

Introduction

The title of this book is ‘The *Music* of Tōru Takemitsu’, and despite the many other fascinating issues, biographical and artistic, that it is tempting to explore in an examination of this many-faceted genius – composer, festival organiser, writer on aesthetics, author of detective novels, celebrity chef on Japanese TV – it is with Takemitsu’s legacy as a composer that the following chapters are predominantly concerned. In fact, the book’s scope is even narrower still, for although Takemitsu, as the worklist at the end of this volume will show, produced a vast amount of music for film, theatre, television and radio as well as a number of other pieces of more ‘populist’ character, such works lie beyond the remit of the present study, which for the most part deals only with the composer’s ‘classical’ scores for the concert platform. Right from the start, however, it should be emphasised that such an approach focuses on only a small area of Takemitsu’s versatile creativity, and it should always be borne in mind that these other areas of activity were an ever-present backdrop to his ‘mainstream’ work, interacting fruitfully with the latter in ways which it has been possible to hint at in the following pages, but – regretfully – not examine in more detail.

The bulk of this work, then – chapters 2 to 11 – is concerned with descriptions of Takemitsu’s music for the concert room, examining the principal scores in roughly chronological sequence, and including a certain amount of biographical information to set them in context. Though this section is continuous, the reader will probably soon realise that the arrangement of these chapters reflects an implicit, provisional division of the composer’s career into three ‘periods’, dealt with respectively in chapters 2–4, 5–8 and 9–11 of the book. Although rather schematic and certainly no watertight compartmentalisation, this periodisation is nevertheless one which, in its broad outlines at least, would appear to find support amongst other writers on the subject. Certainly the suggested transition from ‘second’ to ‘third’ period represented, as we shall see, a change of style so dramatic that it has been hard for commentators to miss it: Yōko Narazaki, for instance, who divides the composer’s music into two periods, speaks of a ‘change from an “avant-garde” to a “conservative” style’¹ around the end of the 1970s; Jun-ichi Konuma, more robustly, of a substitution of ‘eroticism’ for ‘stoicism’ in the composer’s *Quatrain* of 1975.²

hinging on the incontrovertible fact of this obvious stylistic conversion, constitutes an adequate working description of the composer's development, and that further sub-division would be hair-splitting and superfluous. Nevertheless, I feel that there is a second, if less spectacular, distinction to be made between the *juvenilia* from the first decade of Takemitsu's composing career (from 1950 onwards), and the works which succeeded them from around the turn of the 1960s. The 'journeyman' works from the period prior to this point are of interest inasmuch as they reflect, in their purest form, the stylistic imprints of those American and European composers by whom Takemitsu was initially most profoundly influenced in his rather isolated situation in post-war Japan. By contrast, the works from around 1960 onwards reveal a very rapid assimilation of all the preoccupations Takemitsu became aware of as his knowledge of the domestic and international music scene enlarged dramatically – not only those of the modernist avant-garde, but also, and most importantly, of John Cage and, through his influence, of traditional Japanese music. The change wrought upon the musical language of the 'first period' by these powerful outside influences has not escaped the attention of other writers on the subject: Yukiko Sawabe, for instance, certainly agrees on the appearance of at least two new elements in Takemitsu's music around 1960, 'traditional Japanese instruments and the discovery of "nature" in music, a discovery in which the composer was encouraged by his encounter with John Cage'.³ Broadly speaking, too, the rather simplistic-sounding picture of the composer's career as a 'beginning–middle–end' triptych that emerges from the addition of this second transitional point is not without support from other commentators. Although he locates the two turning points in 1957 and 1973/4, for instance, Kenjiro Miyamoto's tripartite scheme is in other respects more or less identical with my own;⁴ while both Takashi Funayama⁵ and Miyuki Shiraishi,⁶ speak, less specifically, of 'early, middle and late periods' in the composer's work.

The approach adopted towards Takemitsu's music in the course of these central chapters is, the reader will soon realise, primarily an analytical one. This to a certain extent reflects the perceptual biases and academic training of the author, and in particular the origins of this book in my own doctoral thesis, rather than any intrinsic advantages such a method might have when applied to Takemitsu's music. In fact, the latter is emphatically *not* carefully put together for the benefit of future academics to take apart again, and analytic approaches towards it therefore have a tendency to take the researcher up what eventually proves to be a blind alley. Takemitsu's own writing about music, significantly, rarely gives away any technical information about his musical construction or contains music-type exam-

ples, concerning itself instead with abstract philosophical problems expressed in a flowery and poetic language, and many commentators – particularly in Japan – have followed his example in dealing with the music on this level, rather than venturing into the murkier waters of his actual compositional method. One has the feeling, therefore, that one is going against the grain of the composer's own preferred concept of appropriate descriptive language by attempting to submit his music to dissection with the precision tools of Western analysis, and is perhaps justly rewarded with a certain ultimate impenetrability.

