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An original composition, Symphony No. 1, and the realization of Western and Japanese influences in Takemitsu's November Steps

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AN ORIGINAL COMPOSITION, SYMPHONY NO. 1, 
AND 
THE REALIZATION OF WESTERN AND JAPANESE INFLUENCES IN 
TAKEMITSU’S NOVEMBER STEPS 

A Dissertation 

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the 
Louisiana State University and 
Agricultural and Mechanical College 
in partial fulfillment of the 
requirements for the degree of 
Doctor of Philosophy 

in 

The School of Music 

by 
Charles Douglas Haarhues 
B.M., Eastern Illinois University, 1996 
M.M., Eastern Illinois University, 1999 
August 2005
DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my wife, Mayumi Yotsumoto. It is only through her inspiration, love, and support that the completion of this project has been possible.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my wife Mayumi Yotsumoto (for everything) and her family, who assisted me in my research on Japanese music and culture; Yoshihide Shimazu and Satoru Iwakiri, for agreeing to be interviewed and for demonstrating their instruments; my mother and father, Arleen and Cal Haarhues; my brother Mike Haarhues; my sisters, Karen Follon and Michelle Haarhues; my advisor, Boyd Professor Dinos Constantinides for his guidance and advise during my years here at LSU; and the other members of my doctoral committee, Dr. Robert Peck, Dr. Stephen David Beck, Dr. William Grimes, and Dr. Kimberly Arp.

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PERSONAL REFLECTION

In June 2004 I traveled with my wife and her father to Tochigi prefecture in north-central Japan to stay for a week at the Aryuveda clinic outside the small town of Takabayashi. The clinic is located in the Aomori woods and is isolated from the noises of modern civilization. Because I had brought with me several books, dissertations, and articles dealing with Takemitsu and Japanese music, I spent much of my time during our stay doing research relevant to my analysis of November Steps. I also had time to take many walks through the surrounding woods. Because of the absence of man-made noise, the atmosphere was one of tranquil solitude, and I was able to hear clearly the sounds of nature, such as the ebb and flow of the wind in the trees and the gentle shaking of the leaves in the breeze. During one of these walks I suddenly understood what is truly meant by a phrase I had read numerous times during my research: “the ultimate achievement the shakuhachi master strives for in his performance is the re-creation of the sound of wind blowing through an old bamboo grove.”

\[1\] Toru Takemitsu, Confronting Silence, translated and edited by Yoshiko Kakudo and Glenn Glasow (Berkeley: Fallen Leaf Press, 1995), 88.
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is in two parts. Part one is an original composition, Symphony No. 1 and is inspired by different aspects of Japanese culture. Part two is an analysis of Tōru Takemitsu’s November Steps, which is scored for orchestra and the traditional Japanese instruments, biwa and shakuhachi.

The first movement of Symphony No. 1 is entitled Rashōmon and is based on the structure of the 1951 Akira Kurosawa film. The harmonic language is primarily polytonal and is based on the octatonic scale. The second movement is entitled For a Person of a Floating World. Its form is derived from the 5-7-5 syllabic structure of haiku poetry. The harmonic language consists of contrasting pentatonic and whole-tone derived sonorities. The third and fourth movements are inspired by Katsushika Hokusai’s woodblock print The Great Wave Off Kanagawa. The third movement serves as a prelude and is entitled The Darkening Sky. The last movement is entitled The Great Wave Off Kanagawa and utilizes the percussion section to emulate a Japanese taiko drum ensemble. Both movements utilize transpositions of a symmetrical scale consisting of two [025] trichords (C-D-F / F#-G#-B).

Part two is an analysis of November Steps and emphasizes the realization of Japanese and Western influences in the composition. It is divided into seven chapters. The first chapter is an introduction. The second chapter is a biography of the composer. The third chapter deals with the Western composers who have had the most profound influence on Takemitsu. The fourth chapter explores Japanese aesthetic concepts which are central to Takemitsu’s music. The fifth chapter discusses the biwa and shakuhachi.

The sixth chapter analyzes November Steps. The introduction explains Takemitsu’s aesthetic approach. Next, previous analyses are described. The third section deals with Takemitsu’s notation for the biwa and shakuhachi. Next, Takemitsu’s orchestral seating plan is discussed. The next two sections analyze how November Step’s form is generated from stratified gestures which accumulate and dissipate over time. The last section explores how the Japanese aesthetic concepts of ma and cyclical time are realized in the composition. The seventh chapter is a conclusion.
PART I: AN ORIGINAL COMPOSITION, SYMPHONY NO. 1

Symphony No. 1

I. RASHŌMON
II: FOR A PERSON OF A FLOATING WORLD
III: THE DARKENING SKY
IV: THE GREAT WAVE OFF KANAGAWA

2 Flutes (flute 1 doubles piccolo)
2 Oboes
2 Clarinets in B-flat
1 Bass Clarinet
2 Bassoons
1 Contrabassoon

4 Horns in F
3 Trumpets in C
3 Trombones
1 Tuba

Percussion 1 (vibraphone, set of four concert toms-high to low)
Percussion 2 (glockenspiel, triangle, a pair of Japanese cymbals)
Percussion 3 (marimba, suspended cymbal, china cymbal, triangle, bass drum)
Percussion 4 (small tam-tam, tam-tam, pair of small Japanese cymbals, wind-chimes, bass drum)

Harp

Violin 1
Violin 2
Viola
Cello
Double bass

Score in C.

All instruments sound as written except for the piccolo which sounds one octave higher than written, the glockenspiel which sounds two octaves higher than written, and the contrabassoon and double bass which sound one octave lower than written.
I: RASHÔMON

Charles Haahrues
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**Notes on the score:**
- Bass drum with medium mallets
- Bassoon with mm and relent
- Bassoon with medium mallets
- Trumpets with straight mute
- Trumpets with straight mute
- Trombones with mm

**MIDI Instr.:**
- Bass Drum with med. mallets
- Bassoon with mm and relent
- Bassoon with medium mallets
- Trumpets with straight mute
- Trumpets with straight mute
- Trombones with mm
II: FOR A PERSON OF A FLOATING WORLD
PART II: THE REALIZATION OF WESTERN AND JAPANESE INFLUENCES IN
TAKEMITSU’S NOVEMBER STEPS
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Tōru Takemitsu (1930-1996) was the most internationally recognized Japanese composer of the twentieth century and *November Steps* is perhaps his most famous composition. It was commissioned by the New York Philharmonic as part of the orchestra’s 125th anniversary celebration in 1967. The previous year Takemitsu had written the piece *Eclipse*, a duet for two traditional Japanese instruments, *biwa* (a lute-like instrument) and *shakuhachi* (a five holed bamboo flute). The Japanese conductor Seiji Ozawa heard that piece while in Japan and later played a tape of the work for Leonard Bernstein. Intrigued by the composition, Bernstein asked Takemitsu to write a piece in which these two instruments would be combined with a symphony orchestra. Because the work was to be premiered in New York during November 1967, Takemitsu titled it *November Steps*. Its premiere was a resounding success, and Takemitsu’s reputation was established as a composer who combined traditional Japanese and Western instruments, despite the fact that the vast majority of his compositions were written solely for Western instruments.

That view of Takemitsu was vastly oversimplified. He was part of a generation of Japanese composers who came of age in the post World War II era. In the years following Japan’s defeat, these young composers turned their backs on traditional Japanese culture and looked to the West for inspiration and musical models. Like their European and American counterparts they considered the old artistic language dead, and in order to develop a modern musical vocabulary, they adopted the new compositional methods of composers like Anton Webern, Olivier Messiaen, Pierre Schaeffer, and John Cage. From the early 1950s through the 1960s Takemitsu associated himself with the international avant-garde, absorbed these new compositional procedures, and applied them in his own compositions. These included the sound mass and extended instrumental techniques of Penderecki, the aleatoric-counterpoint of Lutoslawski, and the micropolyphony of Ligeti.

During this time period, however, Takemitsu and several other of his fellow Japanese composers rediscovered their Japanese heritage and began to incorporate its elements into their own works. For example, while still using the Western musical vocabulary they had spent years mastering, they began to base their temporal models on the Japanese space-time concept of *ma*, or their timbral choices on the concept of *sawari*. The composer Toshiro Mayuzumi, using the scientific methods of acoustical analysis, selected the pitch materials for his piece *Nirvana Symphony* from an analysis of the overtones of a Buddhist temple bell. The resulting music of this
blend of East and West was simultaneously modern and traditional. To the Western listener the
devices of avant-garde contemporary composition were evident, but the sensitive Japanese listener
could also perceive the ancient aesthetic sensibilities that had governed the Japanese arts for more
than a millennium. This process of importing foreign culture into Japan and then molding it to
indigenous tastes was in many ways the same procedure the Japanese had followed since they first
imported the Chinese writing system and its associated cultural ideas from mainland Asia in the
sixth century A.D.

In the 1974 essay “Mirrors” Takemitsu described this transformation from a composer who
looked exclusively to the West to one who used his contemporary Western musical vocabulary in
order to express innately Japanese aesthetic ideas. To do this he employed a metaphor that
described succinctly the dual nature of his musical personality: “Once, I believed that to make
music was to project myself onto an enormous mirror that was called the West. Coming into
contact with Japanese traditional music, I became aware of the fact that there was another mirror.”

To be simultaneously both an Eastern and Western composer was a situation that Takemitsu felt
was inherent with contradictions. Not only did he recognize this condition within himself, but he
also saw it present in Japanese society as a whole. Takemitsu’s compositional solution was not to
blend this yin and yang of East and West. He stated that his goal was to “confront these
contradictions, even intensify them. And those contradictions are for me a valid visa to the world.
That is my act of expression.”

Because of its juxtaposition of Eastern and Western instruments, November Steps is in many
ways an ideal composition to use as a vehicle for the exploration of this dual nature of Takemitsu’s
compositional personality. In this piece, however, did Takemitsu realize his goal of confronting and
intensifying the contradictions between the sound worlds of a symphony orchestra and traditional
Japanese instruments, or is the final result perhaps more complex, and the boundaries between the
two not so rigidly defined?

The purpose of this essay is to investigate the aspects of Takemitsu’s life and his musical
influences which contributed to the development of his personal aesthetic and its realization in
November Steps. The paper is organized into the following chapters: 1) biography, 2) Western
compositional influences, 3) Japanese aesthetic concepts, 4) characteristics and history of the biwa

1 Tõru Takemitsu, “Mirrors.” Translated by Sumi Adachi with Roger Reynolds, Perspectives of New Music Vol.
2 Tõru Takemitsu, Confronting Silence. Translated and edited by Yoshiko Kakudo and Glenn Glasow (Berkeley:
Fallen Leaf Press, 1995), 93.
and shakuhachi, and 5) an analysis of November Steps. The analysis chapter will particularly emphasize the roles of timbre and texture in the determination of composition’s form, the use of cyclical temporal models, the Japanese concept of ma, the use of both modern and traditional performance practices by the biwa and shakuhachi, and the notational system Takemitsu developed for them. By investigating these compositional elements, it is possible to achieve a better understanding of both the Western and Japanese aesthetic principles underlying November Steps and their interaction.
CHAPTER 2: BIOGRAPHY

Tõru Takemitsu was born on October 8, 1930 in Tokyo to Takeo and Reiko Takemitsu. In November of that year his family moved from Japan to Darien, Manchuria, where his father was a government official for a Japanese economic development project. In 1937, in order to begin school, he was sent back to Tokyo to live with his aunt and uncle. Around the time that Takemitsu was sent back to Japan, his father Takeo became seriously ill with tuberculosis. He was sent to Kagoshima in southern Japan for recuperation but died there in 1938. His mother then returned to Tokyo and worked to support her family.¹

Takemitsu’s aunt was a koto teacher so, while he lived with her in Tokyo, he was frequently surrounded by traditional Japanese music. Years later he recalled how, as a child, this music had never appealed to him. On the contrary, he always associated it with his bitter memories of World War II. In contrast, he remembered his family being big fans of American music and movies. His father had kept a collection of New Orleans-style jazz records,² and the entire family enjoyed seeing American films like *It Happened One Night* and *Top Hat*. It was through seeing films like these that he came to realize the great differences between Japanese and American culture.³

During World War II, however, most Western Culture and music was banned in Japan. The fascist government promoted military type marches, nationalistic songs based on harmonized folk tunes, and traditional Japanese music. During the last year of the war the teenage Takemitsu was conscripted to work at a military base deep in a mountainous region of Saitama prefecture.⁴ Most of the Japanese soldiers treated the young laborers harshly, but many years later Takemitsu recalled an exception:

One day, one of the military officers took a number of us to the very back of the barracks where he had a record player and a number of records. There was no needle to play the records, but this officer had carefully sharpened a piece of bamboo, and using it as a needle he was able to play the records for us. One of the first records he put on was the French Chanson, “Parles-moi de l’amour.” For me, hearing that music came as a tremendous shock. I was stunned, and for the first time I suddenly realized the splendid quality of Western music.⁵

After the war the Japanese economy and infrastructure was devastated so Takemitsu never had a

5 Takemitsu, 199.
chance to complete middle school, let alone high school or college. He did, however, manage to find a job as a busboy and waiter at a PX on an American base in Yokohama. Here he was able to listen to American jazz music on records and pick out tunes on a dance hall piano. At this time he also began listening to American concert works by composers such as Roy Harris and Aaron Copland on American Armed Services radio, and studying these and other scores at the library of the Civil Information and Education department of the U. S. occupation government in Tokyo.6

During this period Takemitsu began to make the acquaintance of other young musicians who would later go on to have notable musical careers. In 1946 he joined an amateur choral group that rehearsed at the home of the young conductor and composer Noriteru Hamada. There he met Hiroyoshi Suzuki. Together Takemitsu and Suzuki studied scores of various composers and Rimsky-Korsakov’s orchestration treatise. In 1947 Suzuki and Takemitsu were at a Tokyo used book store when they discovered a score by Japanese composer Kishio Harao. Some time later they went to Harao’s home hoping to become his students. To their disappointment, he declined to accept them as pupils. In 1953, however, Harao would again make Takemitsu’s acquaintance and give him a a copy of his newly published translation of Messiaen’s *Technique de mon language musical*, a work that Takemitsu, over the years, would often say had a significant impact on his musical development.7

The years immediately following World War II were a time of radical change for the Japanese musical scene. From the time Japan reopened contact with the Western world in 1868, the country’s goal was to convert itself into a modern industrial power. In order to do so they imported the Western educational system. This included the Western music education system. Traditional Japanese music was looked upon as inferior. In 1880 Luther Mason arrived from America and established what would eventually become the Tokyo Music School. The system of music education he established still survives in Japan to this day. Because Mason’s two immediate successors at the Tokyo Music School were Franz Eckert and Rudolph Dietrich, the primary compositional influence was Germanic. In addition, several Japanese students who were later to become musically influential in their home country traveled to Germany and France in order to study composition. Their resulting compositions closely resembled the works of the popular European composers that were their models. In the 1930s, however, a group of composers sought to incorporate distinctly Japanese elements into their works. This group included Yasuji Kiyose

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6 Ibid., 200.
7 Siddons, p 8.
(1900-1981), Yoritsune Matsudaira (1907-2001), and Fumio Hayasaka (1914-1955). In the postwar years these composers would have a significant impact on the younger generation that included Takemitsu. The other development that was to influence profoundly the postwar generation of Japanese composers was the discovery of the European avant-garde.\(^8\)

In 1948 the seventeen year old Takemitsu saw a poster on a street corner for a concert by the Toho Symphony Orchestra featuring works by Japanese composers Fumio Hayasaka and Akira Ifukube. Intrigued as to what kind of music Japanese composers would write he went to the box office to buy a ticket (at this time he knew nothing of the prewar nationalist composers). At the ticket office he inquired if there was anyone who could teach him composition. He was given the name of Yasuji Kiyose, one of Japan’s foremost composers of the time. For two years Takemitsu studied with Kiyose, but their lessons consisted mostly of conversations regarding aesthetics, and not applied compositional studies. The real value in Takemitsu’s relationship with Kiyose was his introduction to many important figures in the Nationalist composition movement.\(^9\)

In the post-war era many collective Japanese composition groups were formed loosely modeled after European groups in music and the other arts. Each of these groups had no formal organization, professed an agenda of shared aesthetic beliefs, and pooled their resources to organize concerts of new music. These groups included the *Yagi no Kai* (The Goat Group), *Sannin no Kai* (The Group of Three), and the *Shin Sakkyokuha Kyoukai* (New Composer’s Association). The last of these groups was formed by Takemitsu’s teacher Kiyose in 1946, and included such prominent Japanese composers as Fumio Hayasaka and Yoritsune Matsudaira. The goal of many of these groups was to develop a truly national style. In order to do so they often blended contemporary Western musical techniques with a Japanese aesthetic sense.\(^10\)

Two years after beginning his studies with Kiyose, Takemitsu (along with his friend Suzuki) was granted membership in *Shin Sakkyokuha Kyoukai*. As a result, he received his first public performance on December 7, 1950. The piece performed that day was *Lento in Due Movimenti* for solo piano. The critical reception that his work received, however, was less than enthusiastic, and at the time he even considered giving up music altogether. Despite this, Takemitsu persevered, and in

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\(^8\) For a more detailed history of the development of the modern Japanese music education system and the country’s early Western style composers see the first chapter of Timothy Koozin’s *The Solo Piano Works of Tôru Takemitsu: A Linear/Set-Theoretic Analysis* (Ph.D. diss., University of Cincinnati, 1989), 5-22.

\(^9\) Siddons, 4.

May 1951 his second piece to be publicly performed, *distance de Fée* for violin and piano, was premiered.\textsuperscript{11}

The membership of *Shin Sakkyokuha Kyoukai* mainly consisted of older established composers whose styles had been firmly established in the years preceding World War II. Takemitsu, however, was now beginning to circulate with a younger group of musicians, artists, and poets who, like their post-war European and American counterparts, desired to create a new musical language to replace the styles of the past. The result was the founding of a new artistic organization in September 1951, the *Jikken Kōbō* (Experimental Workshop). In contrast to the music of *Shin Sakkyokuha Kyoukai*, which was nationalistic and relatively conservative, the goal of *Jikken Kōbō* was to work in various media in order to create a new artistic synthesis. As a result, the membership of this new group not only consisted of composers and musicians, but of artists in many other disciplines including poets, painters, photographers, and stage technicians. From 1951 until 1958 *Jikken Kōbō* produced thirteen art exhibitions, stage productions, and music concerts. The first of which was the ballet, *Pleasure for Living*, which featured music by both Takemitsu and his friend Suzuki.\textsuperscript{12} In addition to producing concerts of its members works, *Jikken Kōbō* premiered the works of important European composers in Japan. These included Messiaen’s *Quatuor pour la fin du temps* in 1952 and Schoenberg’s *Pierrot Lunaire* in 1954.\textsuperscript{13}

In 1952 Takemitsu ended his membership with *Shin Sakkyokuha Kyoukai*, but he continued his relationship with Fumio Hayasaka, who became something of a mentor to the young composer. Where Kiyose’s style was based more on formal models and Japanese folk songs, Hayasaka’s music was more daring and novel. He was eclectic and often drew on musical styles from throughout Asia. He was also a noted film composer, working with director Akira Kurosawa on the classic films *Rashōmon* and *The Seven Samurai*. This relationship between the two composers resulted in Takemitsu being hired by Hayasaka as a copyist for his film scores. This job was the beginning of Takemitsu’s career in film music, a career that lasted until his death and resulted in his writing music for dozens of films and television programs.\textsuperscript{14}

Takemitsu’s interest in working in new media included writing incidental music for radio plays, and experimenting with *musique concrète*. In the early 1950s the Japanese composer Toshiro Mayuzumi (1929-1987), while studying in Paris, became familiar with *musique concrète*. When he

\textsuperscript{11} Burt, 26.

\textsuperscript{12} Siddons, 6.

\textsuperscript{13} Burt, 41.

\textsuperscript{14} Siddons, 6.
returned to Japan, Mayuzumi began to compose electronic pieces of his own. This led to the Japanese national broadcasting network NHK in 1955 to set up Japan’s first electronic music studio. At this same time Takemitsu was composing incidental music for a radio play to be broadcast on the rival Shin Nihon Hōsō broadcast network. In the Shin Nihon Hōsō studios he constructed a musique concrète piece that he later revised and titled Relief statique. That same year he went on to produce four more tape pieces in the Shin Nihon Hōsō studios. From 1955 until 1972 Takemitsu regularly worked in the electronic medium. Much of this was primarily related to his film composition, but he produced several concert tape pieces as well.\(^\text{15}\)

Despite his constant compositional activity, Takemitsu’s personal and financial situation in the 1950s was far from secure. Because Japan was still recovering from the devastation that resulted from World War II, poverty was commonplace. Nor was Takemitsu considered an especially promising composer within Japanese music circles. Only his immediate circle of friends from the Jikken Kōbō group were enthusiastic supporters. In addition to his financial problems, he underwent long periods of severe illness in the 1940s and 50s. From June 1953 until March 1954 he was hospitalized with tuberculosis. After being released from the hospital he married Asaka Wakayama, an actress with the Shiki theater group he had first met in 1950. The next year Takemitsu was emotionally devastated when his mentor, Fumio Hayasaka, who had also contracted tuberculosis, died. In 1957 Takemitsu again underwent another long period of illness. During this period he was offered a commission from the Tokyo Metropolitan Orchestra. Because of his depression and illness, Takemitsu was unsure if he could fulfill the commission. Sometimes he could only compose one or two measures a day. The resulting piece, Requiem for Strings, however, would eventually be responsible for a reversal of his fortune.\(^\text{16}\)

In the Spring of 1959, Igor Stravinsky was in Japan to conduct concerts of his music in Tokyo, Kyoto, and Osaka. During this tour, Stravinsky requested to hear some examples of Japanese contemporary orchestral music. A hearing was organized with the NHK Symphony Orchestra, and Takemitsu submitted Requiem for Strings. His work was not selected for inclusion but somehow the score and parts were not removed from the orchestra folders.\(^\text{17}\) In a 1989 interview Takemitsu recalled the event:

> He (Stravinsky) heard it by accident because, when he was in Tokyo, he asked to listen to some Japanese music. The radio stations arranged it. My music was not

\(^{15}\) ibid., 7
\(^{16}\) ibid., 8
\(^{17}\) ibid., 8
supposed to be played, but by chance someone played some and Stravinsky said, ‘Please keep going.’ He listened to my music along with many pieces. After that he had a press conference and he mentioned only my name. Then he invited me to lunch.  

In fact Stravinsky had said, “This is good music, a very impressive and intense music.” As a result of Stravinsky’s glowing endorsement of his music, Takemitsu’s reputation was established. Other events affirmed Stravinsky’s opinion. In 1958 Takemitsu’s piece *Le Son Calligraphie* received the first prize at the contemporary music festival in Karuizawa. Then in 1959 Takemitsu received his first American performance when Thor Johnson conducted *Le Son Calligraphie II* in Chicago. As a result of Takemitsu’s newly earned fame in the world of Japanese concert music, his improving health, and his growing reputation in composing film music, his life changed dramatically. In the 1960s poverty would be replaced by financial security, he would travel frequently abroad for performances of his music, and he would begin to make the acquaintance of notable musicians and other artists from around the world. As a result, his reputation would expand from national to international.

Two events in the early 1960s, however, would greatly influence Takemitsu’s musical philosophy. The first event occurred when Takemitsu happened to attend a performance of traditional Japanese *Bunraku* puppet theater. Before that, Takemitsu, like many other Japanese who had experienced the ultranationalism that had led to World War II, found little value in traditional culture and looked to the West for his musical models. Therefore, when he attended the puppet show and heard the music of the *shamisen*, a traditional Japanese instrument that is used to accompany the *Bunraku* play, he “recognized (for the first time) the splendor of traditional Japanese music.” He decided to begin studying traditional Japanese music with the same fervor he had studied Western music, and from that point on he was determined to “bring forth the sensibilities of Japanese music that had always been within me.”

