



## JAPANESE COMPOSERS OF THE POST-TAKEMITSU GENERATION

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The towering international reputation of Toru Takemitsu has dominated the West's perceptions of contemporary Japanese music, a situation resulting in the relative neglect of other worthy composers. This phenomenon has parallels in other countries, such as France, where Boulez's and Messiaen's overshadowing reputations were factors in the delayed international recognition of Barraqué and Ohana. Accordingly, various important composers who have established significant profiles within Japan during the last 40 years have struggled to achieve attention beyond Asian borders. Some have established cult reputations within contemporary music circles, but more widespread recognition through recordings has been compromised by limited Western distribution of the two Japanese labels that have promoted the post-Takemitsu generations: Camerata and Fontec. Fortunately, the websites for these labels have provided an opportunity for curious Westerners to directly purchase much important music that is ripe for discovery in Western concert halls.<sup>1</sup> Another positive development is the recent release of European recordings of important new Japanese works.

During the late 1950s and early 1960s, the Western avant-garde was eagerly explored by the generation represented by Takemitsu and Mayuzumi, who became the best-known Japanese composers in the West. After studying in Paris, Berlin, and Darmstadt, composers of this generation adopted various stylistic resources from the West, including serialism, the systematic exploration of texture and sound masses, electronics, and aleatoric techniques. However, this interest in advanced Western techniques was complemented by investigations into native musical traditions. Takemitsu created a stark juxtaposition of these elements, with no attempt at assimilation or reconciliation (as in *November Steps* from 1967). In *So-gu II* (1971), Maki Ishii combined two pieces, one involving a gagaku ensemble and the other a Western orchestra, to present a simultaneous clashing of a traditional idiom with a more modernist European style.

The influence of John Cage's ideas of freedom and elimination of taboos had a strong impact on composers in their development of these experimental inclinations. The results of these efforts produced some unique contributions to the sound-world of contemporary music: 1) the aforementioned process of applying advanced Western techniques to native musical traditions; 2) the use of western ensembles to mimic sound-characteristics of Japanese instruments, such as the *sho*, and Japanese Buddhist bells; and 3) the application of avant-garde Western performance techniques and vocabularies to traditional Japanese instruments.

<sup>1</sup> The URL addresses for these labels are [www.camerata.co.jp](http://www.camerata.co.jp) and [www.fontec.co.jp](http://www.fontec.co.jp).

Many composers of the Takemitsu generation, which included Ichiyanagi, Yuasa, Hirose, Ishii, Miyoshi, Matsumura, Miki, and Moroi, were interested in East/West fusions. However, the focus shifted to a more European context as a new generation emerged in the late 1960s. The early works of Noda, Ikebe, and Hirayoshi manifested devices embraced by their teachers: Western ostinatos (a particular interest of Matsumura); motivic transformation, derived from Dutilleux (an interest of Miyoshi); and variation principles.<sup>2</sup>

Eventually, some of these composers embraced more modernist resources while refining their use of traditional techniques. One of the leading composers who followed this path is Shin-ichiro Ikebe (b. 1943), a prolific and versatile composer in many genres. In the late 1960s, he became influenced by the European avant-garde in his gestural language, use of microtonal glissandi, tone clusters, and controlled aleatoric processes. The early orchestral works, including the *Symphony No. 1* (1967), *Energia* for 60 players (1970), and *Dimorphism* for organ and orchestra (1974), reveal these characteristics and a command of ensemble timbres reminiscent of Roberto Gerhard.

Among Ikebe's most important works are seven symphonies which serve as markers to his stylistic development. While maintaining a highly individual language and approach to form in the symphonies since No. 1, he has also established a reconciliation with traditional resources, especially in the use of tonally-grounded materials, repetition, and recycling of themes within multi-movement works. Ikebe's symphonies can be categorized into structures whose movements are thematically related (Fourth and Fifth from 1990, and the Sixth from 1993), or single movements where most of the material is generated from the opening ideas (the Third from 1985, and the Seventh from 1999).<sup>3</sup>

While all the symphonies are worth investigating, Ikebe's Fourth is particularly striking in its individuality of form and deserves a place in the international repertoire. In describing the work's processes, the composer draws parallels with specific objects that eventually achieve definition upon emergence from dreamlike mists.<sup>4</sup> The work is divided into two movements in which the beginning of the second continues with the texture that ends the first. Gradually, variations on earlier ideas emerge from the nebulous sonority and are subjected to more extensive dramatic development, leading to a compelling juxtaposition of earlier textures. The Fifth Symphony represents an almost neoclassical respite from the intensity of its predecessor and is perhaps Ikebe's most conservative essay in the genre. It follows a more conventional fast-slow-fast structure with a recycling of the first movement theme as an underlying ostinato to the primary theme of the last movement. Its musical language is still distinctive, colorful, and hard-edged.

