

## TÔRU TAKEMITSU (1930–1996) , 508

*James Siddons*

Tôru Takemitsu, the leading Japanese composer of the twentieth century, was born in Tokyo on October 8, 1930. In November 1930, the family moved to Dairen, Manchuria, where the father was an official of the Japanese government in southern Manchuria. In 1937, when it was time to enter school, Takemitsu was sent back to Tokyo to live with an aunt and uncle. A musical impression on Takemitsu during the war years was the koto playing of his aunt. He did not like the sound of this music, and in later years koto music would bring back unpleasant memories of Tokyo during the war. Koto music sounded strange and foreign to the young Takemitsu, as it was so different from the recordings of jazz and swing that his father had played at home in Manchuria and that the family had often heard in American movies. Also, the lively style of the militaristic and nationalistic songs that the fascist government was promoting appealed to the young Takemitsu.

In the last year of the war, Takemitsu was inducted into a youth regiment located at a remote food storage depot in Saitama Prefecture, the isolation of which saved Takemitsu from the devastating fire-bombing of Tokyo in March and April 1945. In later years, Takemitsu would recall two vivid memories from this military experience. One was the day his leader played for the company a 78-rpm recording of the American cabaret singer and actress Josephine Baker singing the French chanson *Parlez-moi de l'amour*. His recurring memory of this recording was of the sheer beauty of the vocal line. The other abiding memory of Takemitsu's wartime experience was the visual impression of Allied military equipment. The newsreels of the HMS *Prince of Wales* gave Takemitsu a dream-like view of the West that fascinated him, as did the sight from the Saitama hills of the American B-29s flying overhead on their bombing raids to Tokyo. Takemitsu conflated these glittering, dream-like scenes with the silvery screens showing American movies that he had seen before the war, and he concluded that America and Europe must be the most wonderful places on the

earth. His admiring curiosity about America and Europe would foster his artistic development during the occupation of Japan from 1945 to 1955.

After the war, Takemitsu found work as a busboy and waiter at an American PX in Yokohama, where he played records in the dance hall, which enabled him to learn the songs and dances popular with Americans at the time. He also learned about the Armed Forces Radio broadcasts and listened to all types of music programming regularly. At the PX after hours, Takemitsu practiced on the dance hall piano, a Yamaha grand, the tunes he was hearing on the recordings. He even made a paper piano by drawing a sketch of a keyboard on a piece of paper to silently practice on.

In June 1948, Takemitsu noticed a street-corner poster for a concert by the Tôhō Symphony Orchestra (renamed the Tokyo Symphony Orchestra in 1951) of works by Fumio Hayasaka and Akira Ifukube (in 1954 Ifukube would write the film score for the original *Godzilla* movie, starring American actor Raymond Burr). Curious as to what kind of music a Japanese would compose for orchestra (he knew nothing of the great Japanese orchestral works of the 1930s at this time), Takemitsu went to the orchestra office to buy a ticket to the concert and to ask if anyone would teach him composition. He was given the name of Yasuji Kiyose, an exponent of the music of Claude Debussy, Gabriel Fauré, and César Franck who was one of the leading composers of Japan at the time. Most biographies of Takemitsu list Kiyose as his sole teacher, but not too much can be made of Kiyose's tutelage, for he spent much of each lesson in rambling discourses on musical aesthetics and philosophical ideas; none the less, Takemitsu did dedicate a piano piece to Kiyose in 1949. The truly significant impact of Kiyose on Takemitsu was the widening of Takemitsu's circle of musical friends by including him in composers' groups and in concerts of New Music.

Takemitsu was involved in two composers' groups in the 1950s. His first association was with the Shin Sakkyokuha Kyôkai (New Composers' Association), founded by Kiyose in 1946 with the artistic goal of preserving Japanese character in modern (Western) music. Takemitsu became a member in October 1950 as a pupil of Kiyose. The Shin Sakkyokuha Kyôkai organized nine concerts between 1947 and 1952; Takemitsu received his first public performance at the seventh concert, at Yomiuri Hall, Tokyo, on December 7, 1950, with the premiere of the piano solo *Lento in Due*

*Movimenti*. At the eighth concert, May 31, 1951, the premiere of *Distance de Fée* (1951) became Takemitsu's second publicly performed work. The membership of this group was eleven at its height; of these, film composer Fumio Hayasaka would have a profound influence on the young Takemitsu who, at the age of nineteen when he joined, was a generation younger than Hayasaka, Kiyose, Yoritsune Matsudaira, Urato Watanabe (who studied in Germany), and other older composers in the group. Hayasaka was at the height of his career when the young, impressionable Takemitsu met him. Hayasaka's orchestral work *Kodai no Bukyoku* (Ancient Court Dances [1937]) had won the 1938 Weingartner Prize (established by the Austrian conductor Felix Weingartner when he was in Japan), and he was then composing