The other event occurred in 1961, when the composer Toshi Ichiyanagi returned from nine years of study in the United States. During that time he had attended John Cage’s composition classes in New York, and at the Osaka Contemporary Music Festival in August of 1961,

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18 Takemitsu, Tôru, Tania Cronin, and Hillary Tann, “Afterward,” *Perspectives of New Music* Vol. 27 no. 2 (Summer 1989): 206-207.
19 Ohtake, 6.
20 Siddons, 9.
22 Ibid., 201.
Ichiyanagi performed Cage’s *Concerto for Piano and Orchestra*. Even though Takemitsu had been aware of Cage’s ideas since the mid 1950s, and had even incorporated some of them in his own works, he was unprepared for the impression this piece would make on him. Years later when writing an obituary of Cage he recalled, “I still feel the shock of hearing that piece.” As a result of this “Cage shock,” Takemitsu started to experiment with indeterminacy and graphic notation. Several of his works in the 1960s utilized these elements including *Arc* for piano and orchestra, *Ring*, and *Corona for Strings*.

Takemitsu first met John Cage in October 1962, when he and David Tudor came to Japan in order to attend the Sapporo Contemporary Music Festival. In 1964 Takemitsu traveled to San Francisco in order to attend an electronic music festival, where he again met Cage and David Tudor. From there they traveled together to Hawaii to attend the Festival of Music in this Century sponsored by the East-West Center. Later that same year Cage, Tudor, and the Merce Cunningham Dance Company returned to Japan for a series of performances. Since the mid 1940s, when he attended a series of lectures by Daisetsu Suzuki at Columbia University, Cage had been profoundly influenced by Japanese Zen Buddhism, and this influence was reciprocal. Takemitsu claimed that it was through John Cage that he himself discovered Buddhism. In addition, Cage’s ideas regarding silence, chance operations, and the liberation of sound profoundly influenced Takemitsu’s thinking. It was through these shared philosophical views that they cemented a close lifelong friendship.

Takemitsu’s 1964 travel to the United States was the first of many trips he would make throughout the world. In May 1965 he attended a showing of Masaki Kobayashi’s film *Kwaidan* (for which Takemitsu had written the music) at the Cannes Film Festival. From there he traveled to Paris, where he met, among others, Olivier Messiaen and Iannis Xenakis. In 1967 he again traveled to San Francisco for the premiere of his composition *Dorian Horizon* performed by the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra conducted by Aaron Copland. Later that same year he journeyed first to Toronto for rehearsals, and then to New York for the premiere of *November Steps* by the New York Philharmonic conducted by Seiji Ozawa. He then stayed in New York as a guest of the Rockefeller Foundation until March 1968.

During the 1950s Takemitsu looked only to the West for musical inspiration, but during the

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23 Takemitsu, *Confronting Silence*, 137.
24 Siddons, 9-10.
26 Siddons, 10.
1960s his international reputation quickly became that of a composer who integrated traditional Japanese music with the Western contemporary musical language. Shortly after his experience with the *shamisen* at the *Bunraku* puppet show, Takemitsu began to study the *biwa*, an ancient type of Japanese lute. In 1961 he employed the *biwa* as a sound source for tape music he was writing for the documentary *Nihon no Monyō* (Japanese Patterns). In 1962 and 1964 Takemitsu again used the *biwa* in the films *Seppuku* and *Kwaidan*. The historical setting of these films made the inclusion of traditional instruments only natural.\(^{27}\) In 1966 he composed his first concert work for traditional Japanese instruments, *Eclipse* for *biwa* and *shakuhachi* (*a* five-holed Japanese bamboo flute). Later that year Seiji Ozawa brought a tape recording of the piece to the United States, where Leonard Bernstein heard it. As a result, Bernstein asked Takemitsu to write a piece combining these two instruments with a symphony orchestra for the 125th anniversary of the New York Philharmonic. The resulting composition, *November Steps*, was premiered in New York in November 1967.\(^{28}\)

Despite his reputation for using Japanese instruments, it would be six years before Takemitsu wrote for them again. In 1973, however, he would write four concert works that included traditional Japanese instruments. These were *Distance* for oboe and *shō* (*a* Japanese mouth harp), *Voyage* for three *biwas*, *In an Autumn Garden* for *gagaku* ensemble (*traditional* Japanese court orchestra), and *Autumn* for *shakuhachi*, *biwa*, and orchestra. The last of these pieces, *Autumn*, was written for the same two solo instruments and orchestra as had *November Steps*. In *November Steps* Takemitsu’s goal had not been to blend the Japanese instruments with the orchestra, but to emphasize their differences, to juxtapose the two cultures against each other. In *Autumn*, however, instead of a confrontation between the soloists and the orchestra, he chose to integrate the Eastern and Western instruments. With the exception of a few film scores, Takemitsu would not write any works for Japanese instruments until 1992 when he composed *Ceremonial* for *shō*, Buddhist chant, and orchestra.\(^{29}\)

Since the beginning of his career Takemitsu had written prolifically about music, and beginning in the 1970s, he began to discuss in his essays the concept of the “universal egg,” a symbol for a universal human culture. Takemitsu first encountered this term in the writings of Buckminster Fuller. The technological developments of the twentieth century, Fuller observed, were causing the

\(^{28}\) Takemitsu, *Confronting Silence*, 62.
\(^{29}\) Burt, 126.
countries of the world to come together to form single united culture. Takemitsu saw his own life and music as evidence of this process.\textsuperscript{30} He saw himself as a composer who used a Western musical language to express Japanese aesthetic principles. Whether he used Japanese instruments or not in his music, he was still expressing Japanese aesthetic principles such as \textit{ma} or \textit{sawari}.\textsuperscript{31} In addition, Takemitsu observed that composers who had greatly influenced him, such as John Cage and Claude Debussy, had themselves been influenced by Japanese culture. He also looked to other cultures to explore what they had to offer. He made trips to Australia and Indonesia to investigate the music of the aborigines and Javanese gamelan.

In the 1960s Takemitsu was considered an avant-garde composer. His circle of musical friends included such avant-garde luminaries as John Cage, Morton Feldman, Karlheinz Stockhausen, and Iannis Xenakis, and his music utilized modernist techniques such graphic notation, chance operations, tape manipulation, sound mass, and extended instrumental techniques.

In the 1970s, however, Takemitsu’s music began to change. It became more lush, simpler, and began to display characteristics of tonality. Takemitsu had always been sensitive to timbral gradations in his music, but now his orchestral writing became even more refined. Traditional Japanese music had always emphasized complex sounds and changes of timbre over time, but this new lush orchestral style had Western roots as well. Takemitsu for many years had expressed his love of the music of Debussy. When he traveled to a Japanese resort in Nagano prefecture in 1967 to compose \textit{November Steps}, he took with him two Debussy scores for study.\textsuperscript{32} In essays and interviews over the years he often acknowledged Debussy’s orchestral style as having a profound influence. He admired Debussy’s handling of “color, light, and shadow,”\textsuperscript{33} even calling him “my great mentor.”\textsuperscript{34}

Another French composer who greatly influenced Takemitsu was Olivier Messiaen. As stated previously, in the 1950s he had acquired a copy of \textit{Technique de mon language musical} and often cited its influence. In particular, Messiaen’s modes of limited transposition are often seen as a source of Takemitsu’s own pitch structures. In the 1970s Takemitsu paid homage to Messiaen with the pieces \textit{Quatrain I} and \textit{Quatrain II}. These compositions originated from a 1975 lesson that Takemitsu had with Messiaen in New York in which they analyzed the elder composer’s

\textsuperscript{30} Takemitsu, \textit{Confronting Silence}, 91.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 51-54.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 83.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 110.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 110.
"Quatuor pour la fin du temps." Later Takemitsu asked Messiaen if he could write a work for the same instrumentation. With the French composer’s blessing, Takemitsu composed the two works for the Japanese ensemble Tashi.\textsuperscript{35} Both pieces are essentially the same music. \textit{Quatrain I} is for orchestra and four soloists, and \textit{Quatrain II} is a rescoring of the music for the quartet.\textsuperscript{36}

Another work that found its inspiration from a French artistic figure was 1977’s \textit{A Flock Descends into the Pentagonal Garden}. After seeing a photograph of the French artist Marcel Duchamp with a pattern of a five-pointed star shaved into his hair, Takemitsu later dreamed of a flock of white birds led by a black bird descending into a pentagonal garden. From this dream he derived the central musical idea of his composition. The piece is centered around the pitch F-sharp (the black bird) and the “black note” pentatonic scale starting on it. From this source he then derived five other harmonic fields that would revolve around this central musical idea. These five harmonic fields are all related to the original by derivations of the number five. All these harmonic fields, however, are in one way or another associated with the original pitch F-sharp which Takemitsu saw as a “fixed drone” that runs throughout the work.\textsuperscript{37}

During this period of stylistic change and refinement Takemitsu also came to be recognized worldwide as a major musical voice and as the preeminent Japanese composer of his generation. From the 1970s until his death Takemitsu made regular trips overseas for premiers of commissioned pieces, international music festivals, to give lectures, and to teach. In 1975 he was a visiting professor of composition at Yale, and in 1979 a Regent’s Lecturer at the University of California at San Diego. In addition, he gave lectures at several other American Universities including Harvard and Boston University.\textsuperscript{38} Pieces were commissioned for performance by such distinguished orchestras as the London Sinfonietta (\textit{Rain Coming}, 1982), the Los Angeles Philharmonic (\textit{Riverrun}, 1984), The Chicago Symphony Orchestra (\textit{Visions}, 1990), The London Symphony Orchestra (\textit{Quotation of Dream}, 1991), and the Boston Symphony Orchestra (\textit{From Me Flows What You Call Time}, 1991).\textsuperscript{39}

During this period he continued to write music for movies and television as well. Since the beginning of his career Takemitsu enjoyed collaborating with artists from different fields. The stated purpose of the \textit{Jikken Kōbō} group which he had helped co-found in the early 1950s was the

\textsuperscript{35} Burt, 154-155.  
\textsuperscript{36} Siddons, 77.  
\textsuperscript{37} Takemitsu, Confronting Silence, 97-103.  
\textsuperscript{38} Siddons, 10.  
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 29-106.
interaction of artists in various media. His approach to film composition was highly collaborative as well. Typically film composers only become involved towards the end of a project, after actual filming has been completed. Takemitsu enjoyed participating in a film project from its very beginning and would often visit the set during the filming of a movie.\textsuperscript{40}

He often collaborated with Japan’s finest filmmakers including Masaki Kobayashi (\textit{Seppuku}, \textit{Kwaidan}, \textit{Samurai Rebellion}, \textit{Tokyo Trials}), Masahiro Shinoda (\textit{Pale Flower}, \textit{Double Suicide}, \textit{Silence}), and Hiroshi Teshigahara (\textit{Woman in the Dunes}, \textit{Face of Another}, \textit{Rikyû}). In 1971 he collaborated with Japan’s most internationally renowned director, Akira Kurosawa on the film \textit{Dodes’kaden}. It was Kurosawa for whom Takemitsu’s mentor, Fumio Hayasaka, had written film scores in the 1950s. He again worked with Kurosawa on 1985’s \textit{Ran}, an adaptation of Shakespeare’s \textit{King Lear} set in medieval Japan. Over the course of his life Takemitsu wrote music for over one hundred films and television programs.\textsuperscript{41}

In addition to his composing and teaching, Takemitsu was a prolific writer for newspapers, magazines, and journals. Most of these were essays written for various Japanese publications, but he occasionally wrote for American scholarly journals such as \textit{Perspectives of New Music} (“My Perception of Time in Traditional Japanese Music”), and \textit{Contemporary Music Review} (“Contemporary Music in Japan” and “Mirrors”). In 1995 \textit{Confronting Silence}, a selected collection of his Japanese essays translated into English, was published in the United States by Falling Leaf Press. The vast majority of Takemitsu's writings, however, are still only available in Japanese.

In the last years of his life Takemitsu wrote many works that served as epitaphs to friends and fellow composers who had passed away. These include \textit{Twill by Twilight} (1988) written for Morton Feldman, \textit{Rain Tree Sketch II} for piano (1992) for Olivier Messiaen, and \textit{Paths} for solo trumpet (1994) for Witold Lutoslawski.

Takemitsu himself was diagnosed with abdominal cancer in October 1995. Over the next few months he became increasingly weak and could not attend performances and had to abandon new projects. He had been working on his first opera, but it would never be completed. In mid February his illness became increasingly severe and he had to be admitted to a Tokyo hospital.\textsuperscript{42} Until the

\textsuperscript{40} Tõru Takemitsu, \textit{Tõru Takemitsu: Music for the Movies}, directed by Charlotte Zwerin, produced by Margaret Smilow, 58 minutes, Alternate Current, Les Films D’Ici, NHK, and LaSept/Arte, Videocassette.
\textsuperscript{41} Siddons, 107-117.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 18
end he was optimistic about his recovery, and spoke with visiting friends about his future plans. These plans, however, would never be realized. Takemitsu died on February 20, 1996, and a funeral was held on February 29.

Despite Takemitsu’s passing, his presence continues to be felt on the international music scene. His solo, chamber, and orchestral works continue to be studied, performed, and recorded worldwide. Numerous scholarly writings dealing with his compositions have been published in recent years. These include the books *The Music of Toru Takemitsu* by Peter Burt (Cambridge University Press, 2001), *Toru Takemitsu: A Bio-Bibliography* by James Siddons (Greenwood Press, 2001), and *A Way a Lone: Writings on Toru Takemitsu* edited by Hugh de Ferranti and Yoko Narazaki (Acadamia Music, 2002). In addition, the journal *Contemporary Music Review* published an all Takemitsu issue in 2002 (Vol. 21 no. 4). In the coming years this body of scholarly literature and Takemitsu’s reputation will surely continue to grow.

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CHAPTER 3: WESTERN INFLUENCES

Introduction

Takemitsu often expressed his indebtedness to particular composers in interviews and essays. In the early years of his musical career he turned his back on Japanese culture and looked to the West for his models. As a result, almost all of the composers whose works he studied were either European or American. In addition, he was an avid fan of Western popular culture, so he also absorbed ideas from jazz and movies. This chapter will deal with the Western composers who have had the most profound influence on Takemitsu and discuss the aspects of their music which are reflected in Takemitsu’s own compositions.

Debussy

It is no coincidence that the music of Takemitsu is often compared to that of Claude Debussy. Both composers emphasized subtle gradations of timbre and the multiple layering of musical ideas in their music. His attraction to the French composer’s music was at first intuitive, but later Takemitsu carefully studied Debussy’s orchestral scores. Debussy’s importance to Takemitsu is exemplified by the fact that when he was composing November Steps at a resort in Nagano prefecture in 1967, Takemitsu brought with him the scores of Prélude à “L’Apres-midi d’un faune” and Jeux for inspiration and study. In interviews, Takemitsu’s praise of the man he called “his great mentor” was often effusive. In a 1989 interview with Tania Cronin and Hilary Tann he said this of Debussy:

His orchestration is so special. Sometimes, especially in German music, the orchestration... has too much emphasis, is too much of a single thing. Debussy seeks so many points of focus and many gradations of color. These are very important. He combines several things(musical ideas) at the same time, not just single things... two or three, or sometimes four together... and this music is also very spatial... Debussy’s harmonies move, float...²

Debussy himself had been profoundly influenced by Asian music and culture. He was an avid collector of Japanese art and was open to cultural influences outside the European tradition.³ His hearing of an Indonesian gamelan ensemble at the International Exhibition in 1889 is said to have been “catalytic” in the development of his emerging musical concepts. He recognized that the music demonstrated a multi-layered intricacy that was foreign to the Western musical tradition but equally valid. At a time when most of his musical contemporaries found little of value in Asian

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¹ Takemitsu, Confronting Silence, 110.
² Takemitsu, Cronin, and Tann, 207-208.
³ Koh, 67-68.
music, Debussy’s revelation was especially insightful. The elaboration of a theme in multiple layers that is a core principle in gamelan was also central in Debussy’s orchestration style.⁴

A characteristic shared by both Debussy and Takemitsu was a love of nature, and a desire to express the qualities of nature through their music. Debussy saw a direct link between nature and imagination, a mysterious quality that he desired to express in his composition. Takemitsu had a similar interest, and the titles of his works often evoked natural images (In an Autumn Garden, Raintree Sketch, Autumn, etc.), but he did not wish to merely “describe natural scenery.”⁵ In his essay “Nature and Music” Takemitsu described how he felt that nature and art were connected:

A Lifestyle out of balance with nature is frightening. As long as we live, we aspire to harmonize with nature. It is this harmony in which the arts originate and to which they will eventually return. Harmony, or balance, is in this sense, does not mean regulation or control by ready-made rules. It is beyond functionalism. I believe what we call “expression” in art is really discovery, by one’s own mode, of something new in the world.⁶

Another shared characteristic of both Debussy and Takemitsu is the use of silence. To Debussy, silence was a method to give a musical phrase its full expressive power. He thought that this was a new idea, one that gave his music a spatial dimension.⁷ In all the Japanese arts, however, silence and space are essential elements. This concept is known as ma in the Japanese language. In Sumie ink painting most of the canvas is blank. In Haiku poetry three short lines of poetry describe a scene that is left mostly to the reader’s imagination. Takemitsu often described the importance of silence in his own music. He viewed ma as “time-space with tensions”⁸ and considered it to be an integral part of his music. To the Japanese the silence that precedes an event is of equal importance as the event and the two cannot be separated.

Messiaen

Debussy was not the only French composer whose music greatly influenced Takemitsu. Olivier Messiaen, whom Takemitsu described in a 1992 essay as being “Truly...my spiritual mentor,”⁹ had an equally important effect on Takemitsu. Like Debussy, Messiaen was also influenced by Asian music and incorporated its elements into his own. In particular, Messiaen drew upon the

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⁵ Takemitsu, Confronting Silence, 3.
⁶ Ibid., 7.
⁷ Koh, 65-66.
⁸ Dana Wilson, The Role of Texture in Selected Works of Toru Takemitsu (Ph.D. diss., University of Rochester, Eastman School of Music 1982), 20.
⁹ Takemitsu, Confronting Silence, 141.
rhythmic principles of South Indian classical music in the creation of his own rhythmic theories. Later in his life Messiaen visited Japan as well, which resulted in the piece *Sept Haiki* (1962). The composition’s seven movements were inspired by Messian’s travels throughout the country. The songs of various Japanese birds, including the *uguisu*, are emulated in the movement *Les Oiseaux de Karuizawa*, and traditional Japanese court music inspired the movement *Gagaku*.10

Takemitsu first discovered Messiaen’s music in 1950, when he was given a score of a Messiaen piano piece by Toshi Ichiyanagi (the same man who would premiere John Cage’s music in Japan in the early 1960s).11 During the 1950s Takemitsu’s *Jikken Kôbô* group performed several Messiaen compositions at their concerts (including *Quatuor pour la fin du temps* in 1952).

Takemitsu often cited Messiaen’s *Technique de mon language musical* as having a significant impact on his musical development. Even before he received a copy of Kishio Harao’s Japanese translation in 1954, Takemitsu utilized Messiaen-like pitch structures in early piano pieces such as *Lento in due movimenti* (1950) and *Uninterrupted Rests* (1952-1959).12 Analysis of these and other works by Peter Burt and Timothy Koozin reveal the extensive use of sonorities derived from Messiaen’s modes of limited transposition, most commonly Messiaen’s mode I (the whole-tone scale) and mode II (the octatonic scale). In his music Takemitsu often used the symmetrical nature of these scales to create a sustained static background over which localized events (not necessarily derived from these same symmetrical scales) would occur.13

It was not only through pitch structures that both Messiaen and Takemitsu created static backgrounds in their compositions. Messiaen was a devout Catholic who expressed his faith through his music. His conception of rhythm reflected his theology in that he saw the birth of time as a single beat preceded and followed by eternity. With the occurrence of a second beat, rhythm would then come into existence. The result is that Messiaen did not see rhythm as just a “closed system of temporal divisions, but rather (as) a conception in which temporal events emerge from a background of infinite silence.”14 In pieces like *Quatuor pour la fin du temps* Messiaen used isorhythmic cycles, added value rhythms, and other rhythmic devices as a metaphor for eternity. Takemitsu’s rhythmic conception also served as a means by which temporal events occurred.

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10 Wilson, 34.
11 Takemitsu, *Confronting Silence*, 141.
12 Koh, 69-70.
14 Ibid., 186.
against a background of eternity. His conception, however, was not Christian in origin, but distinctly Japanese. As mentioned earlier, to the Japanese, the silence (ma) that precedes an event is of equal importance as the event. This aesthetic principle originates from a Buddhist conception of time as a “silent pool of eternity” within which “ripples” (temporal events) come and go.\textsuperscript{15}

\textbf{Cage}

Claude Debussy, Olivier Messiaen, and John Cage, are often sited as the three Western composers who most influenced Takemitsu. All three, however, had themselves been profoundly influenced by Asian culture and music. In many ways this could be considered something of a “feedback loop,” a process in which Asian concepts were re-imported back to Japan from the West.\textsuperscript{16} Among these three composers, it was Cage who was the most inspired by Asian and, specifically, Japanese culture. Takemitsu himself claimed that Cage was responsible for his own rediscovery of Zen Buddhism and the value of Japanese culture after years of his emulating the West and avoiding any Japanese qualities in his music.\textsuperscript{17} In fact, Zen Buddhism was at the heart of Cage’s revolutionary musical ideas.

Cage first became acquainted with Buddhist philosophy in the late 1940s while attending lectures by the Zen master Daisetsu Suzuki at Columbia University. Even before then he was part of a group of American composers (which included Henry Cowell and Lou Harrison) who utilized Asian elements in their music. Cage’s early experiments in percussion music and his development of the prepared piano in the 1930s evoke sound qualities similar to that found in Indonesian Gamelan music. He also studied Indian philosophy and rhythmic concepts.

It was the philosophy of Zen Buddhism, however, that led to the creation of his revolutionary ideas regarding music. The goal of Zen meditation is to quiet the mind and allow the individual to experience the world not through any preconceived notions, but as it is. This directly parallels Cage’s principles of non-intention, silence, and the liberation of sound. In Cage’s view, a composer shouldn’t try to impose their will on notes in order to create a piece that is an act of personal expression, but should allow sounds to be free to exist as themselves, and the listener should appreciate them for their own intrinsic qualities. It was this philosophy of Cage’s that Takemitsu identified with the most. In “Notes on November Steps” from the book \textit{Confronting Silence} Takemitsu writes: “Each sound has its own beautiful form and order, like a living cell,”

\textsuperscript{16} Burt, 96.
\textsuperscript{17} Ohtake, 8-13.
and “Imaginative hearing consists of listening to and recognizing sounds in their true nature.”\textsuperscript{18}

Takemitsu had first become aware of Cage in the early 1950s, but he would become more directly influenced by Cage after 1961. As mentioned previously, this was the year in which Toshi Ichiyanagi returned after nine years of study in the United States and premiered Cage’s \textit{Concert for Piano and Orchestra} in Japan. In an obituary that Takemitsu wrote for Cage in 1992 Takemitsu stated: “I still feel the shock of hearing that piece.”\textsuperscript{19} From that moment in 1961, Cage would have the same effect on Contemporary Japanese music as he already had on music in America and Europe. Perhaps his effect on Japan was even greater. The reason being that his philosophy and music confirmed the credibility of traditional Japanese concepts during a time when most Japanese were adopting Western customs and values.