Two of the most important Japanese composers of the next generation are Akira Nishimura (b.1953) and Toshio Hosokawa (b. 1955). Although modernist devices are an integral part of their music, there are mystical and spiritual elements which underlie their aesthetic concerns and justify the use of a broad spectrum of stylistic resources, including stasis, repetition, and silence. Both composers are preoccupied with spiritual connections to nature and the broader universe, perhaps more so than the immediately preceding generation.



Akira Nishimura (photo Zen-On Music Com., Ltd.)

<sup>2</sup> Two of the finest Japanese orchestral works of the late 1960s, Noda's *Chorale Symphony* and Hirayoshi's brilliant *Symphonic Variations*, were released on Denon COCO-6262.

<sup>3</sup> Camerata offers Ikebe's Symphonies 1 and 6 and *Energia* on 30CM-351; Symphonies 3 and 5 and *Dimorphism* on 30CM-374; and Symphonies 4 and 7 and *Les bois tristes* on 28CM-614.

<sup>4</sup> From Ikebe's program notes accompanying the Camerata recording.

However, they also maintain links with older colleagues by investigating ancient Japanese traditions. In addition, Nishimura is associated with pan-Asian aesthetics; musical traditions from Korea, Mongolia, India, and Bali have had an influence on his conceptual thinking as well as his use of specific techniques. As a mystic, he is especially interested in natural phenomena (e.g. the interplay of light, shadows, auras, and rivers) as facilitators of spiritual journeys.

Nishimura's compositional arsenal utilizes a broad range of resources. These encompass Western avant-garde techniques and principles of gagaku heterophony, which create wave-like layers of sound (somewhat reminiscent of Ligeti, although micropolyphony is not incorporated). He also explores more consonant minimalist-like textures from which simple diatonic/modal melodies emerge. In his mature orchestral works, a natural fluidity is achieved in fluctuating between these extremes. Tension is frequently generated through the use of overlapping trills, tremolos, glissandi, and scalar figures within textures of gradually increasing density and volume.

Nishimura has composed prolifically within numerous media, including solo pieces, chamber works for novel instrumental combinations (e.g. Japanese and Western instruments), and numerous orchestral works and concertos. Two early breakthroughs bear the title of *Heterophony*, an early string quartet (1975/1987) and a work for two pianos and orchestra (1988), reflecting the composer's early fascination with this process. In the latter, the original voice is obscured by lines carrying the variations, or drops out altogether, and the characteristic tremolo activity in the pianos creates a vibrational effect which is transferred into the orchestral parts as a rhythmic heterophony. However, Nishimura's real breakthrough as an orchestral composer came with *Into the Lights of the Eternal Chaos* (1991).<sup>5</sup> Striking in its conception and sound world, the work's formal structure frames contemplative passages, which present intricate writing for tuned percussion and strings, between two faster sections leading to separate climaxes. The first involves descending scalar figures, and the second constructs an increasingly dense texture which is initially consonant. Different pulses and rhythmic figures are eventually added to reach a more dissonant climax, where crashing gamelan-type sounds depict the chaos of the title. *Eternal Chaos* and other pieces from the first half of the 90s were grouped into series of orchestral works linked by common philosophical and technical concerns. After a period of development, Nishimura composed pieces in the latter half of the decade that demonstrated a new refinement and maturity of technique, resulting in some of his finest music to date. *Birds in Light* (1994) and *Vision in Twilight* (1995) are good examples of Nishimura's aesthetics and evolving orchestral mastery, which achieve culmination in the stunning *Melos Aura* (1995) and *Canticle of Light* (1996).<sup>6</sup>

*Melos Aura* is the most ambitious of a series of works which explore spatial contexts in the development of complex orchestral textures. The work begins with shifting string sonorities in the middle range. Pitched percussion and wind instruments are almost imperceptibly added to create fused ensemble timbres that impart a subtle aura suggestive of the title. Within sections, moments of repose and new points of departure sometimes begin on a single pitch or a relatively consonant sonority. Through a process of accretion, there is a gradual increase in levels of dissonance, textural density, and the range of orchestral color.