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the film scores for director Akira Kurosawa's *Rashômon* (1950) and *Shichinin no Samurai* (The Seven Samurai [1954]; later the basis of the 1960 American film *The Magnificent Seven*). Although Takemitsu never received formal, extended composition lessons from Hayasaka, he studied that composer's scores alone and with Kiyose, and developed a mentor relationship with Hayasaka that led to Takemitsu's being hired to copy parts for his film scores; that piece-work was the beginning of Takemitsu's film-music career. It was Hayasaka who drew Takemitsu to the world of film music and all the contrasts of realism and dream-like imagination therein that had fascinated Takemitsu about the cinema since his boyhood. When Hayasaka suddenly died on October 15, 1955, at the age of forty-one, Takemitsu was emotionally devastated. Still grieving a year and a half later, Takemitsu composed his *Requiem for Strings* (1957) as a eulogy for Hayasaka, thus starting his lifelong concern with death and its expression in music.

The other group that Takemitsu participated in was perhaps the most influential of the 1950s, the Jikken Kôbô, or Experimental Laboratory. By "laboratory" was meant the group's goal of addressing challenges in the contemporary arts through actual practice or experience (the meaning here of "experimental"). Formed in November 1951 and including artists and poets as well as composers, the Jikken Kôbô presented thirteen concerts, stage

productions, and art exhibitions between 1951 and 1958. Several of Takemitsu's compositions of this time were first performed in these concerts.

Two other areas of musical activity drew Takemitsu's interest in the early 1950s. One area was that of contemporary theatre productions for which Takemitsu composed incidental music. These low-budget, experimental productions included the ballets *Pleasure of Living* (1951), and *Ginga Tetsudô no Tabi* (Journey on the Milky Way Railroad) (1953), and two productions of Jean Anouilh plays. In late 1950, Takemitsu became acquainted with Asaka Wakayama, an actress in the Shiki Theatre troupe. They married on June 15, 1954, and had one child, a daughter named Maki, born December 16, 1961.

Takemitsu also worked in electronic music and musique concrète in the 1950s (see Table 1). His close friend Toshirô Mayuzumi, while studying in Paris during the 1951–1952 academic year, learned about musique concrète there and about the electronic music studio at the Westdeutscher Rundfunk (radio station WDR) begun in 1951. After returning to Japan, Mayuzumi organized an electronic music studio at the NHK (the state broadcasting system of Japan). In October 1955, Takemitsu, who had acquired an interest in making tone colors by playing with radio vacuum tubes as a boy, was composing incidental music for a fine arts festival broadcast on Shin Nihon Hôso (today the Mainichi Broadcasting Company) radio of a play by Yasushi Inoue. For the broadcast, Takemitsu composed a tape of musique concrète in the Shin Nihon studio. That tape was then further developed into *Relief statique*. In May 1956, four more tape pieces were produced by Takemitsu in the same studio, and Takemitsu subsequently worked in electronic music regularly until 1972, and occasionally

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## **Table 1**

### **Electronic Music and Musique Concrète**

Tape Pieces Alone

Musique Concrète Realized at the Shin Nihon (Mainichi) Broadcasting Studio (1955–1956):

*Relief statique*

*Euridice*

*Vocalism A.I*

*Clap Vocalism*

*Tree, Sky, Bird*

Musique Concrète Realized at the NHK Electronic Music Studio:

*Dialogue* (1958)

*Sky, Horse, and Death* (1958)

*Nihon no Monyô (Japanese Heraldry)* (1961)

*Natsukashi San Francisco (Nostalgic for San Francisco)* (1964)

Musique Concrète Realized at Sôgetsu Hall, Tokyo (1960):

*Quiet Design*

*Water Music*

Other Electronic Music:

*Sky* (1971)

*Toward* (1971)

*In Motion*, with filmed percussionist (1972)

Environmental Music (1986):

*A Minneapolis Garden*

*The Sea Is Still*

Tape Pieces with Live (Real-Time) Instruments in Performance:

*Arc for Piano, Orchestra, and Electronic Sounds* (1963–1966, rev. 1976)

*Cross Talk*, for two bandoneons and tape (1968)