Nevertheless, as I have explained elsewhere,⁷ I do not believe that one should for this reason be deterred from making the effort to understand Takemitsu's music on a more technical level. Such an enterprise, I would suggest, is well worth undertaking, for two reasons in particular. First, despite its shortcomings, it is able to uncover a good deal of the still rather secretive goings-on behind the surface of Takemitsu's music, as the following pages will reveal. And secondly, by its very impotence to explain the whole of Takemitsu's creative thinking, it illustrates the extent to which the construction of his music is governed by decisions of a more 'irrational' nature, which even the most inventive of scholars is powerless to account for. Mapping out the area which *is* tractable to analysis, in other words, at the same time gives the measure of that vaster territory which is *not*.

Why this should be so, why Takemitsu's music should ultimately resist analytical explanation, is a question to which I attempt to give some answers in my twelfth and final chapter, which steps outside the bounds of the remit I claimed for this book at the beginning of this introduction to examine some of the more abstract and philosophical issues surrounding his work: offering an assessment of his status as a composer, an examination of some of his aesthetic views (to the extent that I understand them), and an evaluation of some of the more frequent criticisms to which he has been subject. The other place where my subject matter transgresses beyond the bounds of my own self-imposed limitations is at the very beginning of the book. To understand fully the nature of Takemitsu's achievement, it is necessary to see him not only in relation to the international Western music scene, but also in relation to the aesthetic preoccupations of the composers who preceded him in the decades since Western music was first introduced to Japan. As, however, this is a history for the most part almost entirely unfamiliar to Westerners, it has been considered imperative to give a brief overview of the subject in the opening chapter. It is with this pre-history, then – the story of the arrival of Western music in Japan and the development of Japanese composition that succeeded it – that *The Music of Tōru Takemitsu* begins.

1 Pre-history: how Western music came to Japan

Popular culture has ensured that at least one or two key elements in the story of Japan's unique and often turbulent relationship with the Western world have become familiar to a wider audience. Stephen Sondheim's 1975 musical *Pacific Overtures*, for instance, charts the course of events subsequent to that momentous day in the nineteenth century when Japan was finally rudely awakened from its quarter-millennium of feudal stability by a dramatic intervention of modernity. The day in question was 8 July 1853, when Commodore Matthew Calbraith Perry of the United States Navy sailed into Uraga harbour with his powerfully armed ironclad steamboats, the *kurofune* ('black ships'); and to understand the boldness and historical significance of Perry's adventure, one has to travel back in time a quarter of a millennium further still, to 1603. For it was in that year that Ieyasu Tokugawa finally acceded to an office familiar to Westerners, once again, from populist sources, in this case James Clavell's 1975 novel and its subsequent film and television versions: the title of military dictator of all Japan, or *Shōgun*.

Having attained this sovereign position at great cost by finally subjugating the powerful regional warlords (*daimyō*), the Tokugawa family was understandably anxious to preserve the fragile centralised power it had established. In particular, wary of the colonial ambitions of the foreign nationals then resident in Japan – and of any alliance between these and their *daimyō* subordinates – they embarked on a campaign of draconian measures to protect their country from the perceived alien menace. Japanese Christians were martyred, foreign nationals repatriated, and the Japanese themselves forbidden to travel abroad, until by 1641 no contact with the outside world remained except for a small community of Dutch traders confined to their island ghetto of Deshima in Nagasaki harbour. Japan, allowing its subjects no egress and outsiders no ingress, had succeeded within a few decades in turning itself into a self-contained 'hermit kingdom', and henceforth would enforce the most stringent measures to ensure that – right up to the arrival of Perry's ships over two hundred years later – this exclusion policy would remain virtually inviolate.