<sup>5</sup> Camerata 32CM-199 features Nishimura's *Into the Lights of the Eternal Chaos* and *Cello Concerto*. To date, Camerata has released 10 CDs devoted exclusively to his music.

<sup>6</sup> Fontec FOCD 3446 offers Nishimura's *Birds in Light*, *Vision in Twilight*, and *Symphony No. 2*. To date, Fontec has issued 5 CDs devoted entirely to his music.

The form of the piece involves an overall expansion of the orchestral texture to the upper registers in the first third, followed by a corresponding exploration of deeper registers in the lower strings and brass in the following section. The main climax occurs when the maximum range of orchestral registers is reached in a massive tutti passage. Afterwards, the timbral range of the piece is expanded even further with the introduction of low-pitched gongs and microtonal inflections in the upper woodwinds. These appear within a transparent texture that further underscores the extremes of register reached in the preceding climax. With *Melos Aura*, Nishimura felt he had reached a turning point with his exploration of vertical concepts in the shaping and development of orchestral textures. In the next work, *Canticle of Light* (1995), a balance between horizontal and vertical elements is achieved with the juxtaposition of a highlighted modal melody with evolving sound masses.<sup>7</sup> The recent orchestral *Melodies from Light and Shadow* (2000) presents a fine summation of aesthetic concerns of the last decade.<sup>8</sup>

The increasing focus on linear ideas in *Canticle of Light* paralleled a greater interest in the concerto format, leading to a series of works for violin and orchestra and string orchestra. Although the composer had written ambitious concertos earlier in the decade, these works demonstrated a sometimes tentative and awkward grappling with the problems of dealing with disparate modal and chromatic vocabularies within a single composition. However, in the Violin Concerto No. 1, *Afterglow* (1998), *A Mirror of Mist* (1995) and *River of Karuna* (1997), the latter two for violin and strings, there is a seamless integration of these elements, facilitated by an organic evolution of the opening materials.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, Nishimura's imagination in constructing multilayered textures is demonstrated in the deployment of diverse string techniques, which result in a rich subtext to the continuously evolving solo line. In contrast, the Concerto for Flute, Wind Instruments and Percussion (1997) demonstrates a greater austerity in the use of the ensemble. The solo line is frequently accompanied by individual instruments or small groups, a process that renders the occasional tutti interjections all the more striking.

The imaginative diversity of string textures found in the works for large forces are also characteristic of the three String Quartets (1975/1887; 1992; 1997) which, like those of Bartók and Shostakovich, contain some of Nishimura's most personal expression, as well as a distillation of the broad range of influences on his music in general.<sup>10</sup> The First Quartet fuses a terse, organic Bartókian development of short motives with principles of heterophony. In addition, melodies reflecting Mongolian and Korean influences are introduced. In the Second Quartet, the linear element is predominant in the first movement but becomes subordinate in the second to the increasing emphasis on rhythmic pulses and hocket rhythms derived from the Balinese *kechak*.<sup>11</sup> The Second and Third Quartets together provide a virtual encyclopedia of string techniques and textures, but there is never a sense of them being strung together as gimmicks; they are an outgrowth of an organic evolution of the opening materials.

<sup>7</sup> Camerata 30CM-520-1, a two disc set, offers *Canticle of Light*, *Melos Aura*, *Padma Incarnation*, *Heterophony of two pianos and orchestra*, *Monody*, and Concerto for Flute, Wind Instruments and Percussion.

<sup>8</sup> available on Camerata 28CM-523.

<sup>9</sup> Camerata 28CM-522 offers Nishimura's Violin Concerto No. 1, *River of Karuna*, and *A Mirror of Mist*.

<sup>10</sup> Camerata 28CM-524 offers Nishimura's three String Quartets, performed by the Arditti Quartet.