*Seasons*, for percussion and tape (1970)

*Stanza II*, for harp and tape (1971)

Prepared Piano:

*Twin Sisters of Kyoto* (1963)

*The Assassin* (1964)

*Kwaidan*, also released as a tape piece (1964)

thereafter. Takemitsu's creative work in the 1950s was hampered by his poverty (eventually Mayuzumi gave the Takemitsus a Gulbransen piano for a wedding present) and by his recurring bouts with tuberculosis. He was not widely respected as a composer until he was recognized by Igor Stravinsky, who heard the *Requiem for Strings* during his tour of Japan in 1959. Other affirmations of Takemitsu's talent at about the time of Stravinsky's accolade included first prize for *Le Son Calligraphic I* (1958–1960) at the contemporary music festival at

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Karuizawa in 1958, and Takemitsu's first performance in America in November 1959 when Thor Johnson conducted the Pro Musica ensemble in *Le Son Calligraphie II* (1958–1960) at Chicago. His reputation as a film composer was also growing. Thus, Takemitsu's growing confidence, improving health, and developing skills in composition and orchestration all combined to make the year 1960 the doorway to a completely different life for him, one in which constant composing for large orchestras and feature films, frequent international travel, and the fame and financial reward that comes with such success replaced the death-darkened poverty and obscurity of the 1950s.

Takemitsu's numerous overseas trips began in March 1964 when he attended the electronic music festival held at the San Francisco Tape Music Center. It was there that he met John Cage and David Tudor, whom he had already met in October 1962 when they were in Tokyo. In April 1964, Takemitsu went from San Francisco to the Festival of Music and Art in This Century at the East-West Center in Honolulu, where six of his works were performed. There, Takemitsu met more notable avant-garde figures, including Jasper Johns. Takemitsu's association with American artists deepened in November 1964 when Cage, Tudor, and the Merce Cunningham Dance Troupe visited Japan for performances at Sôgetsu Hall. Cage performed Takemitsu's *Blue Aurora* in this event. In May 1965, Takemitsu was at the Cannes Film

Festival for a showing of the film *Kwaidan* (1964; for which he composed the electronic score), then went to Paris where he met Olivier Messiaen (who had visited Japan in 1962), R. Murray Schafer, Iannis Xenakis, and a friend from Tokyo, pianist Yûji Takahashi. In October 1967, Takemitsu was in Toronto for rehearsals of *November Steps* (1967), for shakuhachi, biwa, and orchestra, then in New York in November for the commissioned premiere of that work by the New York Philharmonic Orchestra. By the 1970s, Takemitsu was making yearly trips abroad to attend premieres of his commissioned works, participate in symposiums and festivals, or teach. He received numerous awards for his concert works and his film scores. After his death from cancer on February 20, 1996, the Tôru Takemitsu Composition Award was established, to be administered by the 1,632-seat concert hall Tokyo Opera City. The original panel of judges were György Ligeti, Henri Dutilleux, and Luciano Berio.

Takemitsu distinguished between his concert music and his film music. For Takemitsu, his film music has a rough-hewn, “verité” quality, in that it is molded around the human interest events and emotions of the plot. This quality gave Takemitsu a greater freedom in composing film music than in composing concert works, a surprising statement in that film music has often been thought less amenable to creativity than concert music because the film score must conform to the visual narrative. Film music, for Takemitsu, is a different kind of discipline in composing than the refined techniques of concert music, in that film music does not need to complete thematic and other developmental processes, as concert works do. This makes possible the freedom in composing that Takemitsu enjoyed in writing film music, which is enhanced in Japan, where film

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composers have more artistic control over their scores and sound tracks than usually found in America. Takemitsu would visit film sets to get a feel for the drama and begin composing before the filming was completed. He held that music is an essential part of a film, and even said that an unscored film suggests its own music; yet he often kept his film scores to a minimum (e.g., *Tokyo Trials* has only nine minutes of music), or would go so far as to use his music as a replacement for the expected sounds of the drama (as in

Kurosawa's *Ran*, where some battle scenes are watched as a silent film, with Takemitsu's somber music being the only sound heard).