The first direct evidence of Cage’s influence on Takemitsu was the use of the prepared piano in some of Takemitsu’s film scores in the early 1960s. The first was the 1962 film \textit{Otoshi Ana} (The Pitfall) which Takemitsu scored for two prepared pianos and harpsichord. On the soundtrack the man who had introduced Cage to Japan the previous year, Toshi Ichiyanagi, performed one of the prepared piano parts, Yuji Takahashi performed the other, and Takemitsu himself performed on the harpsichord.\textsuperscript{20}

His use of prepared piano was limited to film scores, but during the 1960s Takemitsu experimented with both graphic notation and indeterminacy in his concert works. Perhaps the most significant pieces of this period were \textit{Ring} (1961), \textit{Corona for pianist} (1962), and \textit{Corona for strings} (originally known as \textit{Corona II}, also 1962). \textit{Ring} consists of four movements that can be performed in any order and three interludes. Each individual movement lacks tempo and dynamic markings and often uses imprecise rhythmic notation as well. The three interludes utilize a circular shaped graphic score. \textit{Corona for pianist} uses a graphic score consisting of circular colored cards that can be inserted into each other, and the score for \textit{Corona for Strings} consists of transparent sheets that are overlaid onto a white sheet.

Even more important to Takemitsu than Cage’s musical procedures was Cage’s musical philosophy. By the end of the 1960s Takemitsu was no longer experimenting with prepared pianos, graphic notation, or indeterminacy, but he never abandoned Cage inspired concepts such as silence as an active musical element, the importance of the act of listening, and the intrinsic

\textsuperscript{18} Takemitsu, \textit{Confronting Silence}, 84-85.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 137.
\textsuperscript{20} Siddons, 109.
importance of individual sound events (in contrast to the view that what is important in music is the relationship between sounds). Perhaps the reason Cage’s ideas resonated so intensely with Takemitsu was the fact that they were originally inspired by Zen influenced Japanese concepts. As previously mentioned, it was through Cage that Takemitsu came to appreciate his own Japanese heritage. An example of the affinity between Cage’s ideas and the aesthetics of traditional Japanese music can again be found in Takemitsu’s “Notes on November Steps”:

In Japanese music, for example, short fragmented connections of sounds are complete in themselves. Those different sound events are related by silences that aim at creating a harmony of events. Those pauses are left to the performers discretion. In this way there is a dynamic change in the sounds as they are constantly reborn in new relationships. Here the role of the performer is not to produce sound but to listen to it, to strive constantly to discover new sound in silence.  

It cannot be coincidence that Takemitsu’s description of the traditional Japanese performer’s goal to “strive constantly to discover new sounds in silence” so closely parallels Cage’s own philosophy.

Webern

The effect that the second Viennese school had on post World War II European composers in many ways paralleled the impact they had in post-war Japan. Takemitsu first discovered the music of Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern in the years after the war and often acknowledged their influence. Like so many other composers of his generation, the composer from this group whom he most admired was Webern. During his formative years in the 1950s he admitted to being ‘enslaved’ by Webern’s music, with its use of sparse texture, cellular motives, and subtle changes of timbre.

While Takemitsu never became a strict serialist. His compositions of the 1950s do at times utilize twelve-tone procedures. In Peter Burt’s analysis of the pieces Le Son Calligraphé I (1958) and Masque (1959) he demonstrates how Takemitsu uses statements of tone rows which are interjected between more modally derived passages. In Le Son Calligraphé I the only transformation of the piece’s “prime row” is through transposition, but in Masque inversions and retrograde-inversions of a row are also present. In addition, Burt shows how a small cell of notes that is prominent in the second movement of Masque is actually derived from a portion of the row

21 Takemitsu, Confronting Silence, 84-85.
22 Takemitsu, Cronin, and Tann, 207.
23 Ohtake, 81.
that Takemitsu uses in the work’s first movement.\textsuperscript{24}

In these works Takemitsu also employs fragmentary textures which greatly resemble the pointillism that Webern’s music is known for. This aspect of Webern’s music had a much more long lasting on Takemitsu than his serial procedures. Even though Webern was not influenced by Asian concepts to any great extent, this pointillistic texture “meticulously defined in regard to articulation, timbre, register, (and) duration”\textsuperscript{25} in many ways displays a striking similarity with certain types of Asian music. The sparse texture of many of Webern’s works resembles traditional Japanese textures in which short fragmented sounds events are related by silences. In this way, as in the cases of Debussy, Messiaen, and Cage, a Western composer whom Takemitsu recognized as having a profound influence perhaps, in some way, directed him back to his own Japanese heritage.

**Ligeti, Penderecki, and Lutoslawski**

Takemitsu’s works from the 1960s reveal an influence by the Eastern European sound mass composers often loosely grouped together as the Polish school. Takemitsu’s compositions from this period feature stratified, sound mass textures far more prominently than traditional melodic/harmonic development. These textures are often composed of many concurrent independent lines which combine to create one or more layered clusters of sound. In addition, some sustained sonority usually functions as a background over which these masses accumulate and then dissipate. To reinforce this stratification of texture, the ensembles in these works are often divided into spatialized groups. In *November Steps* the strings, percussion, and two harps are divided antiphonally. The woodwinds are placed in the center towards the rear with the brass behind them. Throughout the work these groups function independently, only uniting at moments of climax.

The composer most often mentioned in comparison with Takemitsu in the use of these techniques is the Hungarian György Ligeti, but procedures used by the Polish composers Krzysztof Penderecki and Witold Lutoslawski are also often seen. Takemitsu’s use of loosely coordinated pitch cells with no exact rhythm is similar to Lutoslawski’s technique of “aleatoric counterpoint” found in pieces like *Jeux venétiens* and his *String Quartet*. Often, however, Takemitsu achieves this same effect with exactly notated multiple simultaneous lines utilizing different subdivisions of the beat. Penderecki’s string notations, most famously used in *Threnody for the Victims of Hiroshima*, can also be found in Takemitsu’s works of this period. In *November

\textsuperscript{24} Burt, *The music of Toru Takemitsu*, 61-64.
\textsuperscript{25} Wen-Chung, 214.
*Steps* Takemitsu employs in his string writing Penderecki’s symbols for notating pitches one-quarter or three-quarters sharp or flat as well as his symbol for playing the highest pitch on an instrument. While the string writing in *November Steps* is relatively free of the extended techniques employed by Penderecki, Takemitsu does utilize similar effects in his writing for harp. Among these are the striking the body of the instrument with the knuckles, slapping the strings with the palm, playing glissandos with a coin, and the rapid and continuous changing of designated pedals.

**Xenakis**

From their writings and lectures, Toru Takemitsu and Iannis Xenakis would seem to have had fundamentally different approaches to the act of composition. Takemitsu emphasized the sensuous beauty of individual sounds, the importance of nature in his music, and creation as act of an natural expression. He essays were often written in a poetic, enigmatic manner and he repeatedly spoke against the process of creating music through “regulation or control by ready-made rules.” In contrast, Xenakis was a rational intellectual who thought of music in mathematical terms. His stochastic approach was a system which musically portrayed the laws of probability in large scale random events.

Despite this conceptual difference, their music often shared similar characteristics. Both Takemitsu and Xenakis composed music which emphasized large scale textural events, sound masses created through the accumulation of a large number of individual parts that change over time in register, color, and density. In several passages in *November Steps* Takemitsu divides the violins into twenty four parts, each with specific articulations, dynamics, pitches, and durations. In addition, while Xenakis often emphasized the mathematical aspects of his music, he saw his statistically derived musical structures as analogous to natural phenomenon. To Xenakis, his massive “clouds of sound” were accumulations of individual events in the same way that individual raindrops accumulate to create the sound of a rainstorm.

Xenakis and Takemitsu also shared a personal friendship which began in 1961 when Xenakis traveled to Japan. After his visit Xenakis categorized most young Japanese composers as followers of either serialism or the chance methods of John Cage, but praised Takemitsu as an original talent. When Takemitsu traveled to France for the Cannes festival in 1965, he made a point to go

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26 Takemitsu, *Confronting Silence*, 3.
27 Wilson, 38.
28 Ibid., 40
to Paris where, amongst others, he again met with Xenakis.\textsuperscript{29} In 1970 Takemitsu served as director of the Osaka Expo Space Theater for which Xenakis composed the piece \textit{Hibiki Hana Ma}.

Despite their friendship, Xenakis on at least one occasion found reason to criticize Takemitsu’s musical approach. Roger Reynolds relates an incident that occurred at Takemitsu’s home sometime in the late 1960s:

\begin{quote}
It was a warm and collegial occasion like many others we had. Xenakis was relaxed, but—I believe the subject was some recent success of Takemitsu’s—insisted on pursuing the matter of French influence on Takemitsu’s composition, and did so with a blend of irony and sarcasm that seemed distinctly unguestlike.\textsuperscript{30}
\end{quote}

\textbf{Jazz}

Takemitsu was exposed to American jazz early in life through his father’s collection of New Orleans style jazz records. Through this and through his family’s fondness for American movies he developed a fascination for American culture. From the late 1930s until the end of World War II, however, Western entertainment was outlawed in Japan. Beginning with the American occupation after the war, the young Takemitsu again came into contact with jazz. Part of his job when he worked at an American PX in Yokohama in 1946 was to play records of American popular music in the dance hall. In addition he listened to jazz and other American music on Armed Forces Radio.\textsuperscript{31}

This interest in American popular music is not immediately evident in Takemitsu’s concert music from the 1950s through the 1970s, but examples of jazz-like tunes occur in his film scores from that period. Later in life he also wrote arrangements for guitar of American standards such as \textit{Over the Rainbow}, \textit{Summertime}, and \textit{Secret Love} as well as the gospel song \textit{What a Friend We Have in Jesus}.

In 1961 Takemitsu read American jazz composer George Russell’s 1959 book \textit{The Lydian Chromatic Concept of Tonal Organization for Improvisation}. In an interview with Takashi Tachibana, Takemitsu cited this book, along with Messiaen’s \textit{Technique de mon language musical}, as one of the two finest that he had read dealing with music theory.\textsuperscript{32}

Like Messiaen’s modes of limited transposition, it was the system of modes that Russell

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\textsuperscript{29} Siddons, 10
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 3.
derived by chromatically altering the Lydian scale that most influenced Takemitsu. Two of these modes actually correspond to Messiaen’s modes I and II (the whole-tone and octatonic scales), and Takemitsu used them frequently in his compositions even before he read Russell’s book. Takemitsu appears to not only have used Russell’s modes, however, but to have created his own modes based on Russell’s principles. In his article “Takemitsu and the Lydian Chromatic Concept of George Russell” the theorist Peter Burt observes that Takemitsu apparently created his own “Dorian-Chromatic” counterpart to Russell’s Lydian-Chromatic modes in the outer movements of his 1966 piece *Dorian Horizon.*

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33 Ibid., 98.
CHAPTER 4: JAPANESE AESTHETICS

Introduction

In the years following World War II Tōru Takemitsu was totally absorbed in learning the vocabulary of Western contemporary music. To him “...the West was a single enormous mirror” which “overwhelmed the light of other cultures,” including his own. Due to a series of events in the early 1960s in which he rediscovered traditional Japanese culture, he again learned to appreciate his own native culture and to incorporate consciously its elements into his compositions. Takemitsu commented on this in his essay “Gardner of Time” from the book *Confronting Silence*: “There is an advantage for a Japanese composer who has studied modern Western music--music from a completely different culture. That is, he can view his own Japanese tradition from within but with another’s eyes.” In other words it could be said that Takemitsu’s mature music expresses indigenous Japanese aesthetic qualities, but with a Western musical vocabulary.

To be able to understand Takemitsu’s compositions, it is important to go beyond a study of its components (its Western musical vocabulary) and to look at these indigenous Japanese qualities that are central to the music’s aesthetic sensibility. The identification of these qualities is not difficult because Takemitsu was a prolific lecturer and essayist who often discussed the conceptual nature of his music. Many of his essays that have been published in Europe and America deal directly with how Japanese conceptions of time and space differ from those in the West, the Japanese sensitivity to individual timbral events, and the importance of nature to his own sense of compositional expression. The purpose of this chapter is to explore these traditional Japanese aesthetic concepts and place them in historical, cultural, and philosophical context.

**Nature**

The Japanese people feel a special affinity for the natural world. Their country consists of a series of heavily forested, mountainous islands that to them possess a spiritual quality. From the beginning of Japanese history the people have believed that they are part of an intimate trinity that includes the natural and spiritual worlds. Their indigenous religion, Shintoism, sees “man, gods, and nature ...closely related on the same plane,” and “nature means not an objective and inert collection of substance but the sacred rhythm of the cosmos as a living unity.” The central tenet of Shintoism is that all things possess a living, sacred force known as *kami*, and because man and

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1 Tōru Takemitsu, *Confronting Silence*, 92.
2 Ibid., 143.
nature were both born from this common spiritual force, they are harmoniously related parts of the same whole. This is in contrast to the Judeo-Christian tradition which sees humankind, expelled from the paradise of Eden, as something separate from nature. The Western view is that “Nature is something hostile to Man and drags him down when he is struggling to reach God.” 4 Byron Earhart, in his book Religion in the Japanese Experience, sees this attitude exemplified in the expression, “The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.” 5

To Takemitsu, neither life nor musical expression were removed from this “sacred rhythm,” but were means of representing it. In his essay “Nature and Music” Takemitsu expresses a typically Japanese sentiment: “A lifestyle out of balance with nature is frightening. As long as we live, we aspire to harmonize with nature. It is this harmony in which the arts originate and to which they will eventually return.” 6 To him, this “harmony” is what gives music its emotive power. A power that much contemporary Western music, with its emphasis on a composer imposing their will over musical materials through analytic mathematical construction, has lost. In his essay “A Personal Approach” Takemitsu wrote: “Within an organized system sounds are bound and forced by mathematics and physics. Composers have been too steeped in techniques, trying to grasp sounds only through their function within the system.” 7 Instead Takemitsu believed, “our task, not limited to music, is to reveal things that come to us through our spiritual efforts.” 8 He saw the musical expression of primitive peoples as being much more in touch with this spiritual force: “The correspondence between the inner and outer lives of those ancient people was splendid. They related to trees, stones, sky. And poetry, religion, song and dance existed as an undivided unity.” 9

He often expressed this contrast between music constructed by means of mathematical rules and music which arose from natural expression through the metaphor of Western and Japanese architecture. He saw the former as “music (that) was built by piling up bricks of sound to erect edifices of varying styles.” 10 To him this musical architecture was not in harmony with nature, but an attempt to impose human will over it. To continue the metaphor: “In contrast to Western architecture, which occupies space in resistance to nature, Japanese architecture possesses a

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4 Ibid., 131.
5 Ibid., 132.
6 Takemitsu, Confronting Silence, 3.
7 Ibid., 80.
8 Ibid., 79.
9 Ibid., 81.
10 Ibid., 17
tendency to share space in common to nature.” In his “Notes on November Steps” Takemitsu also added this question, “Many contemporary composers have been building walls of sounds following their own clever devices. But then, who lives inside these rooms?”

The titles of Takemitsu’s compositions often reflected his fascination with the natural world. He often wrote several pieces based on a common natural theme. These themes included rain (Cloudburst, Rain Spell, Rain Dreaming), gardens (In an Autumn Garden, A Flock Descends into the Pentagonal Garden, Spirit Garden), trees (Eucalypts I and II, Rain Tree, Rain Tree Sketch), the sea (Toward the Sea I, II, and III, Waves, Between the Tides), and the heavens (Cassiopeia, Star-Isle, and Orian and Pleiades). Of particular interest to him was the Japanese garden. In his 1963 piece Arc for Piano and Orchestra, the orchestra is divided into several groups, each of which represents a different element in the garden. Each of these groups utilizes different tempi and amount of rhythmic activity. Elements represented in the garden which change slowly over time such as rocks and soil undergo slow rates of musical change. Elements in the garden which grow more quickly such as grass and flowers undergo quick rates of musical change. The piano assumes the role of a stroller through the garden. The result is a musical mobile in which these instrumental groups exist in individual overlapping cycles of time.

Despite the representation of a Japanese garden in Arc for Piano and Orchestra, Takemitsu was generally not interested in depicting natural scenery through music, instead he utilized the rhythms of nature in his music. In the natural world he saw a spiritual poetry:

I think about nature always. Or rather, I don’t think. I don’t like to think. But you must listen to the sounds of nature—winds, birds, sea. Musical sounds are not only those made by man-made instruments. Everything living, visible and invisible, has its sound and cycle. I try to picture the inner nature of sounds. Nature must be part of music as it is part of a Japanese house.

Many observers of Japanese aesthetics note that the Japanese people’s sensitivity to the world of nature allows them to listen to the sounds of natural phenomenon in the same way that they listen to music. Takemitsu’s statement that “Everything living, visible and invisible has its sound and cycle” is typically Japanese in this respect. Traditional Japanese musicians often were inspired

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12 Takemitsu, Confronting Silence, 88.
13 This is only a partial list of nature related titles from Takemitsu’s compositional output. For a complete list see James Siddons’ Tôru Takemitsu: A Bio-Bibliography, 27-28.
14 Takemitsu, Confronting Silence, 95.
by the sounds of nature and tried to imitate them in their performance. The biwa players of the Edo period (1615-1867) often emulated the sound of the cicada,\(^\text{16}\) and the ideal sound that the shakuhachi player tried to recreate was “the sound of wind blowing through an old bamboo grove.”\(^\text{17}\) The chirping of thousands of insects on a summer night, or the ebb and flow the wind in a grove both possess this innate musical quality, and long before John Cage spoke of “the liberation of sound,” the Japanese were aware of this.

Like both his Japanese ancestors and Cage, Takemitsu also recognized sound itself as a musical object. Unlike Cage, who utilized the sounds of the world as source materials in his compositions, Takemitsu observed, through listening to nature, how the sounds of musical instruments in a composition could move in a similar manner, changing fluidly over time. He referred to this concept as “the stream of sound.” Takemitsu observed, “Musical composition has no significance other than the giving of meaning to the ‘stream of sounds’ which flow around us from the surrounding world.”\(^\text{18}\) In “Nature and Music” Takemitsu wrote, “I have referred to ‘the stream of sounds.’ This is not only an impressionistic description but a phrase intended to contrast with the usual method of construction in music- that of superimposing sounds one on another.”\(^\text{19}\)

**Sawari**

As seen above, Takemitsu viewed individual sounds in Western music as subservient to the relationships between them that create musical structure. Whether one thinks of Western music in terms of musical architecture, harmonic tension and resolution, or the conflict between unity and contrast, individual sounds have little meaning except in relationship to each other. The Japanese, on the other hand, whether listening to the sounds of nature or to those of musical instruments, find an exquisite beauty in the characteristics of these individual sounds. As a result they have developed a heightened sensitivity to tone quality. The twentieth-century Japanese composer Toshiro Mayuzumi observed:

> In general it can be said the Oriental has a deeper sensitivity to delicate timbres than has the Occidental. In the folk and traditional music of Japan there are innumerable exquisite combinations of timbre which makes it possible to achieve delicate forms of musical expression without the help of other musical elements such as melody, harmony, and counterpoint.\(^\text{20}\)

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\(^\text{16}\) Takemitsu, *Confronting Silence*, 64.

\(^\text{17}\) Ibid., 88.


\(^\text{19}\) Takemitsu, *Confronting Silence*, 9.

\(^\text{20}\) Quoted in Wilson, 32.
Takemitsu agreed with Mayuzumi, and in his essay “Noh and Transience” even saw a spiritual connection with this emphasis on timbre: “I think that as a people who developed the concept of ‘attaining Buddha hood in a single sound’ (Ichion Jōbutsu), the Japanese found more meaning in listening to the innate quality of sound rather than using sound as a means of expression.”\textsuperscript{21}

Because of this fondness for “the innate quality of sound,” the Japanese often prefer musical timbres that are complex. This has led to the creation of traditional musical instruments that incorporate noise as an essential element in their sound. In contrast, “Western instruments, in the process of development, (have) sought to eliminate noise.”\textsuperscript{22} In the West, a “pure sound” is considered the musical ideal, and noise is considered to be an ugly intrusion which hampers musical enjoyment. The Japanese, however, consider noise to be beautiful, and as a result have developed the aesthetic concept of sawari in their traditional music to celebrate this “beautiful noise.”\textsuperscript{23}

In Japanese, the word sawari is ambiguous and has numerous meanings. The verb sawaru means “to touch or feel,” and sawari is the nominalized form of this word. The term also means “obstacle” (this meaning of sawari, however, utilizes a different kanji or Chinese character than the meaning “to touch”). In addition, sawari also refers to the most important parts of traditional dramatic musical works (Kabuki or Noh for example).\textsuperscript{24}

In traditional Japanese music the term originally referred to the buzz or rattle that is part of the sound of the biwa’s vibrating string. The buzz is caused by a grooved ivory plate on the neck of the biwa over which the strings are stretched. This plate is an intentional “obstacle” incorporated into the construction of the instrument which helps create this distinctive sound. In addition, the four or five frets of the biwa are raised to a height of between one and two inches above the neck, and the strings are tuned loosely. The performer does not place their fingers directly on the frets but between them. By pushing down on these loosely tuned strings the performer can produce numerous types of vibrato and tonal inflections ranging from microtonal to a span of several half-steps. In contrast to other instruments in the lute family, the biwa cannot play fast, virtuosic passages but can create “complex, profound, and wonderful sounds.”\textsuperscript{25}

The biwa evolved from the Chinese lute known as the p’ip’a, and was originally imported into

\textsuperscript{21} Takemitsu, Confronting Silence, 56-57.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 64.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 64.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 64-65.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 65.
Japan sometime during the Nara period (710-794 A.D.), but the characteristics described above are Japanese in origin. The first *biwas* were similar to the *p’ip’a* in that they had more frets and these were placed much lower to the neck, but over time Japanese craftsmen created an instrument that reflected Japanese aesthetic tastes. In the *shamisen*, a three stringed lute-like instrument, was imported to Japan from Okinawa in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the instrument had a metal bar inserted as part of its bridge to produce a rattle similar to that heard on the *biwa*. Therefore the term *sawari* was used to describe the resonant twang produced by this instrument as well. Over time, the definition of *sawari* was expanded to describe the general concept of “subtle shifts in pitch and timbre.” These shifts in sound can be due to either the construction of the instrument or to the techniques used by the performer, and the term *sawari* is not limited to the use of this technique by the *biwa* or *shamisen*, but by any musical instrument.

The concept of *sawari* illustrates how the Japanese view timbre as a temporal, changing phenomenon. This is in contrast to the West which sees timbre as essentially an innate, static quality (this Western attitude is exemplified when people refer to “the timbre of the piano” or “the timbre of violin”). It is the cultivation of this attitude towards timbre which is one of the principal characteristics of traditional Japanese music, much contemporary Japanese concert music, and specifically the compositions of Takemitsu. In his essay “My Perception of Time in Traditional Japanese Music” Takemitsu writes:

> The sensing of timbre is none other than the perception of the succession of movement within sound. As well as being spatial in nature, this perception is of course temporal in nature. To put it another way timbre arises during the time in which one is listening to the shifting of sound. It is, as symbolized by the word *sawari* (which has the meaning to touch some object lightly), something indicative of a dynamic state.

**Zen Buddhism**

In addition to Shintoism, the other great religious tradition of Japan is Buddhism. Unlike Shintoism, however, Buddhism is not indigenous but was imported during a period of great cultural borrowing from China which began in the sixth century A.D. The primary reason for this cultural infusion was because, until that time, Japan was a relatively primitive society that had not yet developed its own writing system. In order to bring literacy to their country, the Japanese royal

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27 Ibid., 214-215.
28 Koh, 31.
court authorized numerous Japanese to travel to the mainland for study. Along with the Chinese writing system, these scholars brought back the philosophies embodied in it; Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism.30

Buddhism originated in India during the sixth century B.C.E., and came to China during the first century of the common era where it was influenced by Chinese Taoist philosophy. This tendency of Buddhism to blend with local religions was again demonstrated when it was introduced in Japan. Instead of the Buddhist divinities supplanting the indigenous Shinto kami, they became complementary to each other. The two religions shared similar attitudes toward man’s relationship with the natural world, an all important part of Japanese spiritual life, and Shintoism borrowed from Buddhist art and ritual. This complementary relationship exists even today. In modern Japan, the traditional Japanese wedding ceremony is a Shinto rite, while burial ceremonies are performed by a Buddhist priest.