<sup>11</sup> From Nishimura's program notes accompanying the Camerata recording.

Toshio Hosokawa (photo: Schott-Archiv/Peter Andersen)



Nishimura and Hosokawa acknowledge the influence of different facets of ancient gagaku court music. Whereas Nishimura has been especially interested in the heterophonic aspect, Hosokawa has focused on the application of sound-properties of *gagaku* instruments to Western instruments and ensembles. The composer has used the undulating movements of the *sho* as the basis for the wave-like motions of textures in various orchestral pieces, including the *Ferne Landschaft* series. For example, *No. 2* (1996) begins on a single pitch in the strings and adds additional pitches and timbres in wave-like motions, in coordination with gradual increases in volume and orchestral density, only to return to a single pitch. Each successive presentation results in more complex and protracted activity. In this process, Hosokawa draws parallels between the creation of perspective in East-Asian landscape painting and the relationships between static texture and orchestral detail and gestures, which emerge as special events from the supporting background.

Hosokawa has also been influenced by traditional Japanese music in his emphasis, especially in the chamber music, on the existence of sound in relation to silence, and on the continuum between the two in the articulation and decay of pitches. Central to this exploration is the contextual meaning that each provides to the other, sometimes resulting in a conceptual equality between the two. The composer developed an interest in these relationships after studying Noh music and shakuhachi performance in Zen-Buddhist monasteries.

Hosokawa's works for solo instruments and ensemble embody a principle of the relationship between the individual and nature, with the interaction resulting in a seamless flow between divergent yet unified entities. Most of these works present an initial period of stasis where the soloist blends with the ensemble. For example, in *Voyage I* for violin and ensemble (1997), the sudden emergence of a linear idea from the soloist registers as a genuine 'event' amidst the subdued activity within the texture. Traditional soloist/orchestral roles and motivic development are not a part of Hosokawa's aesthetic. The closest Hosokawa comes to formulating a consistently active and defined soloist role is perhaps found in his Saxophone Concerto (1998–99), where the saxophone is rarely submerged within the texture.<sup>12</sup>

Of all the composers under discussion from the 1950s generation, Ichiro Nodaira (b.1953) is the one with the least discernible ties to Japanese traditions and the strongest embrace of a pure modernist European vocabulary. In contrast to other composers who have drawn inspiration from nature and national traditions, Nodaira uses a conceptual prototype as a starting point, derived from his studies and associations with important French figures, including Manoury, Grisey, and Murail. A Fontec disc (FOCD 2535) devoted to three instrumental works, some involving electronics, provides insight into Nodaira's stylistic development. *Texture du delire I* for flute, clarinet, violin, piano and 2 synthesizers (1982) reflects the influence of the spectral school in the use of processes for the gradual transformation of timbres and registral identities. In the third part, there is timbral vagueness created by instrumental imitation of electronic sound. The two other pieces on the disc involve the generation of material from an initial series of pitches. The overall form of the String Quartet (1995), traces the development of timbral gradations of string textures from the initial E-flat

Ichiro Nodaira (photo: Naoya Iwanaga)



<sup>12</sup> Kairos 0012172KAI offers Hosokawa's *Voyage I*, Saxophone Concerto, *Ferne-Landschaft II*, and *Koto-uta*. For an example of a large-scale work, see Hosokawa's *Voiceless Voice in Hiroshima* on Col-Legno 20087. To date, Fontec has released 8 CDs devoted exclusively to Hosokawa's music.

of the opening series, to the formation of thick chords in the central section, back to a single pitch at the end. Classical contrasts of tempo occur, but in the context of overlapping layers of activity which are alternately in the foreground and background.