'Virtually' inviolate, but not entirely so; despite the dire penalties risked by those who sought to transgress against the exclusion order, from the

eighteenth century onwards various seafarers – Russian, American, British, French and Dutch – all made efforts to persuade the Japanese to reopen their country to foreign commerce. Furthermore, while the Japanese could not travel to the outside world, or make contact with its inhabitants, the educated classes, at least, could read about what was happening there – at first secretly, as various items of information were smuggled in through approved Dutch and Chinese traders, and then more openly, after the *Shōgun* Yoshimune (1716–45) rescinded the ban on the importation of foreign books (provided they contained no reference to Christian teaching) in 1720. As a result of this new development, there eventually came into existence the group known as the *rangakusha* or ‘Dutch Scholars’, whose painstaking efforts to translate works written in that language, starting from scratch, finally bore fruit when the first European work to be published in Japan, an anatomy textbook, appeared in 1774. Significantly, besides medicine, the other area of Western expertise about which the Japanese were especially curious was military science – and with good reason. In the following century Takashima Shūhan (1798–1866), who had learned about Western ordnance from textbooks, was to warn the governor of Nagasaki after the British success in the Anglo-Chinese war that Japan was no more capable of resistance than China, and that the latter’s defensive measures had been ‘like child’s play’.¹ In the eyes of modernisers such as Shūhan, Japan’s need to acquire mastery of this particular branch of Western learning was no longer simply a matter of scholarly curiosity, but of his country’s very survival as an independent nation in the face of the predatory desires of an industrialised West.

This gradual dissemination of Western ideas was one of a number of factors by means of which the formerly impregnable edifice of the exclusionist administration was brought increasingly under attack over the course of the years. Other weapons in the armoury of the reforming *Zeitgeist* included the revitalisation of traditional *shintō* beliefs and the beginnings of research into national history – both of which developments tended to call into question the legitimacy of the *Shōgun*’s primacy over the Emperor, who had been reduced to the role of a mere puppet since the Tokugawa ascendancy. But the force which was to act as perhaps the most eloquent advocate for the abandonment of isolationism was operating on a rather more mundane level than any of the above: that of everyday economic transactions. The period of the Tokugawa Shōgunate saw the emergence of a mercantile class in the cities, and of coin rather than rice as the favoured medium of exchange through which they conducted their business. The ruling military élite (*samurai*) of Japan’s traditional feudal hier-

archy contracted huge debts to this newly emergent bourgeoisie, which they then attempted to displace on to their already overstretched peasant subjects. As a result, the agricultural economy started to crumble, to be ‘replaced by a mercantile economy which Japan was unable to support without calling on the outside world’.² Even without the additional persuasive capacities of Commodore Perry’s superior firepower, therefore, capitulation to the American demand for trading opportunities, when at last it came, was by then a matter of stark economic necessity.

After the gunboats, the diplomacy: as follow-up to his first audacious violation of the exclusion order in 1853, Perry returned with an augmented force in February of the following year, and on this occasion made the long-awaited breakthrough. An agreement concluded on 31 March allowed him the use of the twin ports of Shimoda and Hakodate for limited trade, and provided for consular representation for his country. This success of Perry’s soon prompted others to follow his example: similar treaties were signed with the British in October of the same year, and with the Russians and Dutch in February and November of the following year respectively. Thereafter events moved inexorably to bring about the eventual downfall of the *ancien régime*, although the force that was finally responsible for toppling the ruling military dictatorship, or *bakufu*, perhaps came from a somewhat unexpected quarter. For ultimately it was forces loyal to the Emperor which brought about the resignation of the last *Shōgun* in 1867 and, after a brief civil war, the formation of a provisional government and restoration of the Emperor to what was considered his rightful place at the head of the political structure (the so-called ‘Meiji Restoration’). There thus arose the somewhat paradoxical situation that the foundations of what eventually proved to be the first Western-style government in Japan were prepared by precisely those forces in society which had initially viewed the *bakufu*’s accommodation with foreigners as a betrayal, and whose battle-cry had once been ‘*Sonno jōi!*’ – ‘Revere the Emperor and expel the barbarians!’