The primary traits of Buddhism are the recognition that life is suffering, that nothing in life is permanent, and that nothing in the world possesses an innate “selfness.” It is from an inability to recognize these latter two characteristics of existence that the first characteristic, suffering, arises. This creates a never ending cycle of birth and death which can only be transcended through the attainment of enlightenment. This is achieved by allowing the mind to become still through the practice of meditation. At the moment of enlightenment one transcends the illusionary “self” and comes into harmony with the true nature of existence.

There are many Buddhist sects, but the one that has had the most profound influence on Japanese culture is a form that arose in China during the seventh and eighth centuries A.D. In China this form is known as Chan, but when it was imported into Japan its name was transformed into the word Zen. The basic premise of Zen Buddhism is that enlightenment is not “the attainment of some transcendent realm beyond the world of everyday affairs, but rather as the realization of a more authentic way of being within the realm of day-to-day life.”31 What prevents the pre-enlightened mind from experiencing this “more authentic way of being” is that “our normal pre-enlightenment experience is conditioned by layers of conceptualization that prevents us from experiencing the world the ways it is. The practice of Zen effects a return to the preconceptual level of the individual’s being and to the most basic context of the person, which is understood as

31 Ibid., 85.
The practice of Zen Buddhism had a profound influence on the cultural and artistic life of Japan. The Zen emphasis on stillness, mindfulness, and harmony with the natural world became the aesthetic values central to Japanese arts. Its influence can be seen in painting, poetry, music, theater, architecture, and flower arrangement. In addition, the Samurai ruling class adopted the Zen values of concentration and mental tranquility in the practice archery and swordplay. The noted scholar, Donald Keene, in his essay “Japanese Aesthetics” identifies four elements that are present in all Zen inspired classical Japanese arts. These are:

1. Suggestion--This can be seen in Japanese painting where only a few brush strokes might suggest a mountain range or a bamboo grove. Another excellent example is haiku poetry, where seventeen syllables organized into three short lines (5-7-5) are used to portray a natural scene which alludes to some greater spiritual truth.

2. Irregularity--This is exemplified by the asymmetrical arrangement of the of elements in a temple rock garden or a flower arrangement.

3. Simplicity--The Subdued elegance of the Japanese tea ceremony, where the rituals involved have been reduced to their most refined gestures, is a prime example.

4. Perishability--The Buddhist emphasis on impermanence is reflected in the Japanese concept of *mono no aware*, “contemplation of the sadness at the passing of all things.” This is most famously exemplified by the Japanese love of cherry blossoms that bloom and fade away within a matter of days

### Japanese Conceptions of Time

Takemitsu in his essay “Dream and Number” wrote, “Westerners, especially today, consider time as linear and continuity as a steady and unchanging state. But I think of time as circular and continuity as a constantly changing state.” Takemitsu viewed this “circulating and repeating” conception of time as a typically Japanese characteristic, and in the article “My Perception of Time in Traditional Japanese Music” wrote: “Nature is conceived in terms of seasons, and this has given rise to a unique temporal sense, which has been further fostered by the influence of Zen and Buddhist teachings.” In fact, this circular nature of time is so fundamental to Japanese thought

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32 Ibid., 85.
34 Takemitsu, *Confronting Silence*, 119.
36 Ibid., 11.
that the word akeru means both “to begin” and “to end.”

This distinctive temporal sense is strongly reflected in the structure of traditional Japanese music. Where Western music is based on a system of fixed meter divided into discrete units of absolute time, much Japanese traditional music is not meter oriented and utilizes an elastic sense of time. The rhythms of Nōgaku, the music of Nōh theater, often utilize beats of varying length, and at certain moments the time scheme of the percussion proceeds separately from that of the nōkan (transverse flute). The result is a composite “in which two or more ‘times’ overlap and penetrate each other.”

The contrasting temporal conceptions found in Japan and the West are deeply rooted in the historical and cultural outlook of each society. Western Newtonian thought views time as linear, absolute, and uniform. A subject flows through time from the past, through the present towards the future. This progressive conception of time, however, finds even deeper roots in Judeo/Christian mythology. The ancient Hebrews viewed the events of their history from the Creation, through the bondage in Egypt, to the settlement of the Promised Land as leading towards a better future. The events of the Old Testament flow “successively from a clearly established beginning and progress toward an equally defined goal.” The prophesies of the arrival of the Messiah only amplified this directional aspect of time and created a focal point towards which all historical events progressed. Western literature, drama, and music are all organized according to this linear, goal directed conception of time.

The reincarnation philosophy of Buddhism, however, represents a cyclical view of time in which the reoccurring cycles of birth and death can only be transcended through the attainment of enlightenment. When Buddhism was introduced to Japan in the sixth century, this conception of time conformed with the indigenous beliefs of an agrarian Japanese society that was strongly influenced by the reoccurring cycles of the seasons and the natural world. These two spiritual traditions reinforced each other, and this cyclical view of time persists even in the modern Urbanized Japan of today. For example, since the Meiji restoration the Western Gregorian calendar has been adopted, but it is used simultaneously with the native gengo calendar that is based on the reign of each successive emperor. According to this system, the year 2005, because

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37 Ibid., 11.
38 Joan Stambaugh, Impermanence is Buddha-nature: Dōgen’s Understanding of Temporality (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990), 65.
40 Ibid., 56.
it is the sixteenth year of the rule of the emperor Akihito, is designated as Heisei 16. The year Heisei 1 was the year 1989 of the Gregorian calendar. This was when Akihito succeeded his father Hirohito. When Akihito dies and his son Naruhito assumes the throne, a new era will begin.

In contrast to earlier forms of Buddhism, the Zen conception of time is a more sophisticated one, and enlightenment is viewed not as the accession to some mystical domain beyond the world but rather as the realization of a more authentic way of being within it. The Japanese Zen monk Dōgen (1200-1253) expressed a theory of time that reflects this Zen point of view. To Dōgen, “anything whatsoever that is happening is not in time, but is time itself.” In contrast to the Western notion of time as a “static container” through which events flow, this concept, known as “being-time” (uji), postulates that time cannot exist without being and that being cannot exist without time. The two are the same. Furthermore, “being-time is not a condition only of human existence, but it defines all things: mountains, rivers, the multitudinous manifestations of spring--all these things are being-time.”

According to Dōgen, the concept of “being-time” is inherent with contradictions to the unenlightened mind. Foremost among them is that since time does not exist separately from being, then nothing exists but the present moment, but at the same time, all moments past and future exist simultaneously in the present. This concept applies to space as well as time. In Dōgen’s view the whole universe is contained within each of its particular elements. It is only through the practice of meditation that one is able to still the mind and become aware of this presence of eternity/infinity in each moment/thing.

To the Westerner “being-time” is difficult to comprehend, but it forms the temporal/spatial model of all Zen influenced art. Instead of works that utilize a goal directed model of time in which contrasting forces move in a measured linear fashion and are ultimately resolved, Zen influenced art utilizes a temporal model in which ephemeral events occur against an underlying static background representing eternity. The result is the creation of a meditative mood in which “the present moment of experience (comes) into contact with something that has transcended time.”

F.S.C. Northrop in his book *The Meeting of East and West*, uses an insightful metaphor in which these contrasting views of time become immediately apparent:

The Westerner represents time either with an arrow, or as a moving river which comes out of a distant place and past which are not here and now; and which goes

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41 Stambaugh, 26.
42 Wilkens, 37.
43 Koozin, “The Solo Piano Works of Tōru Takemitsu: A Linear /Set-Theoretic Analysis,” 47.
into an equally distant place and future which also are not here and now; whereas, the Oriental portrays time as a placid, silent pool within ripples come and go.\textsuperscript{44}

In his dissertation “The Solo Piano Works of Tôru Takemitsu: A Linear /Set-Theoretic Analysis” Timothy Koozin states that this “reality ...(in which) the stream of natural events occurring in the absolute present superimposed against a background of timeless eternity...is a concept of stasis defined by motion.”\textsuperscript{45} To Koozin this “unity of opposites” where infinity and impermanence coexist simultaneously creates an “element of vitality” in traditional Japanese art forms that contrasts with the goal oriented methods of the West. “It is not a tension of conflicting forces directed toward a goal of resolution, but rather, it is a subtle dynamic presence which never subsides, adding a continual vitality to traditional work of Japanese art.”\textsuperscript{46}

Koozin then provides examples of the presence of this “dynamic” tension between these fleeting moments and the “background of eternity” in the traditional Japanese art forms of Noh theater, sumie ink painting, and the haiku of sixteenth century master Bashô. His example of a Bashô haiku is one of the most famous poems in Japanese literature:

\begin{center}
An ancient temple pool;
Jump of a frog
The sound of water.
\end{center}

Koozin writes: “The ancient pool, a metaphor for continuity and eternity, is contrasted with the sudden impulse of the frog. The union of these two elements creates profound imagery of sound and motion. The poem, like all Zen-inspired arts, is imbued with freshness, liveliness and spontaneity, yet also invites quiet contemplation.”\textsuperscript{47} The “background of eternity” found in sumie ink painting is formed through the artist leaving large portions of the space blank. Because only a minimal amount of brush strokes occupy a small amount of paper, space becomes an integral part of the composition. In Noh theater the “background of eternity” is represented by the elasticity of time in which “an instantaneous flash of emotion may be represented in twenty minutes of stylized dance. The linear flow of events may be interrupted or reversed through interludes showing events which occurred long before those depicted earlier in the play.”\textsuperscript{48}

Takemitsu, in essays discussing the aesthetic foundations of his own music, often referred to

\textsuperscript{45} Koozin, “The Solo Piano Works of Tôru Takemitsu: A Linear /Set-Theoretic Analysis,” 45.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 45.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 49.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 53.
the music of Noh theater. In “Nature and Music” he wrote: “There is something in the pauses in a Noh drama that has to do with eternity... much of our traditional music aims at an immeasurable metaphysical sense of time.”

To a Japanese listener like Takemitsu, these pauses in Noh are not merely intervals between events in the drama, but are filled with a life of their own. They create a meaningful tension that represents a metaphysical sense of time and space beyond temporal events. This concept of emptiness, with its origins in “being-time,” is considered a living and vibrant component fundamental to all traditional Japanese arts. It encompasses both physical space and time and shapes idioms as diverse as literature, the visual arts, music, drama, architecture, and landscape design. Each of the four elements identified by Donald Keene as being present in Zen inspired Japanese arts: suggestion, irregularity, simplicity, and perishability, are related to this concept. In the Japanese language it is known as ma.

Ma

As defined in a dictionary, the word ma translates as “interval” or “pause.”

Like the word sawari, however, it has numerous shades of meaning that range from the mundane to the mystical. Takemitsu called it a “very philosophical term...It’s very suggestive...there are many ambiguities...it’s very beautiful.” This ambiguity is fundamental to the word. As stated previously, the word ma encompasses conceptions of both time and space. To the Japanese, these two qualities are not distinct but exist in a mutually interdependent relationship to each other. As a result, when the Chinese character that represents ma is used in compound words, its meaning is extended to include various durations of time (jikan, isshukan, etc.), the space between two items (aida), living room (ima), timing (kankaku), valley (tanimu), crevice (sukima), etc.

When used in the arts, the term means “the natural distance between two or more things existing in a continuity,” or “the natural pause or interval between two or more phenomena occurring continuously.” Whether the concept of ma is utilized in music, poetry, or architecture, it is not merely a pause or interval, but a vibrant part of the artistic experience. Takemitsu put it succinctly when he said, “I think ma is time-space with tensions.”

49 Takemitsu, Confronting Silence, 7.
51 Takemitsu, Cronin, and Tann, 212-213.
54 Takemitsu quoted in Wilson, 20.
The metaphysical connotations of the word *Ma* have their origins in both the Shinto and Buddhist religions. The various sacred deities of Shintoism, known as *kami*, do not dwell in a single place but travel between locations in the physical and spiritual worlds. The followers of Shintoism, in order to influence where these *kami* might descend into the physical world, cordon off a sacred area in their shrines by fastening a twisted straw rope around four wooden posts. This area, known as the *kekkai*, is either entirely empty or contains only a solitary rock or tree. According to Shinto beliefs, this creates a holy space where the *kami* can then descend from the heavens and fill the emptiness with spiritual force.\(^{55}\)

Even more important to the concept of *ma* as expressed in Japanese traditional arts is the related Buddhist concept of *mu*, or nothingness. In order to come into harmony with the “infinite source of all existence”\(^{56}\) one must still the mind through the discipline of meditation. When this is achieved, one experiences a state of intense but serene mental concentration. Instead of being at the mercy of fleeting thoughts and desires, the mind becomes a “placid, silent pool.”

The gardens of Zen temples are mediums for meditation which are physical realizations of this spiritual nothingness. Perhaps the most famous of these is the stone garden of the *Ryoan-ji* temple in Kyoto. Known as “The Garden of Emptiness,” it consists of fifteen irregularly shaped stones of various sizes positioned at different intervals on a rectangular bed of raked white gravel. The stark simplicity of the design comes from the elimination of all unnecessary elements. Therefore, the focus of concentration becomes, not the items themselves, but the *ma* between them. In keeping with Dōgen’s theory of “being-time” in which all of existence is contained within each of its individual elements, the garden is said to represent the structure of the entire universe.\(^{57}\)

As demonstrated in the piece *Arc for Piano and Orchestra*, Japanese gardens were an important source of inspiration to Takemitsu. In “Nature and Music” he wrote of a visit he made to the moss garden of the *Saihoji* temple in Kyoto. While overall he found it not to be to his personal tastes, he recognized in the garden a particular spatial realization of *ma* that impressed his musical sensibility:

> The Moss Garden in Kyoto was a disappointment, but the sounds created there impressed me deeply...The sharp sounds echoing from the corners of the garden were made simply by water running from bamboo spouts. But the spatial arrangement and careful attention to the quality of the tone were not the result of mere skill. At the basis there was harmony: the harmonization of the sound--

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\(^{55}\) Wilkens, 63.

\(^{56}\) Koh, 38.

\(^{57}\) Ibid., 45.
whether light or dark--with the shifting aspects of the natural landscape.\textsuperscript{58}

This spatial arrangement of sound, its roots in the concept of \textit{ma}, and Takemitsu’s sensitivity to the delicate shades of timbre that result from it played an important role in his aesthetic conception. Several of his compositions utilize non traditional instrumental seating plans. In the 1964 string orchestra piece \textit{Dorian Horizon} Takemitsu divided the ensemble into three instrumental groups; the first arranged in a semicircle at the front of the stage, the second placed in a line at far stage right, and the third lined up along the back of the stage with each member spaced as far apart as possible. In an essay discussing the reasons for such an unusual seating plan, Takemitsu wrote, “In this arrangement, dynamics are a crucial part of the music, since a \textit{forte} has quite a different meaning depending on whether it is near or far. A sound, whether played \textit{piano} or \textit{forte}, has less meaning when heard from a distance. We perceive only the pure movement of the sounds.”\textsuperscript{59}

While the spatial aspects of \textit{ma} were important to Takemitsu, its temporal considerations were even more so. If \textit{ma} is considered to be “the natural pause or interval between two or more phenomena occurring continuously,” then its temporal manifestation is silence. To Takemitsu, silence and its relationship to sound contained metaphysical connotations rooted in Dogen’s “being-time.” In the same way that eternity is contained in each moment, all sounds are contained in silence, and the two are inseparable. Sound emerges from the undifferentiated background of silence and serves as a frame to give it meaning. In the essay “A Single Sound” Takemitsu discussed the relationship between these diametrically opposed elements:

To the sensitive Japanese listener who appreciates this refined sound, the unique idea of \textit{ma}- the unsounded part of the experience- has at the same time a deep, powerful, and rich resonance that can stand up to the sound. In short, this \textit{ma}, this powerful silence, is that which gives life to the sound and removes it from its position of primacy. So it is that sound, confronting the silence of \textit{ma}, yields supremacy in the final expression.\textsuperscript{60}

The Japanese composer Ikuma Dan noted that the silence of \textit{ma} should not be confused with the rest in Western music. In the West the beat defines the rhythmic structure of music and the rest is secondary to it, but in traditional Japanese music the situation is reversed. The period between events is the defining characteristic. Therefore, \textit{ma} is an active element and is regarded in the traditional Japanese temporal arts such as music and theater as a “period of intense and meaningful waiting between successive events.”\textsuperscript{61} In \textit{Noh} theater this period of “not doing” can

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{58} Takemitsu, \textit{Confronting Silence}, 9.
\item \textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 116-117.
\item \textsuperscript{60} Takemitsu, \textit{Confronting Silence}, 51.
\item \textsuperscript{61} Koozin, “The Solo Works of Tōru Takemitsu: A Linear/Set-Theoretic Analysis,” 54.
\end{itemize}
last up to several minutes, and the aficionado of Noh savors it as a vital part of the aesthetic experience. Koozin, however, notes, “Extended intervals of silence, however, are not always required to create *ma.*” In his analysis of Takemitsu’s piano piece *Pause ininterrompue* he states that, while the piece contains very few rests in the score, *ma* is created through the attention paid to “the sustaining powers of the instrument, choosing dynamic and durational levels which focus attention of the performer and listener on the isolated sonority as it fades to silence over the desired span of time.”

Koozin notes that in this way the listener does not hear the silence as “partitions between events,” but:

> The sound event draws silence into the piece as an active rather than passive element. It is possible to think of Takemitsu’s long, decaying tones as *hashi* (bridges) projecting from the world of sound into silence. The moment of waiting for sound to become silence is in this way imbued with the quality of *ma.*

Using the research of Jonathan Chenette as his point of departure, Koozin expands the concept of *ma* in his analysis of Takemitsu’s piece *Piano Distance* to include cycles of repetition within the composition. In this situation *ma* is created through periods of contrast between referential pitches or important musical gestures. These cycles can exist at various levels and these can be nested within each other. In *Piano Distance* the pitch D-natural plays an important structural role. It is firmly established in the piece’s opening before contrasting pitch material is introduced. Over the course of the work D-natural reoccurs at semi-regular intervals. Koozin observes, “In recognizing this cycle of repetition, the listener’s memory supplies a connection which spans the intervening discontinuity, creating an interval of *ma.*” In his analysis Koozin also recognizes other cycles of repetition occurring simultaneously within this macro-structure. In addition to being an example of the application of an expanded definition of *ma* within a Takemitsu composition, the cycles of repetition in *Piano Distance* also serves to illustrate the circular nature of time that Takemitsu himself observed is fundamental to the Japanese view of the world.

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62 Ibid., 56.
63 Ibid., 57.
64 Ibid. 62.
CHAPTER 5: THE SHAKUHACHI AND BIWA

Introduction

Most scholarly writings in the English language dealing with Takemitsu’s November Steps have focused on the orchestral sections of the piece, while only giving cursory attention to the shakuhachi and the biwa portions. Reasons for this include the fact that in November Steps the notation for these instruments allows the performers a great degree of liberty and serves merely as a jumping off point for their performance, and that doing any extensive research on the biwa and shakuhachi requires a lengthy study of the Japanese language. Exceptions include Hugh de Ferranti’s and Yayoi Uno Everett’s respective chapters, “Takemitsu’s Biwa,” and “Reflecting on Two Cultural ‘Mirrors’: Mode and Signification of Musical Synthesis in Tôru Takemitsu’s November Steps and Autumn” in the book A Way a Lone: Writings on Tôru Takemitsu (Tokyo: Academic Press, 2002), and the chapter “An East-West Confrontation: November Steps” in Hwee Been Koh’s doctoral dissertation East and West: The Aesthetics and Musical Time of Tôru Takemitsu (Boston University, 1998). De Ferranti’s work focuses on Takemitsu’s use of the biwa in his compositions, beginning with his music for the documentary Nihon no Mon’yô (Japanese Signs) through November Steps, and his relationship with Kinshi Tsuruta (1911-1995), the biwa performer most associated with Takemitsu. Uno Everett’s work uses semiotics to identify “culture-specific references of musical gestures and temporal relations,”¹ and includes an analysis of the pitch material from a transcription of the biwa and shakuhachi cadenza. Koh’s work mostly focuses on pitch material in the orchestral portions of the piece, but also deals to some extent with the characteristics of the biwa and shakuhachi and their notation.

Since this document deals with the Japanese and Western influences in November Steps, and since the Japanese aesthetic concepts discussed in chapter four (specifically ma and sawari) are core to the performance of traditional Japanese music, attention must given to the shakuhachi and biwa. The purpose of this chapter is to provide background information on the history of both the biwa and the shakuhachi and to describe the characteristics and performance techniques of these two instruments. In addition, in the next chapter a detailed explanation of the notational systems developed by Takemitsu for these instruments in November Steps is included. In the composition he utilized both traditional and contemporary techniques and these are identified. Takemitsu wrote

the piece specifically for Tsuruta and Katsuya Yokoyama (1934-), two performers with whom he had developed a close musical relationship. Takemitsu knew the traditions from which they came and their performance tendencies. For these reasons he created notational systems that allowed his soloists a great deal of freedom. This allowed them to create music that was both rooted deeply in Japanese tradition and thoroughly modern.

**Biwa: The Instrument and Its History**

The Japanese biwa is a fretted, pear shaped, stringed instrument which at first glance greatly resembles the Western lute. It directly evolved from the Chinese p’ip’a and was first introduced in Japan sometime during the Nara period (710-794 A.D.).\(^2\) Over time, however, several changes were made to the instrument so that today its playing technique and resulting sound are quite different from its Chinese ancestor. The most profound alteration to the instrument is the reduction of the number of frets to only four or five and their greatly increased height above the neck. On the p’ip’a both the strings and the frets are close to the neck so that when a string is pressed down, a definite, predictable pitch results. On the biwa, however, the frets are so high that this is impossible to do. Instead, the performer presses the strings down between the frets. Because the strings, which are made from silk, are relatively loosely strung, a variety of pitches can be produced between each fret (In fact, the Satsuma biwa player Yoshihide Shimazu once demonstrated to the author the playing of a full octave major scale by just increasing the tension on one string at a single fret).\(^3\) In addition, as mentioned in the previous chapter, these relatively loose strings produce a distinctive buzz or rattle when plucked, giving the instrument unique timbral characteristics. As a result of these changes, the instrument lost much of the functionality of the original Chinese instrument. Instead of “complicated passage work” that the p’ip’a is capable of producing, the Japanese listener is interested in listening to “the delicate resonance of a single sound, in the shifting tensions and the resulting shades of sound.”\(^4\) This musical quality that the biwa embodies is sawari.

Another major difference between the two instruments is the size of their respective plectrums. The biwa’s plectrum, called bachi, is significantly larger than the p’ip’a’s. One of the reason’s for such a large plectrum is the playing technique called bachioto. This technique involves percussively striking the body of the biwa with the plectrum to produce a sharp smack. The impact

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\(^2\) Malm, 150.