Although these works are satisfying in their own right, they do not match the scale and accomplishment of the monumental 43-minute *Quatorze ecarts vers le defi* (1990–91), which closes the disc. Scored for piano, eight strings and live electronics, the work is in 14 sections performed without pause to create a continuously evolving single movement span.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, the divisions facilitate the demarcation of expressive contrasts, key structural junctures, and the deployment of various groupings within the ensemble. The lengthy initial section encapsulates the expressive range within the overall work and presents an alternation, also representative of the larger form, between fast parts with a mechanistic intensity and slower ones of a more lyrical nature. The resourceful piano writing, reflecting the composer's own background as a professional pianist, demonstrates the hard-edged, virtuosic flamboyance of early Stockhausen and Boulez, tempered with extended tertian sonorities. Many of the computer-processed sounds are triggered by timbres and tempi generated by the pianist. This electronic component encompasses alterations of the piano sound, harmonic and sonorous underpinnings, and finally the creation of its own independent sound universe. Its evolution gradually progresses from a minimal presence in the opening section, through sonorous and rhythmic functions in immediately successive sections, to a full realization of its technical potential in the 6th, 8th and final parts. The maximum levels of volume and density of texture are reached at these points. In addition to serving as an active participant in the ongoing musical discourse, the strings act as a mediator between the well-tempered piano and the microtonal inflections within the electronic component.

The composer describes the large-scale arc of the piece as a repetitious effort by the machine to escape the 'automatization and formalization' provided by the development of the initial nine-pitch series, which generates most of the work's material.<sup>14</sup> The emancipation process is perhaps most clearly demonstrated in the eighth and final sections; their conclusions feature the only occasions where the electronic component is presented with cadenzas of more individualized material. The concluding section starts with alternating confrontational statements between the piano and electronics, eventually leading to an increasingly frenetic piano cadenza. A stream of electronic noise ends the piece amidst instrumental silence, completing the emancipation process. Nodaira's *Quatorze Ecarts* is one of the most impressive achievements ever to emerge from IRCAM. The work pushes expressive and technical concerns to new boundaries, as is characteristic of the finest works from that environment, but it also maintains links to tradition with its classical balancing of diverse textures, expressive contrasts, and tempo.

One of the more interesting phenomena in recent Japanese music is the emergence of women composers on the international scene. A most promising figure is Keiko Harada (b.1968) who, like Nodaira, has developed a style of a more international cast, which does not readily manifest influences from Japanese traditions. Her characteristic exploration of unusual timbres and mercurial shiftings of tempo and



Keiko Harada (photo courtesy of Cyprés Records)

<sup>13</sup> Performed by Pierre-Laurent Aimard and the Ensemble Intercontemporain, conducted by Peter Eötvös.

<sup>14</sup> From Nodaira's program notes accompanying the Fontec recording.

density of texture are influenced by studies of European modernism at Darmstadt. She is also interested in improvisation involving acute perceptions of musicians. For example, in *wa-ta-ri I* for chamber ensemble (1999), while rhythms are regulated, a performer is required to be attentive to the pitches of improvisation being performed by a designated player, and then respond based on various 'changes in the performer's state of mind'.<sup>15</sup> At times, the resulting interaction is somewhat similar to free jazz, as in the opening of *Heavy Wood* for 5 players (1998), with its repetitive riff in the double bass, accompanied by sharp, abrasive sounds in the bass clarinet and other instruments.

Harada's *Sonora Distancia II* for guitar and 11 instruments (1996–97) explores a broad range of timbres, ranging from the microtonally tuned guitar to the shifting functions of piano and percussion, which alternate between percussive attacks to more sustained, resonating sonorities.<sup>16</sup> Perhaps Harada's most impressive achievement to date is *Sonora Distancia III* for accordion, piano, percussion, and orchestra (2000–01), which creates a distinctive sound world; the positioning of the soloists on stage and the larger ensemble within the orchestral pit leads to a spatial volleying of timbres, especially in the quick exchange between the groups in the shaping of broad gestures.<sup>17</sup> As in her other ensemble pieces, the fluid alternation between flamboyant ideas and a poetic sensibility suggests a composer with an instinctive sense of theatre.