However, Takemitsu's film and concert works did influence each other reciprocally: for example, although the use of traditional Japanese instruments in *November Steps*, commissioned for the New York Philharmonic Orchestra, was widely regarded as innovative in 1967, Takemitsu had in fact developed his groundwork for that music in a number of film and broadcast scores between 1961 and 1966. In the other direction, Takemitsu's score for *Ran* has the dark orchestral sound developed in a number of concert works around 1980 and even going back to the *Requiem for Strings*. Another line of influence within Takemitsu's works is from the musique concrete techniques of the 1950s' tape pieces to the soundtracks of several films of the 1960s (such as *Kwaidan* and *Woman of the Dunes* (1964) using electronically manipulated sounds of Japanese instruments, the human voice, the sound of rubbing sandpaper, wooden planks being shredded by hand, and prepared piano. These reciprocal influences and crossing lines of development between Takemitsu's electronic works, film scores, concert works for Western instruments in many chamber-music combinations, and works for Japanese instruments makes it arbitrary to present these works in isolated categories, for they blur the lines of his creative work.

Table 2 displays Takemitsu's combinations of Western instruments. The display of numbers in each instrument's column provides an indicator of Takemitsu's changing interests in tone color. In the 1950s and 1960s, his instrumentation centered on combinations of strings, with interests also in flutes and guitars of various types; but by the 1970s, brass and percussion combinations were drawing his creative attention, with the clarinet joining the flute and guitar as favored instruments. Then after 1980, Takemitsu's chamber works returned to his earlier focus on strings, on flute (now producing two memorable solos), and on guitar; although there continue to be some brass and percussion works after 1980, their music is of a different sort.

The changing interests in instrumentation shown in Table 2 are seen again in Table 3, which lists fifteen quasi-concerto works for orchestra and one or more Western solo instruments in the 1980–1995 period but only seven in the 1962–1976 period, when Takemitsu was interested in large orchestral sound, dominated by brass, percussion, and piano often used for percussive effects;



he even scored for two orchestras. Many commentators have noticed the change in Takemitsu's general musical style from a dry, percussive style of the 1960s to a sonorous, melodious style of the 1980s and 1990s. As these changes were taking

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## Table 2

### Chronological List of Works for Instrumental Ensemble and Solos

(Piano solos and works calling for traditional Japanese instruments or electronic media are omitted.)

	flute	Oboe	cor Anglais	Clarinets	bassoon	horn	trumpet	Trombone	tuba	guitar	piano	violin	viola	Violoncello	Doubling	other
<i>195 Distance</i>												1	1			
<i>Sos de Fée</i>																
<i>Chamber Concerto</i>	2		1	2	1	2	2	1								
<i>Le Son Calligraphie I, II, III</i>												4	2	2		
<i>Masque</i>	2															
<i>196 Landscapes</i>												2	1	1		
<i>Sos e RING</i>	1															trumpet, guitar, lute alto flute, elec. organ
<i>Sacrifice Sonant/Valeria</i>									vibr			1	1	1		
<i>Dorian Horizon Hika</i>													8	2	2	5
												1	1			

<i>Stanza I</i>	vibr	1	1	1	fem ale voice
<i>1970s</i>	4				
<i>Eucalypts I</i>	1		1		
<i>II</i>					
<i>Distance</i>	1				optio nal shô

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<i>Voice</i>	1				
<i>Munari by Munari</i>			1+		
<i>Garden Rain</i>		1432			
<i>Folios</i>				1	
<i>Le Fils des étoiles</i>	1			1	
<i>Quatrain II</i>	1			111	
<i>Bryce</i>	1	2		2	
<i>Waves</i>	11	2	1		
<i>Twelve Songs for Guitar</i>				1	
<i>Waterways</i>	1	2		211	1
<i>1980s</i>			vibr		
<i>A Way a Lone</i>				211	
<i>Toward the Sea</i>				1	alto
					flute
<i>Rain Tree</i>			3		
<i>Rain Spell</i>	11		vibr	11	
<i>From Far Beyond Chrysanthemums and</i>				11	
<i>November Fog</i>					
<i>Rocking Mirror Daybreak</i>				2	
<i>Orion</i>				1	1
<i>Wavelength</i>		2			two dancers and video
<i>Entre-Temps</i>	1			211	
<i>Signals from Heaven Day Signal</i>		2441			piccolotrumpet

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<i>Night Signal</i>				4	2	3	1	
<i>A Solitary Road</i>								2
<i>All in Twilight</i>							1	1
<i>Itinerant: In Memory of Isamu Noguchi</i>				1				1

	<i>Toward the Sea II</i>	1		alto
				flute
1990s	<i>And Then I Knew 'Twas Wind</i>	1	1	1
	<i>Between Tides</i>			1 1 1
	<i>Herbstlied</i>	1		2 1 1
	<i>Bad Boy</i>		2	
	<i>Equinox</i>		1	
	<i>Paths: In Memoriam Witold Lutosławski</i>	1		
	<i>A Bird Came Down the Walk</i>			1 1
	<i>Air for Solo Flute</i>	1		
	<i>In the Woods</i>		1	