\(^4\) Takemitsu, *Confronting Silence*, 54.
of *bachioto* is especially dramatic, and its use expands the timbral pallet of the *biwa* through the introduction of a purely noise element. It is idiomatic to the *Satsuma-biwa*, a type of *biwa* from southern Japan which is discussed in greater detail below.5

Except for the earliest style *biwas*, which were used in Imperial court music (*gagaku*) ensembles, the instrument has traditionally been played by professional solo performers who have used it to accompany their recitations. These performers, known as *biwahōshi* or *mōsō-biwa*, were a guild of traveling blind Buddhist priests who wandered from town to town singing Buddhist sutras for the villagers. Over time, in order to attract more attention, their repertoire changed from religious scripture to dramatic stories of war. This new style, known as *Heiki-biwa*, was named for the most popular of these narratives, the *Tale of the Heiki*. This was a musical accounting of the historic battles between the rival *Heiki* and *Genji* clans of the *Heian* period (794-1185).6

Another style of *biwa* evolved during this time in the *Satsuma* region of the southern Japanese island of Kyushu. This style, known as *Satsuma-biwa*, prospered because these musicians, under the protection of their guild, were allowed to travel freely throughout the country. As a result, *Satsuma*’s ruling *Shimazu* clan found they made excellent spies. When the country became unified during the *Tokugawa* era (1625-1868), the usefulness of these spies waned so the *Shimazu* rulers assigned their *biwa* musicians the task of creating a repertoire of morally edifying songs to maintain the warrior spirit of the samurai class. During this period other styles of *biwa* declined in popularity, but *Satsuma-biwa* spread in popularity throughout Kyushu. When the last *Tokugawa Shogun* was overthrown in 1868 and Japan entered a period of great modernization, several of the men who were involved in the new government came from the *Satsuma* region. Along with their political skills they brought the music of the *Satsuma-biwa* to the new capitol of Tokyo.7

Because the exclusionary privileges of the old *biwa* guilds had been abolished in this new era, the learning of the *Satsuma-biwa* soon became a favorite pastime for many amateur musicians throughout Japan. The instrument used was the traditional *Satsuma* type with four frets, four strings, and the largest *bachi* of all the various biwas. Around 1910 the Tokyo resident Kinshin Nagata modified the vocal stylings of *Satsuma-biwa* to create the *Kinshin* school of performance. In the 1920s another style was developed in which elements of the *shamisen* (a three stringed fretless lute) and the *chikuzen-biwa* (another popular *biwa* style) were incorporated into *Satsuma-"
biwa technique. This new style, known as nishiki-biwa, involved performance on a modified Satsuma-biwa in which a fifth string and fifth fret were added.8

It is the kinshin and nishiki modified Satsuma-biwa styles that Kinshi Tsuruta, the biwa player for whom Takemitsu composed November Steps and several other pieces, performed. Tsuruta, however, was not just a disciple of these traditions, but introduced several innovations of her own. These included both new performance techniques and alterations to the instrument. In the 1960s she experimented with the placing of a contact-microphone on the biwa in order to amplify it. Later she remodeled the interior of the instrument so it could produce a louder, more balanced sound, and redesigned the frets to allow more rapid left-hand passages. Because of her association with Takemitsu’s music, she became, by the 1970s, the most well-known of Japan’s biwa players. This fame and inclination for innovation allowed her, in the last years of her life, to create her own school of biwa performance, the Tsuruta ryû (Tsuruta school).9

The role of the biwa as an accompanying instrument to vocal recitations has traditionally been limited to instrumental interludes between verses and providing a reciting tone at the beginning of each verse. At no point does the performer sing and play simultaneously. Therefore, the role of the biwa is to help to define large scale formal divisions within a recitation and to musically reinforce passages in the text. Both the voice and the biwa utilize a set of melodic patterns, each of which corresponds to a particular point in the narrative.10 The vocal patterns are relatively fixed in performance. The most likely cause of this is fact that the text itself is a fixed structure. The biwa patterns, however, are open to a fair amount of variation and performers often combine different motives together to create larger improvised forms.11 The most dramatic of these biwa pattern types is kuzure, a set of four tremolo like figures which consist of a rapid alternation between low and high strings and which is used to musically depict war scenes.12

Since the beginning of the twentieth century a variety of tablature systems, called danpōfu, have been used for representing biwa patterns. In these systems, four lines are used to represent the four biwa strings. Triangular symbols are used to depict up and down strokes of the bachi and their approximate rhythmic relationship to each other. Some, but not all, of these tablature systems

9 Ibid., 55.
11 Ibid., 126.
12 Shimazu (2002).
also utilize symbols which represent the degree of tension to be applied to the string and the resulting pitch. Historically, the primary method for learning the biwa and its repertoire has been direct transmission from teacher to student, so this tablature system has primarily been used as a reinforcement to this traditional method and is used only in the early stages of study.\(^{13}\)

While microtonal embellishments are an integral part of the biwa’s style, the basic tonal organization of almost all biwa music since 1600 is based on the yō and the in scales (see example 5.1). Each is centered around two focal pitches a perfect fifth apart, and consists of a pentatonic core with two alternate pitches for the second and fifth notes of the scale. The pentatonic core of the yō scale is common to folk and indigenous music worldwide, while the core of the in scale is distinctly Japanese. The in scale’s most notable feature is the upper neighbor tones of the two focal pitches, each located a half step above the two central pitches\(^{14}\)

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\(^{13}\) de Ferranti, “Composition and Improvisation in Satsuma Biwa,” 114-117.

\(^{14}\) Malm, 160
motions are used to create several different unique vibratos and microtonal pitch inflections. These range from subtle to wild and erratic. These and other articulations are central to the shakuhachi’s technique, and are consistent with the aesthetic concept of sawari. What is important to the shakuhachi player is not the performance of virtuoso passages, but the coloring of a sustained pitch through various articulations, shifting timbral effects, dynamics, and subtle pitch bending. The traditional shakuhachi sound ebbs and flows in such a way that it is often said that the goal of the shakuhachi master is to “recreate the sound of wind in a decaying bamboo grove.”

Like the biwa, the shakuhachi was imported from China during the eighth century. The name was originally a Chinese word referring to the measurement of one such instrument (one shaku and eight sun or about 58 centimeters). Also like the biwa, the early shakuhachi was used in gagaku court music ensembles. After the eleventh century it was no longer part of the gagaku ensemble and faded into obscurity. During the Edo period (1625-1868) it re-emerged as a solo instrument. An instrument which, again like the biwa, embodied the idea of sawari.

In this solo shakuhachi style the focus is on individual, complex sounds over the creation of elaborate melodies. This is another example of the Japanese people’s tendency to change the characteristics of an imported instrument and its music over time to suit their own aesthetic tastes. Gutzweller and Bennett, in their research doing computer analysis of the shakuhachi’s acoustic properties, call these individual sounds “tone cells.” In describing them they write: “The rhythmically very free music is organized into ‘tone cells’ which generally last a breath and are separated from one another by clear rests (ma). Because of the extremely slow tempo, these tone cells rarely fuse into a coherent melody, but rather form relatively independent musical entities.”

Because of this emphasis on sustained, fragmented “tone cells,” solo shakuhachi music has no regular meter consisting of strong and weak beats. This style, known as honkyoku, arose in connection with the Zen Buddhist Fuke sect, and is often used as a means of meditation. From this practice comes the Japanese phrase “’Ichion Jōbutsu,’ (meaning) With one sound one becomes

14 Takemitsu, Confronting Silence, 51.
15 Malm, 166-167.
17 Ibid., 38.
The founders of the Fuke sect, however, were not seekers of enlightenment but masterless samurai known as rōnin who had lost their class privileges during the violent upheavals which marked the era before the emergence of the Tokugawa dynasty. In order to protect themselves from possible annihilation when Ieyasu Tokugawa unified the country under his dictatorship in the 1630s, they acquired a large Buddhist temple in Kyoto and forged papers claiming historical origins in China. The shogunate saw through this ruse, but instead of disbanding this large group of desperate men, they enlisted them as spies in order to keep an eye on other groups of rōnin who were still a potential source of trouble to the new government. This agreement gave rise to a famous figure of the Edo period, the komusō; the basket hatted, shakuhachi playing Buddhist monk who wandered the backstreets of Edo’s pleasure districts playing his bamboo flute and eavesdropping on intimate conversations. In the 1750s, however, the Buddhist monk Kinko Kurosawa divorced the shakuhachi repertoire from its secular origins and created the Kinko school of shakuhachi performance as a tool for meditation. This new repertoire consisted of thirty-six pieces which today form the basis of the honkyoku style.

When Japan entered the modern age with the Meiji restoration (1868), the established Buddhist shakuhachi schools, like all the other old music guilds, lost their exclusive privileges. This allowed amateurs to take up the study of shakuhachi and many new styles proliferated. Today there are three main categories of shakuhachi music. The first, honkyoku, has already been mentioned and consists of all the pieces which were composed by the early shakuhachi masters and are associated with the komusō tradition. The second, gaikyoku, consists of pieces borrowed from other instruments like the shamisen or the koto. Even though these pieces are performed on the shakuhachi, their basic style remains consistent with the versions performed on their original instruments. Some gaikyoku works are duets in which the shakuhachi is paired with either the shamisen or koto. In these cases, the shakuhachi melody is not independent, but serves to double the original melodic line. The third category, called shinkyoku, consists of all pieces written in the modern era. These compositions vary greatly in style and form, and include pieces written in a more Western style. Perhaps the most famous of these shinkyoku compositions is Haru no Umi (The Spring Sea), a duet for koto and shakuhachi, which has been transcribed for instrumental

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21 Takemitsu, Confronting Silence, 65.
22 Malm, 169.
23 Gutzwiller and Bennett, 58.
24 Malm, 173-175.
combinations ranging from violin and piano duet to full symphony orchestra.\textsuperscript{25}

While the music of the biwa and the shakuhachi sound considerably different, there are certain common traits between the two instruments and their respective traditions. Like the biwa, the shakuhachi repertoire consists of pieces constructed from a standard set of patterns based on the yō and in scales. This repertoire and its constituent patterns are primarily passed from teacher to student through direct oral transmission. Also like the biwa, a tablature system, which in the shakuhachi’s case indicates fingering positions on the instrument, is used in the early stages of learning. On a more generalized aesthetic level, the emphasis on the subtle shading of individual sounds (sawari) and the use of “time/space with tensions (ma)”\textsuperscript{26} act as guiding principles in the music of both these instruments. As demonstrated in chapter three, these two principles are deeply rooted in Japanese culture and religion and shape not only biwa and shakuhachi music, but all traditional Japanese arts.

Another important common characteristic of shakuhachi and biwa music is the amount of freedom that the performer is allowed in interpreting a piece. As seen previously, biwa music consists of a regular group of basic patterns which can be combined in numerous ways to create larger improvised forms. Shakuhachi music is also open to a high degree of variation. At one point in his life, Katsuya Yokoyama spent three years learning the piece San An (Safe Delivery) from his teacher Watazumi Dōso. One of the reasons it took Yokoyama so long to learn this work was the many changes his teacher made while performing it for his pupil.\textsuperscript{27} This situation is by no means unusual, as a high degree of creative liberty is normal in shakuhachi music. This freedom is an important part of Japanese music, and it will play an important role in November Steps, where the liberty granted to the Japanese instruments contrasts with the strictly notated structure of the orchestral passages.

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 170.
\textsuperscript{26} Takemitsu quoted in Wilson, 20.
CHAPTER 6: ANALYSIS OF NOVEMBER STEPS

Introduction

After receiving a commission from the New York Philharmonic in early 1967 to write a new composition for biwa, shakuhachi, and orchestra to be performed as part of the orchestra’s 125th anniversary celebration in November of that year, Takemitsu isolated himself in a small resort in the mountainous Nagano region of Japan in order to compose. As he worked on his new piece, he considered appropriate titles. Takemitsu searched for a name that would be: “precise but not limiting, strongly evocative, but still leaving room for imagination.”\(^1\) Among several proposed names, one seemed to have potential:

It was this last title, Water Rings, that seemed to grow inside my vague musings. In my mountain cabin the sounds that reached me always echoed, varying with weather conditions. Since I intended to use this idea of sound in my music, the title Water Rings seemed appropriate at the time.

For me the sound of biwa and shakuhachi was to spread through the orchestra gradually enlarging, like waves of water. When I mentioned this to my friend Jasper Johns (the American artist) he told me that “water rings” in the United States usually referred to those rings left in a dirty bathtub.

I continued to write titles...Steadily, slowly my thoughts focused. I decided on the title November Steps.\(^2\)

While this story is humorous, it describes accurately Takemitsu’s original conception of his composition. He often used water, in its various forms, as a metaphor for his compositional conceptions. To him sound did not exist in discrete mathematical units but as an unbroken continuity, a “stream of sound.”\(^3\) In this stream he saw no strict division between intentionally musical sounds and those of the surrounding world. Likewise, he saw no division between regular and irregular sounds. Consistent with the concept of sawari, elements of noise were just as musically valid as those of pure controlled sound. To Takemitsu, sound, like a stream which ebbs and flows, could swell and dissipate over time, and a sonic spectrum could move in a continuum from a pure sign wave to white noise and back again. Takemitsu states:

I have referred to the “stream of sounds.” This is not only an impressionistic description but a single phrase intended to contrast with the method of construction of music--that of superimposing sounds one on another. This is not a matter of creating new space by merely dividing it, but it does pose a question: by admitting a new perception of space and giving it an active sense, is it not possible to discover a new unexpected, unexplored world.\(^4\)

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\(^1\) Takemitsu, *Confronting Silence*, 86.
\(^2\) Ibid., 87.
\(^3\) Ibid., 8.
\(^4\) Ibid., 7-8.
Here was an approach that was consistent with traditional Japanese concepts such as the relationship between nature and music, cyclical time, sawari, and ma; as well as the contemporary techniques of Western composers like Debussy, Messiaen, Cage, Penderecki, and Xenakis. In composing November Steps Takemitsu was able to explore this “new concept of (musical) space,” a concept which included not only physical space, temporal space, and pitch space, but also the metaphysical space which exists between the worlds of East and West: a space whose contradictions he wanted to “confront and intensify.”

Like Water Rings, Takemitsu’s new title for his composition was “precise but not limiting (and also) strongly evocative.” November Steps refers not only to the month in which the piece was to be premiered in New York, but also suggests much more. The English word “step” can be translated in Japanese as “dan” or “danmono,” the sectional divisions of the traditional Japanese Noh drama. This art form in particular epitomizes many of the traditional Japanese aesthetic concepts, and strives in performance to create a metaphysical sense of time and space beyond temporal events. In his essay “Notes on November Steps” Takemitsu offers these eleven statements without any explanation:

1. A composer should not be occupied by such things as how one blends traditional Japanese instruments with an orchestra. Two worlds of sound: biwa-shakuhachi and the orchestra. Through juxtaposition it is the difference between the two that should be emphasized.

2. To create several different audio foci is one aspect (an objective one) of composing and to try to hear a specific voice among numerous sounds is yet another.

3. Sound in Western music progresses horizontally. But the sound of the shakuhachi rises vertically, like a tree.

4. Do you know that the ultimate achievement of the shakuhachi master strives for in his performance is the re-creation of the sound of wind blowing through an old bamboo grove.

5. First concentrate on the simple act of listening. Only then can you comprehend the aspirations of the sounds themselves.

6. There is something suggestive in the biologists’ report that the dolphins’ communication takes place, not in their sounds, but in the length of silences between sounds.

7. Like time zones on the globe, arrange the orchestra in several time zones-a spectrum of time.

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5 Ibid., 86
6 Ibid., 87-88.
8. A composition should not give the impression it is complete in itself. Which is more pleasurable, a precisely planned tour or a spontaneous trip.

9. Many contemporary composers have been building walls of sounds following their own clever devices. But then, who lives inside these rooms.

10. Eleven steps without any special melodic scheme...constantly swaying impulses, like Noh drama.


**Previous Analyses of November Steps**

Previous in-depth analysis of *November Steps* in the English language is represented by works written by Edward Smaldone ("Japanese and Western Confluences in Large Scale Pitch Organization of Tōru Takemitsu’s *November Steps* and Autumn” in *Perspectives of New Music*, 1987), Hwee Been Koh ("East and West: The Aesthetics and Musical Time of Tōru Takemitsu,” 1998), and Yayoi Uno Everett ("Reflecting on Two Cultural “Mirrors”: Mode and Signification of Musical Synthesis in Tōru Takemitsu’s November Steps and Autumn” in *A way a Lone: Writings on Tōru Takemitsu*, 2002). The composition is also given attention in the chapter “Projections on to an Eastern Mirror” from Peter Burt’s book *The Music of Tōru Takemitsu* (2001), but Burt’s observations are made in the context of commenting on Takemitsu’s “Japanese period” and are more general. Dana Richard Wilson discusses the instrumentation and orchestral seating plan of *November Steps* in his Ph.D. dissertation “The Role of Texture in Selected Works of Tōru Takemitsu” (1982), but his primary analysis is focused on other compositions.

Smaldone’s analysis, the earliest of those concentrating on *November Steps*, deals primarily with pitch relations in the piece. According to Smaldone, the pitch organization of *November Steps* alludes to the traditional Japanese *in-sempo* mode. This scale contains “two central nuclear tones a fifth apart (one primary and one secondary) (which) are heard as the primary pitches of a given transposition.” In Smaldone’s view, despite the frequent occurrence of individual dissonant tone clusters throughout the composition, the “large-scale pitch organization (in *November Steps*) is defined by the path between nuclear tones...around which the tone clusters circulate.” Whether or not one agrees with the argument that the pitch organization of *November Steps* is derived from the *in-sempo* mode, Smaldone’s observation is insightful. His analysis, however, is limited to the

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7 Edward Smaldone, “Japanese and Western Confluences in Large-Scale Pitch Organization of Toru Takemitsu’s *November Steps* and Autumn,” *Perspectives of New Music* Vol 27 no. 2 (Summer 1989): 218.
8 Ibid., 218.
piece’s opening twenty-four measure orchestral statement, and his choice of pitches which are the most important to the deep level structure is debatable. Smaldone’s criteria for his choice of “nuclear tones” is based on “orchestral doubling (and) registral placement.” He gives preference, however, to pitches at the top of the texture over pitches at the bottom, and at times gives importance to pitches that are relatively short in duration and appear to have no more structural weight than others in the texture.

Koh’s examination of November Steps is more comprehensive than Smaldone’s and more accurate. As a starting point she focuses on the contrasting “sound worlds” of the Japanese instruments and the Western orchestra. Takemitsu’s stated goal in the composition was to juxtapose these two “worlds of sound” in order to emphasize the differences between them. Koh acknowledges this aesthetic approach, but focuses on finding “common denominators which... create an interface between Western and Eastern instruments” in order to “see how Takemitsu achieve(s) a large-scale continuity.” She identifies the two most important techniques utilized in achieving this continuity as: 1) the use of extended harp techniques which imitate the timbral and gestural characteristics of the biwa immediately before and after passages featuring the Japanese instruments; and 2) “the use of focal pitches (D, E, and A)... (which serve as) the nucleus around which other tones in both Western instruments and sawari in Eastern instruments are oriented.” The use of D, E, and A as “focal pitches” is only natural since the open strings of the biwa in the composition are tuned D, E, A, E, E and the five holes of the shakuhachi produce the pitches D, F, G, A, D. Furthermore she contends that the emphasis on the pitches D and A “suggests a polarity that is not unlike a V-I relationship.”

Uno Everett, while acknowledging the concept of “nuclear tones” in her analysis, contends that “the unique qualities of musical synthesis in November Steps cannot be accounted for by conventional pitch-based analysis alone.” Instead, she employs the terminology of Charles Pierce’s semiotic theories as an analytic tool in order to explore the musical manifestations in the composition of Takemitsu’s concept of Eastern and Western “cultural mirrors.” In Uno-Everett’s view, certain musical gestures in the work such as “Debussyian sonorities and textural devices...
(act as) image-icons...(for) contemporary Western musical practice, while cellular elaboration and modal references to Kinko-ryū shakuhachi playing denote traditional Japanese musical practice.”¹⁵ These sonic “image icons” serve as metaphors for the visual “image-icon” of the mirror, which itself serves as a metaphor for the cultural differences between Eastern and Western cultures. Furthermore, she asserts that Takemitsu “blurs the boundary between cultural ‘mirrors’ by overlaying gestures and articulations associated with the shakuhachi and biwa in the parts of the Western instruments.”¹⁶ She contends, however, that this blurring is not significant enough to transform the piece into a “new, hybrid entity,”¹⁷ but that the juxtaposition of Japanese and Western elements serves Takemitsu’s goal of confronting and intensifying the contradictions between them.

**The Notation of the Biwa and Shakuhachi as Used in November Steps**

Traditionally, the method for learning both the biwa and shakuhachi has been direct oral transmission from teacher to student. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, notational systems have existed for both these instruments, but these are not exact and serve primarily as reminders to performers who have learned their repertoire primarily by rote from their teachers. When Takemitsu began writing for shakuhachi and biwa, he ignored these and developed his own systems of notation. He combined a graphic notation for the shakuhachi along with a tablature system for the biwa. By doing this he allowed a certain degree of liberty to his performers, and they in turn used his written music as a jumping off point for their performances. This practice is consistent with biwa and shakuhachi traditions, both of which allow performers flexibility in the interpretation of their respective classic repertoires.¹⁸

The first piece Takemitsu composed which combined these two instruments was the duet Eclipse (1966). Because this work was composed specifically for the two master musicians, Katsuya Yokoyama and Kinshi Tsuruta, Takemitsu was able to work with them to develop certain performance practices which fleshed out the indeterminant elements of his notation. For Eclipse, in addition to the notated music, Takemitsu gave the performers instructions regarding pitch and other choices available to them. They were free to interpret these within their respective traditions.

¹⁵ Ibid., 127-129.
¹⁶ Ibid., 129.
¹⁷ Ibid., 148.
¹⁸ For a more in-depth exploration of traditional notational systems and the relationship between composition and improvisation in shakuhachi and biwa music see the articles “Shakuhachi Honkyaku Notation: Written Sources in an Oral Tradition” by Riley Lee and “Composition and Improvisation in Satsuma Biwa” by Hugh de Ferranti, both of which are in Musica Asiatica 6 (1991).
Yokoyama did this using the musical conventions of *honkyoku* style of *shakuhachi* and Tsuruta by the conventions of the *Kinshin* and *nishiki* styles of *Satsuma-biwa*. By the time he wrote *November Steps* for these same two musicians, Takemitsu’s notational system had already been tested, and the relationship between the composer and his two soloists was mature enough to allow a high degree of trust between them. Takemitsu knew the performance tendencies of both Yokoyama and Tsuruta and could exercise a degree of control while still allowing significant freedom.  

Having mastered the coordination of *shakuhachi* and *biwa* in *Eclipse*, the new compositional challenge for Takemitsu in *November Steps* was the integration of these two instruments with a symphony orchestra. It was a task that he found very frustrating. The sound worlds of the Japanese and Western instruments were too far apart. He solved this problem by resolving not to integrate the two traditions but to confront them (in *Autumn*, a later work for *biwa*, *shakuhachi*, and orchestra, Takemitsu overcame this difficulty and integrated the Eastern and Western instruments, focusing on their commonalities and not their differences). There are relatively few places in the *November Steps* where the Japanese instruments and the orchestra play simultaneously. When they do play together, the orchestral interjections are short. Through most of the piece the *biwa* and *shakuhachi* are juxtaposed against the orchestra in this fashion. In these places Takemitsu writes out the pitch information on Western style five line staves (see example 6.1). These statements of the Japanese instruments are marked *senza tempo*, so the rhythms are notated proportionally and are flexible in duration. Above and below each staff are directions for articulation, dynamics, and types of vibrato. Approximately two-thirds of the way through the composition, however, there is the extended cadenza for the *biwa* and *shakuhachi*.