Both Harada and Misato Mochizuki (b.1969) have cultivated a general modernist orientation after studies with Ferneyhough, among others, but the latter is more preoccupied with nature as a catalyst for inspiration. In contrast to Nishimura and Hosokawa, Mochizuki has been less influenced by its mystical aspects than by more rational scientific thinking about the subject. For example, the chamber work, *Si bleu, si calme* (1997) reflects concepts involving natural cycles of air and water. Growth and complexity are manifested in overlapping rhythmic figures and busy piano figuration, while the idea of calm is represented by simple intervals and rhythms. The interaction of these two forces leads to an overlaying of textures where repeated intervals emerge. *Chimera* for chamber ensemble (2000) presents a continuous pulsating rhythm and repetitions of short figures, and the sudden interjections of foreign elements create hybrid constructions suggestive of the title. *Chambre clair* for chamber orchestra (1999) also features a continuous pulse and repetition, which establish order within frenetic activity involving overlapping phrases and ostinatos.<sup>18</sup> Chimerical aspects are infused with a sudden introduction of slower material, and eventually become dominant when an initially obscured nursery tune gradually becomes the sole element that ends the piece.

Mochizuki's most ambitious work to appear on disc is the 20-minute orchestral work *Camera lucida* (1999), which introduces concepts derived from photography, especially in the 'infinite reproduction of an ephemeral moment and an animated panorama under effects of light'.<sup>19</sup> The composer's desire to musically simulate a 'new arrangement of images recorded at different speeds and angles' is reflected by accretions to rhythmic figures, coupled with their acceleration and

Misato Mochizuki (photo Guillaume Jégou, courtesy of Breikopf & Härte!)



<sup>15</sup> From Harada's program notes accompanying the recording.

<sup>16</sup> *Cypres CYP5605* offers Harada's *Heavy Wood*, *Sonora Distancia II*, and various solo and chamber pieces.

<sup>17</sup> *Fontec FOCD 2553* offers Harada's *Sonora Distancia III* and *wa-ta-ri I*, and various solo and chamber pieces.

<sup>18</sup> *Kairos 0012402KAI* offers Mochizuki's *Si bleu, si calme*, *Chimera*, *La chambre clair*, and 2 chamber pieces.

<sup>19</sup> From Mochizuki's program notes for *Camera Lucida* accompanying the *Col Legno* recording *WWE 2CD 20075*, a 2-disc set of highlights from the *Donaueschinger Musiktage* 1999.

Karen Tanaka (photo: Yawara Watanabe, courtesy ChesterNovello)



deceleration. At times, this leads to the effect of a perpetuum mobile, and elsewhere the superimposition of a continuous pulse, as in other works, mimics a ritualistic ceremony. Moreover, a musical equivalent of photographic enlargement is created through overlapping timbral articulations of the same chord, and through reductions in the density of texture so that individual chords become more prominent.

Karen Tanaka (b.1961) attracted international attention as early as the mid-1980s and became interested in progressive European resources, including IRCAM technology. Some of her finest orchestral works are *Prismes* (1984), *Initium* (1993), and *Wave Mechanics* (1994, for chamber orchestra). Particularly distinctive is *Initium* with its lean textures and cool, discrete balance of alternating statements between the electronic component and ensembles within the orchestra. Beginning in the late 1990s, Tanaka began to explore a much wider variety of stylistic venues, including minimalism (*Techno Etudes*, 2000), and even soundscapes with an almost New Age ambience (*Questions of Nature*, 1998). But the prevailing character of the instrumental music from this new period centers around a Neo-Romanticism involving an unabashed embrace of tonality, gently undulating ostinatos, and diatonic melodies. The title of her first work for full orchestra in several years, *Departure* (1999–2000), symbolizes the sudden shift from an international modernist language to her current aesthetic orientation. This period also marks an increasing preoccupation with the orchestra, with three subsequent works appearing in quick succession: *Guardian Angel* (2000), *Lost Sanctuary* (2002), and *Absolute Rose* (2002). The development of Tanaka's current language achieves a breakthrough with *Lost Sanctuary*, which presents a more distinctive melodic profile, greater contrasts over its more protracted time span, and a broader harmonic and expressive range than is found in the immediately preceding works. *Absolute Rose* also suggests that the composer has found a fertile vein for continued exploration.

Mari Takano (photo © Mari Takano)



A pupil of Ferneyhough and Ligeti, Mari Takano (b.1960), like Tanaka, has explored many contemporary stylistic currents. However, in contrast to her compatriot, she pushes the boundaries by embracing a more eclectic mix of diverse influences within individual pieces, including jazz, rock, popular, and ethnic elements. These co-exist with more traditional Western classical concepts of form and development. The ethnic aspects in particular reflect as much of an outreach to Korean and Indian music as to Japanese traditions. All of these diverse elements are filtered through a sensibility that discovers common links between them. A profile disc of her chamber works has been released by BIS (CD-1238), which includes vocal, chamber, and solo pieces.

