Western musical influence on Japanese composers

- "My music is very influenced by the Japanese tradition, especially the Japanese garden, in color, spacing, form. At the same time, it is very influenced by Messiaen, Debussy, and Schoenberg - maybe even stronger than by the Japanese garden…. When I use Japanese instruments, people say, "Oh, very Japanese!" Sometimes for me it is too heavy. Then, I like to go in another direction. I really love to write my own music, and music should be very powerful." (Koozin, 124)

- "The channels of transmission through which this Western music first came to be re-established in Japan are essentially three in number. First, there was the reintroduction of Christian devotional music... Secondly, there was the incorporation of musical study into the school curricula, of which more must be said shortly. But the most assiduous cultivation of Western music of all initially occurred as a by-product of reform in that sphere in which the spur towards modernization was most keenly felt: the creation of a modern fighting force. Military drill on the Western model naturally required Western-style martial music, and there thus came into being first of all the simple fife-and-drum bands..." (Burt, 8-9)

- "[Takemitsu’s] music is delicate and emotional. The pacing with which different expressive events follow one another, the density with which they are superimposed on one another, and the colors they evoke, bespeak an aura that is quintessentially Japanese in spirit” (Koh, 2).

Takemitsu’s Beginnings

- b. Oct. 8, 1930 in Tokyo
- At one month old, his family moved to China (Manchuria) for father’s job
- Was influenced by jazz at an early age, since his father was privileged enough to own many records.
- His father passed away when he was seven years old, and he went to live with his uncle. This was an emotionally tough time for him, which may have led to his distaste for Japanese music - "When I was a child I lived in Tokyo with my aunt, a koto teacher... I heard traditional Japanese music around me all the time. For some reason, it never really appealed to me, never moved me. Later, hearing traditional Japanese music always recalled the bitter memories of the war” (Burt, 22).
- After WWII the American forces occupied Japan, which actually was an unforeseen blessing for Takemitsu. He was sent to a military base to work and he listened to the US Armed Forces Network, which introduced him to composers such as Gershwin, Debussy, Mahler, and Messiaen.
- "...just before Christmas 1946 - there occurred yet another signal event in Takemitsu’s life linked in some way with American popular music. The young composer obtained a year’s employment at a ‘PX’ attached to the US Army camp at Yokohama, where it was agreed that, in return for playing jazz records to the GIs by night, he might make use of the piano in the unoccupied hall during the day. The luxury this opportunity represented for the young Takemitsu in those years of desperate post-war privation cannot be overemphasized: until then, the lack of a piano on which to try out his compositional experiments had reduced him to such extreme ruses as knocking on the houses of complete strangers to obtain access to one, or even fabricating a ‘paper keyboard’ which could produce sounds only in his own aural imagination” (Burt, 24).
- Takemitsu later decided to become a self-taught composer. He did experiment with Japanese music despite the painful connotations. However, most of his music was influenced by Western composers.
- Helped found a composers’ association called the "New Composition Group” and was inducted into it two years later.
Rain Tree Sketch (1982)

1) Influence of Debussy, Messiaen and Schoenberg:
"The obvious influence of composers such as Debussy and Messiaen on Takemitsu’s musical language has tended to result in an emphasis among commentators upon the 'im-pressionistic' qualities of music; but, at the same time, it should not be overlooked that his music from the very beginning permitted itself the expression of at least one emotional state as well: that of profound, dignified melancholy. 'This may indeed be a personal feeling...but the joy of music, ultimately, seems connected with sadness. The sadness is that of existence. The more you are filled with the pure happiness of music-making, the deeper the sadness is’” (Burt, 29).

Debussy: avoidance of cadences, impressionistic quality, flow of the music

Messiaen: (Quartet for the End of Time)
- ametrical: no pulse, no meter signature, irregular rhythmic patterns
- mysticism: Quartet's program= waking of the birds (black bird=clarinet, dust=cello, trees=violin).
  Reference to nature, spiritual quality of the music.
- effect of timeless experience: cycling materials with no sense of beginning/end
- no cadences
- octatonicism
- staticism

Schoenberg: idea of the Grundgestalt and set class collections: emphasis on set class [014] in this piece.

2) Takemitsu’s own musical style:
- three different types of accents: strong, medium, and soft
- three different kinds of fermatas: very long, medium, and short
- pedalling: $R=$right pedal (damper), $L=$left pedal (soft), $Sus=$ middle pedal (sostenuto)
- sonorities: constructs them from the bass (pedal points) to the high register
- dynamics: mostly $p$
- form: ABA? Cyclical form= opening material comes back, even though it is imperceptible for the listener
- set class [014]: beginning of the piece.

*a, b, and c, and d: Takemitsu’s treatment of silence. Concerned w/resonance of sound and silence.
Toru Takemitsu Film Music

- Takemitsu has written the score to 74 movies and has been the exclusive screenwriter for director Hiroshi Teshigahara.
- At times, film scores provided him a convenient "sketch pad" for musical experiments that later found their way into major orchestral compositions. In the powerful *biwa* (short-necked plucked lute) and shakuhachi music of the films *Seppuku* (Harakiri, 1962) and *Kaidan* (Kwaïdan, 1964), for example, one hears Takemitsu setting for himself the "impossible" challenge of combining traditional Japanese instruments with Western symphonic ensembles.
- His experimentation with electronic music in the scores for Shinoda's 1964 film *Kawai Hana* (Pale Flower) and Teshigahara Hiroshi's *Suna no Onna* (Woman in the Dunes) (his most acclaimed film work) the same year closely parallels Takemitsu's most successful ventures into *musique concrete* during the mid-1960s.
- Similarly, the ethereal sound textures of Shinoda's film *Hanare-Goze Orin* (Banished Orin, 1977) seem woven of the same threads as Takemitsu's landmark 1979 composition for gagaku instruments called *Shô-tei-ga* (In an Autumn Garden).
- Woman in the Dunes was composed in a span of just two months.
- Takemitsu's "unabashed appreciation for natural phenomena" is always present. Calling himself "a gardener of music," he viewed his music as a Japanese garden--circular, not linear: "Beethoven is the gate to a beautiful garden but my music is the vine that entwines it."

Sources

- "Octatonicism in Recent Solo Piano Works of Toru Takemitsu" by Timothy Koozin. In: *Perspectives of New Music*, vol. 29 no.1, 1991, p.124
- http://www.soundintermedia.co.uk/treeline-online/grilli.rtf

Study Questions

- Name two of Takemitsu’s influences.
- Discuss three of the following elements of Takemitsu’s style: accents, fermatas, pedaling, sonorities, dynamics, form, and set class.

Listening List Item

Rain Tree Sketch by Takemitsu, 1982