![Example 6.1: shakuhachi and biwa notation in senza tempo section after measure 35](image)

In the cadenza, because he is not constrained by the coordination of his soloists with the orchestra, Takemitsu uses the graphic and tablature notational systems that he first developed for *Eclipse* (See examples 6.2 and 6.3). The *biwa* notation is organized into nine separate gestures,

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19 de Ferranti, 60.
20 Used by permission of C.F. Peters.
Example 6.2: November Steps biwa cadenza

Used by permission of C.F. Peters.
Example 6.3: November Steps shakuhachi cadenza"^^

"^^ Used by permission of C.F. Peters.
and the *shakuhachi* notation is organized into seven gestures. Instructions in the score indicate that these may be played in any order. The performers therefore, are allowed a significant degree of freedom in their interpretation, and the resulting music has the potential for varying greatly from performance to performance. This use of graphic notation and mobile form in the cadenza can be considered to be the result of influence by Cage, but is also consistent with traditional Japanese performance practices. With only a minimal amount of notation guiding them, Tsuruta and Yokoyama in their performances were able to create music rooted deeply in the Japanese perception of time and the aesthetic concepts of *ma* and *sawari*. In this cadenza the music no longer moves forward through time like an arrow but dwells in a manner similar to Dogen's "being-time." Takemitsu expresses this idea in his essay on *November Steps* in the book *Confronting Silence* by using a typically Japanese metaphor:

3. Sound in Western music progresses horizontally. But the sound of the *shakuhachi* rises vertically, like a tree.  

**Biwa Techniques Notated in the Score of November Steps**

For the cadenza Takemitsu developed a tablature system for notating the *biwa* (See examples 6.4 and 6.5). The instrument is listed in the score as a five-stringed *Satsuma-biwa*. This is the modified version of the instrument which was developed in the 1920s, and is known as the *nishiki-biwa*. The designated tuning for this instrument is indicated in the score as D, E, A, E, E. In this tablature system the individual strings are notated as Arabic numerals enclosed in squares, the fret numbers are notated as Roman numerals, and the degree of tension on the string at the designated fret is indicated by Arabic numerals ranging from 1 to 3 (low to high tension). Each pluck of a

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**BIWA NOTATION:** A 5-stringed instrument is required (Satsuma biwa)
The tuning is as follows: D, E, A, E, E

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>String</th>
<th>Notation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>IV, V</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **I**, **II**, **III**, **IV** = the strings
- **I**, **II**, **III**, **IV** = the number of the fret
- **I**, **II**, **III**, **IV** = the degree of tension of the string at the designated fret; 1 to 3 indicates from light to strong tension
- " = down stroke of the plectrum
- " = up stroke of the plectrum
- " = pluck with finger(s)
- " = quick alternation of the plectrum
- " = hit the body of the instrument with the plectrum
- " = hit the body of the instrument with the finger, fist or palm
- " = rub upward the designated string lightly from the bottom to the top with the point of the plectrum
- " = rub upward all strings while hitting the body of the instrument lightly with the plectrum

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**Example 6.4:** Instructions for Takemitsu's *biwa* notation

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23 Takemitsu, *Confronting Silence*, 87.
24 Used by permission of C.F. Peters.
Example 6.5: Explanation of selected biwa notation for gesture number three in the cadenza\textsuperscript{25}

String is notated by a dot. The size of the dot indicates the intensity of the playing. In addition, traditional Western notation for downstrokes and upstrokes of the plectrum are utilized. Several other symbols are also used to designate both traditional biwa techniques and new techniques developed by Tsuruta during the 1960s while working with Takemitsu on several film and television projects and on Eclipse. A detailed explanation of the biwa techniques included in Takemitsu’s instructions for November Steps follows.

**Biwa Notation**

**Pluck with finger(s)**--This is not a traditional Satsuma-biwa technique, but was developed by Kinshi Tsuruta.\textsuperscript{26}

**Hit the body of the instrument with the plectrum**--As mentioned previously, this is a traditional Satsuma-biwa technique. Known as bachioto, its percussive effect is very dramatic.\textsuperscript{27}

**Hit the bottom of the instrument with the fist, finger, or palm**--This is another new biwa technique developed by Tsuruta. It is similar to the extended string technique used by Penderecki in Threnody for the Victims of Hiroshima and other works.

**Rub upward the designated string lightly from the bottom to the top with the point of the plectrum**--This is a technique known as suribachi and is used sparingly in the nishiki-biwa style.

**Rub upward all the strings while hitting the body of the instrument lightly with the plectrum**--

\textsuperscript{25} Used by permission of C.F. Peters.
\textsuperscript{26} de Ferranti, “Takemitsu’s Biwa,” 64.
\textsuperscript{27} Shimazu, 2002.
This is another new technique developed by Tsuruta.\footnote{de Ferranti, “Takemitsu’s Biwa,” 64.}

**Kuzure**—A traditional *Satsuma-biwa* tremolo technique that consists of the rapid alternation between low and high strings. The effect is very dramatic in performance and is used in the climactic portions of both a traditional recitation and the *November Steps* cadenza.\footnote{Malm, 162.}

*Shakuhachi Techniques Notated in the Score of November Steps*

The graphic notation used for the *shakuhachi* in each of the seven gestures of the cadenza in *November Steps* consists of two parallel lines (Refer back to example 6.3). The top line indicates generalized pitch information, and uses symbols representing instructions such as “glissando up” or “jump upward or downward to a different note close to the playing note”\footnote{Lependorf, 235.} (see examples 6.6 and 6.7). No exact pitches are indicated anywhere in the cadenza and pitch choices are left entirely to the discretion of the performer. The bottom line indicates articulations, timbres, and different vibratos to be employed. Most of these are techniques found in traditional *honkyoku* performance, but a few, such as “play with voice,” are non-traditional and most likely originated from Takemitsu’s study of Western contemporary music. Takemitsu is much more specific regarding timbre than pitch in the score. In his instructions for the *shakuhachi* located at the beginning of the score he states: “The first note of the playing is left to the performer’s choice, then the performer should concentrate into the sound and listen to its changes of color and intensity.” An explanation of the articulations and vibratos included in Takemitsu’s instructions follows.

**Articulations**

*Muraiki*—(*mura*- scattered, *iki*- breath) This is an explosive breath attack. Depending on the register and dynamic level, the resulting sound may be mostly breath with little or no trace of an actual pitch.\footnote{156}

**Play with voice**—This is not a traditional *shakuhachi* technique, but does create an interesting timbral effect which is consistent with the concept of *sawari*.

**Tap the hole of the instrument strongly with the fingers**—Another non-traditional effect. This is likely derived from contemporary Western musical practice.

**Ending Figures**

*Furiotoshi*—(*furio*- shake, *toshi*- drop) In *shakuhachi* music, pitches are not simply cut off, but an ending figure is often employed. *Furiotoshi* consists of rapid up and down head shakes.
SHAKUHACHI NOTATION: The first note of the playing is left to the performer’s choice, then the performer should concentrate into the sound and listen to its changes of colour and intensity.

\[\text{up} \quad \text{down} \quad \text{up down} \quad \text{up down}\]

- = slight changes upward - a small portamento
- = large changes upward - upward glissando
- = opposites of the above
- = jumping within an extremely small interval (upward or downward) from the playing note
- = jumping within an extremely large interval (upward or downward) from the playing note
- = play slowly (it has to be grasped interiorly)
- = play rapidly (it has to be grasped interiorly)
- = from the playing note jump upward or downward to an extreme distance, then move freely as a melody
- = jump upward or downward to a different note close to the playing note
- = jump upward or downward an extreme distance with Muraki playing - playing with much breath
- = jump upward or downward within a small interval with Muraki playing
- = glissando up
- = glissando down
- = make an accent with strong breath
- = Muraki playing (with much breath)
- = play with voice
- = staccatissimo
- = tap the hole of the instrument strongly with the fingers
- = Furitoshī
- = Otoshi
- = Furikiri

Vibrations
- = without vibrato
- = Yokoyuri
- = Murashi-yuri
- = Take-yuri
- = Tate-yuri
- = Komi

Example 6.6: Instructions for Takemitsu’s shakuhachi notation

Example 6.7: Explanation of shakuhachi notation for gesture number four in the cadenza

followed by a final drop in pitch.

Otoshi—This is a drop in pitch before cutting off the sound with no headshakes.

Furikiri—(furi-shake, kiri-cut) This ending figure consists of the headshakes followed by the cutting off of sound without any final drop in pitch.

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31 Used by permission of C.F. Peters.
32 Used by permission of C.F. Peters.
Vibratos

*Yokoyuri*—(yoko- horizontal, yuri- wave) Vibrato created by a side to side head motion. This vibrato type raises the fundamental pitch.

*Mawashi-yuri*—(mawashi- circular, yuri- wave) This vibrato is created by circular head motion and both raises and lowers the pitch.

*Take-yuri*—(take- bamboo, yuri- wave) Similar to *tate-yuri*.

*Tate-yuri*—(tate- vertical, yuri- wave) An up and down head motion vibrato. This type of movement lowers the fundamental pitch.

*Komi*—Also known as *komi-buki* (staccato breath). This technique consists of panting into the *shakuhachi* in order to produce a series of reiterated pitches. This technique differs from regular staccato in that there is less separation between reiterations. In *honkyoku* playing it is often combined effectively with pitch bending and *muraiki*.33

**Orchestral Seating Plan**

Two of Takemitsu’s eleven statements which characterize various aspects of *November Steps* deal directly with the instrumental spatial organization of the composition. They are:

2. To create several different audio foci is one aspect (an objective one) of composing. And to try to hear a specific voice among numerous sounds another.

7. Like time zones around the globe, arrange the orchestra in several time zones- a spectrum of time.34

The first statement reads as a compositional goal for the piece. In *November Steps* Takemitsu was not interested in blending the instruments of the orchestra to form a “single giant instrument.” Like Debussy, he was interested in creating music which contained “many different points of focus and many gradations of color.”35 The music in *November Steps* consists of multiple layers of sound which accumulate and dissipate over time. These layers are separated by elements such as register, timbre, harmony, rhythm, and instrumental placement. In this way Takemitsu is able to combine instruments to create several smaller ensembles within the orchestra which he can then weave together to create a larger musical fabric.

The second statement serves as a strategy for realizing the goals expressed by the first. Arranging the orchestra into spatial “time zones” is a method method for creating “different

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33 Lependorf, 236.
34 Takemitsu, *Confronting Silence*, 87-88.
35 Takemitsu, Cronin, and Tann, 207-208.
audio foci” and the spatial arrangement of instruments can allow a listener “to hear a specific voice among numerous sounds.” As a result, the seating plan for *November Steps* is not a conventional one, but divides the orchestra into several groups in order to create distinct timbral groups, antiphonal effects, and multi-focal zones (see example 6.8).

The *shakuhachi* and *biwa*, being the soloists, are placed center stage at the very front of the orchestra. The spatial arrangement is crucial for the performance, with instruments strategically placed to enhance the auditory experience.

### INSTRUMENTATION

- Shakuhachi (Japanese end-blown bamboo flute)
- Biwa (Japanese plucked lute)
- 2 Oboes
- 3 Clarinets in Bb
- 2 Trumpets in C
- 3 Trombones (tenor)
- 4 Percussion (2 placed on right side, 2 on left side)
  - Left side: tubular bells, 3 gongs, 2 tam tams, Chinese cymbal
  - Right side: tubular bells, 3 gongs, 2 tam tams
- 2 Harps (1 placed on right side, 1 on left side)
- Strings (12-5-4-3 each, placed right and left side)

*Note:* All instruments sound as written except for the Contrabasses sounding one octave below.

### SEATING ARRANGEMENT

![Seating Arrangement Diagram](image)

(R) and (L) Strings should be placed as far apart as possible

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Example 6.8: *November Steps* Seating Arrangement

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36 Used by permission of C.F. Peters.
ensemble. Percussion, harps and strings are divided into two equal sized groups (2 percussion, 1 harp, 12 violins, 5 violas, 4 cellos, and 3 contrabass each). These are placed opposite each other on the left and right sides of the stage, strings in the front and percussion to the rear. The two harps are placed opposite each other just to the inside of the strings. The woodwinds and brass are positioned center stage and to the rear of the ensemble. This creates a semicircular orchestral pattern behind the soloists which allows for the creation of stereophonic effects. Throughout the piece gestures are begun in either the left or right group and then imitated by the opposing group. As the music develops, other timbral, registral, and spatial groupings accumulate to create greater orchestral density. At strategic moments the left and right halves synchronize to form powerful tutti statements. The music then dissipates as the multiple audio foci are subtracted one by one.

As demonstrated in chapter three, Takemitsu’s spatial arrangement of instruments is not unique to November Steps. Koh views this attention to physical space in Takemitsu’s music as being inspired by Cage, but this spatialization of instrumental forces in avant garde music of the 1950s and 1960s is not unique to Cage. Another notable example is Karlheinz Stockhausen’s 1955 composition Gruppen, which is scored for three separate orchestra’s situated at three locations within a concert hall. Takemitsu’s attention to the placement of instruments, however, may not be solely attributed to Western influence. It may also have its roots in the spatial aspects of the concept of ma. As seen in chapter three, Takemitsu’s observation about the moss garden of the Saihoji temple in Kyoto reveals the sensitivity to the physical movement of sound which exists in the traditional Japanese arts:

> The sharp sounds echoing from the corners of the garden were made simply by water running from bamboo spouts. But the spatial arrangement and careful attention to the quality of the tone were not the result of mere skill. At the basis there was harmony: the harmonization of the sound—whether light or dark—with the shifting aspects of the natural landscape.\(^37\)

**General Principles of Construction**

1. A composer should not be occupied by such things as how one blends traditional Japanese instruments with an orchestra. Two worlds of sound: biwa-shakuhachi and the orchestra. Through juxtaposition it is the difference between the two that should be emphasized.\(^38\)

The first of Takemitsu’s eleven statements describing November Steps characterizes his basic principle of construction for the composition: do not blend the two sound worlds but juxtapose

\(^{38}\) Ibid., 87.
them. Reasons for this compositional choice are not strictly aesthetic, but also practical. Attempting to blend the orchestra with the *biwa* and *shakuhachi* presents several potential difficulties. Western instruments employ the equal-temperment system, but the Japanese instruments produce music based not “on the articulation of steady discrete pitches, but on the concept of continuously changing timbres and gestural shapes (sawari).”\(^{39}\) Both the *biwa’s* and *shakuhachi’s* performance traditions realize this through the use of numerous vibratos, articulations, and tonal inflections to create complex, individual sounds. Blending the Japanese instruments with the orchestra would limit their ability to utilize these expressive devices, divorcing them from the power of their musical tradition, and resulting in them becoming little more than exotic curiosities.

3. Sound in Western music progresses horizontally. But the sound of the *shakuhachi* rises vertically, like a tree.\(^ {40}\)

Pitch is not the only musical parameter which separates the Eastern and Western instruments. As Takemitsu observes in his third statement, the temporal conceptions of the two differ. Western instruments proceed “horizontally” in goal ordered motion like “an arrow, or as a moving river,”\(^ {41}\) while the Japanese instruments dwell “like a tree” against a “background of eternity.”\(^ {42}\) In accordance with the principles of *ma* and *sawari*, both the *shakuhachi* and *biwa* produce complex, enigmatic sounds which are complete in themselves and are related by silences. The duration of these pauses are left to the discretion of the performers. Western instruments, however, move forward through time in units of precisely defined duration.

This contrast is immediately apparent in the score by the different ways Takemitsu handles their rhythmic organization. Orchestral sections are organized according to the principles of Western meter, utilizing measures, time signatures, and tempo markings. The sections consisting of just the Japanese instruments are *senza tempo*, employing proportional and graphic notation. In these passages the soloists are allowed a high degree of freedom to interpret the notation according to the performance practices of their respective traditions. In passages where the soloists and orchestra interact, the orchestral statements are short and serve to punctuate gestures by the *biwa* and *shakuhachi*. In these situations the orchestra is fully notated, utilizing standard Western notation, while the *shakuhachi* and *biwa* are written using proportional notation, usually without any bar lines. In a few short passages the *shakuhachi’s* rhythm is written out exactly using

\(^{39}\) Uno Everett, 131.

\(^{40}\) Takemitsu, *Confronting Silence*, 87.

\(^{41}\) Northrop, 343.

\(^{42}\) Koozin, “The Solo Piano Works of Toru Takemitsu: A Linear /Set-Theoretic Analysis,” 47.
Western notation, but in actual performance these are not interpreted strictly.\textsuperscript{43} In addition, certain measures which act as transitions between orchestral passages and those in which only the Japanese instruments play contain notation which indicate that the orchestral instruments should hold their notes as long as possible. This results in an effect in which the horizontal sound world of the orchestra dissolves into vertical sound world of the biwa and shakuhachi.

It should be noted, however, that while Takemitsu uses Western metric notation in the orchestral passages, the time is often elastic and no regular pulse is apparent. The beginning tempo of the composition is one eighth note equals 60, but this value oscillates between 72 and 48 throughout the course of the composition, frequently by means of \textit{accelerando} and \textit{ritardando}. Considering all this, the use of Western metrical notation appears to be more for the purpose of the coordination of the ensemble than for dividing sound into discrete metrical units. As stated previously, Takemitsu’s interest lies not in any mathematical approach, but in creating “a stream of sound,” a musical continuum whose various parameters ebb and flow.

By choosing to pit the \textit{shakuhachi} and \textit{biwa} against the orchestra, Takemitsu’s resulting composition in many ways resembles a Western concerto form, with its sectional construction, solo-tutti contrast, and climactic cadenza. Even though there is very little recurring material in the composition, there is enough (and this material is strategically located) to suggest a ritornello form. This musical structure is also a realization of Takemitsu’s original vision for the piece in which “the sound of \textit{biwa} and \textit{shakuhachi}...(spreads) through the orchestra, gradually enlarging, like waves of water.”\textsuperscript{44}

\textbf{Takemitsu’s and Koh’s Sectional Divisions Within November Steps}

10. Eleven steps without any special melodic scheme... constantly swaying impulses, like \textit{Noh} drama.\textsuperscript{45}

Inspired by \textit{Noh} theater, Takemitsu divides the composition into eleven steps (\textit{dan} or \textit{danmono} in Japanese). These are indicated in the score by numbers placed inside circles positioned at the beginning of each of the designated steps. These correspond to various entries of the of the \textit{biwa} and \textit{shakuhachi} or to re-entries of the orchestra after soloistic passages by the Japanese

\textsuperscript{43} Because of the freedom Takemitsu allowed his soloists in the realization of \textit{November Steps} each performance varies to some degree from any other. The primary source for this analysis is the recording: Tõru Takemitsu, \textit{November Steps}, performed by the Tokyo Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Hiroshi Wakasugi, Denon CO-79441, 1992, CD. A secondary recording used is: Tõru Takemitsu, \textit{November Steps}, performed by the Saito Kinen Orchestra, conducted by Seiji Ozawa, Philips PHCP-1603, 1989, CD.

\textsuperscript{44} Takemitsu, \textit{Confronting Silence}, 87.

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 88.
instruments. Therefore the twenty-four measure opening orchestral statement is not numbered, and the proportions of these danmono are highly unbalanced (asymmetry is highly prized in the traditional Japanese arts). For example, the entries of danmono 2, 3, 4, and 5 occur between measures 25 and 30 (in the 1992 Denon recording these measures occur over a span lasting a little more than two minutes). In contrast, the 10th step consists of the shakuhachi and biwa cadenza and lasts approximately eight minutes.

Koh, in her analysis, also divides November Steps into eleven danmono, but her divisions do not always correspond with Takemitsu’s. Where Takemitsu’s divisions are based solely on entries of the Japanese instruments, hers are not. As stated previously, Takemitsu does not supply a numeral designation for the opening twenty-four measure orchestral statement. Koh, however, divides this section into three separate danmono. She states that her criteria for each of her eleven formal areas is “guided by the conventional sense of beginning, middle, and end, (and) the end of each formal area is determined by a general sense of cadential repose.” While her choices for segmentation sometimes appear to be based on textural considerations, the emphasis of her analysis of each danmono are the focal pitches which act to connect the biwa and shakuhachi with the orchestra and provide an underlying large scale pitch organization.

In addition to dividing the piece into eleven formal units, another characteristic that Takemitsu’s and Koh’s methods of segmentation share is that they each create only a single level of formal structure. This ignores the fact that smaller formal units may be nested within these larger groupings to create a compound form. Perhaps a more accurate way to look at November Steps’ formal structure is not to view it as eleven, single layer steps, but to see the composition as consisting of a series of progressively smaller formal units nested within a large scale super structure. It might also be more accurate to see musical texture, and not pitch, as the primary building block in the creation of the composition’s form.

Gestural Accumulation and Dissipation

As stated previously, one of Takemitsu’s goals in composing November Steps was “to create several different audio foci.” Dividing the orchestra into “several time zones” is one strategy to do this, but not his only one. Not only does he use physical space to create “multiple sound-

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46 Koh, 169.

47 In traditional tonal music this is common. For example, in a large scale ternary form like a minuet and trio (which itself can be part of a larger multimovement form) each of its large sections might consist of a smaller formal unit such as a binary form.

48 Takemitsu, Confronting Silence, 87.

49 Ibid., 88.
producing localities,” he uses registral space, timbral space, various sonority types, multiple *divisi* and other means in order to stratify the orchestra into a large number of individual sound events. Form in the orchestral portions of *November Steps* is developed through the accumulation and dissipation of a large number of these individual gestures to produce large scale textural events that change over time in register, color, dynamics, and density. This accumulative process is highly reminiscent of the music of Ligeti, whose composition *Atmospheres* Takemitsu was familiar with.\(^51\) Focal pitches around which these sound masses circulate do play a major part in creating continuity throughout the composition, but in terms of creating formal structure, their role is a reinforcing one, not primary one.

Uno Everett in her analysis of *November Steps* recognizes this “terraced orchestra texture”\(^52\) as an important element in *November Steps*. In describing the composition she states: “Gestures are tossed back and forth between the two orchestral subgroups in cascading micropolyphony, with the woodwinds and brass adding distinctive sonic layers to this bifurcating, tree-like intersection of the two orchestras.”\(^53\) As part of her analysis Uno Everett identifies ten different categories of these small gestures. Since her focus is on semiotics, she is more interested in the role of these gestural types as “image-icons” for Western musical practices than in how they generate form. These ten (along with two others which I consider to be of importance in the piece), however, serve as the basic building blocks for the large scale textural events which, when juxtaposed against the Japanese instruments, give the composition its shape. They are:\(^54\)

- G1) Short staggered attacks (see example 6.9);
- G2) Short homorhythmic units (see example 6.10)
- G3) Sustained chordal entries (see example 6.11)
- G4) Cascading unison entries (see example 6.12)
- G5) Cascading string harmonics (see example 6.13)
- G6) Extended techniques for harp and percussion (see Example 6.14)
- G7) Ligetian micropolyphony (see example 6.15)
- G8) Sustained, blocked chords on “A” (see example 6.16)
- G9) Sustained, blocked chords on “D” (see example 6.17)
- G10) Extended string effects (a la Penderecki) (see example 6.18)
- G11) Pyramiding chords (see example 6.19)
- G12) Cascading chords (see example 6.20)

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\(^50\) Ohtake, 23.


\(^52\) Uno Everett, 131.

\(^53\) Ibid., 131.

\(^54\) The names of gestures 1-10 are taken from Uno Everett, 132. The musical excerpts for the following examples are all by permission of C.F. Peters.
Example 6.9: G1--short staggered attacks (mm. 21-23): These occur almost exclusively in the harp and percussion. They often serve as articulators for the beginnings and endings of large sound masses. The percussion instruments are all metal and are usually allowed to decay freely. In passages consisting of only these instruments this technique creates a bridge between the worlds of sound and silence.

Example 6.10: G2--short homorhythmic units (m. 10): These occur in the strings, woodwinds, and brass. When multiple timbral groups combine to articulate this gesture simultaneously, it serves to define climactic points in the composition. This gesture also occurs, however, in conjunction with other gestural types as part of a “cloud of sound.”

Example 6.11: G3--sustained chordal entries (mm. 30-32): This gestural type often serves as a background over which shorter gestures come and go. These sustained sonorities often consist of mixed interval sonorities or tone clusters which are distributed over a large registral space. They often start quietly, build to a peak volume, and then fade into silence.
Example 6.12: G4--cascading unison entries (m. 3): These often occur in conjunction with other antiphonally juxtaposed gestural types and serve to articulate the composition’s focal pitches.

Example 6.13: G5--cascading string harmonics (m. 3): This unique timbral device is articulated by the divisi violins as a descending gesture which is traded between the left and right ensembles.
Example 6.14: G6--extended techniques for harp and percussion (mm. 21-23): As both Koh and Uno Everett observe, these gestures often “simulate the effect of sawari in anticipation of the first biwa entry” in order to serve as a timbral link between the Japanese and Western sections. Harp effects include striking the strings with the palm, plucking the strings with the fingernails, and making a glissando on a string with a coin.

Example 6.15: G7--Ligetian micropolyphony mm. (mm. 14-16): These gestures occur both fully notated (as seen in this example) and also as a series of noteheads with directions like “rapid and staccatissimo” (emulating Lutoslawski’s aleatoric counterpoint).