The most impressive vocal works reflect Takana's refreshingly eclectic approach. The second of *Two Chansons* (1997) incorporates influences as diverse as folk music and scat singing, which seamlessly flow into one another. Simple repeated notes and chords in the piano reflect a more traditional grounding for the far-reaching vocal lines. *Blumenarie* (*Flower Aria*, 1993), a short excerpt from an opera in progress, is scored for soprano, violin, guitar, and piano. The eclecticism of the instrumental writing reflects Renaissance music and, in the composer's words, the staggered entrance of voices in Bulgarian women's choirs.<sup>20</sup> The most ambitious vocal work on the disc is *Woman's Paradise* (1988–91), which the composer describes as an 'abstract opera' in four movements, each scored for different chamber forces and reflecting common developmental threads. If the eclecticism

<sup>20</sup> From Takano's program notes accompanying the BIS recording.



sometimes reveals an awkward juxtaposition of diverse elements, there is also an imaginative experimental spirit, which is most effective in the last non-vocal movement where the sounds of bells are simulated by synthesizers recorded in Midi and one synthesizer performed live.

However, the two works on the disc that arguably signal the arrival of a significant compositional talent are purely instrumental and the most recent of the group. The two-movement *Mugen no Tsuki-Mugen no Hoshi* (1998) is scored for the unusual combination of *koto*, *jushichigen* (a 17 string bass koto), *hichikuri* (a small oboe-like instrument), *sho* (a mouth organ), and violin. Even though the instrumentation is primarily Japanese, a distinctly national character is made more elusive by the references to Western pop and jazz, Korean and Indian traditional music, and by unconventional uses of the instruments. For example, according to the composer, the *hichikuri* is played like a soprano saxophone, a *koto* mimics the sound of a guitar, and the *jushichigen* can be used to sound like an African stringed instrument.<sup>21</sup> The musical discourse of each movement also abandons the equanimity of some traditional Japanese music and projects more Western concepts of motivic development, and dramatic momentum leading to conventional climaxes. The textures range from imitative *gagaku* lines to highly fluid, independent writing that emphasizes the timbral properties of the instruments. Moreover, the development of materials is on an order of brilliance which, as in the best music of Bartók, results in more profound and universal statements that transcend the national origins of the materials.

Takano's 11-minute solo piano work *Innocence* (2000) is a work of comparable quality, though of a more decidedly Western character. Reminiscent of Rzewski's eclectic style, the piano writing features a brilliant fusion of a popular music vernacular with far-ranging development of its materials that reaches into unexpected harmonic and expressive territories. In another similarity to Rzewski, Takano combines a rhapsodic improvisatory spirit with an idiomatic command of diverse piano textures, contrapuntal techniques, motivic development, and formal structure. The first part of the piece features a recurring, leaping bass line, occurring in different harmonic contexts, which serves as a grounding device for much of the florid writing that characterizes this section. After the climax, the bass line disappears and the coda presents three short, reflective episodes of great poignancy and beauty. This is an impressive piece whose range of expression and accomplishment is greater than many piano works of two or three times its duration. Based on the evidence provided by the works on this disc, the scope of Takano's investigation into ethnic, popular, jazz, and art music suggests that her range has expanded beyond the pan-Asian concerns of some of her compatriots to encompass an international melting pot of styles.

A survey documenting the richness of Japan's compositional scene can only concentrate on a handful of composers. Moreover, the focus of this overview has been on several figures born after 1950, but there are many other emerging talents as well as worthy figures who have had strong reputations in Japan for several decades. These include Teruyuki Noda, Tokuhide Niimi, Somei Satoh, Jo Kondo, Takashi Yoshimatsu, Toshiro Saruya, Atsuhiko Gondai, Naomi Sekiya, Hitomi Kaneko, Akio Yasuraoka, Hiroyuki Yamamoto, and others. One can only hope that the greater international attention accorded to Oriental composers in general, coupled with easier accessibility to recordings, will lead to an increasing number of Western performances of worthy Japanese composers in mainstream concert venues.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.