

Music and the non-human vol. 3

Kyushu University Faculty of Design 2024-5 concert series

16:00 21 July 2024

Programme

First part : the classical gagaku repertory

Hyōjō no chōshi

Bairo

Taishikichō no nyūjō

Etenraku

Second part : contemporary pieces

Daryl Jamieson: 'Hour of the Monkey' from *Descants I* (2020)

Riccardo Vaglini: *Lettera alla madre* (1991)

John Cage: *One⁹* (1991)

Traditional Afro-Brazilian song (arr. by John Coltrane) : *Ogunde* (1967)

Aftertalk

Fabio Rambelli, Daryl Jamieson

Performer: Fabio Rambelli (shō)

Fabio Rambelli is a professor of Japanese religions and cultural history at the University of California, Santa Barbara. He has published extensively on semiotics, materiality, and ritual systems in Esoteric Buddhism and Shinto, with special focus on the metahuman dimension in Japanese religious history. He is currently working on the intellectual history of gagaku. He plays the shō and the u (both the classical repertory of gagaku and contemporary music for those instruments); he has studied with Maestro Bunno Hideaki and Maestro Manabe Naoyuki. His musical CDs include *Pearls* (2023) with his duo Neo Archē (shō+gaku-biwa), *New Heritage* (with his trio ryūteki+hichiriki+shō, 2023), and *The Turning Point* (shō+drums, 2024), an exploration of the possibilities of the shō in a free-jazz context (all published by Edgetone Records).

Fabio Rambelli plays the shō 'Horidashi' (early nineteenth century) and 'Jazumaro' (2017).

Support

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Programme Notes

The shō, a bamboo mouth-organ, is a very ancient musical instrument; archeologists have discovered prototypes dating to twenty-five centuries ago. In its present form, the shō came to Japan from China in the eighth century, and has undergone very few changes since then. Used for many centuries only in parts of the gagaku repertory, since the 1980s it has begun to attract the interest of contemporary composers, not only in Japan but all over the world.

The shō is perfectly positioned to explore the non-human (or metahuman) dimension of music. The shō as it exists today is (supposed to be) a perfect copy of a musical instrument created by one of the primordial goddesses of the ancient Chinese mythology (Nuwa, or Joka in Japanese), who heard a group of phoenixes (a divine bird) singing and decided to create an instrument to reproduce their sound faithfully. To do that, Nuwa went to Mt. Kunlun (a sacred mountain) to gather some special bamboo, and created the instrument in the shape of a phoenix. Therefore, the shō is not an arbitrary human invention, but a perfect copy of a divine animal and its sound, created by a divine being out of her divine intention with materials from a sacred mountain. Human intervention is limited in reproducing the original work of the goddess and in keeping the tradition alive... The shō is also the instrument of Daoist immortals (sennin) and of the Buddhist heavenly realms (especially the Pure Land).

This concert proposes a selection of compositions for shō: pieces from the classical gagaku repertory in the first part, and contemporary pieces in the second part.

Hyōjō no chōshi is a modal prelude (in the mode of *hyōjō*, equivalent to E Dorian in Western music), based on a score from the late fifteenth century, but which can be probably traced back to a couple centuries earlier. *Hyōjō* is the mode that was often used in Buddhist ceremonies, because it refers to the West, and hence to the Buddha Amida's Pure Land.

Bairo, also in the mode of *hyōjō*, is one of the oldest extant pieces in the entire Gagaku repertory. It was first performed at the inauguration of the Great Buddha of Tōdaiji in Nara in 752. We present the part of shō of this composition, preceded by its unique prelude (*Bairo no netori*).

Taishikichō no nyūjō is a secret melody (*bikyoku*) that was transmitted to emperors and shoguns in the Muromachi period. Written in the mode of *taishikichō* (equivalent to E Mixolydian), it was one of the most precious compositions of the entire shō repertory handed down by the Toyohara Family, but was abandoned in the late 1400s. This reconstruction by Fabio Rambelli is based on indications provided by professor Endō Tōru and Dame Miyata Mayumi, to whom goes our gratitude.

Etenraku is the single, best-known composition of the entire gagaku repertory. Allegedly composed in China towards the fifth century CE, it is now the soundtrack of many Shinto ceremonies. Today we present a recent version, a transposition in the mode of *ichikotsuchō* (equivalent to D mixolydian) by Tōgi Masatarō for the Ono Gagakukai at Ono Terusaki Shrine in Tokyo (which we thank for their permission to perform it). *Etenraku* is preceded by the short prelude (*netori*) in *ichikotsuchō*.

The second part opens with a recent composition by Daryl Jamieson, 'Hour of the Monkey', from his larger piece *Descants I* for shō and u (2020). It has to be played in a natural environment exactly at the beginning of the hour of the monkey (according to the traditional Japanese hour system), which in Fukuoka is at 17:06 on the day of the concert.

Lettera alla madre (Letter to the mother, 1991) is a little-known composition by Italian composer Riccardo Vaglini, which explores emotions and the theme of absence.

*One*⁹ by John Cage (1991) is a long composition (more than 90 minutes) for solo shō that the composer created soon before he died. It is an excellent demonstration of Cage's own musical aesthetics: the attention to the general soundscape framed in a rigorous structure that however leaves open the intervention of chaos and randomness, as well as his passion for Japan. Today we will present one segment of the entire composition.

Ogunde is a traditional Afro-Brazilian song dedicated to the gods, adapted for shō by Fabio Rambelli after John Coltrane's version (1967). This melody, from a very distant musical tradition, resonates incredibly well with the classical repertory of gagaku and its power to interact with the non-human.