Example 6.16: G8--sustained, blocked chords on “A” (mm. 51-52): Because this gesture’s bass note is the focal pitch A, it assumes a dominant-like role before a solo entry of the biwa in measure 52. The pitch content of the chord is a tone cluster distributed over an octave and a major sixth. Like the sustained chordal entry, this chord begins quietly, builds to a peak dynamic, and then fades into silence.

55 Ibid., 131.
Example 6.17: G9--sustained, blocked chords on “D” (mm. 55-56): The most important statement of this gesture occurs from measure 54 to measure 56, immediately before the biwa and shakuhachi cadenza. Because its bass note is the focal pitch D, its proximity to the “block chord on A” and its strategic placement before the cadenza, this chord assumes the role of a tonic-like sonority. Like the previous gesture, this sonority’s pitch content is a tone cluster distributed over a wide register.

Example 6.18: G10--extended string effects (a la Penderecki) (mm. 25-26): Extended string effects include both col legno battuto and tratto, snap pizzicato, the highest pitch on the instrument and notation for performing pitches a 1/4 tone or 3/4 tone sharp or flat.
Example 6.19: G11--pyramiding chords (mm. 51-52): In contrast to the sustained chordal entries, the chords in this gesture enter a pitch at a time and build up to a complete sonority. These chords either dissipate voice by voice, or fade as a unit into silence.

Example 6.20: G12: cascading chords (m. 11): This gesture is very similar to the cascading harmonics, but instead of cascading individual notes played as harmonics, it consists of a series of cascading three note chords that are antiphonally traded between the left and right string sections.

Formal structure of November Steps

Assuming that the form of the orchestral portions of November Steps develops from a process of accumulation and dissipation of these twelve gestural types to create massive “clouds of sound,” and that these large scale textural events are juxtaposed against passages featuring the two
Japanese solo instruments, then the next step is to determine what kind of large scale musical shape develops from the interaction of these two opposing elements. This process results in the identification of three basic types of large scale structural units. They are:

1. Large orchestral statements with no biwa or shakuhachi. Nested within these units are a series of large-scale textural events consisting of many individual gestures. The general pattern for these textural events often begins with initial staggered harp and/or percussion articulations followed by an accumulation of stratified gestures in the strings, winds, and brass. After reaching a climactic point of greatest musical density and volume, these gestures dissipate, eventually reaching a final series of harp/percussion articulations which fade into silence.

2. Passages consisting of biwa and/or shakuhachi juxtaposed against orchestral interjections. These major sections begin with extended senza tempo passages consisting only of the shakuhachi and biwa. The orchestra then enters with short interjections as the Japanese instruments continue to play. These interjections are often pointillistic and individual gestures rarely accumulate to the density of the large scale orchestral statements. There is one passage in these sections where the soloists do not play, but it is short, lasting a mere six measures.

3. The biwa and shakuhachi cadenza. This event begins approximately two-thirds of the way through the nineteen minute composition and lasts about eight minutes. In terms of Western oriented goal-directed motion, this is the ultimate point of arrival in the piece.

These three types of large scale structural units combine to create an overall six part basic structure. Example 6.21 shows this six part form along with the nested subsections from which each major section is composed. The measure numbers for each of the orchestral subsections are included. Since senza tempo passages featuring only the Japanese instruments are not assigned measure numbers in the score, they are labeled senza tempo 1 through 8 (senza tempo 7 being the shakuhachi and biwa cadenza). Also included in the example are Takemitsu’s eleven danmono. As stated previously these coincide with the either the entries of the Japanese instruments or re-entries of the orchestra after extended senza tempo passages. After the opening orchestral statement and an extended dialogue between the Japanese instruments and the orchestra, a second orchestral statement occurs (this is just before the halfway point in the composition). What is significant about this passage is that it is the only place in the composition where previously stated material occurs (In this restatement, however, the left and right orchestral gestures are exchanged). Following this section is another dialogue between the soloists and the orchestra followed by the eight minute biwa and shakuhachi cadenza. The piece concludes with a final exchange between the orchestra and the two soloists. Example 6.22 provides another perspective on this six part formal structure, emphasizing instrumental density.
Section 1--Opening Orchestral Statement: mm. 1-24

Takemitsu’s danmono

Major orchestral event one (introduction)
Consists of three orchestral subevents: 1. mm. 1-5  2. mm. 6-13  mm. 14-24

Section 2--Shakuhachi and biwa with orchestral interjections: mm. 25-35

(Extended) senza tempo 1: shakuhachi and biwa  (Danmono 1)
Interjection 1: mm. 25-26  (Danmono 2)
  Senza tempo 2: shakuhachi and biwa
Interjection 2: mm. 27-29  (Danmono 3)
Consists of two orchestral subevents:1. m. 27  (Danmono 4)
  2. mm. 28-29
  Senza tempo 3: shakuhachi and biwa
Interjection 3: mm. 30-35  (Danmono 5)
  (Extended) Senza tempo 4: shakuhachi and biwa (section close)  (Danmono 6)

Section 3--Orchestral Statement (ritornello): mm. 36-48

Major orchestral event two (includes return of opening material)
Consists of 3 subevents:
  1. m. 36  (Danmono 7)
  2. m. 37  3. mm. 38-48

Section 4--Shakuhachi and biwa with orchestral interjections: mm. 49-56

  Senza tempo 5: solo shakuhachi  (Danmono 8)
Interjection 4: mm. 49-52  (Danmono 9)
  Senza tempo 6: solo biwa
Interjection 5: mm. 53-56 (section close)  (Danmono 10)

Section 5--Shakuhachi and biwa cadenza

(Extended) senza tempo 7

Section 6--Conclusion: mm. 57-70

consists of 4 subevents:
  1. mm. 57-63  2. mm. 64-66  3 mm. 67-68  4. 68-70
  Senza tempo 8: solo shakuhachi

Keep silence

Example 6.21: The formal outline of November Steps
Example 6.22: Instrumental density vs. time

![Graph showing instrumental density over time with labeled sections for orchestral gestures and specific measures.]

- Orch. gesture 1: Shakuhachi & biwa with orchestral interjections
  - mm. 1-2
- Orch. shki/bwa with orca.
  - mm. 24-35
- Shakuhachi and biwa cadenza
  - mm. 36-48
- Conclusion
  - mm. 57-70

Dakono:
- 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
- 8, 9, 10
- 11
Major Sections Within *November Steps*

The next portion of this essay will explore the formal construction of each of the individual sections of *November Steps*.

**Section 1-Opening Orchestral Statement, mm. 1-24**

This section can be divided into three separate subevents (see examples 6-23 a, b, c, d, e, and f). The first occurs from measure 1 to measure 5 and consists of a series of gestures in the left and right string ensembles, punctuated by short staggered attacks by the left and right harps. The strings in the opening measure are stratified into five separate gestures, two in the right ensemble and three in the left. To enable this stratification Takemitsu assigns a separate staff for each of the violins. The violas of each ensemble are divided between two staves, as are the cellos. The piece opens with the right ensemble’s violins 7-12 sustaining a unison F-natural (also articulated by the left harp). They are then joined by violins 1-6 playing a series of cluster-like chords in rhythmic unison. These gestures are followed in the left ensemble by staggered entries of F-natural in the violas and cellos. Gradually gestures begin to accumulate as the left ensemble’s violins 5-12 state a sustained B-flat and are joined by violins 1-4 playing a short high register E-natural harmonic. As these series of gestures begin to subside, new stratified string gestures take their place. These include sustained cluster chords, cascading string harmonics, and most importantly, a series of staggered entries of the focal pitch D-natural. The orchestral density increases in measure four as the left and right strings trade antiphonal cascading harmonic gestures, and reaches a climax in measure five as the left and right strings unite together in statements of short homorhythmic units. The left and right harps join the strings at the climactic moment, playing a series of glissandos (the last of which is performed by the fingernails) to create the impression of one large block of sound. This ends subevent one.

Where subevent one ends abruptly, subevent two follows a pattern of beginning with a minimal amount of orchestral density, building to a climax, and then gradually subsiding to almost nothing (example 6-16b, c, and d). It begins in measure six with the right ensemble’s violas 1-3 sustaining an A-natural (another of Koh’s focal pitches), and violas 1-3 in the left ensemble sustaining F-sharp. Gradually the other violas and the cellos enter to create two antiphonally related cluster-like chords. Other short gestures begin to enter over the next several measures. In measure nine the brass and the woodwinds make their first entrance. The trombones and trumpets enter with an

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56 Examples 5-16a, b, and f are based on Uno Everett’s segmentation of the respective pages from the *November Steps* score, p. 133-135. The segmentation of all other examples from the score are my own.
Example 6.23a (measures 1-3)\textsuperscript{57}

\textsuperscript{57} Used by permission of C.F. Peters.
Example 6.23b (measures 4-7)
Example 6.23c (measures 8-11)
Example 6.23d (measures 12-16)
Example 6.23e (measures 17-20)
Example 6.23f (measures 21-24 and *senza tempo* 1)
A/G-sharp diade. Over this the woodwinds enter with a short passage utilizing micropolyphony (combined with aleatoric counterpoint), followed by three short homorhythmic chords. As the trumpets and trombones continue to sustain their diade (with the trombones moving from A to B-flat), other stratified gestures arise and subside in the strings. This use of a sustained background over which localized events come and go is a favorite Takemitsu device and is analogous to Northrop’s “silent pool within (which) ripples come and go.”58 This procedure can be found elsewhere in *November Steps* as well as in many of Takemitsu’s other compositions. Subevent two comes to a climax in measure twelve as the left and right strings each state three antiphonally related, stratified homorhythmic gestures over a sustained cluster chord in the brass. Gradually the gestures dissipate, leaving only antiphonal, staggered attacks in the percussion and harps (again utilizing extended techniques), signaling the end of subevent two and linking it to subevent three.

This subevent (example 6-23d, e, and f) follows the same pattern of accumulation, climax, and dissipation as subevent two. It opens in measure 14 with the two trumpets. The trombones and woodwinds join them one by one with independent melodic lines to create a large, micropolyphonic sound mass. The climax of this subevent is reached in measure 18 when the strings enter. The left and right violins each state a series of short homorhythmic cluster chords. These gestures are joined by the left and right lower strings (each divided into five separate staves) playing a series of staggered portamentos which begin *sul ponticello* and move to position ordinary. The subevent dissipates as the strings, brass and woodwinds gradually drop out. By measure 21 the texture has been reduced to single left and right contrabasses sustaining a D-natural harmonic as gongs, tam-tams, celli, and harps (utilizing extended techniques) articulate a series of short pointillistic attacks. As this event fades into nothingness (again the silent background of eternity) two more basses, playing E-natural harmonics, enter. Both Koh and Uno Everett note that this D/E diade serves as a pitch link to the initial entry of the shakuhachi, which follows this opening orchestral statement, and that the harp and cello extended effects imitate the “effect of sawari in anticipation of the first biwa entry to come.”59

Section 2-Shakuhachi and biwa with orchestral interjections: mm. 25-35

The second large-scale section of *November Steps* introduces the shakuhachi and biwa, and these two instruments dominate this portion of the composition. With the exception of six measures (mm. 30-35), one or both of the Japanese instruments are heard throughout this section.

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58 Northrop, 343.
59 Uno Everett, 131.
The role of the orchestra is primarily a supportive one, providing interjections of pointillistic color behind the two soloists. Nowhere in these passages do the stratified orchestral gestures accumulate to the density achieved in the opening 24 measures, and for long periods the orchestra is silent.

After the remaining strings fade out in measure 24, ending the initial orchestral statement, the shakuhachi enters with a sustained D (refer back to example 6-23f), eventually bending up to an E (The same two pitches which end the opening orchestral statement). At this point the character of the music changes to a mood of serene intimacy. The focus is no longer on large shifting clouds of sound, but on the coloring of a sustained pitches through the use of various articulations, shifting timbres, dynamic changes, and subtle pitch bending. When the biwa enters, it provides a percussive contrast to the shakuhachi’s sustained pitches, but this instrument also emphasizes the shifting tensions produced with each individual sound. In these passages sound no longer moves forward through time but seems to stand still, rising “vertically like a tree” against a background of limitless silence.

After nearly a minute and a half the orchestra re-enters, punctuating the shakuhachi and biwa music with a pair of antiphonally related descending string gestures which combine micropolyphony with extended string effects (see example 6-24). These effects include snap pizzicato (ala Bartok), playing the highest note on the instrument (ala Penderecki), and col legno battute. As these two gestures begin to dissipate, the right ensemble violins again enter in pyramiding fashion to form a sustained pianissimo secundal chord. Ending this orchestral interjection are staggered attacks of gongs, tubular bells, and harp which are allowed to vibrate, fading into silence along with the sustaining violins.

Following this interjection is another short passage featuring only the shakuhachi and biwa (senza tempo 2). After several seconds, as the two soloists continue to play, the orchestra again enters with a series of small gestures. The most dramatic of these are a rapid series of cascading string harmonics performed by the right ensemble’s violins. As with the previous orchestral punctuation, this interjection ends with a sustained chord which fades into silence. This time, however, the chord is stated by both the left and right violas playing harmonics. Uno-Everett feels that these chords evoke the sound of another Japanese instrument, the sho, a mouthharp consisting of seventeen reed pipes which is used to produce sustained chords in traditional gagaku court music.  

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60 Takemitsu, *Confronting Silence*, p. 87.  
61 Uno-Everett, p. 138.
After another passage consisting of only the two soloists (*senza tempo* 3), ending with the *shakuhachi* melody climbing to a *fortissimo* F-natural in the instrument’s high register, a short passage (mm. 30-35) begins consisting of only the orchestra. Short staggered attacks in the harp and percussion initiate this section. Concurrent with these gestures, the woodwinds play a series of short homorhythmic cluster chords. A series of overlapping sustained clusterchords in the brass and low strings (violas and cellos) follow. Beneath this constantly changing series of individual gestures, the contrabasses sustain a low A-natural, providing a static background. Timothy Koozin in his analysis of Takemitsu’s piano music views this type of procedure as a “concept of stasis defined by motion.” As the strings decrescendo into silence, the brass provide another sustained static background over which the violins engage in pointillistic micropolyphony. Eventually the violins join the brass in this sustained background sonority. As this sound complex begins to fade, the cellos and basses join this chromatically saturated texture. At the very bottom of this texture, single basses in both the left and right ensembles (separated by an octave and a third from the next lowest voice) sustains a low D beneath these mutating clouds of sound, creating a large scale pitch motion which to Koh “suggest a V and I relation.”

This fading sonority provides a bridge for the next *shakuhachi* and *biwa* passage (*senza tempo* 4). Again an intimate mood is created as the solo *shakuhachi* enters. After an initial jump into its high register, the *shakuhachi* descends to its middle register where it plays a series of sustained pitches within a narrow melodic range. What is most notable here, however, is not the pitch material, but the delicate shadings of sound. Each sustained tone seems to grow from silence and then subside back to it. Subtle changes in vibrato, articulation, and timbre further enhance this effect. As the music ebbs and flows, the meaning of the Takemitsu’s statement, “the ultimate achievement of the *shakuhachi* master... is the re-creation of the sound of wind blowing through an old bamboo grove” can be truly understood. As the passage begins to draw to a close, the *biwa* enters with a series of reiterated B-flats and C-naturals, which begin slowly and quietly and then gradually become louder and faster. A climax is reached as the plectrum strikes the body of the *biwa* with a percussive smack (*bachioto*), followed by a vigorous rubbing of the instrument’s strings by the plectrum from the bottom of the neck to the top. The *shakuhachi* concludes this gesture, jumping to a high C above the treble staff. The violins re-enter playing their highest

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64 Koh, 180.
65 Takemitsu, *Confronting Silence*, 87.
possible note (again a Penderecki-like extended effect). This signals the beginning of the next major orchestral event.

Section 3--Second Orchestral Statement (quasi-ritornello): mm. 36-48

The second orchestral statement is significant for several reasons. First, with the exception of the composition’s opening 24 measures, it is the longest segment of the piece where the shakuhachi and biwa are not heard (The only other significant section where this occurs is in the opening measures of the conclusion). Next, it is the first place in the composition since the opening where gestures accumulate to the density levels heard in the first 24 measures. It is also the only point in the piece where previously stated material returns and thus serves as a quasi-ritornello. Lastly, its location is approximately halfway through the work. For these reasons these 12 measures can be considered an important structural landmark in the composition.

This quasi-ritornello can be divided into three textural subevents (see examples 6-25a, b, and c). The first two are relatively short, but the third one is longer, and its construction is more more complex than the basic pattern of accumulation, climax, and dissipation. Instead, as gestures begin to dissipate after an accumulation to a climax, new gestures enter and then taper off. This creates a wave-like effect in which the music swells and then recedes (Takemitsu’s original title, Water Rings, again seems to be an appropriate metaphor for the musical structure of the composition).

The first subevent (m. 36) serves as a bridge between the Japanese and Western instruments. As stated previously, this section opens with the violins sustaining their highest possible note as the shakuhachi plays a high C, creating one of the most dramatic points in the composition. The shakuhachi’s leap up to E cues the violins to portamento down to definite pitches creating another sustained tone-cluster. The violas, cellos, percussion, and harps join this chromatically saturated sonority as the basses again sustain an A at the bottom of the texture. At the height of this subevent the trumpets enter on F-sharp and the trombones double the contrabasses’ low A. As each of the stratified string gestures quickly fade out, the brass and shakuhachi continue to sustain their respective pitches. Eventually the shakuhachi also drops out, leaving only the slowly diminuendoing trumpets and trombones. A fermata leaves the length of this sustaining diade to the discretion of the conductor, and isolates the previous series of gestures into their own subevent.

Just as these two instruments fade out, a series of stratified string and harp gestures enter and rapidly accumulate into another chromatically saturated sound complex. This is the second subevent of the ritornello (mm. 37-38), and it consists entirely of short homorhythmic gestures
Example 6.25a (measures 36-39)\textsuperscript{66}

\textsuperscript{66} Used by permission of C.F. Peters.
Example 6.25c (measures 44-48)

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and sustained sonorities. The contrabasses in the left string ensemble provide a degree of tonal stability by again sustaining an A at the bottom of the texture. In a much higher register the right ensemble’s basses sustain an F-sharp harmonic. The various gestures quickly accumulate and then dissipate, once again subsiding to an A/F-sharp diade. A fermata once more leaves the duration of this sonority to the discretion of the conductor and marks the end of another subevent.

The beginning of the third subevent (mm. 38-48) consists of a pair of identical sustained cluster chords in the left and right strings and a series of short staggered entries in the two harps. These overlap with the sustaining A/F-sharp diade in the basses, creating a link with the previous subevent. As these gestures end, the woodwinds, in their highest register, enter with a gesture consisting of Ligetian micropolyphony. This gesture overlaps with the left violins stating a series of cascading unison entries on the focal pitch D. This is a slightly altered return of a gesture first heard in the right ensemble violins in the composition’s third measure. What occurs next in measures 41-43 is an almost exact restatement of the material from measures 3-5 (the climax of the composition’s opening subevent), the primary difference being that the material which had originally been in the left ensemble is now in the right and vice-versa. As these gestures end, they dovetail with a pyramiding cluster sonority stated by muted brass (mm. 43-44). Over this sustained sonority, new gestures enter in the woodwinds and harps and then taper off. The harp gesture is notable in that it consists of an extended effect in which the performer is instructed to continuously and rapidly repeat a four note cell while continually changing designated pedals. As the two harps begin new phrases consisting of short staggered attacks, the strings join in with pointillistic micropolyphony, which quickly recedes. Once more the harps state a rapidly repeating four note cell while changing pedals. As they decrescendo into silence, the shakuhachi enters with a tremolo figure, beginning the next section.

Section 4--Shakuhachi and biwa with orchestral interjections: mm. 49-56

The last formal section before the climactic biwa and shakuhachi cadenza consists of the two Japanese instruments punctuated by two, four measure orchestral interjections. In this segment, however, the traditional instruments do not perform duet passages, but are each given their own solos. The shakuhachi solo is first (senza tempo 5). Replacing the ritornello’s dovetailed gestural blocks of sound are a series of a sustained pitches, each related to the next by silence and colored by shifting timbres and subtle pitch bending. Eventually small orchestral subgroups enter, providing a delicate, quiet backdrop to the bamboo flute’s complex, shifting sounds. Gradually,
sustained, stratified string sonorities begin to accumulate and then reach a climax as the *shakuhachi* melody rises into its high register (mm. 50-51). The rhythmic coordination between the *shakuhachi* and the orchestra in this passage is not exact. The score indicates that the soloist and orchestra should end this passage together, but in the 1992 Denon recording, the orchestra finishes the passage several moments before the *shakuhachi*. Following the double bars which ends this section is the direction “keep silence” beneath a fermata. By allowing the music to fade completely in this manner, Takemitsu again draws the listener into a sound-world in which silence becomes an active element.

Following this fermata the *biwa* solo begins (*senza tempo* 6). This time the orchestra does not enter with sustained sonorities. Instead, gongs, tam tams, and harps (again utilizing extended effects which emulate the timbre of the *biwa*) articulate a series of staggered entries. The sustaining abilities of each of these percussive instruments are utilized, as each one is allowed to decay naturally after being struck. In this way silence/ma once more becomes an active element within the composition. As these gestures begin to dissipate, the brass, woodwinds, and strings enter with a series of stratified sustaining sonorities, rapidly bringing the composition to its point of greatest orchestral density (mm. 54-56). At the climactic moment, the *shakuhachi* enters, joining these combined forces before the entire ensemble gradually fades back into silence. For approximately the next eight minutes, the sound-world of Western music, with its goal ordered, teleological focus, will be replaced by the Japanese sound-world of the *biwa* and *shakuhachi*. The climactic cadenza has begun.

Before discussing the cadenza, however, it should be mentioned that the sonorities which end each of the last two orchestral interjections before the cadenza are significant for several reasons. Foremost among these is the fact that the bass note of the first of these chords (mm. 51-52) is the focal pitch A, and the bass note of the second chord is the focal pitch D (55-56). Uno-Everett considers these individual sonorities so important that she labels each of them with their own gestural categories, “G8--sustained, blocked chords on A” and “G9--sustained, blocked chords on D.” In both her and Koh’s view, this perfect fifth relationship is significant in that it “lend(s) structural coherence to the work in its long-range architecture.”

The placement of these two chords immediately before the cadenza confirms this, but calling it a dominant-tonic relationship might be going too far. Takemitsu’s compositional approach is much more chromatic/modal than

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67 Uno-Everett, 132.
68 Ibid., 139.
tonal, and the pitch material of these “G8” and “G9” sonorities are intervalically complex. An example of this is the pitch structure of the G8 sonority found in measures 51-52 (basses and celli). It is a favorite of Takemitsu’s, the whole-tone plus one chord. Here it is combined with another, complementary whole-tone plus one chord stated simultaneously in the right ensemble’s violins and violas to create a chromatically saturated sound complex. (see example 6-26). The “G9” sonority found in measures 55-56 is an even more complex, dense cluster chord, which includes in its middle register several pitches a quarter-tone apart.

Example 6-26: whole-tone + 1 chords (measures 51-52)

Section 5--Biwa and Shakuhachi Cadenza (senza tempo 7)

If one thinks in terms of Western goal-directed motion, this formal section can be considered the climax of composition. All previous events in the work lead up to it. The two “quasi-cadential” chords located in measures 51-52 and measures 55-56 only serve to confirm this. As a climax, however, it is quite unusual. In a typical orchestra piece, the climax would be the most dramatic and musically extroverted section. As in the previous passages featuring only the two Japanese instruments, however, the mood created in the cadenza is one of serenity, intimacy, and mindfulness, aesthetic values central to the traditional Japanese arts. Any restraints placed on the biwa and shakuhachi through the need to coordinate with the orchestra are removed, and they are allowed to utilize all the expressive devices of their traditional performance practices to create music of subdued elegance in which each gesture is one of refined simplicity.