The conflicting ideologies which rendered this situation so paradoxical – the ‘modernising’ spirit of the new administration, in opposition to a sometimes aggressive nostalgia for traditional Japanese certainties on the part of those who had helped bring it to power – afford one of the first glimpses of a clash of values that has had a central role in determining Japan’s subsequent cultural development right up to the present day. The historian Arnold Toynbee (1889–1975), who took an especial interest in this aspect of Japan’s cultural history, once coined a handy pair of expressions to describe these kinds of opposing responses that may be ‘evoked in a society which has been thrown on the defensive by the impact of an alien force in superior

strength'.³ The attitude of the progressives and 'modernisers', on the one hand, he characterised as the 'Herodian'⁴ position; that of 'the man who acts on the principle that the most effective way to guard against the danger of the unknown is to master its secret, and, when he finds himself in the predicament of being confronted by a more highly skilled and better armed opponent . . . responds by discarding his traditional art of war and learning to fight his enemy with the enemy's own tactics and own weapons'.⁵ On the other hand, in opposition to this receptive, mimetic attitude, Toynbee posited the idea of 'Zealotism': the stance taken by 'the man who takes refuge from the unknown in the familiar, and when he joins battle with a stranger who practises superior tactics and enjoys formidable new-fangled weapons . . . responds by practising his own traditional art of war with abnormally scrupulous exactitude'.⁶

For Toynbee, the course of action ultimately chosen by the nineteenth-century Japanese in response to their dramatic exposure to Western technological prowess constituted the 'Herodian' reaction *par excellence*: for him, the Japanese were 'of all the non-Western peoples that the modern West has challenged . . . perhaps the least unsuccessful exponents of "Herodianism" in the world so far'.⁷ Though at first sight this might appear to be a sweepingly imperious, 'etic' pronouncement on the situation, it is nevertheless one that would appear to be given a certain 'emic' validation when one considers certain reactions on the part of the Japanese themselves – such as the remarks of Takashima Shūhan quoted a few paragraphs previously, or the craze for wholesale Europeanisation that followed in the wake of the *Meiji* restoration, when the desire of the Japanese ruling classes to remodel themselves on the lines of their newly found trading partners went far beyond the minimum necessary to acquire an adequate military competence. But side by side with such sycophantic imitation by a small élite there co-existed amongst the population at large other, drastically less welcoming responses to the Western intrusion – of such a nature to suggest that, as one leading authority on Japanese culture expressed it, Western culture was 'accepted as a necessity but its donors were disliked'.⁸ And at this point one becomes aware that the image conjured by Toynbee, of a wholehearted subjugation to the 'Herodian' ideal, might require a certain qualification, to say the least. In fact, the truth of the matter would appear to be rather that the atavistic reaction described by Toynbee as 'Zealotism' on no account perished with Perry, and has indeed never really gone away since. To an extent it can be highly profitable, indeed, to regard much of the subsequent cultural history of Japan as ideologically motivated by the dialectical opposition between the twin forces of progressive cosmopolitanism and regressive nationalism: an

oscillation, as the Takemitsu scholar Alain Poirier expresses it, ‘between expressions of a nationalism, betraying itself sometimes in the form of violent protectionism, and of a willingness to be open towards the Occident’.⁹

This ‘oscillation’ described by Poirier, however, constitutes only one mode of expression – what might be called the ‘diachronic’ – of the underlying opposition, betraying itself above all in the form of horizontal, historical fluctuations of power between two polar positions, of which the most dramatic in recent times have probably been the disastrous resurgence of political nationalism before and during the Second World War, and the extreme receptivity towards Americanisation in the Occupation years that succeeded it. But at the same time this fundamental tension also expresses itself vertically, as it were ‘synchronically’, as a kind of basic and ongoing schism in the Japanese psyche, what has been described as ‘a kind of double structure or perhaps parallelism of lifestyle and intellectual attitude of the modern Japanese’.¹⁰ In this compromise between ‘modern’ imperatives and ‘traditional’ instincts, experience tends to be compartmentalised, with Western behavioural codes operating in certain areas – for example, in most areas of ‘public’, corporate life – but with other, predominantly private domains reserved as sites wherein citizens tend ‘consciously or unconsciously to maintain the traditions passed on from generation to generation’.¹¹ In both of the above manifestations, this interplay of forces – not necessarily a destructive one – has played a crucial role in shaping both the historical development and everyday orientation of Japanese culture during the modern period. And – as we shall very shortly discover – this has been as much the case with the composition of Western-style music in Japan, as with any other form of cultural activity. Horizontally, throughout the historical period that has elapsed since this European art form was first transplanted to Japanese soil, we shall observe fluctuations between imitation of the West and declarations of nationalistic independence; vertically, taking a ‘slice of time’ through any particular moment in that history, we shall observe time and again in the work of individual composers the same preoccupation with establishing their own equilibrium between these recurrent, inimical forces – the centrifugal force of adopting a Western idiom, the centripetal one of defining, by contrast, a uniquely ‘Japanese’ identity. Indeed – as Miyamoto has correctly observed – this opposition between an imported foreign culture and their own, and the manner of dealing with both, was long conceived as the ‘central problem’ facing Western-style Japanese composers.¹²