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### Table 3

## Works for Orchestra(s), with or without Soloist(s), Including Japanese Instruments

One Orchestra with Western Solo Instrument(s)

*Tableau noir*, for narrator (1958)

*Coral Island*, for soprano (1962)

*Arc*, piano (1963–1966, 1976)

*Asterism* (1967)

*Cassiopeia*, for one percussionist (1971)

*Gitimalya*, for marimba (1974)

*Quatrain*, for clarinet, violin, cello, and piano (1975)

*Far Calls, Coming, Far!*, for violin (1980)

*To the Edge of Dream*, for guitar (1983)

*Orion and the Pleiades*, for cello (1984)

*riverrun* (1984)

*Vers, l'Arc-en-ciel, Palma*, for oboe d'amore and guitar (1984)

*I Hear the Water Dreaming*, for flute (1987)

*Nostalgia* (1987)

*A String around Autumn*, for viola (1989)

*From Me Flows What You Call Time*, for five percussionists (1990)

*My Way of Life*, for baritone and chorus (1990)

*Fantasma/Cantos*, for clarinet (1991)

*Quotation of Dream*, for two pianos (1991)

*Family Tree* (1992)

*Fantasma/Cantos II*, for trombone (1994)

*Spectral Canticle*, for guitar and violin (1995)

One Orchestra with Japanese Solo Instrument(s)

*Seppuku*, for biwa (1962)

*November Steps*, for biwa and shakuhachi (1967)  
*Autumn* (1973)  
*Ceremonial*, for shô and Buddhist chant (1992)  
Two Orchestras

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*Crossing*, for harp, guitar, vibraphone, piano/celeste, and choir of at least twelve altos and twelve contraltos (1969)  
*Gemeaux*, for oboe, trombone, and two conductors (1971–72, 1986)  
Orchestra Alone  
*Pleasure of Living* (1951)  
*Journey on the Milky Way* (1953)  
*Solitude Sonore* (1959)  
*Music of Tree* (1961)  
*Green* (1967)  
*A Flock Descends into the Pentagonal Garden* (1977)  
*Dreamtime* (1981)  
*Star-Isle* (1982)  
*Dream/Window* (1985)  
*Twill by Twilight: In Memory of Motion Feldman* (1988)  
*Visions* (1990)  
*How Slow the Wind* (1991)  
*Spirit Garden* (1994)

place, Takemitsu composed very little electronic music after 1972, and by the late 1970s had developed a nostalgic attraction to a style of slow, sonorous jazz harmony that had been popular around 1950. Takemitsu adapted this lush jazz harmony to some choral works, especially the *Handmade Proverbs—Four Pop Songs* (1987), and this interest in the popular music of his youthful days at the American PX may have influenced his decision to recompose from memory his 1950 piano solo *Lento in Due Movimenti* as *Litany*. In a similar retrieval, the two volumes of *Uta* (Songs) include a song from 1954 (text by Kuniharu Akiyama) and a new song with poem and music by Takemitsu on the sorrow of certain childhood recollections. In this way, much of Takemitsu's later composing (c. 1976 to 1995) was done in the nostalgia of (no doubt dream-like, cinema-like) memories of his early life up to about 1957 and the composing of the *Requiem for Strings*.

In the midst of the foregoing work in composition, Takemitsu gradually gained an interest in traditional Japanese instruments. This compositional interest has often been misunderstood in the West. As related earlier,

Takemitsu knew little about native Japanese music as a child and did not like what little he did hear. Even when he did begin to score for Japanese instruments in the 1960s, his purpose was to use the instruments for innovative scoring effects; that is,

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while the instruments are traditional Japanese, the music Takemitsu wrote for them is grounded in the European avant-garde of the 1960s. Even though Takemitsu used (or quoted) familiar idioms and melodic motifs for Japanese instruments in his film scores and concert works, the music is essentially his own creation out of his own Western-influenced world. Few professional performers of traditional Japanese music have shown any interest in the new music Takemitsu has written for their premodern instruments. That is why his works for shakuhachi and biwa (a combination unknown in the traditional repertoires) have been performed by the same two players, Katsuya Yokoyama and Kinshi Tsuruta, respectively, over and over. Takemitsu's avant-garde use of traditional instruments is a primary reason why the rhetorical claims are often heard in the West, that Takemitsu's output can be simply explained as a kind of amalgam of East and West. In actual fact, Takemitsu had universalist views about the future of world music, but saw many contradictions and difficulties in music-mergers for the present.

