearted exploration of neo-nationalism with *November Steps*, Japanese ideas had remained an important influence, but in a more nuanced manner. Though the search for a unique Japanese Western music was always inherent in the experiments of Takemitsu’s generation, it was not their conceit. They searched for Japanese *Western* music, for *yōgaku*. Academic discussions of the Eastern and Western aspects of his work can tangle up quickly, but the basics of Takemitsu’s situation are clear: he was a Japanese-born, Japanese-based musician who wrote Western music in a Western style. The appropriation of Japanese aesthetics in his music had more to do with the natural influence of his heritage and environment. All Cage did was open Takemitsu up to these influences.

Takemitsu was aware of the Western-ness of his work, saying once as if it were a confession, “I do write Western music, don’t I?”¹⁴³ For Cage, Takemitsu had “a kind of excellence that one often associates with Japan, but an elegance greatly colored by contemporary European styles. So that when he asked me after a performance of one of his works what I thought of it, I said that it was clearly most beautiful, but I didn’t find it particularly Japanese.” In Cage’s opinion, the continuity present in Takemitsu’s music, though related to Japanese tradition, had an “articulated continuity one associates with European thought.”¹⁴⁴ The

¹⁴³ "Enter the Garden: A Portrait of Toru Takemitsu," interview, April 22, 2007, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b007gbq2>.

¹⁴⁴ Yayoi Uno Everett and Frederick Lau, eds., *Locating East Asia in Western Art Music* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2004), 197-198.

non-teleological but articulated continuity Cage speaks of is likely the French sensuality discussed above.

Takemitsu's awareness of his Western musical sound and concurrent understanding of Japanese ideals became a major part of his personal style during the last years of his career. His late style does not fit easily into either of Said's classifications of late style, but rather takes on certain aspects of both reconciliation and rejection. During the postmodern era Takemitsu truly came into his own, writing music from his own soul. The methods he had gathered throughout his career matured into a single sound during this period, separating it from the work of his earlier years. This culmination of Takemitsu's oeuvre solidified him as the quintessential Japanese composer of Western music.

IV. Conclusion

“Music is noise submitted to order by wisdom.”
- Puccini¹⁴⁵

During the middle of the twentieth century, the Japanese avant-garde gained an understanding of Western music incredibly quickly, in part because of Japanese culture’s unique ability to protect its core identity during periods of assimilation. Takemitsu was deeply engaged in this exploration of Western technique, but his noncommittal way of implementing modernists’ dogmatic techniques preserved his personal artistic control. The ambiguity of his technical methods separated him from his Japanese peers in a very “Japanese” way.

As a new generation of the avant-garde came of age, the international music scene went through a tremendous transition into the postmodern era. Takemitsu’s commercial success and nominally apolitical stance separated him from his successors, but the tonal music that he slowly embraced exhibits many of the characteristics of a postmodernism of reaction. Though commentators usually avoid the loaded term “postmodernism,” Takemitsu’s work was greatly impacted by the new avant-garde environment.

Takemitsu’s search for a unique, personal musical sound and his search for “a single sound” coincided to connect his music once again with the traditional sounds of his homeland. Though he did not intend to write Japanese music, the way Takemitsu dealt with silence, texture, and lyricism during the final period of his life combined with forces already at work in his career to solidify his late style.

The idea that Takemitsu’s late style “arrived” connotes that each and every development in his career led to that arrival. Most discussions of his music focus on the modernist and

¹⁴⁵ Alan Fletcher, *The Art of Looking Sideways* (London: Phaidon, 2013).

anti-modernist experimentation of the 1950s and 1960s, because the value of Takemitsu's artistic contributions is much more difficult to ascertain after the turn to postmodernism. Galliano posits that his move away from the avant-garde imperative toward a unique, personal aesthetic was potentially "in reaction to the disturbing return of nationalist fervor that was making itself felt in Japan." During those years Takemitsu spoke often of the global future, and the need to prepare for it.¹⁴⁶ He likely shared the opinion that museum director Seiji Oshima expressed in 1991, that the reconciliation of Western avant-garde and artistic tradition was an inevitable destiny for non-European nations.¹⁴⁷

Over the course of his career Takemitsu had made connections with thousands and thousand of musicians, composed hundreds of pieces, and impacted far more listeners than one can count. Takemitsu's reputation was at its height at the time of his death. He was so established that for the West, it was as if Takemitsu *was* Japanese contemporary music.¹⁴⁸ His place within the twentieth-century music pantheon, however, is not assured. Postcolonial theorist Rey Chow has said, "if the impetus of modernity is a criticism of the past, then much of our cultural criticism is still modernist."¹⁴⁹ The story of Takemitsu has suffered under the dominant modernist interpretation, seeming to shrivel during the last two decades of his life. Unfortunately, some of his best work during the eighties and nineties receives hardly any attention compared to his Western contemporaries.

At the core of the avant-garde philosophy there is a "confidence in the final victory of *time* and immanence over traditions."¹⁵⁰ The life of Tōru Takemitsu, however, shows that

¹⁴⁶ Galliano, *Yōgaku*, 277.

¹⁴⁷ Francis, "Your Bag of Thrills," 10.

¹⁴⁸ Burt, *The Music of Tōru Takemitsu*, 216.

¹⁴⁹ Havens, *Radicals and Realists in the Japanese Nonverbal Arts*, 135.

¹⁵⁰ De La Fuente, *Twentieth Century Music and the Question of Modernity*, 138.

oftentimes tradition triumphs over time and immanence. Though the Japanese have engaged in substantial cultural nationalism over the last few decades, Takemitsu's implementation of Japanese tradition was totally natural and intrinsic to his method of work. From beginning to end, he used Western techniques, blending them into a personal methodology where none of them remained individually recognizable, developing them into a unique, sensuous, sensational Late Style.

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