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 – silent since the early years of the seventeenth century, but gradually being heard once again following the reopening of the ports in the 1850s, and especially after the ban on Christianity was abrogated in 1873. 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 modernisation 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 known as *kotekikai*, and then – after September 1869, when the Satsuma clan were loaned instruments and given instruction by the Irish-born bandmaster John William Fenton (1828– ?) – full-blown military bands on the Western model. Fenton's band acquired its own instruments from England in 1870 and later became the official band of the Japanese navy, its directorship passing in 1879 to the Prussian musician Franz Eckert (1852–1916); while the army was to establish its own band in 1872, at first under the leadership of Kenzō Nishi, and then subsequently – and in interesting contrast to the naval band – under the direction of two French bandmasters: Gustave Charles Dagon, who presided until 1884, and his successor Charles Edouard Gabriel Leroux (1850–1926).

The importance of these developments for the wider dissemination of Western music resides in the fact that, besides their proper function within the armed forces, these bands also performed roles which demanded that they appear in a more public situation. One such function was the provision of ceremonial music for diplomatic occasions, out of which expediency grew the creation of what still remains Japan's national anthem to this day, *Kimi ga yo* – possibly one of the earliest examples of 'Western-style' composition to involve at least a partial Japanese input. But in addition, and more importantly still, the military bands played a vital role in the reception of Western music in Japan by giving public recitals of it, to such an extent that 'until about 1879 . . . musical activity was organised around the military band, and it was the band that pioneered the way in what today we would call the public concert'.¹³

It was during the 1880s that, alongside these military band concerts, public recitals also began to be given by Japan's first generation of music school students. As already suggested, the institution of a public education system on Western lines was the third and, ultimately, probably the most decisive factor in the promulgation of Western music in Japan. For, in their earnest efforts to imitate wholesale the pedagogic practices of the West, the

Ministry of Education had stipulated in its regulations of 1872 that singing practice should form part of the school curriculum at elementary level, and instrumental tuition at middle-school level. This was in spite of the fact that at the time the facilities for putting such Utopian ideals into practice were totally lacking – ‘an act symptomatic of the progressiveness of the authorities, who had received the baptism of the new spirit of the Reformation’.¹⁴

Much of the responsibility for turning such ambitious schemes into reality was entrusted to an aristocratic Ministry official called Shūji Izawa (1851–1917), who on the orders of the Ministry was sent to the United States in 1875 to examine American pedagogic methods, and to study music under the Director of the Boston Music School, Luther Whiting Mason (1828–96). In October 1879, shortly after Izawa’s return to Japan, a ‘Music Study Committee’ (*Ongaku Torishirabe Gakari* – effectively a small music college) was set up at Izawa’s recommendation, and in the same month he set forth his ideals for musical education in his ‘Plan for the Study of Music’. If the reception history of Western-style music in *Meiji*-era Japan has up till now read rather like one of uncritical, if not necessarily sympathetic, assimilation, then this document of Izawa’s supplies us with one of our first glimpses of a counter-tendency. But at the same time, Izawa was clearly too much of a realist to lapse into mere reaffirmation of traditionalist certainties. Instead – and fascinatingly – by describing ‘three general theories’, he sets out his argument for the future direction of Japanese musical studies in almost classical dialectic fashion. First comes the ‘thesis’, to the effect that since ‘Western music has been brought to almost the highest peak of perfection as a result of several thousand years of study since the time of the Greek philosopher Pythagoras’, it would be better to cultivate such music exclusively and abandon the ‘inadequate Eastern music’ entirely. Next comes an ‘antithetical’ proposition: since every country has its own proper culture, it would be absurd to try to import a foreign music, and therefore the best policy would be to bestow the utmost care on the cultivation of one’s own musical heritage. So far, it is easy to discern in these two opposing arguments fairly conventional statements of classic ‘Herodian’ and ‘Zealotist’ positions respectively. But it is at this point that Izawa adds something new, something that we have so far not directly encountered at any point in our discussion of this topic. As a third possible option – and it is clearly the one which Izawa himself favours – he suggests a ‘synthesis’ of the above antithetic alternatives: the possibility of ‘taking a middle course between the two views, and by blending Eastern and Western music establish[ing] a new kind of music which is suitable for the Japan of today’.¹⁵ And it is here that one catches sight, for