Takemitsu expressed his difficulty in writing for Japanese instruments further in a comment he made as a panelist at a symposium held as part of the Asian Music Festival, Suntory Hall, Tokyo, March 23, 1990 during which he pointed out that, far from being comfortable using traditional Japanese instruments, they in truth caused him many compositional problems.

Takemitsu's composing for Japanese instruments has been episodic: after the film scores of 1961–1966 laid the groundwork for *November Steps*, there was a five-year lapse, followed by four concert works of 1972–1973, one of which, *In an Autumn Garden*, was expanded into a gagaku (court music) work of the same name (1979) that was Takemitsu's last for Japanese instruments, except the orchestral work *Ceremonial* of 1992, which calls for Buddhist chant as well as the shô.

In those years when Takemitsu was active in writing for orchestra, he wrote little or nothing for traditional Japanese instruments, and vice versa. The

exceptions were *November Steps* and *Autumn* (1973); unfortunately, the great popularity of *November Steps* has led to the mistaken impression that it typifies Takemitsu's works.

Takemitsu's mature orchestral scoring, arrived at by around 1970, typically calls for triple winds, doubling on piccolo, English horn, bass clarinet, and various brass instruments. The string sections are large and sometimes divided. The percussion battery is always large, often calling for multiple percussionists, but the array of percussion instruments is surprisingly consistent from one work to the next: gongs, tam-tams, antique cymbals (crotales), and cowbells are typical, as are timpani, xylophones, and even vibraphones.

Although Takemitsu composed relatively little vocal or choral music, he maintained close relationships with important poets and writers, including Kenzaburô Oe, recipient of the 1992 Nobel Prize in Literature. He was cowriting a book with Takemitsu, *Opera o Tsukeru* (Making an Opera), at the time of the Nobel award, and his *Rain Tree* series of short stories are the inspiration for Takemitsu's compositions of the same name. Other poets in Takemitsu's circle

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were Shûzô Takiguchi, a founding member of the Jikken Kôbô, Shuntarô Tanikawa, and Makoto Ôoka.

The primary source for the study of Takemitsu's aesthetic thought is his essays and conversational interviews with composers, performers, and writers published in some ten volumes from 1971 until his death, but the only substantial effort to date in translating Takemitsu's prose works into a Western language is the English translation of twenty-one essays by Yoshiko Kakudo and Glenn Glasnow in *Confronting Silence* (1995).

Takemitsu grouped many of his instrumental compositions into thematic series. Most of the themes come from literature or nature, and some compositions are included in two series. Some of these theme-series are works on trees, gardens, rain, constellations, or the sea or waterscape. The musical meaning of such themes for Takemitsu is not the verbatim portrayal

of rain drops or tree leaves on a primary level as visual images; rather, Takemitsu deals with some aspect of the theme-item that makes an emotional, intellectual, or sensual impression on the viewer-listener. The following are some statements by Takemitsu that illustrate his understanding of his theme-ideas:

- Gardens: concerning *Arc for Piano and Orchestra*—“The solo piano assumes the role of an observer strolling through the garden. In the same way that plants and sand exist in a given space in their own time, changing with the climate and seasons...so do musical aspects change in this piece.”
- Trees: citing Jean-Marie G.Le Clézio, Rainer Maria Rilke, Motokiyo Zeami, Matsuo Bashô, and other writers—“In a magnificent way trees transform time into space.... Their growth from within develops in two directions: roots below, branches and leaves above...in undivided action and with a glance toward infinity and eternity.... So trees exist beyond God’s will and human action.”
- Rain: Takemitsu’s program note in the score of *Rain Spell*—“This work is intended to realize the magical image and the gradation in coloration of the rain in a small-scale ensemble.”

A unifying theme in the rain series is the image of the rain running into rivers, which in turn empty into the ocean, creating, in Takemitsu’s own English expression, “a sea of tonality.” The image of flowing water in these works goes back to an idea Takemitsu got while in a subway train in Tokyo in 1948. The roar of passing trains caused Takemitsu to think of sound as a flowing continuum, like flowing water; his Japanese term for this is “oto no nagare.” In 1983, this program note appeared in the score of *Rain Coming*: “It is the composer’s intention to create a series of works which, like their subject [rain], pass through various metamorphoses, culminating in a sea of tonality.” Thus, the works in the rain series are preludes to those in the waterscape series, about rivers and the ocean. Another focus of Takemitsu’s theme-ideas is how things change over time. The phrases “gradation in coloration” and “pass through various metamorphoses” indicate this interest in mutability, as does the program note for the

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percussion work *Seasons* that explains that the work is not about the four seasons themselves but the change of seasons between them. Many other examples of Takemitsu’s interest in change, mutability, borders, and time-space relations are found in his titles, program notes, and essays on his compositions.