The freedom which Takemitsu allows his soloists in the cadenza is in direct contrast to the detailed notation of the orchestral passages. This is consistent with the performance practices of

69 Whole tone and octatonic scales, two of Messiaen’s modes of limited transposition, are commonly found in Takemitsu’s compositions. For more concerning this subject, see Peter Burt’s The Music of Tōru Takemitsu. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) or Timothy Koozin’s The Solo Piano Works of Tōru Takemitsu: A Linear/ Set-Theoretic Analysis. Ph.D. diss., University of Cincinnati, 1989.
both the *shakuhachi* and *biwa*, where notation serves only as a general guide, and the performer is allowed a high degree of liberty in interpreting standard repertoire. In *November Steps*, Takemitsu’s graphic notation for the *shakuhachi* specifies no pitch information, only general direction. The *biwa*’s tablature notation is more specific regarding fret placement and string tension, but still allows a great degree of freedom. The rhythmic aspects of the notation allows both performers considerable liberty, as does the fact that the individual gestures may be performed in any order. Much more specific are the directions for the various articulations and vibratos in the *shakuhachi* notation. As previously seen, five different types of vibrato are specified, as are three different ending figures and five different articulation types. Extended effects for the *biwa* are also precisely notated. This indicates that Takemitsu is far more concerned with timbre and *sawari* in the cadenza than with any specific pitches.

Another unusual aspect of the cadenza is its proportion in relation to rest of the composition. The entire duration of *November Steps* is a little over nineteen minutes, and the duration of the cadenza is around eight minutes. This is approximately forty percent of the piece. It is then followed by a short conclusion. Takemitsu himself recognized this unusual proportional relationship in a 1988 interview: “*November Steps* as a composition seems to me proportionally very strange, and maybe wrong--eight minutes for *shakuhachi* and *biwa*, and then the (following) orchestra part is very short.”

Section 6—Conclusion: mm. 57-70

As mentioned above, the final portion of *November Steps* is quite short in relation to the cadenza. In the 1992 Denon recording it lasts a mere one and a half minutes. This means that the cadenza’s duration is more than five times that of this concluding section. Of course, as mentioned in chapter four, irregularity is recognized as an important element in traditional Zen inspired Japanese arts. Takemitsu the “Western composer” might have considered this proportion to be wrong, but perhaps to his inner intuitive Japanese aesthetic sense, it was entirely correct.

The conclusion can be divided into four subevents (See examples 6.27a, b, and c). The proportions of these can be roughly divided into long (7 measures), short (two measures), short (one measure), and long (three measures plus a final *senza tempo*). Uno-Everett considers this to be a “condensed recapitulation of the opening *tutti*.” Since the conclusion’s four subevents do not correspond to the three heard in the opening orchestral statement and none of the stratified

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71 Uno Everett, 144.
Subevent 1

Example 6.27a (measures 57-61) \(^{72}\)

\(^{72}\) Used by permission of C.F. Peters.
Example 6.27b (measures 62-67)

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Example 6.27c (measures 68-70 and final *senza tempo*)
gestures which occur in the opening are repeated here, this is not true in the usual sense. Smaldone’s prominent “nuclear tones,” F, B-flat, and most importantly D, however, are present. It is the saturation of this focal pitch (D) which provides any basis for considering this section to be any kind of recapitulation.

The conclusion begins quietly with three and a half measures (mm. 57-60) of short, staggered entries stated by tam tams, gongs, and the two harps (again utilizing extended effects which recall the biwa), before being joined by various stratified, sustained cluster-like sonorities and pyramiding chords in the brass and strings. Koh accurately observes that the percussion and harps in this transitional passage provide a “sense of continuity in the succession of sound color” by “recalling and evoking gestures from the Eastern instruments.” This subevent reaches its point of maximum density in measure 62 and subsides over the next two measures. As the music ebbs in measure 63, the left and right harps play a series of short motives centered around the focal pitch D. When this subevent ends in measure 64, all instruments become silent, except for the two harps which each articulate a single staggered D-natural.

The next subevent (mm. 64-65) begins with a series of short homorhythmic sonorities located in both the left and right violins and violas. The last of these is sustained over the next measure and consists of a pure whole-tone chord. As this sonority is sustained, it is joined briefly by the left and right contrabasses stating a complementary six note whole-tone chord (with D in the bass), creating a chromatically saturated sound complex. This subevent ends with the two harps playing short motives centered around D, and the left and right ensemble basses playing a sustained unison D harmonic. These bass harmonics greatly resemble the timbre of the shakuhachi, and possibly act as a timbral foreshadowing of the re-entry of the shakuhachi on the pitch D two measures later.

The third subevent (mm. 67) is only one measure in duration and consists entirely of staggered entries by several divided string subgroups performing harmonics. The accumulated pitches form a four note secundal chord (D, D-sharp, E, F), the registral spacing of which is arranged so that lowest and highest pitches are both the focal pitch D natural.

In the final subevent of the piece, the emphasis on the focal pitch D becomes even more concentrated. As the string harmonics from the previous subevent decrescendo into silence, the shakuhachi enters for a final time, stating D. The biwa joins in, articulating a C-sharp which is then bent up to D. The biwa repeats a slightly elaborated restatement of this motive as the shakuhachi continues to sustain its pitch. In measure 70, the orchestra states a final, short flurry of pointillistic

73 Koh, 197.
micropolyphony followed by the shakuhachi crescendoing to fff and ending on D-sharp. The piece ends with the instruction “keep silent” beneath a fermata.

**Ma and Cyclical Temporality in November Steps**

6. There is something suggestive in the biologists’ report that the dolphins’ communication takes place, not in their sounds, but in the length of silences between sounds.

10. Eleven steps without any special melodic scheme...constantly swaying impulses, like Noh drama.\(^{74}\)

As stated previously, Takemitsu’s goal in composing *November Steps* was to “confront and intensify” the differences between the sound worlds of East and West, the orchestra and the Japanese instruments. These two opposing elements, however, are not completely divorced from each other. Aesthetic principles present in the traditional Japanese arts help give shape to the entire composition and not just the passages featuring the shakuhachi and biwa. In the sections featuring the orchestra Takemitsu utilizes his acquired Western musical vocabulary in order to express “the essence of traditional (Japanese) music” and to “recreate, or reelucidate (this essence), in new, modern forms.”\(^{75}\) The time/space concept of *ma* and the idea of time as a cyclical repeating entity are two related aesthetic principles present throughout *November Steps* which exemplify this “essence of traditional music.”

Takemitsu, in his essay “My Perception of Time in Traditional Japanese Music states:

> Nature is conceived in terms of the seasons, and this has given rise to a unique temporal sense, which has been further fostered by the influence of Zen and Buddhist teachings. This special temporal sense is strongly reflected in the time structures of the traditional music of Japan.\(^{76}\)

This “unique (Japanese) temporal sense” views time both as a “repeating and cyclical entity,” and temporal events as ripples which come and go against a “background of eternity.” Both of these concepts have historical and spiritual roots originating in Japan’s two principle religions, Shintoism and Buddhism, and are deeply ingrained in Japanese culture. As demonstrated in chapter four, they manifest themselves in the traditional Japanese arts. Most notably through aesthetic principle of *ma*. As a result of his discovery of “the splendor of traditional Japanese music”\(^{77}\) in the early 1960s, Takemitsu began to utilize these concepts as governing principles in his compositions, and they manifest themselves in *November Steps* in numerous ways.

\(^{74}\) Takemitsu, *Confronting Silence*, 88.

\(^{75}\) Takemitsu, “Contemporary Music in Japan,” 203.


\(^{77}\) Takemitsu, “Contemporary Music in Japan,” 201.
Timothy Koozin, in his analysis of Takemitsu’s solo piano piece, *Pause ininterrompue*, finds that while “very few rests of silence are written into the score, ...(there are many) tones which are attacked quietly and allowed to fade to inaudibility”\(^{78}\) in order to dissolve “the boundaries between sound and silence.”\(^{79}\) This technique is used frequently in *November Steps* during passages consisting of only the harp, and/or percussion. Percussion instruments such as tam tams and gongs are struck with a variety of mallets, and are allowed to decay naturally. To quote Koozin:

> In this sense, the sound event draws silence into the piece as an active rather than passive element. It is possible to think of Takemitsu’s long, decaying tones as *hashi* (bridges) projecting from the world of sound into that of silence. The moment of waiting for sound to become silence is imbued with the quality of *ma*.\(^{80}\)

Creating a bridge between “the world of sound and silence” in the piece is not exclusive to percussive instruments. Whether in in the strings, brass, or woodwinds, almost all entries of a sustained sonority in the orchestral portions of *November Steps* utilize what Dana Richard Wilson calls a “fade in/fade out technique”\(^{81}\) to similar effect. These gestures typically begin at a volume of *pp* or *ppp*, crescendo to a peak, and then gradually decrescendo back to silence. As in the percussion and harp gestures, this creates a dissolution of the boundaries between sound and silence. In passages which act as a transition between the orchestra and the *shakuhachi* and *biwa*, these gestures also serve to dissolve the boundaries between the metered and *senza tempo* sections. For these bridging passages, Takemitsu uses specialized notation which directs the performers to sustain the sonorities as long as possible (often accompanied by the written direction *rallentando*). As the orchestral instruments fade out over the course of several seconds, the Japanese instruments enter creating still another *hashi* between the two sound worlds (to use cinematic language this technique could be more accurately described as a “dissolve” than a “fade out”).

This “fade in/fade out technique” is not only present within individual gestures but shapes the composition’s overall form as well. The large scale textural events, which result from the accumulation and dissipation of a large number of individual gestures, often begin quietly, with a minimal amount of instrumental density. As gestures accumulate and reach a point of climax, the corresponding dynamic level increases as well. After the climax is realized, both the stratified gestures and the overall dynamic level dissipate back to a point of minimal density/volume. This creates multiple levels of the “fade in/fade out technique”. In Wilson’s view this procedure

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\(^{78}\) Koozin, *The Solo Piano Works of Tōru Takemitsu: A Linear/ Set-Theoretic Analysis*, 55.

\(^{79}\) Ibid., 56.

\(^{80}\) Ibid., 57.

\(^{81}\) Wilson, 118.
“suggests the possibility of a work’s (in this case November Steps) cyclical nature-- returning to the work’s point of departure (silence).”

The principle of large-scale sound events emerging from silence and eventually returning to it result in November Steps being a highly sectionalized composition. Takemitsu stated that “in Japanese music danmono are the equivalent of Western variations,” and he considered the piece to be “a set of eleven variations.” Edward Downs, in his program notes for the composition’s premiere performance, called the piece “a series of exquisite miniatures.” This structure is typical of traditional Japanese music in which “short fragmented connections of sounds are complete in themselves...related by silences that aim at creating a harmony of events.”

This idea of Takemitsu’s compositions being cyclical in nature is not limited to the principle of textural accumulation/dissipation. Koozin, in his analysis of Takemitsu’s Piano Distance, contends that ma is also created through periods of contrast between referential pitches or important musical gestures. In Koozin’s view, these cycles can exist at various levels and can be nested within each other. Intervals of time between appearances of the focal pitch D in November Steps are consistent with this observation. In the opening orchestral statement for example, this pitch is prominently heard in measures 3-5, as both the left and right violins state it in staggered, antiphonally related entries at the top of the musical texture. D is again heard prominently in the contrabasses at the end of the initial orchestral statement (measures 21-24), and serves as a pitch link to the opening shakuhachi passage. Between these two areas the pitch D, while sometimes stated briefly as part of various clusters, is no more significant than any of the other eleven chromatic pitches. At semi-regular intervals throughout the composition, however, structurally prominent restatements of the focal pitch D occur (see example 6-28). The most significant of these is the conclusion, where D is reiterated almost constantly. In this section it is heard at the top of the texture, the bottom of the texture, in all the participating orchestral groups, and in both of the Japanese instruments. Probably the next most important restatement of the pitch D is in the quasi-ritornello, where it is heard as part of a return of the material from measures 3-5. As stated earlier, this is the only location in the composition where material is restated, giving these measures even greater structural weight. Another structurally prominent restatement of this focal pitch is the “sustained blocked chord on D located immediately before the shakuhachi/biwa cadenza.

- Wilson, 120.
- Takemitsu, Confronting Silence, 63.
- Quoted in Wilson, 138.
- Takemitsu, Confronting Silence, 84.
The consistent reoccurrence of this pitch at structurally important junctures in *November Steps* creates a three part cycle in which the focal pitch is stated, followed by its disappearance, and its eventual return. In Koozin’s view, “in recognizing this cycle of repetition, the listener’s memory supplies a connection which spans the intervening discontinuity, creating an interval of *ma*.”\(^86\) In order for the listener to recognize this three part cycle (at least on a subconscious level), the periodic reiterations of the focal pitch must be notable enough so that the “larger expanses of contrasting material may be bridged.”\(^87\) It is not a process which is evident from the beginning of the composition. With each successive, prominent restatement, however, the importance of the pitch D is reaffirmed and strengthened. By the conclusion, its role as a quasi-tonic is confirmed in the mind of the listener. In this way the sensitive listener becomes an active participant in the unfolding of the work. Another of Takemitsu’s eleven statements addresses this characteristic of the composition:

5. First concentrate on the simple act of listening. Only then can you comprehend the aspirations of the sounds themselves.\(^88\)


\(^{87}\) Ibid., 62.

\(^{88}\) Takemitsu, *Confronting Silence*, 87.
CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

The introduction to this essay describes a 1974 article entitled “Mirrors” in which Takemitsu employs a metaphor that describes precisely the dual nature of his musical personality: “Once, I believed that to make music was to project myself onto an enormous mirror that was called the West. Coming into contact with Japanese traditional music, I became aware of the fact that there was another mirror.” In other words, blinded by the light of Western culture, he composed music in his youth that reflected the influences of Western composers such as Debussy, Messiaen, and Webern. After becoming aware of this “other mirror,” however, he began to explore his Japanese tradition and incorporate its elements, such as ma (space) and sawari (timbre), into his own works. Nevertheless, his compositional goals were not to merely blend the music of East and West but to “confront and intensify” the contradictions between the two.

November Steps, with its use of Western orchestra and traditional Japanese instruments, is in many ways an ideal composition for the purpose of exploring this dual nature of Takemitsu’s compositional personality. Did Takemitsu, however, realize his goal of confronting and intensifying their contradictions? It is true that he did not use the shakuhachi, biwa and orchestra to create a “superficial blending of East and West.” That approach was attempted in the 1930s by other Japanese composers, who grafted Japanese folk tunes onto Western forms and harmonies, but with unsatisfactory results. Instead, Takemitsu purposely juxtaposed the two “sound worlds” against each other, emphasizing their differences. The boundaries between them, though, are not always rigidly defined. Because certain Japanese aesthetic elements are present throughout November Steps, the resulting composition is more complex, transcending the respective traditions of East and West.

This transcending of the traditions of East and West, however, did not begin with Takemitsu. As observed in Chapter two, the three Western composers (Debussy, Messiaen, and Cage) who were most influential on the young Takemitsu were themselves greatly influenced by the music of various Asian cultures. It is merely speculation, but perhaps even while “being blinded by the light of the Western mirror,” Takemitsu found something in the music of these composers which resonated with his innate Japanese sensibilities. By reimporting Asian concepts back to Japan from the West, a reciprocal process or “feedback loop” was created. Takemitsu himself admitted that it was Cage who introduced him to Zen Buddhism.

1 Takemitsu, “Mirrors,” 47.
2 Takemitsu, Confronting Silence, 93.
Perhaps there were particular elements in the works of other Western composers who were not influenced directly by Japanese or Asian music that also resonated with Takemitsu’s Japanese sensibilities. The emphasis on timbral and textural elements in the music of composers such as Webern, Ligeti, Xenakis, and Penderecki would appeal to the Japanese sensitivity to timbre and the preference for complex sounds (sawari). The spatial characteristics of much twentieth century avant garde music would also very likely appeal to a Japanese listener’s innate appreciation for the time/space concept of ma.

All these twentieth century avant garde elements (as well as others) are present in November Steps. The stratifying of the orchestra into two separate ensembles and even smaller instrumental groupings within these could be seen as an extension of Debussy’s principle of creating multiple orchestral layers and the instrumental spatial arrangement of Cage and Stockhausen or as the application of the concept of ma to timbral and physical space. The use of extended instrumental effects could be seen as reflecting the influence of Penderecki, or as the the application of the concept of sawari. The creation of large scale textural events that vary in density, timbre, register, and dynamics emulate the works of Xenakis and Ligeti, but could also be an attempt to create music which ebbs and flows in the same manner as “wind blowing through an old bamboo grove.”

As shown in the last section of chapter six, Japanese aesthetic concepts are in evidence throughout the composition. Cyclical temporal concepts and the principle of ma can seen as shaping both the large-scale textural events and the individual gestures that combine to form them. These gestures and events arise from a “background of silence” and then subside back again into it. Percussive instruments are allowed to decay naturally acting as “hashi (bridges) projecting from the world of sound into that of silence.” The semi-regular reoccurrence of the focal pitch D pitted against contrasting pitch material can also be viewed as an application of both ma and the principle of reoccurring temporal cycles.

November Steps is neither a superficial blending or a simple juxtaposition of Japanese and Western elements. These opposing elements react to each other in complex ways on various levels, creating a composition which transcends these constituent parts to form a unique, fascinating, and unified whole.

Takemitsu, in his writings from the decade after November Steps was composed, recognized the complex ways in which his Japanese and Western influences interacted within himself and his

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3 Ibid., 88.
4 Koozin, The Solo Piano Works of Tôru Takemitsu: A Linear/ Set-Theoretic Analysis, 55.
works. In essays from this period he employs a metaphor that reflects the evolution of his thought, one which he borrowed from the American inventor Buckminster Fuller: the “universal (or cosmic) egg.”

As Fuller pointed out, “The airplane era laid a new cosmic egg in the nest of everyday reality, integrating all the previous separate civilizations’ experiences in one history and one geography.” Naturally, relationships of lending and borrowing had already developed in various cultures in the past. But at present, when modern Western dominance is facing collapse, they have a different significance.

A mirror is being broken and in each shattered piece different faces are reflected. No longer can you view your image in a single mirror. And a shattered mirror cannot be reassembled.

The idea of integration and of the wholeness of human aspiration is not directed at creating an innocuous, neutral state but at finding oneself among those countless conflicting and irregular shapes. Modern Japan has spent a long time trying to discover itself in the huge Western European mirror, but now that some time has passed, it should try to see itself in those countless fragments of mirror.\(^5\)

**November Steps** is a product of this integration of human cultures. It is not unique, however, in Takemitsu’s output. Scholars have explored the interaction of Japanese and Western elements in several Takemitsu compositions, but this line of investigation is by no means exhausted. One work that is yet to be studied in depth is the 1973 composition **Autumn** which, like **November Steps**, is scored for *shakuhachi*, *biwa*, and orchestra. Despite the common instrumentation, however, **Autumn** is a very different piece from **November Steps**. In a 1988 interview Takemitsu explained:

> At the time that I wrote **November Steps** it was very difficult to make a blending of both of them (the Japanese and Western instruments) at once... **Autumn** was written (six years) after **November Steps**. I really wanted to do something which I hadn’t done in **November Steps**, not to blend the instruments, but to integrate them.\(^6\)

If, on a philosophical level, the approach behind composing **November Steps** was the juxtaposition of “conflicting and irregular shapes,” then the approach behind the composition of **Autumn** could be considered an attempt to create a work which reflects “the idea of integration and of the wholeness of human aspiration.” In their respective articles, both Smaldone and Uno Everett make reference to these contrasting approaches in **November Steps** and **Autumn**, but neither has subsequently gone on to investigate **Autumn** in depth. An analysis of the interaction of Japanese and Western elements in this later composition would be a worthwhile pursuit. Perhaps one would find aspects of cultural juxtaposition in **Autumn**, just as aspects of integration can be found in **November Steps**.

After 1973 Takemitsu largely abandoned composing for Japanese instruments. This does not

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\(^5\) Takemitsu, *Confronting Silence*, 70.

\(^6\) Takemitsu, Cronin, and Tann, 209-210.
mean, however, that he abandoned expressing indigenous Japanese aesthetic qualities in his music. His fascination with nature and desire to create music which was in harmony with it never diminished. The titles of his later compositions demonstrate this fact; a few examples include *Rain Tree* (1981), *I Hear the Water Dreaming* (1987), and *Spirit Garden* (1994). Similarly, never do his later compositions emphasize Western goal-directed motion, but, like so much of traditional Japanese music, suggest a metaphysical temporality “beyond the concept of everyday time.” They gradually ebb and flow, with the “stream of sound” seemingly arising from a background of silence and then dissipating again into it. The pacing of these works is as deliberate and refined as a *Nōh* drama. Even his fondness for Debussy- and Messiaen-like sonorities in these later works reinforces this feeling of timelessness. Likewise, his ability to create subtle shadings of timbre which gradually change over time only became more sophisticated.

As Takemitsu evolved as a composer, he integrated his Japanese and Western influences to create a uniquely personal and highly refined style. A style so individual that it is as distinctly recognizable as those of other twentieth-century masters such as Stravinsky, Webern, Debussy, and Messiaen. Continued scholarship of his works can only help shed more light on the developmental path of this multicultural composer who could not have existed before the twentieth century.

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7 Takemitsu, *Confronting Silence*, 7.
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Interviews


Video


Sound Recordings


APPENDIX A: OUTLINE OF NOVEMBER STEPS ANALYSIS

Introduction

Previous Analyses of November Steps
Pitch analysis
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Koh
Semiotics
Uno Everett

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Biwa Techniques Notated in the Score of November Steps
Biwa Notation
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G2) Short homorhythmic units
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G4) Cascading unison entries
G5) Cascading string harmonics
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G8) Sustained, blocked chords on “A”
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Formal structure of November Steps
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3. The biwa and shakuhachi cadenza

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Section 2-Shakuhachi and biwa with orchestral interjections: mm. 25-35
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Ma and Cyclical Temporality in November Steps
Creating a bridge between sound and silence
The fade in/fade out technique
Cyclical time
Ma and the focal pitch D
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VITA

Charles Haarhues is a candidate for the Doctor of Philosophy degree at Louisiana State University where he currently serves as an instructor of music theory. His principal composition teachers include Dinos Constantinides and Stephen David Beck. In the spring of 2004 he served as an adjunct instructor of music theory at the University of New Orleans. Haarhues received his Bachelor of Music degree with a concentration in jazz studies from Eastern Illinois University in 1996 and his Master of Music degree in composition from Eastern Illinois University in 1999. In addition, he has performed traditional African drumming with Abubakari Lunna, Gideon Alorwoyie, and Oscar Sulley Braimah. Haarhues’ music has been performed at numerous events throughout the United States, Europe, Central America, and Japan, including the LSU Festival of Contemporary Music, the 2001 National SEAMUS conference, the College Music Society Southern Chapter Conference, the Southeastern Composers League Conference, the Southeastern Composers Symposium, and the Electric Latex Festival. His orchestral compositions has been premiered by the Louisiana Sinfonietta and the Contemporary Conservatory of Athens Ensemble. He has received awards and commissions from numerous organizations including four consecutive ASCAP Plus awards, the Louisiana Sinfonietta, the Of Moving Colors Dance Company, and the LSU Union Art Museum. In the Spring of 2003 he was commissioned to write arrangements for a joint performance of the Acadiana Symphony and the Cajun band Steve Reily and the Mamou Playboys performing at the River Ranch Festival. Haarhues can be heard as a performer on the Oscar Sulley and Bontuku recordings *Snows of Kilimanjaro* (1991) and *The Fish and the Shrimp* (1989). His compositions appear on the CDs *LSU Composers Forum with the Louisiana Sinfonietta and Soloists* (2004) and *LSU Composers Forum with flutist Iwona Glinka featuring Music for Solo Flute from Louisiana State University and Greece* (2003). Haarhues currently serves as the president of the Mid-South Chapter of the National Association of Composers USA (NACUSA) and sits on the national advisory board. He is also a member of ASCAP, the College Music Society, the Society of Composers Inc., SEAMUS, and the Southeastern Composers League.