Around 1980, the “sea of tonality” in the waterscape works was defined by Takemitsu as the three-note ascending motif Eb-E-A (conjunct semitone and perfect fourth); when the E flat is read in the German pronunciation “Es,” the English word “sea” results. Takemitsu extended his sea motif upward: A-C sharp-/Db-F-A (two major thirds and a minor third above the A of “sea”). “Into that sea of vibrations,” wrote Takemitsu of *Far Calls. Coming, Far!* (1980), “pours the solo violin.”

An important companion theme within the waterscape works is the imagery of the novel *Finnegan’s Wake* by James Joyce. When Takemitsu turned his attention to the novel in the early 1970s, its themes of life, death, and time flowing like a river into the ocean were consonant with his already-developing ideas of “oto no nagare,” and thus the novel easily slipped into an influential position in Takemitsu’s creative thought. The most easily seen aspect of this influence is the several composition titles that are words or phrases from this novel: *A Way a Lone* (1981), *Far Calls. Coming, Far!*, *riverrun* (1984; the opening word of the novel, uncapitalized), and possibly *For Away* (1973).

One group of works may be taken as a definable series even though Takemitsu never identified them as such: these are his works on death and his musical eulogies. Takemitsu was conscious of this theme in his music: in a 1990 program note for *My Way of Life* (composed for the late Michael Vyner), he wrote, “I have reached the age where ‘death’ is more like a familiar sight than a thing to fear. As I completed this composition, I felt as if I had just sincerely sung one of my songs to my closest friends.” Other musical eulogies are *Twill by Twilight: In Memory of Morton Feldman* (1988), *Itinerant: In Memory of Isamu Noguchi* (1989), *Litany*, and *My Way of Life*, both in memory of Michael Vyner, *Paths: In Memoriam Witold Lutosławski* (1994), *Rain Tree Sketch II: In Memoriam Olivier Messiaen* (1992), and *Nostalgia: In Memory of Andrei Tarkovskij* (1987). To this list may be added selections from Takemitsu’s film music, such as the funeral music from *Black Rain* (1989), which has been published.

On the death of Cage in 1992, Takemitsu wrote, “In the sorrow that grips me I see not the void but the clear blue sky, and I sense the vast realm of undying death.” His phrase “not the void but the clear blue sky” recalls another aesthetic concept that occupied Takemitsu’s thought, that of the meaning of



“distance” in music. Takemitsu’s interest in “distance” is in fact his creative work with “ma,” the Japanese aesthetic concept of time and space in works of art. In *Distance* (1972), the title refers to the musical, technical, and cultural “distance” between the oboe and the shô; *Dorian Horizon* (1966) explores spatial placement of instruments on the stage. But *Far Calls. Coming, Far!*, in evoking distant sounds attempting communication, and *Signals from Heaven*, in evoking the sky, portray a “distance” that, like “the clear blue sky,” is not a void. In an

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essay for a Tokyo newspaper in 1993, Takemitsu wrote, “My music is something like a signal sent to the unknown. Moreover, I imagine and believe that my signal meets another’s signal, and the resulting physical change creates a new harmony from the original two.”

Closely related in thought to *Signals from Heaven* is the constellation series. The early works in this series, such as *Asterism* (1967), for piano and orchestra, and *Cassiopeia* (1971), are dry and percussive in style. Later examples, especially *Orion* (1984) and *Orion and the Pleiades* (1984), have a human warmth and flowing lyricism.

A number of later Takemitsu works explore the meaning of the phenomenon of the dream; these are all influenced by his film music, not as arrangements of specific film scores but as explorations of the dream-like characteristics of the cinema and how those emotional and sensual effects carry over into composing music for the concert or recital stage. For Takemitsu, a film is a dream, this being a deeply etched conception going back to his childhood viewing of American films in Manchuria and Tokyo. Compositions in this series are *Dreamtime* (1981), *Dream/Window* (1985), *Entre-Temps*, *I Hear the Water Dreaming* (1987), *Quotation of Dream* (1991), *Rain Dreaming* (1986), *To the Edge of Dream* (1983), and *Visions* (1990). Closely related to “dream” in Takemitsu’s composing is “number,” the quantifying ingredient in music and the measurement of time in (visual-dream) film and music. The principal works in the dream and number series are *Quatrain* (1975), *A Flock Descends into the Pentagonal Garden* (1977), *Dreamtime*, and *To the Edge of Dream* (1983).

Finally, Takemitsu's keen interest in the recording of his works must be mentioned. As with his film music (more than one hundred scores), he was closely involved in the recording and production of many of the more than two hundred LP albums with his works that appeared in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, and subsequent compact disc releases. Similarly, the Tokyo concert series "Kyô no Ongaku" (Music of Today) was an annual event led by Takemitsu that for some twenty years from 1973 presented significant performances of new music by Takemitsu and other avant-garde composers.

### SELECTED WORKS

*Lento in due Movimenti*, for solo piano (1950, recomposed 1950 as *Litany*)

*Uninterrupted Rest I, II, III*, for solo piano (1952, 1959)

*Requiem for Strings*, for string orchestra (1957)

*Tableau noir*, for narrator and chamber orchestra (text by Kuniharu Akiyama) (1958)

*Scene*, for cello soloist and string orchestra (1959)

*Piano Distance*, for solo piano (1961)

*Wind Horse*, for soprano, alto, tenor, and bass and double soprano and alto choir (texts by Kuniharu Akiyama) (1961–1966)

*Coral Island*, for soprano and orchestra (text by Makoto Ooka) (1962)

*Corona for Pianist(s)*, for solo piano (1962)

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*Corona II*, for string orchestra (1962)

*Arc for Strings*, for string orchestra (1963)

*Dorian Horizon*, for string orchestra (1966)

*Stanza I*, for soprano and instrumental ensemble with speaking parts (text from prose of Ludwig Wittgenstein) (1969)

*Eucalypts I*, for flute, oboe, harp soloists, and string orchestra (1970)

*For Away*, for solo piano (1973)

*Les Yeux clos I, II*, for solo piano (1979, 1988)

*Toward the Sea II*, for alto flute and harp soloists and string orchestra (1981)

*A Way a Lone II*, for string orchestra (1981)

*Rain Coming*, for chamber orchestra (1982)

*Rain Tree Sketch*, for solo piano (1982)

*Rain Dreaming*, for harpsichord and solo piano (1986)

*Handmade Proverbs—Four Pop Songs*, for six male voices (texts by Shûzô Takiguchi with English translation) (1987)

*Nostalghia: In Memory of Andrei Tarkovskij*, for violin solo and string orchestra (1987)

*Tree Line*, for chamber orchestra (1988)

*Family Tree: Musical Verses for Young People*, for narrator and orchestra (text by Shuntarô Tanikawa) (1992)

*Rain Tree Sketch II: In Memoriam Olivier Messiaen*, for solo piano (1992)

*Songs*, for soprano, alto, tenor, and bass (texts by various Japanese poets and Takemitsu) (1984, republished 1992)

*Archipelago s.*, for chamber orchestra (1993)

## **Works for Japanese Instruments**

Film and television scores for *Nihon no Monyô* (NHK, 1961), for electronically modified Japanese instruments;

*Seppuku* (1962), for biwa and orchestra;

*The Assassin* (1964), for shakuhachi and prepared piano;

*Kwaidan* (1964), for electronically modified piano and Japanese instruments;

and *Minamoto no Yoshitsune* (1966), for biwa, shakuhachi, and orchestra.

*Eclipse*, for biwa and shakuhachi (1966)

*November Steps*, for biwa, shakuhachi, and orchestra (1967)

*Distance*, for oboe and shô (1972)

*Autumn*, for biwa, shakuhachi, and orchestra (1973)

*In an Autumn Garden*, for gagaku ensemble (1973, 1979)

*Voyage*, for three biwas (1973)

*Ceremonial: An Autumn Ode*, for shô, male choir for Buddhist chant, and orchestra (1991–1992)

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

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Siddons, James. 1999. *Toru Takemitsu: A Bio-Bibliography in Music*. Westport, CT: Greenwood. [Annotated lists of prose writings, compositions, recordings, film

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scores, and references in Japanese and Western languages and introductory biographical essay.]

Takemitsu, Tôru. 1995. *Confronting Silence*. Trans. Yoshiko Kakudo and Glenn Glasow. San Francisco: Fallen Leaf. [Selections from Takemitsu's various books and articles.]